

GOOD FENCES: AMERICAN SEXUAL EXCEPTIONALISM AND MINORITY RELIGIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Megan Prince Goodwin: *Good Fences: American Sexual Exceptionalism and Minority Religions*  
(Under the direction of Randall Styers)

This dissertation is about the ways sexual difference complicates contemporary American religious pluralism, particularly since 1980. Suspicions of sexual deviance frequently haunt minority religions, regardless of their communities' mores or practices. To explore this issue, I engage a set of popular narratives that portray minority religions (Islam, Mormonism, and witchcraft) as predatory, coercing or duping vulnerable American women and children into religious nonconformity and sexual transgression. Federal agents, law enforcement officials, foreign policymakers, and others have used such narratives—and a desire to liberate their alleged victims—to justify restraining these “dangerous” forms of religious difference.

Books like *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers* are part of a broad and persistent public discourse about the appropriate role and regulation of religious and sexual difference. My case studies indicate a persistent and troubling pattern of responses toward religious and sexual difference within the American public sphere. These narratives of contact with American religious minority communities provided significant material consequences and are symptomatic of a broader trend in American public discourse – one that simultaneously vaunts American religious tolerance and discourages religious and sexual difference. I present these stories and their public reception as contributions to an ongoing public negotiation of the kinds of beliefs and practices mainstream Americans will and will not tolerate.

Media pundits, law enforcement officials, and Congress members have sanctioned interference into religious minority communities as efforts to liberate vulnerable American women and children. These polemics encourage attempts to rescue community members who are assumed

to be too weak mentally or physically to resist presumably dangerous beliefs and practices. My case studies identify minority religious communities as especially given to gendered and sexual exploitation of American women and children.

By locating the abuse of women and children in America's religious margins, these rhetorics of "liberation" encourage normative religious and sexual practices without violating a professed national commitment to religious freedom. Paradoxically, such liberatory rhetorics often work to constrain Americans' religious and sexual freedoms while doing little to prevent violence against women and children.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are no words, but these will have to do.

It is no exaggeration to say that, had I never met Randall Styers, this dissertation—and, quite frankly, my life—would have been altogether another, and in all likelihood a lesser, undertaking. His infinite patience, inerrant guidance, and unwavering support during my seven years at Carolina have been invaluable. He has become a mentor, life coach, and cherished friend: one who taught me how to speak Southern, think in a straight line, and always run up the escalator. I would be a very different (and most likely unemployed) scholar without him.

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Jason Bivins convinced me I was an Americanist and put me in front of a classroom to prove it. The piece he commissioned for *Religion Compass* set the tone for this dissertation and my scholarly trajectory. I'm grateful for his critical engagement with my work, his unflagging and sardonic sense of humor, and his complete unwillingness to entertain my insecurities.

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## The Wall Between Us: American Sexual Exceptionalism and Minority Religions

**April 2008**

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services escorts more than four hundred Mormon fundamentalist children aboard buses borrowed from local school districts and the Eldorado First Baptist Church. These are the children of Yearning for Zion, a large community of Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints who practice plural marriage, or theologically mandated polygyny. Tearful women in elaborate pompadour braids and high-necked prairie dresses look on before boarding buses themselves.<sup>1</sup> Without a court order, Texas' Department of Family and Protective Services commences the single largest protective custody seizure in the history of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

**January 1997**

In a Michigan child custody suit between a European American mother and an Arab American father, the presiding judge allows the mother's attorney to screen the film *Not Without My Daughter* as evidence. The film portrays an Iranian man, a devout Muslim, as an abusive, controlling husband and kidnapping father.<sup>3</sup> In November 2001, President George W. Bush will justify attacking Muslim-majority nations by insisting that Muslim terrorists wish to deny women education, health

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Bradley Evans, "The Past as Prologue: A Comparison of the Short Creek and Eldorado Polygamy Raids," in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints*, ed. Stuart Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Linda F. Smith, "Child Protection Law and the FLDS Raid in Texas," in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell Jacobson and Lara Burton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 304.

<sup>3</sup> American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, *1996-97 Report on Hate Crimes & Discrimination Against Arab Americans* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 1997), 33. On this point, see also Jack G. Shaheen, "Hollywood's Muslim Arabs," *The Muslim World* 90, no. 1-2 (2000): 36.

care, and social mobility.<sup>4</sup> That same month, First Lady Laura Bush will accuse Afghan Muslim men of “deliberate human cruelty” toward women and children.<sup>5</sup> “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women,” she insists.<sup>6</sup>

## February 1984

Specialists on satanic ritual abuse arrive in California to consult on the McMartin Daycare Trial, which charges seven current and former employees of the award-winning school with 52 counts of felony child abuse. Swayed by these experts, police officers, social workers, and mental health professionals elicit from child witnesses shocking testimony of ritualized torture and sexual defilement. More than a hundred similar cases will emerge in the next five years. When the trial is dismissed and its defendants acquitted, the McMartin Daycare Trial will stand as the longest and most expensive criminal trial in US history of its time.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

Each of these incidents began with a story: a story of women and children duped or forced into sexual depravity under the auspices of minority religious practice. Jon Krakauer told a tale of women and children ruthlessly exploited by the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in his 2003 *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*. Betty Mahmoody chronicled her daring escape from Iran and from her tyrannical and sexually controlling Muslim husband in her 1987 *Not Without My Daughter*. Michelle Smith, with her psychiatrist-turned-spouse, shared her recovered memories of ritualized abuse at the hands of insidious Satanists in her 1980 memoir, *Michelle Remembers*.

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<sup>4</sup> “President George W. Bush Addresses the Nation” (World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA, November 8, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/ramadan/islam.html>.

<sup>5</sup> “Radio Address by Mrs. Bush” (Crawford, TX, November 17, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 117.

More than merely stories, however, these texts were voices crying out in the wilderness – witness borne to the exploitation of American women and children, actions against the abuse and coercion of the innocent and helpless at the hands of American religious outsiders. The publication of these texts and the broader dissemination of these stories—often by the authors themselves—were calls to action. Law enforcement agencies at all levels, mental health professionals, news outlets, and the United States federal government responded to these calls. Despite a professed national commitment to religious freedom, Americans would not allow minority religious communities to sexually and psychologically manipulate the nation’s women and children. Even religious tolerance must have its limits: these incidents show that sexual impropriety often marks the limits of that tolerance.

Except...

Except that Krakauer’s account of plural marriage and “violent faith” fails to account for the hundreds of Mormon fundamentalists—men, women, and children alike—who do not feel exploited by or coerced into their religious or sexual practices. Indeed, Krakauer allows very few practicing Mormon fundamentalists a voice in his book. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ intervention, swayed in part by Krakauer’s testimony that polygyny is inherently abusive, alienated and terrified the women and children it sought to help without detaining a single male member of the community.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Betty Mahmoody’s tale portrayed all Muslim men as monsters, even those who profess to love America and their wives. Her story is one of hundreds of such memoirs, a

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<sup>8</sup> TX House of Representatives, 79th Legislature (R), *H.B. 3006, A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT Relating to Certain Requirements and Limitations Relating to a Person’s Age, Marital Status, Residency, and Relations by Consanguinity and Affinity; Providing Criminal Penalties.*, 2005; Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton, “Prologue: The Incident at Eldorado, Texas,” in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues* (Oxford University Press, 2011), xviii. On women’s agency and networking in Mormon fundamentalist communities, see also Janet Bennion, *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

cacophony of voices that essentializes Islam as inherently and especially injurious toward women.<sup>9</sup>

This narrative, echoed by influential US foreign policy-makers, continues to justify American intervention into Muslim majority nation-states – often to the detriment of the women and children in those countries.<sup>10</sup>

And the abuses Michelle Smith remembered with the help of her psychiatrist directly contradict the testimony of her siblings (absent from the memoir) and local police records of the times and places in question. Repressed/recovered memory syndrome remains a hotly contested psychological diagnosis.<sup>11</sup> More to the point, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's ten year inquiry into the phenomenon yielded no credible evidence to corroborate any allegation of satanic ritual abuse.<sup>12</sup>

These stories are by no means unique: they lay within a well-established genealogy of narratives about contact with outsiders. Such stories articulate anxieties about other-ness, often

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<sup>9</sup> Farzaneh Milani, *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 232-3. Lila Abu-Lughod and Anupama Rao, "New Texts Out Now: Lila Abu-Lughod and Anupama Rao, Women's Rights, Muslim Family Law, and the Politics of Consent," *Jadaliyya*, February 16, 2012, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4337/new-texts-out-now\\_lila-abu-lughod-and-anupama-rao-](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4337/new-texts-out-now_lila-abu-lughod-and-anupama-rao-).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2002): 340-1. Ibid., 344, where Hirschkind and Mahmood state that "the widely respected Afghan women's organization, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, put out a statement saying 'The people of the world need to know that in terms of widespread raping of girls and women from seven to 70, the track record of the Taliban can no way stand up against that of these very same [United States-led] Northern Alliance associates.'" See also Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 784; and John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America: a Documentary History* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2010), 11: "the contemporary media, from CNN sound bites to television's 24, depict Islam as a religion infused with violence and antithetical to the American way of life. Films such as *Not Without My Daughter*...have shaped and reinforced this interpretation."

<sup>11</sup> James T. Richardson, Jenny Reichert, and Valerie Lykes, "Satanism in America: An Update," *Social Compass* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 566. See also Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, And Sexual Hysteria, Updated with a New Final Chapter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Richard J. Ofshe and Margaret Thaler Singer, "Recovered-Memory Therapy and Robust Repression: Influence and Pseudomemories," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 42, no. 4 (1994): 391-410.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Satanic Ritual Abuse*, by Kenneth V. Lanning, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (1992).

expressed as suspicions about sexual impropriety. The purpose of this dissertation is to identify a pattern within these narratives and explore their material consequences.

This dissertation is about the ways sexual difference complicates contemporary American religious pluralism, particularly since 1980. Suspicions of sexual deviance frequently haunt minority religions, regardless of their communities' mores or practices. To explore this issue, I engage a set of popular narratives that portray minority religions (Islam, Mormonism, and witchcraft) as predatory, coercing or duping vulnerable American women and children into religious nonconformity and sexual transgression. Federal agents, law enforcement officials, foreign policymakers, and others have used such narratives—and a desire to liberate their alleged victims—to justify restraining these “dangerous” forms of religious difference.

Let me state clearly from the beginning: I have no wish to dismiss or diminish the very real damage and trauma resulting from sexual exploitation and coercion within minority religious communities. Without a doubt, such abuses absolutely do occur.<sup>13</sup> There can be no excuse for such actions. Scholars of American religions must attend, however, to the staggering discrepancy between the size and influence of controversial American minority religious communities and the public outcry against them.<sup>14</sup> We must also note that the fervor of this public outcry is deafening compared to the relative public silence regarding the all-too-common abuse of women and children in mainstream American households.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Most pertinent to my analysis is the conviction of former FLDS leader Warren Jeffs of child sexual assault and aggravated child sexual assault. But see also incidents reported among David Koresh's Branch Davidians, the Children of God, and other new religious movements. Susan J. Palmer, “Rescuing Children? Government Raids and Child Abuse Allegations in Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints*, ed. Stuart Wright and James Richardson (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 51–79.

<sup>14</sup> Terryl Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5, 114. See also Gayle Rubin, “Blood Under the Bridge: Reflections on ‘thinking Sex’,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 33–4: “Zealotry and unprincipled behavior were acceptable in the service of ‘protecting’ women.”

<sup>15</sup> Rubin, “Blood Under the Bridge,” 38: “Despite the facts that most sex abuse is perpetrated at home and by family members [and] most murdered children are killed by their parents...the family is depicted as a place of safety threatened by dangerous strangers” (38). See also Steven Mintz, “Placing Childhood Sexual Abuse in Historical

Books like *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers* are part of a broad and persistent public discourse about the appropriate role and regulation of religious and sexual difference. These books are perhaps not significant as individual works of popular nonfiction; indeed, scholars have dismissed these works as trite, racist, ahistorical, and incomplete. Even the public responses to each individual publication in efforts to discourage and control sexual and religious difference might be dismissed as isolated moral panics – brief aberrations in an otherwise rational and secular American public sphere.<sup>16</sup> But taken as a whole, these texts do not indicate rare overreactions to unfamiliar beliefs and practices; rather, my case studies indicate a persistent and troubling pattern of responses toward religious and sexual difference within the American public sphere.<sup>17</sup>

These narratives of contact with American religious minority communities provided significant material consequences and, I contend, are symptomatic of a broader trend in American public discourse – one that simultaneously vaunts American religious tolerance and discourages religious and sexual difference. I present these stories and their public reception as contributions to an ongoing public negotiation of the kinds of beliefs and practices mainstream Americans will and will not tolerate.

Perhaps most troubling is the role “liberation” plays in this rhetoric: media pundits, law enforcement officials, and Congress members have sanctioned interference into religious minority communities as efforts to liberate vulnerable American women and children. (Rhetorical distinctions

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Perspective,” *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, July 13, 2012, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2012/07/13/placing-childhood-sexual-abuse-in-historical-perspective/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Moral panic” refers to an intense public reaction to an issue or group perceived to threaten a culture’s social order. On this issue, see in particular Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> These responses are comparable though not reducible to the “performed outrages” Jason Bivins theorizes in his “Embattled Majority: Religion and Its Despisers in America (Or: The Long-Lurching Wreck of American Public Life),” *Religion in American History*, 2012, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2012/11/embattled-majority-religion-and-its.html>.

between women and children in such discourse are often vague.) Public rhetoric regarding mainstream American values—articulated by police officers, judges, reporters, popular press authors, and others—adopts a paternalistic tone toward religious minorities. Such polemics encourage attempts to rescue community members who are assumed to be too weak mentally or physically to resist presumably dangerous beliefs and practices.<sup>18</sup> My case studies and similar public discourses thus identify minority religious communities as especially given to gendered and sexual exploitation of American women and children.

By locating the abuse of women and children in America's religious margins, these rhetorics of "liberation" encourage normative practices without violating a professed national commitment to religious freedom. Paradoxically, such liberatory rhetorics often work to constrain Americans' religious and sexual freedoms while doing little to prevent violence against women and children.<sup>19</sup>

This introduction outlines the theoretical premises of my project. In the first section, I discuss the significance of my case studies' narrative genealogy. I suggest that works like *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers* are performative texts. Narratives of captivity and abuse at the hands of outsiders are never merely stories – they are texts that foster anxieties within the body politic and encourage action to resolve those anxieties. As such, the genre's ability to persuade readers and incite action far exceeds the significance the texts alone. I introduce and contextualize each of my case studies within this literary genealogy. I provide background on the authors and briefly summarize each book's topic, argument, and conclusions. I

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<sup>18</sup> See Burlein on the "action-adventure heroism" inherent to the "romance of masculine protectionism." Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 26-7.

<sup>19</sup> Hirschkind and Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency," 340-1, cites the increased incidence of sexual assault after US-led military incursion into Afghanistan. Tamatha Schreiner and James Richardson note that the largest state custodial seizure of children in American history resulted in very few convictions for sexual abuse but subjected FLDS mothers to "the devastating emotional impact of the raid, the forced removal of their children, the threat of extended or permanent state custody, allegations of sexual abuse, and the intrusive public scrutiny of their lives." Tamatha L. Schreiner and James T. Richardson, "Pyrrhic Victory? An Analysis of the Appeal Court Opinions Concerning the FLDS Children," in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints*, ed. Stuart Wright and James Richardson (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 259.

then discuss the material consequences of each publication, paying specific attention to the ways these narratives have worked to constrain the religious and sexual freedoms of Americans in general and American women in particular.

The introduction's second section provides a more detailed theorization of American sexual normativity. I note the historical peculiarities of the American mainstream in the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a confluence of unprecedented religious diversity, gendered and sexual activism, and public anxiety about moral (read: sexual) decay and depravity. While anxieties regarding marginal groups' sexual improprieties are prevalent throughout American history, I show that the United States after 1980 is an especially rich context in which to consider the co-constitutive relationship between religious intolerance and normative sexuality. In particular, I emphasize the fraught relationship between “good sex” and minority religions deemed in/tolerable by the American public. I employ and expand on Jasbir Puar's theory of sexual exceptionalism to consider a demonstrable national investment in protecting normative American sexual practices.

The final section contextualizes my case studies within a broader impulse in national public rhetoric: the popular articulation of America's commitment to religious freedom and moral rectitude. Rhetoric extolling America as exceptionally religiously tolerant and diverse often dismisses or disregards the extent to which a specific, limited, and religiously informed sexual ethic informs normative American sexuality. A conservative Christian ethic thus shapes the popular understanding—our intuitive sense—of tolerable sexuality; conformity to American sexual norms constrains the public's tolerance of minority religions. The introduction concludes with an overview of subsequent chapters and a brief discussion of the work's significance.



## *Narrating American Religion(s)*

There is nothing political in American literature.

Laura Bush

“Laura Bush’s Literary Salon,” *The New York Times* (10 October 2002)

This section argues for the performativity of the texts that comprise my dissertation’s case studies. In identifying these narratives as performative, I suggest the stories *do* more than they *say*.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, these kinds of stories articulate mainstream anxieties about contact with America’s religious margins and authorize actions to constrain and discourage religious and sexual difference. Such narratives thus justify attempts to regulate the practices of religious outsiders on the grounds of sexual decency, despite America’s professed national commitment to religious freedom. And like America’s founding narrative that Sacvan Bercovitch identifies as “Pilgrims, Puritans, and the Quest for Religious Freedom,” the narrative of the duplicitous and sexually vile religious outsider has shown, as Bercovitch says, “astonishing tenacity.”<sup>21</sup>

My analysis of this dissertation’s case studies includes not only close readings of the texts themselves, but also considerations of the material consequences of the text’s publication and publicization.<sup>22</sup> To this end, I refer to each case study not as a text, but rather as a narrativization. In his 1981 “The Narrativization of Real Events,” historian and literary scholar Hayden White argues that the translation of lived experience into narrative lends consequence and coherence to the

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<sup>20</sup> On the capacity of language to act or effect action, see in particular J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 186.

<sup>22</sup> As White reminds us, the significance of narrativization depends upon both making available the text available to the public *and* the public’s insistence upon the text’s importance. That is, “it is the ‘publicity’ that makes the difference.” Hayden White, “The Narrativization of Real Events,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 4 (July 1, 1981): 798. On the “strange materiality of discourse, see also Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, xii.

“virtual chaos of ‘events.’”<sup>23</sup> White emphasizes the inherently moralistic nature of narrativization.

The turning of events and experiences into a story does not merely relate those events and experiences. As White insists: “story forms not only permit us to judge the moral significance of human projects, they also provide the means by which to judge them, even while we pretend to be merely describing them.”<sup>24</sup> This is to say that narrativizations both provide moral guidance for their readers and instruct those readers in how to gauge the morality embedded within the narrative.

In the context of my case studies, the transformation of personal experiences and historical events into “stories” translates complex and often poorly understood beliefs and practices into straightforward and proximate formulas for mainstream Americans.<sup>25</sup> Readers identify protagonists based on the characters’ familiarity (their “same-as-me-ness”)<sup>26</sup> and antagonists on their strangeness and inscrutability. These narrativizations evoke a sentimental and dramatic emotional response to the sufferings of the protagonists, who are always the characters most closely identified with the American religious mainstream.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, these narrativizations collapse the lived complexities of unfamiliar religious beliefs and practices, consolidating undigested difference into a more recognizable and vilifiable Other.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> White, “The Narrativization of Real Events,” 795, in conversation with Louis Mink regarding the purpose and significance of narrative.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 797.

<sup>25</sup> See Robert Orsi on the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of extreme or disturbing religious persons or groups: “Americans want to be protected from these religious actors, but at the same time they want access to some of their power, an unstable mix of desire and prohibition.” Robert A. Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 182.

<sup>26</sup> See Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 11 (emphasis added): “Everyday practices that predicate *bonding on ‘same-as-me-ness’* produce our very *perceptions of intimacy and connection as threatened by difference* rather than strengthened by it.”

<sup>27</sup> On the cultural currency of sentimentality, see *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7: in religiously intolerant discourse, “names and places might change, but the plots and conclusions remain numbingly the same.” See also David Brion Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1960): 208; and Robert Neelly Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 256.

In the case of Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*, the marginal group is the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Krakauer is an American mountaineer and the author of several works of popular non-fiction; he is best known for his accounts of out-of-doors derring-do, including *Into Thin Air* and *Into the Wild*. *Under the Banner of Heaven* interweaves two narratives: an informal history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and an account of murders committed by Dan and Ron Lafferty, two former members of a Mormon fundamentalist extremist sect. Throughout the book, Krakauer implies that Mormonism—not the Lafferty brothers' splinter sect, but all Mormonism—is inherently violent and sexually suspect. Despite being condemned by LDS spokespeople and dismissed by religious studies scholars, *Banner* ignited a media firestorm and sold thousands of copies. In direct response to his research for *Banner*, Krakauer dedicated significant time and personal resources toward the capture and imprisonment of former FLDS leader Warren Steed Jeffs. The author also testified before the Texas Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee in support of a bill that directly targeted the FLDS community in Eldorado, Texas as sexually suspect “fringe religious community.”<sup>29</sup> Following these proceedings and a false report of sexual violence within the community, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services initiated the largest government detention of American children in the nation's history, an episode that ultimately alienated the very FLDS women and children the Department was attempting to save.

Betty Mahmoody describes Muslim men as suspect religious Others in *Not Without My Daughter*. The 1987 international best-seller chronicles the harrowing escape of Betty Mahmoody and her daughter Mahtob from captivity and abuse in post-revolutionary Iran. The author narrates her husband's rapid deterioration (or reversion?) from an industrious and thoroughly Americanized medical doctor into an abusive, impotent lunatic shortly after their family's arrival in Tehran.

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<sup>29</sup> TX House of Representatives, 79th Legislature (R), *H.B. 3006, House Research Bill Analysis*, May 12, 2005.

Mahmoody's tale of captivity and liberation sold 15 million copies internationally and has been translated into 20 languages; Sally Field played Mahmoody in a 1991 film adaptation.<sup>30</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that *Not Without My Daughter* made Betty Mahmoody an international feminist icon, poster girl for women's liberation from oppressive—and notably religious—patriarchal abuse. *Daughter* is one of dozens of such memoirs, a genre that has proved exceedingly popular among American audiences.<sup>31</sup> More significantly, Mahmoody's anti-Muslim rhetoric, which emphasizes women's vulnerability in the face of a monstrously masculinized Islam, foreshadows justifications of United States' military action against Muslim majority countries throughout the early 2000s.

Under the therapeutic ministrations of Dr. Lawrence Pazder, Michelle Smith recovered memories of years-long abuse at the hands of unknown captors. Smith and Pazder published these recollections in a "lurid, disturbing, and unforgettable" 1980 pulp nonfiction volume entitled *Michelle Remembers*, which records startling accounts of psychological and physical trauma identified by Pazder as satanic.<sup>32</sup> Though now widely discredited, the book served as evidence in police seminars on alleged occult activity, in United States Senate testimony on the growing presence of "evil" in the United States, and in the longest and most expensive United States' criminal trial of its time. *Michelle Remembers* and its authors had a direct and lasting impact on American law enforcement, juridical proceedings, psychological and psychiatric treatments, and news reporting during the 1980s and early 1990s – including Smith and Pazder's direct influence on the psychologists and law enforcement officials gathering evidence for the McMartin Daycare Trial and on the popularization of psychological diagnoses of repressed/recovered memories and Multiple Personality Disorder related to satanic ritual abuse (MPD-SRA). New religious movement scholars have gone so far as to

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<sup>30</sup> Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 215.

<sup>31</sup> Such narratives do not enjoy the same popularity among the Middle Eastern and Central Asian populations the books portray.

<sup>32</sup> Gareth Medway, *Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 176.

identify *Michelle Remembers* as the catalyst for a decade-long, transnational period of moral anxiety commonly referred to as the “Satanic Panic,” a widespread national episode that vilified childcare professionals, working mothers, and religious witches alike.<sup>33</sup>

That the basic approaches and conclusions (dare we say morals?) of these stories are strikingly similar is no coincidence. Throughout my case studies, and in a number of other highly public formulations of religious intolerance, a strikingly similar villain emerges.<sup>34</sup> As American religious historian David Brion Davis notes: “When the images of different enemies conform to a similar pattern, it is highly probable that this pattern reflects important tensions within a given culture.”<sup>35</sup> With regard to my case studies, I will show that the confluence of marginal religiosity and normative sexuality is just such an “important tension” within late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century American culture. It is important to recognize these rhetorical consistencies as persistent precisely because they reflect ongoing concerns within the body public – and because to fail to do so fuels indifference toward larger efforts to promote religious tolerance.<sup>36</sup> Rhetorical constructions of religious outsiders as sexually predatory facilitate Americans’ self-perception as simultaneously religiously tolerant and morally upright.<sup>37</sup>

The efficacy of these kinds of narrativizations lies in the powerful affective responses these stories evoke from their audiences. As Anne Burlein notes in her 2002 *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge*, articulations of religious intolerance appeal to

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<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1993), 68.

<sup>34</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 7, as well as Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 262.

<sup>35</sup> Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion,” 213. At *ibid.*, 216-7, Davis notes sexuality and gender roles as among these central tensions.

<sup>36</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> See Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 23 (emphasis added): “On examining the *uses* to which such representations of Mormonism have been put, it becomes clear that America’s *ongoing process of self-definition* has been facilitated by the appropriation of images of a handy, ready-made Other. The Mormon Villain, it turns out, is *integrally related to an evolving American self-definition*. Not only must the mode of representation be consistent with the image of Pilgrims, Puritans, and the Quest for Religious Freedom, but so *must the enemy represented be conducive to America’s self-concept*.”

American audiences not only by engendering fear, “but also, and more powerfully, by playing on how vulnerable (and violent) people can be when they are trying to do ‘what’s best.’”<sup>38</sup> Burlein argues that American understandings of “what’s best” follow intimate domestic disciplines—lessons learned in the context of the home, and from women in particular—that construct difference as inherently threatening.<sup>39</sup> Sociologists Robert Bellah and Robert Greenspahn concurred with Burlein: “diverse forms of religious hostility... share certain characteristics. Although expressed in theological language, they reflect a sense of fear, fear that the others are *not just wrong, but dangerous*.”<sup>40</sup> Such stories, then, appeal to an understanding presumed shared among Americans regarding what religious practice should look like. At the same time, these narrativizations present American religious outsiders as threatening examples of religion done wrong.

With Burlein, American religions scholars John Corrigan and Lynn Neal identify the appeal to normative gender roles and sexual practices as a common strategy in discrediting minority communities and justifying intolerance.<sup>41</sup> Burlein calls these “gut issues,”<sup>42</sup> reductions of complex issues to personal affective responses. The issues themselves, Burlein claims, are of less import than the paternalistic protectionism mobilized in response to the pursuant moral panic(s). For Burlein, then, the construction of sexual difference as threatening “remasculinizes the national body politic.”<sup>43</sup> Corrigan and Neal further insist that religiously intolerant invocations of “proper”

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<sup>38</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>40</sup> Bellah and Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*, ix (emphasis added).

<sup>41</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 12, as well as Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 257-8.

<sup>42</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. On this point, see also Rubin, “Blood Under the Bridge,” 37: “The rhetoric of child protection has anchored many conservative agendas with respect to intensifying women’s subordinate status [and] reinforcing hierarchical family structures.” See also Emily S. Rosenberg, “Rescuing Women and Children,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (2002): 460: “Historians have recognized that the rescue theme often works to display and reinforce notions of the superior manliness of the rescuer nation, indeed to cast the nation itself in a manly role. The nation itself is summoned to provide protection to women or to a country—emblematically feminized—that rival men are violating.”

gendered and sexual behaviors specifically function to undermine minority religions' legitimacy in either reason or morality.<sup>44</sup> The centrality of normative gender and sexuality to American national identity makes accusations of sexual depravity particularly effective, often despite the absence of evidence to support such accusations. Narrativizations that portray religious outsiders as dangerous—and in particular, as threatening “proper” gender roles and “normal” sexuality—confirm fears, authorize disciplinary actions, and justify the privilege enjoyed by mainstream beliefs and practices. Thus minority religious groups emerge in the American public sphere not only as aberrant, but as a threat to mainstream cultural values, specifically values about gender and sexuality.<sup>45</sup>

My case studies and their narratological kindred constrain both mainstream American religiosity and normative American sexuality. This is to say that religious intolerance does not exist in a vacuum: it exploits other systemic inequalities. Texts like *Banner*, *Daughter*, and *Michelle* evoke readers' intimate sentimental commitments while confirming deep-seated and often unconsidered anxieties about the dangers of religious and sexual difference. At the same time, this discourse and its material effects reaffirm paternalistic assumptions about hierarchical binary gender roles by insisting that women in minority religious communities *require* saving.<sup>46</sup>

In this way, my case studies—narrativizations of allegedly real events—participate in the public negotiation of normative sexuality and tolerable religiosity. These texts, accounts of largely private and individual experiences, might signify little in isolation. But through their public reception, dissemination, and incitement of action, these narratives help serve as arbiters of “common sense” and “public morality.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 258.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>46</sup> On the “romance of masculine protectionism,” see Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 26. At *ibid.*, 13, Burlein asserts that “in proportion to the height of a culture's hopes in femininity stand its fears” (13).

<sup>47</sup> White, “The Narrativization of Real Events,” 795.

## *Thinking American Sex*

Most people cannot quite rid themselves of the sense that controlling the sex of others,  
far from being unethical, is where morality begins.

Michael Warner  
*The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*

This section examines the role public discourse plays in shaping and constraining American normative sexuality. I suggest such discourse relies on assumptions of a national consensus about acceptable (that is, tolerable) sexual identities and practices. This assumed consensus invokes an imagined—which is to say symbolic, impossible, and yet materially consequential—link among all Americans. I emphasize three elements characteristic of public discourse on “normal” American sexuality: the co-constitutive nature of heterosexuality and binary, hierarchical organization of gender roles; the cultural validation of certain sexual practices and identities as universal and innate; and the ways in which persons or groups overtly identified with sex often face public condemnation. I note the contributions of queer theorists Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, and Michael Warner to my understanding of American sexual discourse and outline ways in which each theorist informs my research.

I next propose that several intertwined historical factors in post-1970s America make this period particularly rich for investigations into the confluence of sexuality and religion in public discourse. While public critique and regulation of sexual difference obviously has a long history, I suggest that a range of factors—a resurgence of radical religious innovation; second wave feminism’s emphasis on women’s sexual autonomy; gay activists’ insistence on the visibility and legitimacy of sexual difference; and the emergence of a new Christian alliance, promoting a conservative sexual agenda—contributed to an elision of conservative sexuality with “morality per se” in American public discourse.



The result of this elision is a popular understanding of “normal” American sexuality that is at once informed by conservative Christian sexual ethics and often unaware of its own religiously-informed assumptions. Such presumably secular discourse, as I will show, may function to discourage both religious and sexual difference while appearing to conform to a professed national commitment to religious freedom. I propose that public discourse about acceptable religiosity and sexuality gives shape to a form of American sexual exceptionalism – an understanding of normative American sexuality as both universalizable and distinctive, in need of protection and defense. I engage Jasbir Puar’s concept of American exceptionalism from her 2007 *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* to analyze my case studies’ rhetorical investments in protecting American normative sexuality and particularly the sexual respectability of American white women. These case studies make visible particular national commitments, rhetorical strategies, and cultural assumptions about the “acceptable” boundaries of sex and religion in contemporary American society.

## **“Normal” Sex and “Shared” Values**

The confluence of religion and sexuality in American public discourse presents a curious paradox: many politicians, news pundits, law enforcement officials, and judicial authorities seem comfortable publicly examining our presumably most private activity – that is, sex. And despite a professed national commitment to religious freedom, public figures frequently use suspicions of indecent or improper sexuality to justify intervening in minority religious communities. While judges, police officers, reporters, and other public figures seldom overtly criticize minority religions, many cast aspersions on the real or suspected sexual proclivities of religious outsiders.

Public accusations of sexual impropriety often allude to shared American values, a set of common priorities regarding what constitutes proper, moral, acceptable (one might say orthodox)

sexual practice.<sup>48</sup> As Mary Jo Neitz and Marion Goldman note in the introduction to *Sex, Lies, and Sanctity: Religion and Deviance in Contemporary North America* (1995), “In the dominant [American] culture religion continues to articulate norms regulating sexuality... Religions perform this function even for those who do not subscribe to the specified rules.”<sup>49</sup> For this reason, Neitz and Goldman explain, “people are apprehensive when religions appear to deviate from what are believed to be common values.”<sup>50</sup> An assumed consensus among Americans about their “common values” lends weight to accusations of improper sexual practice. That a consensus among hundreds of millions of people is perhaps impossible does not rob appeals to shared values of their weight. Benedict Anderson referred to this symbolic, yet materially consequential, unity as an imagined community – a group of people who do not physically interact, but consider themselves a coherent social entity based on a presumption of shared commitments.<sup>51</sup>

Social theorist Michael Warner’s concept of a public is perhaps more apt with regard to my case studies. To consider post-1970s America as a public in Warner’s sense is to say that the American body politic includes and excludes certain kinds of people, who have at their disposal certain media and genres, whose communications operate within certain linguistic conventions.<sup>52</sup> Warner understands a public as a social entity shaped by the circulation of discourses. As a

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<sup>48</sup> On the consequences of “heretical sex,” see Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Psychology Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Jo Neitz and Marion S. Goldman, eds., *Sex, Lies, and Sanctity: Religion and Deviance in Contemporary North America*, vol. 5, Religion and the Social Order (Bradford: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 1995), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6: “I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community... It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” See also Lauren Gail Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, “Queer Nationality,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 214: “America” is “understood not as a geographic but as a symbolic locus in which individuals experience their fundamental link to 250,000,000 other individuals.”

<sup>52</sup> Michael Warner, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 10.

Warnerian public, the American body politic acts as a “space of collective improvisation” in which an impossible but nevertheless material unity among millions of people takes shape. American public discourse (in the form of laws, news broadcasts, popular books, etc.) contributes to an “intuitive sense” of who “we” are and what is important to “us.”<sup>53</sup> Warner, with social theorists Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman as well as religious studies scholars Ann Burlein, Anne Pellegrini, and Janet Jakobsen, has argued that appeals to American identity also serves to compel certain kinds of sexual performances – sexual acts and identities deemed “normal” within the American public sphere.<sup>54</sup>

My analysis of normative American sexual morality—“shared values”—utilizes three key propositions from critical theories of sexuality. First, American normative sexuality creates expectations and compels performances of binary, hierarchical gender roles. This first idea follows from heteronormativity, the naturalization of heterosexuality as universal and innate. Queer theorist Judith Butler suggests that heteronormativity *creates* gender by requiring binary roles. Butler calls this the “heterosexual matrix,” which “assumes that for bodies to make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.”<sup>55</sup> That is, heteronormativity makes sense of bodies in hierarchical, binary, reproductive terms.

For the purposes of this project, the hierarchical binary reproductive organization of human gender matters because articulations of religious intolerance invoke and reinforce gendered inequality through appeals to the innocence and helplessness of American women. To adapt Burlein, the bodies of American women lend “physical embodiment to the national body politic that is a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 21-3; Berlant and Freeman, “Queer Nationality,” 48; Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 12; Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Beacon Press, 2004), 21. On the exclusion of sexual difference as a strategy of nation-building, see Matti Bunzl, “Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some Thoughts on the New Europe,” *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005): 499–508.

<sup>55</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Psychology Press, 1990), 151.

community we imagine rather than live concretely.”<sup>56</sup> The paternalistic, protectionist tone adopted throughout my case studies makes much of the (presumed) physical and sexual vulnerability of American women, often grouping female adults with children of both genders as a singularly vulnerable sub-class of citizen: women-and-children. Through such discourses, the American body politic both justifies intervening into religious minority communities and reassures itself of the necessity of saving and protecting “innocents.”<sup>57</sup>

Second, American public discourse both lends sexual acts “an excess of significance” and identifies some sexual practices and identities as more moral, or normal, or healthy than other kinds.<sup>58</sup> I addressed heteronormativity above, but the cultural validation of certain kinds of sex over other kinds extends well beyond either heteronormativity or a hierarchical homo/hetero binary. In her seminal “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” Gayle Rubin maps this cultural divide as a caste system or “charmed circle” of “Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed Sexualit[ies]” and “Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural, Damned Sexualit[ies].”<sup>59</sup> “Sexuality that is 'good,' 'normal,' and 'natural,'” she suggests, “should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home. It should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and female.”<sup>60</sup> Bad sex

may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial. It may be masturbatory or take place at orgies, may be casual, may cross generational lines, and may

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<sup>56</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> On the function of innocence in religiously intolerant discourse, see Ibid., 15-6. Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, 1 further notes that the American public frequently congratulates itself for being sexually exclusive. See also Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 258: public discourse frequently describes the religiously intolerable as “go[ing] against gender, sexual, and family norms, which represents [sic] a threat to both religious (Protestant) and American life. There can be no ‘real’ religious reason for such threatening actions. Further, the supposed sexual deviance of these Others corrupts the ‘innocent,’ in most cases defined as white Protestant women.”

<sup>58</sup> Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” 11.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

take place in 'public,' or at least in the bushes or in the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles.<sup>61</sup>

This sexual dichotomy is demonstrably hierarchical. Those who engage in good/blessed sex receive “certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and marital benefits.”<sup>62</sup> Unrepentant sexual transgressors may be accused of mental illness, disrespectability, and criminality, as well as restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, and economic sanctions.<sup>63</sup> This is to say that engaging in good or normative sexual practice confers privilege within contemporary American culture, while engaging in bad or transgressive sex garners social stigma and often negative material consequences.

Several important aspects of Rubin’s theorization of good and bad sex shape my understanding of normative American sexuality. First and perhaps most importantly, I note the confluence of “good sex” and “good religion” – that is, those acts and identities deemed good by the American public coincide with those deemed moral by mainstream American religious doctrine (a point to which I shall return in more detail shortly).<sup>64</sup> Next, as Rubin herself notes in her reflections on “Thinking Sex,” critics of nontraditional sexuality frequently assume that those who engage in transgressive sexual practices must be “uninformed, duped, or coerced” into doing so.<sup>65</sup> My case studies reflect a similar assumption about the religious minorities—particularly women members of minority religious communities—depicted in each narrative. This is to say that American public discourse frequently identifies participants in marginal practices as irrational, trapped, or misled.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> I take the theorization of “good religion” from Orsi’s “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth.” I explore this category and its connection to normative American sexuality in the third section of this introduction.

<sup>65</sup> Rubin, “Blood Under the Bridge,” 29. Rubin is critiquing a feminist analysis of a pornographic film, but her point extends to her broader theorizations.

Also significant is the extent to which public disapproval of sexual difference passes for sexual ethics – even in the absence of evidence for accusations of abuse or coercion.<sup>66</sup> In the case studies I explore throughout this dissertation, public distaste for sexual difference often authorizes interference into religious minority practice, even absent evidence that transgressive sexuality has taken place.<sup>67</sup>

The third important proposition of critical sex theory I engage in this dissertation is the fraught nature of what Michael Warner calls “sex in public.” In his 1999 *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, Warner notes that despite a public culture saturated with sexual imagery, the American public “still fear[s] and despise[s] those whom they identify with sex.”<sup>68</sup> While mass media facilitates unprecedented public discussions about sex, Warner argues, anyone associated with “actual sex” can be “spectacularly demonized.”<sup>69</sup> Warner insists that anxieties about public identification with sex (and particularly with sexual difference)—which he calls “erotophobia”—can and do “coexist with and even feed on commercial titillation, desperate fascination, therapeutic celebration, and repression.”<sup>70</sup> My case studies demonstrate the extent to which religious minorities—when they are identified publicly with sex—can be “spectacularly demonized.” Moreover, the public discussion of these minority communities often pairs anxieties about sexual difference with titillating descriptions of sexual abuse, attending to the details of these harrowing tales with “desperate fascination.” Though public officials bemoan the alleged abuses, these same officials frequently linger over shocking particulars while excoriating religious minorities

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 29. On this point, see also Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Here again, see the FBI findings that discredited all allegations of satanic ritual abuse (Lanning, *Satanic Ritual Abuse*), as well as the false reports that led to the raid on Yearning for Zion (Jacobson and Burton, “Prologue: The Incident at Eldorado, Texas,” xvii).

<sup>68</sup> Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, 21, 33.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

for their supposed prurience.<sup>71</sup> Sex in public—as both public identification with “actual sex” and public rhetoric about those acts and identities—can thus be understood as a key element in shaping normative American sexuality. While both Rubin and Warner have noted the influence of conservative religious opinions on late 20<sup>th</sup> century American sexual morality, only Warner attends to the role religion played in collapsing sexuality into morality in the American public sphere.<sup>72</sup>

This linkage between religion and sex in the American public sphere is at once a broad trend and a historically contingent phenomenon. Social theorist Charles Taylor identifies a post-Reformation sexual ethic as the root of American morality, in which marital sex stands in for and sometimes overshadows other forms of ethical concerns.<sup>73</sup> Tracy Fessenden notes the seminal role sex and sexuality play in the formation of coherent national identity, as well as the construction of certain bodies and practices as “symbolic threat[s]” to that identity.<sup>74</sup> David Brion Davis likewise observes the prevalence of sexual deviance accusations leveled against religious outsiders.<sup>75</sup> Corrigan and Neal emphasize the ways assertions of religious intolerance “raise fears about gender and sexuality to persecute other religions.”<sup>76</sup> The construction of religious outsiders as sexually suspect has been a historically prevalent trope in American public discourse.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Marie Anne Pagliarini, “The Pure American Woman and the Wicked Catholic Priest: An Analysis of Anti-Catholic Literature in Antebellum America,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 99.

<sup>72</sup> Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” 11; and Rubin, “Blood Under the Bridge,” 32.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Taylor, “Sex & Christianity: How Has the Moral Landscape Changed?,” *Commonweal*, September 28, 2007, <http://commonwealmagazine.org/sex-christianity-0>.

<sup>74</sup> Tracy Fessenden, Nicholas F Radel, and Magdalena J Zaborowska, eds., *The Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality, and National Identity in American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion,” 216-17, 219-21.

<sup>76</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 258.

<sup>77</sup> On the construction of social outsiders as necessarily sexually deviant or suspect, see also Gayle Rubin’s concept of “sex negativity.” Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” 11.

Yet American public discourse about sexuality has also changed dramatically in the last forty years. Several factors have contributed to an elision of “sexuality” with “morality” in American public sphere discourse after the 1970s: new religious movements’ facilitation of religio-sexual innovation<sup>78</sup>; second wave feminism’s emphasis on women’s sexual autonomy<sup>79</sup>; gay liberation activists’ insistence on the visibility and legitimacy of sexual difference<sup>80</sup>; and perhaps most influentially, the emergence and politicization of a new Christian alliance, promoting a conservative sexual agenda.

In his 2008 “The Ruse of Secular Humanism,” Warner describes the mobilization of an unprecedented “pan-Christian alliance” against the modern perils of teen pregnancy, gay rights activism, and similar sexual and gendered “threats.”<sup>81</sup> Warner notes that the regulation of sex—debates over abortion, contraception, and other transgressions—rallied a confederation of

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<sup>78</sup> On religio-sexual innovation during the late twentieth century, see Elizabeth Puttick, *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality, and Spiritual Power* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); and Susan J. Palmer, *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women’s Roles in New Religions* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Adrienne Cecile Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1980); and Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique (50th Anniversary Edition)* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), among a number of others. The late twentieth century was a time of significant shifts in women’s sexual autonomy. As Nathan and Snedeker note, “many middle-class adolescents stopped keeping their premarital sexual experimentation a secret from adults, abortion was legalized, the proportion of unmarried teenage mothers more than quadrupled, the divorce rate tripled, women with young children streamed into the workforce, and day-care centers proliferated. The swiftness of these changes unsettled many Americans.” Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2001), 4.

<sup>80</sup> John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 227, 232. Activist Harry Hay founded one of the earliest American gay rights movement, the Mattachine Society, in 1950. For the most part, however, the public sphere did not attend to issues of gay identity and rights until the emergence of what historian John D’Emilio calls the gay “liberation impulse” in the late 1960s – and, in particular, the publicity and activism that followed the Stonewall Riots. Beginning on June 28, 1969, the Stonewall Riots were a series of public demonstrations against harassment of the gay community by the New York City Police Department. By 1970, gay liberation groups surfaced in cities and on college campuses throughout the nation. While this was by no means the first time sex had occupied the American public imagination, it did arguably constitute the broadest and most public advocacy for non-heteronormative sexual acts and identities in American history. *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>81</sup> 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/>. 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* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).



disparate Protestant communities (and even some Roman Catholics) in the late 1970s.<sup>82</sup> “These Christians needed sex to exist as a movement,” Warner notes.<sup>83</sup> This conservative Christian alliance formed around—indeed, required— a conservative sexual consensus that condemned homosexuality, abortion, contraception, pornography, and other symptoms of “moral decline.”<sup>84</sup> “The New Christian Right” launched a massive and influential political and popular campaign against “moral decline” and threats on “the family” throughout the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>85</sup> The New Christian Right’s attempts to protect “the family” from the dangers of transgressive sex—and, more broadly, the consolidation of public Christian morality around issues of sexual morality—set the stage for couching patriotic concern in the language of sexual regulation. This consolidation around and politicization of non-normative sexuality as symptomatic of a national moral atrophy directly contributed to the elision of morality, values, and normative sexuality in American public discourse.<sup>86</sup>

Since the 1970s, then, American public discourse about “shared values” and morality often invokes an assumed consensus regarding normative sexuality. I argue that such rhetoric has been deeply shaped by conservative Christian sexual ethics, but it is neither reducible to particular denominational perspectives nor even necessarily discernible as religious sentiment *per se*. Indeed, as I will argue, these religio-sexual ethics “have become so institutionalized... that they can be taken for good old American values.”<sup>87</sup> This conflation marks the religious origins of commonsense and

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<sup>82</sup> Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Williams also at *ibid.*, 5, that “by the end of the 1960s, [conservative Protestants] fear of cooperating with Catholics had dissipated in the midst of their concerns over secularism and moral decline.”

<sup>83</sup> On this point, see also Bethany Moreton, “Why Is There so Much Sex in Christian Conservatism and Why Do so Few Historians Care Anything About It?,” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009): 717–738.

<sup>84</sup> Warner, “The Ruse of ‘Secular Humanism’”; and Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 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.

<sup>86</sup> Regarding the “fear regime” established by evangelicals after 1960s, see Bivins, “Embattled Majority.”

<sup>87</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 3.

American values, at once reinforcing and obscuring religious influences on notions of normative sexuality operant in the American public sphere.

## **“Good Sex” and American Minority Religions**

Several scholars have proposed that sexual ethics often unmarked as Christian inform popular understandings of normal (or “good”) American sexuality.<sup>88</sup> In their 2004 *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*, Ann Pellegrini and Janet Jakobsen emphasize that “religion—specifically Christianity—shapes legislation, public policy, and even jurisprudence around sex... [T]he assumptions that underlie sexual regulation are so deeply embedded that people no longer recognize them as being derived from religious thought.”<sup>89</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini note that Christian sexual ethics—which delimit “good” sex in terms of binary, monogamous, heterosexual, moderately procreative, marital intercourse—have been normalized as “good old American values.”<sup>90</sup>

Through an analysis of United States Supreme Court decisions, Pellegrini and Jakobsen argue that American assumptions about religion, values, and public interest are “crucially connected” to sexuality and its regulation.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, they suggest that “the secular state's regulation of the sexual

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<sup>88</sup> Scholarly analyses of the Christian underpinnings of American secularism have largely emphasized the influence of Protestant beliefs and practices on the constitution of the American body politic. However, the pan-Christian alliance of the late 1970s adopted Roman Catholic rhetoric on issues like abortion, premarital sex, and homosexuality. (See, for example, *Ibid.*, 5 regarding public appropriation of Catholic sexual morality to the exclusion of most other Catholic doctrines on social justice. See also Tracy Fessenden’s argument that the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church has strengthened its alliances with conservative forces in the United States by continuing its hardline stance on contraception and abortion. See Tracy Fessenden, “Sex and the Subject of Religion,” *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, January 10, 2008, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/10/sex-and-the-subject-of-religion/>. For this reason, I refer to these religious influences as Christian, acknowledging both the extensive influence of Protestant dogma and the irreducibility of these ethics to any single denomination.

<sup>89</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Regarding “moderate procreation,” note public rhetoric regarding the hyperfertility of American religious minorities, including Roman Catholics and Latter-day Saints.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

life of its citizens is actually religion by other means.”<sup>92</sup> The authors challenge the rhetoric of both religious and sexual tolerance, suggesting that tolerance is an inherently hierarchical model (“we” in power tolerate “them,” those who do religion and/or sex differently).

American public discourse draws on an imagined consensus regarding appropriate sexuality; the boundaries of sexual propriety are, as Pellegrini and Jakobsen argue, directly informed by a sexual ethic derived from conservative Christianity. It follows, then, that religious groups and people who engage in non-normative sexual behaviors often meet with suspicion, ridicule, and hostility. The sexual mores and practices of minority religions have historically been targets of popular suspicion and anxiety in the American public sphere.<sup>93</sup> Those beyond the bounds of good sex—who engage in multiple-partnered, same-gendered, casual, or recreational sex, who have too many children, or foreswear sex altogether—are often assumed to be not merely transgressive, but anti-American.<sup>94</sup> Those who engage in bad sex for religious reasons or with religious justification often meet with a peculiar form of social censure: the religious sex scandal, a public and often vituperative expulsion of transgressive forms of religion and sexuality from the American body politic.<sup>95</sup>

It is true that some minority religions—including a significant number of new religious movements—do condone or even encourage non-normative sexual behaviors for their adherents.<sup>96</sup> Yet the public response to such doctrines or practices is massively disproportionate to the number of

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<sup>92</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Such suspicions and anxieties are, of course, not unique to America. For similar rhetorical strategies in a European context, see George Lachmann Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: H. Fertig, 1985).

<sup>94</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party*, 25.

<sup>95</sup> See Katherine Pratt Ewing, “Religion, Spirituality, and the Sexual Scandal,” *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, August 2, 2010, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/08/02/religion-spirituality-sexual-scandal/>.

<sup>96</sup> Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 126-141.

citizens persuaded by or engaged in them.<sup>97</sup> More: minority religions are frequently suspected and accused of sexual deviance and even coercion regardless of their communities' mores or practices.<sup>98</sup>

It is this intersection—American minority religions and notions of normative sexuality—that forms the core research focus of this project. Why are religious minorities so frequently accused of sexual transgression? Why do we, the presumably secular American public, assume we know what's “really going on” in minority religious communities?<sup>99</sup> Why is the burden of proof so often laid on defendants, rather than on prosecutors, in cases of suspected religiously motivated sexual abuse?<sup>100</sup> Why, when sexual abuse of women and children is so prevalent in American society, do we so commonly locate it within religious minority communities?<sup>101</sup> In short, why do we so often suspect religious outsiders of sexual predation or coercion, and why does sex work so well as a tool for marginalizing suspect religiosities? This confluence marks my project's primary focus, the tendency of American public discourse to identify minority religious communities as especially prone to sexual transgression, duplicity, and violence.

It is fair to say that sex marks the limits of religious tolerance. We the people will allow religious difference only insofar as it does not violate our intuitive sense of sexual morality (as I noted above, “sex” and “morality” are often deployed interchangeably in recent American public

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<sup>97</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 42, 87; Janet Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 180.

<sup>98</sup> Dawson, *Comprehending Cults*, 126-141; and Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion,” 213-4.

<sup>99</sup> Catherine Wessinger, “‘Culting’: From Waco to Fundamentalist Mormons,” *Religion Dispatches*, May 6, 2008, [http://religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/219/\\_culting\\_\\_from\\_waco\\_to\\_fundamentalist\\_mormons\\_\\_\\_culture\\_\\_\\_/](http://religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/219/_culting__from_waco_to_fundamentalist_mormons___culture___/)

<sup>100</sup> Catherine Ross, “Legal Constraints on Child-Saving: The Strange Case of the Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints at Yearning for Zion Ranch,” *Capital University Law Review* 37 (July 30, 2009): 410; Stuart Wright and James Richardson, eds., *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 15.

<sup>101</sup> Palmer, “Rescuing Children? Government Raids and Child Abuse Allegations in Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective.”

discourse). American religious studies scholars David Campbell and Robert Putnam note in their 2010 *America's Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* that disagreements involving “such intimate matters as sex and the family” often denote a fracture point in public discourse on religion.<sup>102</sup> Several American religious studies scholars have noted the efficacy of sexual suspicion as a method of discrediting minority beliefs and practices throughout the nation’s history. Mormon studies scholars’ Terryl Givens and Sarah Barringer Gordon provide insightful analysis of Mormon disenfranchisement on the grounds of sexual indecency during the nineteenth century; Tracy Fessenden and Marie Anne Pagliarini demonstrate the prevalence of anxieties about Catholic celibacy during that same period.<sup>103</sup> Neal and Corrigan likewise insist that “the intertwining of religious differences with other forms of divergence—[specifically] the meaning of family, sexuality, and reproduction—continues to be central to the issue of intolerance generally.”<sup>104</sup> Yet observing the frequency with which allegations of “bad” sex work to defame religious minorities provides a limited and ultimately unsatisfying theorization of American religious intolerance.

As discussed above, American public discourse frequently invokes a presumed consensus regarding normative sexuality, and that presumed consensus informs the American body politic’s stance toward acceptable religion. But it is not enough to say that good sex marks the limits of Americans’ religious tolerance. Rather, I suggest that a shared American sense of “good sex” has been shaped by and reinforces a shared sense of “good religion,” and vice versa. This is to say that in American public discourse, religion and sex are co-constitutive terms. Certain beliefs, practices,

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<sup>102</sup> Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 3.

<sup>103</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*; Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman’s Sphere,” *Signs* 25, no. 2 (January 1, 2000): 451–478; and Pagliarini, “The Pure American Woman and the Wicked Catholic Priest.”

<sup>104</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 81.

people, groups, sentiments, or experiences are excluded from the category of “American religion” even by purportedly secular logics. Such exclusions are not always or only intentional.

Thus to understand American religious intolerance, we must account for more than intentional condemnations and deliberate rejections of religious difference. Intolerance is at once larger and more pernicious than hate speech and physical assault. We must instead frankly acknowledge the violence of systemic exclusions of minority groups from national identity formation, the intimate violence of knowledge-production.<sup>105</sup> Epistemic violence can act through ignoring, silencing, and obscuring divergent forms of religious belief and practice, thus constraining the conditions of possibility for religious pluralism.

An imagined consensus regarding of good religion and normal sex authorizes and perpetuates these exclusions in American public discourse. As I noted above, it follows that religious people or groups who engage in non-normative sexuality would meet with public suspicion. But how to account for the prevalent assumption that minority religions are inherently sexually suspect? I propose that anxieties regarding bad sex do not merely mark the boundaries of American religious tolerance. Rather, such anxieties and the accusations of deviance that follow from them also work to promote normative religious and sexual practices. By conflating normative sexuality with good old American values, public rhetoric about American religion constructs American sexuality as necessarily moral and exemplary – that is to say, exceptional.

## **American Sexual Exceptionalism**

For the purposes of this dissertation, “American sexual exceptionalism” refers to an understanding of American sexuality as distinct from and superior to the presumed religio-sexual perversity of the

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<sup>105</sup> On the brutality of exclusion, see Bercovitch as cited in Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 22. On the epistemic violence inherent in knowledge production, see Spivak’s seminal “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66–97.

religious or non-native outsider.<sup>106</sup> American sexual exceptionalism functions as a distinctive yet universalized sexual normativity. Queer theorist Jasbir Puar's understanding of the role sexuality plays in promoting American exceptionalism directly informs my own. In her 2007 *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Puar argues that exceptionalism "paradoxically signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority)."<sup>107</sup> She maintains that discourses of sexual exceptionalism configure the United States as "an exceptional nation-state," one whose policies and moralities manifest as somehow unique and universalizable.<sup>108</sup>

Suspensions of sexual misconduct have a special ability to discredit people in American public discourse, never more so than when such accusations occur under the auspices of religion.<sup>109</sup> Such anxieties frequently occasion well-intentioned liberatory discourse that nevertheless polices the boundaries of what counts as real/true/good American religion: *we* (insiders) need to save *them* (outsiders). As I noted above, though, the public response to such doctrines or practices is often massively disproportionate to the number of citizens who engage in them.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, minority religions are frequently suspected and accused of sexual deviance and coercion regardless of their communities' mores or practices.<sup>111</sup>

Discourses of American sexual exceptionalism produce and require an "other," what sociologists of moral panics call a "folk demon," an individual or group that emerges as predatory

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<sup>106</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 3, 8.

<sup>109</sup> On the "specialness" of religion, see Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Regarding the particular glee of public sphere discourse regarding sexual misconduct in religious communities, see Ewing, "Religion, Spirituality, and the Sexual Scandal."

<sup>110</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 42, 87.

<sup>111</sup> Dawson, *Comprehending Cults*; and Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion."

and perverse, particularly toward women and children.<sup>112</sup> Rhetorics of American sexual exceptionalism (“good” sex) foster condemnation of the folk demon’s imagined predatory perversity. American sexual exceptionalism at once condemns and marginalizes these imagined sexual transgressions, insisting that sexual misdeeds are horrifying but also (and more importantly) fundamentally other-than American.

American sexual exceptionalism bolsters intolerant rhetoric and actions on the grounds of protecting vulnerable Americans from the (presumed) sexual predation of religious outsiders. American sexual exceptionalism accuses religious outsiders of sexual deviancy in the process of “discerning, othering, and quarantining” folk demons; these religiously and sexually perverse figures also “labor in the service of disciplining and normalizing subjects worthy of rehabilitation *away from* these bodies.”<sup>113</sup> Such exceptionalist rhetoric further disciplines and normalizes American sexuality as something distinct and precious, in need of protection from the perverse sexuality of imagined religious predators.

Thus in this dissertation, I argue that public rhetoric about minority religions demonstrates the extent to which particular notions of normative sexuality have shaped and constrained popular understandings of *real* American religion since the early 1980s. I engage several popular narratives that portray minority religions (Islam, Mormonism, and witchcraft) as predatory, coercing or duping vulnerable American women and children into religious nonconformity and sexual transgression. In these narratives, normative sexuality—understood as binary, marital, moderately procreative, and heterosexual—marks the boundary of acceptable American religiosity and the limit of American religious tolerance. At the same time, a shared popular sense of good sex authorizes the surveillance and regulation of minority religious practices without overtly seeming to violate America’s professed

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<sup>112</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>113</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 38.



commitment to religious pluralism and freedom. In this way, public rhetoric discourages religious nonconformity even as it promotes normative sexual practices. This strategy's efficacy lies in its claim to protect America's most vulnerable citizens, women and children.

Narratives like *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers* identify the people and problems of religious minorities as somehow outside contemporary American culture – as though women and children were not abused in other contexts, as though such abuse were the product of peculiar theologies rather than broader systemic inequalities. This kind of intolerant rhetoric authorizes *real* Americans, in their *common* sense and *shared* values, to police the sexual transgressions (real or imagined) of religious outsiders while looking away from the sexual crimes happening in their own homes and families. Authors like Jon Krakauer, Betty Mahmood, and Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder identify minority religions as the proper targets of intolerance—and the women and children of marginal religions as especially vulnerable populations—while drawing attention away from the prevalence of mainstream, presumably secular abuses.

The narratives that constitute my case studies simultaneously condemn the abuse of women and children while doing little, if anything, to prevent or disrupt such violence. The authors consistently recount tales of horrific sexual violence against women to demonstrate the barbarity of their abusers, and ostensibly the need for commonsense Americans to intervene. But as sociologist Mary de Young notes, “sexual trauma tales can sustain the status quo by simply reiterating, without critique, the dominant cultural discourse about sex and gender.”<sup>114</sup> As she explains:

For all their horror, [these stories] are conservative and preservative. Their depiction of female victimization and helplessness so resoundingly resonates with dominant cultural ideologies that the stories, themselves, are pitiable yet provocative tales about the inevitability of sexual violence in the lives of females. As hegemonic tales, they offer no

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<sup>114</sup> Mary de Young, “Breeders for Satan: Toward a Sociology of Sexual Trauma Tales,” *Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 2 (1996): 111.

solutions, map out no trajectory for social change. They can only be listened to, not acted upon.<sup>115</sup>

I would qualify de Young's assessment here, as I will argue throughout this dissertation that stories like *Banner*, *Daughter*, and *Michelle* can be and have been acted upon. However, de Young's basic assertion is correct. Public responses to such narrativizations protect and maintain normative American sexuality as exceptional, while reinforcing hierarchical gendered assumptions about women's inherent vulnerability, capitalizing on the titillating details of the abuses they chronicle, and ultimately doing little if anything to prevent the kinds of abuses the authors purport to condemn. These exotic and damning portrayals of minority religions effectively limit the conditions of religious possibility in contemporary America. And, as I will discuss in the following section, public discourse that singles out minority religions as particularly prone to sexual abuse promotes intolerance toward religious minorities while appearing to conform to the perception of the United States as a nation exceptionally committed to both religious tolerance and diversity.

### *Complicating American Religious Pluralism*

America peacefully combines a high degree of religious devotion with tremendous religious diversity – including growing ranks of the nonreligious. Americans have a high degree of tolerance for those of (most) other religions, including those without any religion in their lives...

How has America solved the puzzle of religious pluralism – the coexistence of religious diversity and devotion? And how has it done so in the wake of growing religious polarization? By creating a web of interlocking personal relationships among people of many different faiths. This is America's grace.

Robert Putnam and David Campbell  
*America's Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*

This section examines historians' emphasis on America's exceptional religious diversity and seeming ambivalence toward the prevalence of religious intolerance.<sup>116</sup> I propose that many such historical

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>116</sup> See Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 15: "a national narrative without reference to religious intolerance is...a fake."

accounts reflect the “intuitive sense” of legitimate religiosity described in David Campbell and Robert Putnam’s *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Similar to the “shared values” I explored in the previous section, a bias toward mainstream Christianity informs this “intuitive sense” apparent in irenic accounts of American religious history. Robert Orsi theorizes the mainstream Christian bias visible in such accounts as “good religion.” Orsi also notes the role normative sexuality has played in shaping popular culture and scholarly understandings of good religion, and Corrigan and Neal likewise comment on the prevalence of sexual suspicion in religiously intolerant discourse. But there is currently no extended analysis of the role notions of normative sexuality plays in complicating American religious pluralism.

## Narrating Pluralism

Contemporary Americans tend to think of pluralism and religious freedom as *fait accompli*. Political scientist Wendy Brown notes that the “nation-states of the West are presumed always already tolerant,” particularly of religious difference.<sup>117</sup> This presumption holds especially true in the context of the contemporary United States. There is a deep and abiding national investment in Americans’ self-perception as remarkably, unprecedentedly—indeed, exceptionally—tolerant of religious diversity.<sup>118</sup> The “founding myth” of America’s grand democratic experiment takes root in the assumption of an always already fulfilled promise of unparalleled religious freedom.<sup>119</sup>

The grand narrative of American religious history goes something like this: the American experiment offered protection from religious oppression and religious strife following the centuries

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<sup>117</sup> Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>118</sup> John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America: a Documentary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. On the “astonishing tenacity” of this national myth of origins, see also Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 186.

of religious violence that ravaged central and western Europe.<sup>120</sup> Though the colonies might have struggled to accommodate religious difference—Catholics barred from public office, Quakers executed, indigenous “heathens” forcibly converted or massacred—American democracy enshrined religious freedom in its Constitution. Americans “thr[ew] themselves into the intellectual embrace of [religious liberty] as a cardinal principle of nationhood.”<sup>121</sup> Though isolated religious conflicts might have arisen, these United States nevertheless provided more tolerance of religious diversity than anywhere in the world. By the nineteenth century, religious freedom had emerged as “a realized goal, and a remarkable one at that.”<sup>122</sup> A shared moral code, irrespective of creed, bound the nation together in spite, or perhaps because, of our differences; this founding myth of already-achieved religious freedom “culminates in the twenty-first century with a United States that prides itself on being the most religious diverse nation in the world.”<sup>123</sup> American public discourse is rife with such self-congratulatory conviction.

Narratives of U.S. religious history have schooled present-day Americans in the catechism of our unmatched religious diversity and commitment to the protection of religious liberty.<sup>124</sup> Textbooks and numerous well-received American religious historiographies have contributed to this irenic account of American pluralism. As Corrigan and Neal note, American religious history “often reads something like a Garrison Keillor story where the religion is nice, its practitioners are upstanding, and the nation is above average.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> On America’s founding myth centered on “Pilgrims, Puritans, and the Quest for Religious Freedom,” see Bercovitch as quoted in Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 4. See also *ibid.*, 5: “it is hard to overestimate Americans’ emotional embrace of the First Amendment as the perceived solution to the problem of religious intolerance.”

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

<sup>123</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

A number of scholars have recently produced surveys of American religious diversity in this conciliatory vein.<sup>126</sup> Diana Eck's 1997 *A New Religious America: How a Christian Country Became the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* celebrates the triumphant emergence of religious multiplicity from humble Christian origins. Even in the text's revised preface, which frankly acknowledges violent attacks on American Muslims, Sikhs, and Coptic Christians after September 11, 2001, Eck insists that "the multireligious and multicultural fabric" of the United States is "too strong to rend by random violence."<sup>127</sup> Amanda Porterfield's 2001 *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late Twentieth-Century Awakening* posits a "post-Protestant culture," an American social arrangement that results from a "variety of factors working together to loosen the dominance of Protestant institutions over the larger culture while at the same time allowing beliefs and activities rooted in Protestant tradition to interact more freely than ever before with beliefs and attitudes from other traditions."<sup>128</sup> Chris Beneke's work, both in his 2006 *Beyond Toleration* and in the 2010 *The First*

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<sup>126</sup> Among the many problems with this scholarly approach to American religious pluralism is the ahistoricity of the conversation. Beneke and Grenda acknowledge a discursive shift from language of "religious liberty" to "religious freedom," as well as the Christian bias of tolerance in the colonial and early republic periods. Many academic conversations about American pluralism seem to assume pluralism is a static category. On this point see William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>127</sup> Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Now Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), xv. The reading of attacks following 9/11 or later attacks on American Muslims and Sikhs and Coptic Christians mistaken for Muslims as "random" is, I would argue, a gross misunderstanding of the material effects of American foreign policy with regard to the so-called "Islamic world." On this issue, see also Hirschkind and Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency"; Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?." It also misrepresents the material reality of a more endemic intolerance toward American religious minorities. See Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America* as well as Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Violence and other intolerance-motivated targeting of religious minorities are neither random nor (regrettably) rare in the contemporary United States.

<sup>128</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late-twentieth-century Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6. The irenic tone is consistent throughout Porterfield's text – see also her observation at *ibid.*, 11, that "those with backgrounds outside of liberal Protestantism have become less marginalized with respect to mainstream American culture, while those of us from within liberal Protestantism have undergone a process of becoming at least somewhat decentered." This passage both minimizes ongoing interreligious conflict and marginalization of American religious minorities and fails to acknowledge Porterfield's own position of privilege as a mainline American Protestant while celebrating the "Protestant origins of religious freedom" and the unqualified "universality" of religion. *Ibid.*, 209, 230.

*Prejudice* (co-written with Christopher Grenda), insists that the basic premise of religious pluralism was “with us from the beginning,” though he notes that “if religious pluralism represents one of the most laudable features of the modern world, it also ranks among the most difficult to achieve and maintain.”<sup>129</sup> Beneke’s work with Grenda does attempt to complicate the notion of religious in/tolerance, but again concludes that while “religion was the United States’ first prejudice – an early and frequently inveterate source of bigotry,” Americans ultimately made religion “the locus of the first sustained efforts to mitigate bigotry’s efforts.”<sup>130</sup> Stephen Prothero’s introduction to his 2006 edited volume, *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America*, insists that an influx of Catholic immigrants in the 1830s and 1840s permanently shifted the overtly Protestant character of American religion; he explains that the volume’s authors approach “U.S. religious diversity not as a proposition to be proved but as the truism it has become” and “acknowledg[e] religious diversity as an undeniable fact.”<sup>131</sup> Each of these authors approach American religious pluralism as a challenge met and promise fulfilled.

None of these authors assumes so assured and triumphant a tone as that of Robert Putnam and David Campbell in their 2010 *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (again, see the epigraph to this introduction). In this nearly 700-page survey of American religions, the authors reassure us that America has “solved the puzzle of religious pluralism” by “peacefully combin[ing] a high degree of religious devotion with tremendous religious diversity.”<sup>132</sup> Campbell and Putnam

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<sup>129</sup> Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda, *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Christopher J. Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Beneke’s work is troubling not only for his exceptionalist chronicle of American religious history, but also for his glancing treatment of interreligious conflict. See, for example, *ibid.*, 222, where Beneke states: “Over time, Americans—as well as foreign observers—would come to associate religious pluralism with the United States itself.” Beneke also notes American anti-Catholicism, anti-Mormonism, and other forms of nationalist religious hostility only to minimize and dismiss them. See *ibid.*, 10–11, 12, 208, 222.

<sup>130</sup> Beneke and Grenda, *The First Prejudice*, 1.

<sup>131</sup> Stephen R. Prothero, *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>132</sup> Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 550.

locate “America’s grace” in a reconciliation between Americans’ religious devotion and American religious difference. In doing so, the authors exemplify the irenic tone of many scholarly treatises on American religious pluralism.<sup>133</sup>

In explaining the methodology used to interpret their survey data, Putnam and Campbell suggest that an informal but “convincing” way of “empirically measuring religiosity” lies in “ask[ing] whether it [presumably the person, group, belief, sentiment, experience, or practice in question] matches *our intuitive sense* of what it means to describe someone as religious.”<sup>134</sup> The authors’ phrasing here is telling. The use of the first person collective pronoun, “our,” includes the reader in the authors’ assumptions (their intuitive sense) about what does and does not count as “religion.”

Campbell and Putnam dismiss concerns about “parochialism” unintentionally informing their “religiosity index,” insisting that their methods “includ[e] only terms that could apply to *all religious traditions*.”<sup>135</sup> The characteristics that “we” presumably associate with religion include a person who:

- Attends religious services frequently
- Prays often
- Has a strong belief in God
- Holds religion important
- Believes that religion defines her identity
- Says she strongly believes in her religion<sup>136</sup>

This religiosity index betrays a definitive Christian bias, despite its pretensions to inclusivity.<sup>137</sup> Note the emphasis on attending religious services (excluding religious people who practice privately,

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<sup>133</sup> See in particular Putnam and Campbell’s discussion of religious multiplicity as benign variation or “flavors.” Ibid., 21.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 20 (emphasis added).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. (emphasis added).

<sup>136</sup> Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 20

<sup>137</sup> The scope and application of the term “religion” is contested in non-western contexts, though conversations about religion and post-colonial theory exceed the scope of this inquiry. It is worth noting, however, that Campbell and Putnam’s omissions in the formulation of this index include the epistemic violence done by imposing the category “religion” on non-western cultures. On the imperialist implications of “religion,” see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*

ranging from Muslim women who pray in their homes to solitary Wiccans), on prayer as the primary votive practice, on singular language for the divine (excluding polytheists, animists, those who reject the personification of the divine, and those whose votive practices exclude a deity or deities), on understanding of religion as an individual matter (marginalizing those whose religious identity is primarily communal), and the concluding accent on religion-as-faith.

Setting aside for a moment the Christian coloring (flavoring?) of this index, I am struck by the presumption of consensus in the authors' rhetoric. "If you know someone" who exemplifies the above characteristics, Campbell and Putnam inquire, "would you not describe her as highly religious? And, likewise, would you describe someone who does *not* do or believe these same things as *not* being religious?"<sup>138</sup> (Again, note the use of second person to encourage the reader's complicity with these assertions.) The authors emphasize that this—presumably shared—"intuitive sense" of the essential characteristics of religion is "the most convincing test of all."<sup>139</sup> Obviously, any attempt to quantify American religiosity requires a delimitation of the study's terms and scope. Yet I am troubled by the authors' reliance on in the validity of their (and perhaps more significantly, their audience's) "intuitive sense" of American religion.

I emphasize these terms—"intuitive sense"—because the phrase presupposes an affective approach to recognizing American religion even as it disregards the cultural forces that shape and constrain such an approach. This is to say that relying on an "intuitive sense" to locate and measure "American religion" reduces the undertaking to a feeling that certain things do or do not *count* as American religion, while discounting the biases, fears, affinities, and ignorances that might make us feel better about some forms of religion than others – more inclined to recognize certain beliefs and

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>138</sup> Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 21 (emphasis in original).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



practices as *really* religious or to dismiss other beliefs and practices as false or bad or not religious at all.<sup>140</sup>

Reliance on an intuitive sense, an appeal to a presumed shared morality or common values, is of course not unique to Campbell and Putnam. Indeed, like appeals to Americans' presumably shared sexual morality, public rhetoric about American religion frequently invokes an imagined consensus. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate whom such discourse excludes, and on what terms those individuals or groups are excluded.

## **“Good Religion” and “Normal Sex”**

Though public discourse frequently appeals to Americans' shared values, the boundaries of acceptable American religion are often vague. Terryl Givens calls this lack of definition an “unarticulated orthodoxy,” the weight of which, Givens asserts, is “considerable.”<sup>141</sup> But understanding American religious belonging or exclusion in terms of orthodoxy or heresy adopts a Christian taxonomy while implying a cogent if tacit code underlying public expressions of acceptance or rejection.<sup>142</sup> I am not convinced that Americans' sense of tolerable religiosity is so coherent.

Rather, public discourse seems to deploy what I think of as definitions of American religion similar to the vague consensus on pornography: we know it when we see it.<sup>143</sup> I intend the invocation of Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart to be neither flippant nor incidental. The

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<sup>140</sup> See, for example, Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth.”

<sup>141</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 78.

<sup>142</sup> Givens' argument is, ultimately, that the American public initially rejected and condemned 19th century Mormonism not for its (relatively rare, however incendiary) practice of plural marriage, but for its theological peculiarities, which ultimately threatened to demystify Christianity itself. Ibid., 81-83.

<sup>143</sup> *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964). See also *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476 (1957), in which Justice Brennan defined linguistic obscenity as “‘to the average person, applying *contemporary community standards*, the dominant theme of the material, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest’ and which is ‘utterly without *redeeming social importance*’”; and *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15 (1973). On this point, see also Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 11.

challenge of a diverse culture is precisely that of what we as a society are and are not prepared to live with, to allow, to tolerate. We determine the tolerable according to “contemporary community standards” and deem intolerable that “without redeeming social importance.”<sup>144</sup> The limits of tolerance, then, are not laws, but feelings (dare one say intuitions?) based on assumptions of shared values and common sense.

Robert Orsi suggests as much in his oft-cited “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth.”<sup>145</sup> The vagaries of “American religion” do not prevent the establishment of a religious hierarchy: “we may not know what religion is but at least we can say with certainty what bad religion is or what religion is not. The mother of all religious dichotomies—us/them—has regularly been constituted as a moral distinction—good/bad religion.”<sup>146</sup>

As Orsi explains, public distinctions between good/real/true religion and bad/fake/false religion are informed by a “denominationally neutral” sedimentation of American Protestant ethics and aesthetics “recast as an ethical system.”<sup>147</sup> American popular culture draws heavily on political ideas and cultural practices that understand *religion* as “private, voluntary, individual, textual, and believed.”<sup>148</sup> Such ethics also deeply value notions of progress and ever-increasing or already-achieved tolerance of religious diversity.<sup>149</sup> These mainline Christian notions have been seminal in

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<sup>144</sup> Roth v. United States, 354 U.S. 476 (1957).

<sup>145</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 177-204

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 183. Orsi’s expressed primary concern is the hierarchical prioritization of “good” and “bad” religions within religious studies itself. However, as I address in more detail in Chapter 1, American religions scholars have demonstrated the elision of “good religion” with Christian ethics and aesthetics in American legislation (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*); print culture (Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*); jurisprudence (Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)); and technological discourses (John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)).

<sup>147</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 186.

<sup>148</sup> Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, 7-8.

<sup>149</sup> See also *ibid.*; and Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*.

the formation of American identity; mainline Christian ethics and aesthetics have emerged as a largely unmarked category in the public sphere.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, this falsely coherent morality is often presumed to be “good, even necessary for democracy.”<sup>151</sup>

Many Americans fail to recognize the extent to which their shared values and common sense have been shaped by this “domesticated modern civic Protestantism”; American public discourse often obscures or denies the religious forces that have shaped (and continue to shape) our presumably common sense and shared values.<sup>152</sup> Orsi suggests that “in contemporary American popular culture” good religion is (among other things) “rational, respectful of persons, noncoercive, ...agreeable to democracy” and “a reality of mind and spirit not body and matter.”<sup>153</sup> Thus “bad religion,” we can infer, is irrational, disrespectful of persons, coercive, hostile to democracy, enthusiastic or emotionally uncontrolled, and embodied or material.<sup>154</sup> Bad religion might be—or seem—“ugly, violent, or troublesome;” and, as Orsi briefly mentions, bad religion often challenges traditional gender roles and sexual norms.<sup>155</sup>

If the qualities Orsi highlights inform Americans’ understandings of real or “good” religion, it is perhaps not surprising that religious people and groups who emphasize practice over belief, community over individualism, obedience over autonomy, and embodied experience over intellectual conviction have met with suspicion in the American public sphere. This is not to minimize or excuse the marginalization of religious minorities, but only to emphasize the often-unremarked Christian underpinnings of Americans’ intuitive sense of “real” religion. It is worth noting, however,

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<sup>150</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 33, 107, 119.

<sup>151</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 186.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.; Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 33.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>154</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 188.

<sup>155</sup> On this point, see also Bellah and Greenspahn’s observation of “loose-boundedness” in minority religions. Bellah and Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*, 222.

that an American religious minority need not veer dramatically from mainstream beliefs and practices to be suspected or accused of having done religion “wrong.”<sup>156</sup> Such suspicions, as I established above, are particularly pronounced with regard to minority religions’ sexual practices.

## *Chapter Outline*

This project engages three best-selling popular nonfiction narratives published between 1980 and 2003. These three narratives—Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2003), Betty Mahmood’s *Not Without My Daughter* (1987), and Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder’s *Michelle Remembers* (1980)—are rich and illuminating examples of American public discourse concerning normative sexuality and tolerable religion. Each of these narratives portrays a minority religion as intolerable by providing “evidence” of that religion’s sexual exploitation of American women and children. I focus on these narrativizations because of their remarkable popularity among American readers, but also because each book has been used as evidence in public actions against the minority religion it describes. The minority religions in question—Mormonism, Islam, and witchcraft—have, as I will show, been the target of mainstream American suspicion and intolerance.

Taken as a whole, these books and the public’s reaction to them reveal a persistent and troubling pattern of response toward religious and sexual difference within the American public sphere. The public has responded to these books (and books like them) by attempting to liberate women and children from minority religions. As I explore in subsequent chapters, such attempts at liberation have alienated fundamentalist Mormon women from social services intended to help them, have discounted women’s desire to become or remain Muslim and worsened conditions for women in Muslim-majority countries, and have led to the imprisonment of childcare givers on specious and unsubstantiated accusations of satanic child abuse.

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<sup>156</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 78.

The first chapter, “The Trouble with Tolerance,” reviews pertinent literature on the subject of American religious intolerance and underscores the role normative sexuality plays in constructing and constraining American religion. I argue that popular understandings of American religion have been shaped by normalized or secularized mainline Christianity, and normalized Christian sexual ethics in particular. Religious intolerance in contemporary America mobilizes popular anxieties about sexual bodies and sexual practices to marginalize minority religions. Such intolerance is not always explicit. I propose that ostensibly secular scholarly assumptions about what does and does not constitute American religion have been informed by normalized Christian sexual ethics. I present these three popular pulp nonfiction narratives—*Under the Banner of Heaven, Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers*—as texts that promote intolerance of marginal American religions based in suspicions of non-normative sexuality.

The second chapter, “An Unusual Place: Do Mormon Fundamentalists Really Need Saving?,” argues that public discourse about liberating Mormon fundamentalist women and children constrains Americans’ religious and sexual freedoms while impeding abuse victims’ access to support and assistance. I first examine Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (2003). Krakauer’s work portrays Mormon fundamentalist identity as defined by the practice of polygamy; his hypersexualized and sensationalized portrayal of Mormon fundamentalism relies on a normalized Christian sexual ethic to marginalize this religious minority. Next, I examine public responses to *Banner’s* publication. I pay particular attention to the legislative hearings preceding the 2008 raid on the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ Yearning for Zion ranch, during which Krakauer testified as an expert witness on Mormonism and Mormon fundamentalism. Finally, I examine the protectionist discourse surrounding Mormon fundamentalism – public declarations that Mormon fundamentalist women are necessarily forced or duped into plural marriage and thus are in need of rescue and protection by the American body politic. This rhetoric positions Mormon fundamentalism outside contemporary American culture

and ignores the complexity of these Mormon fundamentalist women's religious and sexual agency. Reporters, lawmakers, and social workers involved all consistently discounted the possibility that some Mormon fundamentalist women had deliberately chosen to remain in their minority religious community and in their unconventional marriages. Most significantly, this case study demonstrates that attempts to rescue religious minorities may actually hinder the ability of abuse victims to seek assistance while failing to prevent systemic abuses of women and children.

The third chapter, "Daddy, Do I Hate Americans?" Domestic Terrorism and American Exceptionalism after the Iran Hostage Crisis," argues that Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter* (1987) essentializes Muslim masculinity as a frustrated lasciviousness that necessarily oppresses and abuses women, thus authorizing public anti-Muslim sentiment. I first examine the extent to which the book and film versions of *Not Without My Daughter* characterize Muslim men as domestic terrorists, racially, sexually, and religiously perverse. Next, I show that the author's self-characterization exemplifies an American sexual exceptionalism, simultaneously authorizing anti-Islamic sentiment and demonstrating the perils of marriage outside the American mainstream. Finally, I consider the ways in which the dual discourses of domestic terrorism and American sexual exceptionalism preoccupied the American public sphere in the wake of the Iran hostage crisis. The discursive construction of Muslim masculinity as racially, sexually, and religiously perverse ignores the theological and practical complexities of lived Islam, occludes significant evidence of American domestic abuse absent of supposed religious motivation, and (as with the previous case study) disregards the possibility of women's willing participation in minority religions.

The final chapter, "Play Me Backwards: Feminist Complicity in the Satanic Panic," argues that feminist activism during the 1980s through the mid-1990s surrounding satanic ritual abuse both reinforced American sexual exceptionalism and restricted American women's religious and sexual freedoms. I present Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder's *Michelle Remembers* (1980) as the catalyst for widespread accusations of satanic ritual abuse in the United States. I emphasize that the text

shaped later portrayals of satanic ritual abuse, particularly with regard to the text's infantilization of the victim, the construction of child abuse as a distinctly religious phenomenon, and the link established between Satanism and child sexual abuse. Finally, I examine the feminist complicity in promoting satanic ritual abuse accusations, which I argue reinforced American sexual exceptionalism and restricted American women's religious and sexual freedoms by discouraging American mothers from working outside the home and Americans in general from participating in a demonstrably feminist mode of religiosity, modern witchcraft.

The conclusion considers the significance and problematic nature of American sexual exceptionalism, particularly in relation to minority religions. Public rhetoric that constructs minority religions as necessarily dangerous, irrational, and perverse neither reflects the lived experience of many members of these minority religions nor protects survivors of domestic and sexual abuses. Drawing on the work of political scientist Sarah Song and social critic Teju Cole, I propose constructive approaches to helping vulnerable members of American minority religions. These include paying attention to the consequences of narrativizing contact with social outsiders and, perhaps most importantly, taking seriously the expressed desires, needs, and recounted experiences of minority religions' members themselves.

## The Trouble With Tolerance

Violence most often is located in the cultural spaces between violent deeds and free thought,  
inciteful speech and loaded silence, agency and submission, reality and fantasy.

Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*

In her 2002 *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge*, Ann Burlein notes that “whereas power relations can be overtly articulated”—such as those evident in the Klan demonstrations described in Burlein’s introduction—“more often [these relations] form a silent curriculum: those lessons teachers inculcate without needing to save a special day on the syllabus.”<sup>1</sup> I propose that more common if less discernible forms of religious intolerance comprise such a silent curriculum: that religious intolerance is not something only Klansmen and Islamophobes perpetrate; that we learn what does and does not “count” as American religion more through unremarked or unintentional exclusions and assumptions than through hate speech or violent assaults.<sup>2</sup>

In seeking to analyze religious intolerance, I consider not only hate speech and violence, but also tacit exclusion and more subtle maneuvers to police the boundaries of real/true American religion. Definitions of religious intolerance must also include the silences and unconscious exclusions of certain forms of religiosity from the category of American religion. Religious intolerance is not reducible to “religious hatred” or “religion as a weapon,” though the category absolutely includes religiously motivated violence, hatred, and hate speech. Reducing religious intolerance to violence or hatred codifies “the myth of religious violence,” the assumption that all

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



religion is inherently violent and thus requires regulation by a secular state.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, locating religious intolerance solely in explicit intent makes intolerance something extremists do – rather than actions and attitudes endemic to mainstream understandings of American religion.<sup>4</sup> The violence resulting from religious intolerance is neither necessarily visible nor intentional; we must also consider the lasting damage of epistemic violence resulting from interreligious hostility. The normalization of American identity as religious in a particular (Christian) way has rendered all but the most explicit forms of intolerance invisible, making intolerance simultaneously harder to pinpoint and more pernicious.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I will survey pertinent literature on the subject of American religious intolerance and underscores the role normative sexuality plays in constructing and constraining American religion. I argue that popular understandings of American religion have been shaped by normalized or secularized mainline Christianity, and normalized Christian sexual ethics in particular. Religious intolerance in contemporary America mobilizes popular anxieties about sexual bodies and sexual practices to marginalize minority religions. Such intolerance is not always explicit. I propose that ostensibly secular scholarly assumptions about what does and does not constitute American religion have been informed by normalized Christian sexual ethics. I present three popular pulp nonfiction narratives—*Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers*—as texts that articulate and authorize intolerance of marginal American religions based in suspicions of non-normative sexuality.

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<sup>3</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Lynn S. Neal, “Intolerance and American Religious History,” *Religion Compass* 4, no. 2 (2010): 114–123.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Beacon Press, 2004), 56.

## *Klansmen and Countersubversives: Considering Religious Intolerance*

Surprisingly few American religious scholars have directly engaged the category of religious intolerance. American religious historian American historian David Brion Davis's analysis of nineteenth century nativist literature is one of the field's earliest considerations of similarities among anti-religious minority rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> His 1960 essay, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," demonstrates "important tensions" among nativist attempts to suppress and cast suspicion on Mormonism, Masonry, and Roman Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> Davis notes that while Mormons, Catholics, and Masons differed significantly on theological terms, as "imagined enemies," public rhetoric regarding these groups "merged [them] into a nearly common stereotype."<sup>8</sup> Nineteenth century expressions of religious intolerance were marked by fear and fascination with religious outsiders; Masons, Catholics, and Mormons "were seen to embody those traits that were precise antitheses of American ideals."<sup>9</sup> Rejection of these groups, then, was understood as an articulation of patriotism and piety.<sup>10</sup>

Davis' concept of counter-subversion, or nativists' rhetorical attempts to suppress minority religions, relies on an assumption of common American values and shared American ideals. Nativists emphasized the necessity of "a common loyalty and a fundamental unity among the people," insisting that true Americans "freely subordinat[ed] themselves to the higher and more abstract demands of the Constitution, [mainstream Protestant] Christianity, and American public

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<sup>6</sup> Nativism refers to the socio-political tendency to favor the interests of established inhabitants of a country over those of immigrants or "outsiders."

<sup>7</sup> Davis David Brion, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1960): 213-4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

opinion.”<sup>11</sup> This religiously intolerant rhetoric subordinated denominational and institutional specificities to the presumed primacy of common Protestant American values. This insistence on the necessity for a shared public American morality encouraged a marked suspicion of the seemingly occult workings of American Catholicism, Masonry, and Mormonism, Davis suggests. “Most Americans of the Jacksonian era appeared willing to tolerate diversity and even eccentricity,” he notes, “but when they saw themselves excluded and even barred from witnessing certain proceedings, they imagined a ‘mystic power’ conspiring to enslave them.”<sup>12</sup> Suspicion and anxiety concerning non-public religious practices led counter-subversives to accuse religions outside the Protestant mainstream of treason, mind-control, religious zealotry, inherent dishonesty, and sexual perversions.<sup>13</sup>

While the public sphere of Davis’ nineteenth century nativists is not equivalent to that of late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author’s work has bearing on contemporary considerations of religious intolerance. His work provides evidence both for religious intolerance’s historical precedent and for accusations similar to those made against contemporary intolerable religions (such as immoderate piety and sexual perversion). The characteristics Davis found common to nativist rhetoric—most importantly for my purposes, the persistent accusations or insinuations of sexual perversion—are absolutely endemic to more contemporary instances of religious intolerance. Thus Davis’ understanding of nineteenth century rhetorical attempts to police American religion by excluding Mormons, Masons, and Catholics demonstrates important similarities among different rhetorics of religious intolerance.<sup>14</sup> The counter-subversive rhetoric Davis examines is rooted in convictions that marginal religions are not simply theologically wrong, but dangerous. Thus rejections and even persecutions

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 209, 211.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 211, 216-17.

<sup>14</sup> On contemporary attempts by individuals and institutions to correct American religion through expressions of religious intolerance, see Martha Nussbaum, “Religious Intolerance,” *Foreign Policy* no. 144 (October 2004): 44.

of the “imagined enemies” of American religion constitute attempts to correct and police dangerous religiosities; and religious intolerance becomes patriotism and piety.

Robert Bellah and Frederick Greenspahn produced the first edited volume of note on American interreligious conflict. In their 1987 collection, *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America*, sociologist Bellah and Judaic Studies scholar Greenspahn noted the contradictory prevalence of a rhetoric of tolerance and interreligious conflict throughout American history. “The facts of American life have not always been as benign as the United States’ official policy of tolerant religious pluralism,” the authors insisted.<sup>15</sup> “Intergroup hostility has been as real a fact of American life as the rhetoric of tolerance.”<sup>16</sup> Greenspahn and Bellah attributed this tradition of religious conflict to the historical influence of an American Protestant mainstream and anxieties about religious difference, as well as the necessity for “tight-bounded” understandings of appropriate religious belief and practice.

*Uncivil Religion* demonstrates that America’s Protestant mainstream has been historically anxious about religious difference. Bellah and Greenspahn noted that “America originated as a predominantly Protestant culture” and that “a perceived threat to the ‘American way of life,’ however that is understood,” underlies much religious conflict.<sup>17</sup> The authors suggested “the sheer emotion” underlying much interreligious hostility demonstrates underlying suspicions of religiosities outside the Protestant mainstream.<sup>18</sup> “These diverse forms of religious hostility...reflect a sense of

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Neelly Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), vii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, ix. See Bromley on this point as well: “When a group feels that its interests are threatened, it is likely to attempt to *vest its interests and activities with the mantle of legitimacy by contending that its rights and privileges flow from and support a basic cultural value*. Hence this makes the legitimization of extreme measures against that group contestable.” David G. Bromley, Anson D. Shupe, and J. C. Ventimiglia, “Atrocity Tales, the Unification Church, and the Social Construction of Evil,” *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 3 (1979): 42–43 (emphasis added).

<sup>18</sup> Bellah and Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*, ix.

fear, fear that the other groups are not just wrong, but dangerous,” they insisted.<sup>19</sup> Greenspahn and Bellah located this fear in “religious uncertainty, with deep-seated social and psychological concerns masked by theological language.”<sup>20</sup> The authors proposed that fear and suspicion of religious beliefs and practices outside the Protestant mainstream inform much religious conflict.

Bellah’s conclusion to the volume attributed these anxieties about religious difference to tensions between “loose” and “tight-boundedness” in modes of American religiosity, concepts Bellah mapped roughly onto American political liberalism and conservatism.<sup>21</sup> “Tight-bounded” (*i.e.* conservative) understandings of American religion claim exclusive access to America’s “fundamental values,” while “loose-boundedness” (*i.e.* liberalism) resists definitions and prizes consensus.<sup>22</sup> Thus Bellah located religious conflict in desires to maintain group identities and boundaries.<sup>23</sup>

Bellah and Greenspahn ultimately insisted not only on the reality of interreligious conflict, but also on its relative rarity. “Despite the passion that often accompanies interreligious relations, it is probably fair to say that religious persecution has caused fewer deaths in America than in most Western countries over a comparable period,” the authors maintained. “We must, therefore, not only note the reality of religious hostility, but also explain its *relatively* small proportions.”<sup>24</sup> The authors attributed the “relatively small proportions” of religious intolerance to patterns of increased secularization among Americans. “Bluntly put, many Americans do not regard religion as important enough to fight for,” Bellah and Greenspahn concluded.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. On the erotics of fear at play in political religions, see also Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: the Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Bellah and Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*, ix.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

*Uncivil Religion* highlights the importance of the lived realities of interreligious conflict to the study of American religious history. Bellah and Greenspahn suggested such hostilities originate in a shared sense of fundamental American values – values that require defense against “loose-bounded” non-Protestant-mainstream religions. Whereas minority religions might display intolerant tendencies, they lack the cultural influence to normalize their intolerance or meaningfully discriminate against mainstream religions. The historical Protestant dominance in America’s religious sphere renders “other” religions suspect and, as Greenspahn and Bellah proposed, dangerous. However persistent interreligious conflict has been throughout American history, the authors concluded by insisting that interreligious conflict has been rare in comparison to the conflicts experienced by other modern nation-states.

Several Christian theologians also have contributed to scholarly considerations of American religious intolerance. Dorothee Sölle detected religious intolerance in what she perceived as the inherent normativizing absolutism of all religion. “Religious groups...lay claim to absolute and universal validity for their theological propositions,” Sölle explained in her 1984 “Christianity and Intolerance.” “Because of this claim to universal validity, [religious] knowledge is imperative and authoritative in character [and]...communication with other groups is severely limited.”<sup>26</sup> Susan Thistlethwaite’s 1994 “Settled Issues and Neglected Questions: How Is Religion to Be Studied?” likewise defines religion itself in universalizing and intolerant terms. “Religion is by definition value-laden and poses universal claims,” Thistlethwaite insists. “Thus, even societies that have a history of religious tolerance have resident within them *the fundamental intolerance* and its accompanying tendency to social instability *that is characteristic of religion*.”<sup>27</sup> Both Sölle and Thistlethwaite attempt to

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<sup>26</sup> Dorothee Sölle, “Christianity and Intolerance,” in *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1984), 63-4.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Thistlethwaite, “Settled Issues and Neglected Questions: How Is Religion to Be Studied?,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 4 (December 1994): 1042-3 (emphasis added); see also Nussbaum on this point.

problematize what they see as the universalizing tendencies of all religion and emphasize the potential of religious diversity to combat intolerance.

American Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna was among the first American religions scholars to consider interreligious conflict from the perspective of minority religions. Sarna's 1998 *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream* emphasizes the historical diversity of American religion, as well as the contributions of minority religious communities to "American life."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, though, Sarna argues that the historiography of American religion has largely obscured important tensions between marginal religions and the American Protestant mainstream. The "dynamic encounter" between minority religions and the Protestant mainstream—between "minority outsiders and majority insiders"—is "central to the religious experience of millions of Americans," Sarna insists.<sup>29</sup> He detects these outsider/insider tensions "between pressures [on minority religions] to conform to the religious patterns of the mainstream; and countervailing pressures...to resist them and remain apart."<sup>30</sup> Sarna emphasizes minority religions' desire to be recognized as legitimate *American* religion. At the same time, Sarna underscores the distance between these minority religions and the American Protestant mainstream.

These "arenas of conflict" have forced minority religions to develop "survival strategies" under the Protestant mainstream's "shadow," Sarna suggests.<sup>31</sup> Despite the inescapable influence of Protestantism, Sarna emphasizes the necessity of "treating minority group members as historical actors in their own right rather than just as victims of history acted upon by the majority."<sup>32</sup> Sarna

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Sarna, *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2, 4, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3.

insists on taking seriously the agency of minority religions in the analysis of interreligious conflict, as well as the potential for such conflict to present not only “contention and pain,” but also “stimulus for wondrous creativity.”<sup>33</sup>

*Minority Faiths* makes several key contributions to defining religious intolerance. Sarna argues for the importance of considering American religion from perspective of minority religions, as well as for the significance of recognizing the agency and creativity of religious outsiders. The author notes that members of minority religious communities often negotiate desires to be recognized as American religions while remaining distinct from the American Protestant mainstream. Minority religions negotiate their identities under the “shadow” of the Protestant mainstream; they strive for recognition as American religions while attempting to retain their theological and practical specificities. In sum, *Minority Faiths* underscores the contentious dynamism of interreligious encounters while insisting that such conflicts also provide opportunities to expand popular understandings of American religion. Sarna’s work is particularly significant for its emphasis on the agency of religious minorities, particularly minority religions’ negotiations of their place in the American public sphere.

American religious historians John Corrigan and Lynn Neal provide a recent and significant consideration of religious intolerance in their 2010 *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History*.<sup>34</sup> This volume represents a major contribution in demonstrating importance and persistence of intolerance throughout American religious history. In their introduction, Neal and Corrigan note that religious intolerance is “seemingly more generic than the term religious violence yet more

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 3, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Lynn Neal has written several other pieces of note on American religious intolerance. See Lynn S. Neal, “Christianizing the Klan: Alma White, Branford Clarke, and the Art of Religious Intolerance,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 78, no. 02 (2009): 350–378, Neal, “Intolerance and American Religious History,” and Lynn S. Neal, “‘They’re Freaks!’: The Cult Stereotype in Fictional Television Shows, 1958–2008,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 3 (February 2011): 81–107.



specific than either bigotry or prejudice,” and thus “does not lend itself easily to definition.”<sup>35</sup> The authors note the appeal of what we might call a definition of intolerance analogous to the definition of pornography, which is to say we (scholars and citizens alike) know religious intolerance when we see it.<sup>36</sup> But Corrigan and Neal also note that the assumptions that underlie this assessment—the presumptions of shared values and cultural “common” sense—are the very building blocks that often shape religious intolerance itself.<sup>37</sup> “Religious intolerance often occurs precisely because a religious group challenges or seeks to defend an assumed cultural morality,” Neal and Corrigan insist.<sup>38</sup> Thus the authors demonstrate the limitations of a definition that relies on a presumed common American morality.

Corrigan and Neal’s efforts to define religious intolerance further highlight the Protestant biases that inform many expressions of intolerance. “A definition [of religious intolerance] that takes its cues from understandings of right and wrong shared by a certain group tends to privilege majority religious views, namely *Protestant Christianity*, and thereby fails to adequately define or recognize religious intolerance.”<sup>39</sup> The authors and other contributors to this volume thus attempt more precise definitions of the phenomenon. The volume foregrounds the ways “perceptions of religious difference” instigate “disrespect, intimidation, or violence toward others.”<sup>40</sup> The authors propose a causal link between “religious beliefs and attitudes”—specifically beliefs or attitudes informed by particular Protestant notions of common American values—and “actions against or interactions with

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<sup>35</sup> John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America: a Documentary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>36</sup> On the difficulties of defining obscene or pornographic material, see Justice Potter Stewart, *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (Supreme Court of the United States of America 1964).

<sup>37</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 11-12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

those who are perceived as religiously different.”<sup>41</sup> Thus Corrigan and Neal’s definition indicates the ways in which the perception of shared Protestant values informs and instigates episodes of religious intolerance.

*Religious Intolerance in America*’s definition of religious intolerance is also notable for its understanding of the phenomenon in emphatically violent and overt terms. Intolerance “use[s] religion as a weapon;” indeed, the authors “define intolerance as a type of violence.”<sup>42</sup> Corrigan and Neal suggest that scholars often confine intolerant rhetoric to “the realm of the imagined, the symbolic,” while religious violence is better understood as “actual, real, and enacted.”<sup>43</sup> In contrast, the volume broadens its definition of violence to include rhetoric and affect, insisting that “hateful ideas, words, and acts are related to violent practices.”<sup>44</sup> Thus “cross burning, vandalism, hate speech, public protests, threatening notes, written treatises, and the propagation of false allegations can also be viewed as religiously violent acts.”<sup>45</sup> By locating intolerance in rhetoric and prejudice as well as in violent action, Neal and Corrigan highlight the complex and multiple locations of religious intolerance.

Corrigan and Neal’s definition takes seriously the role played by intent and experience in considerations of religious intolerance, specifically the intent to “intimidate and inhibit” religious practice, which might be experienced as violent by targets of those actions. “A court decision that denies the legitimacy of one’s religious practice or a stereotypical portrayal and of one’s faith in a film may...[be] experienced as an ‘attack,’ as violent,” the authors propose. “[This experience] is not the same as being tarred and feathered, raped, or lynched, but these [intolerant] acts may still intimidate

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 252, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

and inhibit the practice of one's faith and be defined by victims as violent."<sup>46</sup> Neal and Corrigan's definition highlights the roles of intentionality and experience in the volume's understanding of religious intolerance.

Thus *Religious Intolerance in America*'s definition of religious intolerance is a valuable contribution to American religious studies in its insistence on the complexity of the category. Corrigan and Neal insist upon the term's breadth and elusiveness. They note the dangers of presuming common values or morality, gesturing toward the mainstream Protestant bias that often undergirds such a presumption. The volume demonstrates the prevalence of religious intolerance in the lived experience of American religion by illustrating intolerance's historical prevalence and contemporary instantiations. The authors define intolerance in emphatically violent terms, and they insist upon the connections between intolerant rhetoric and violent actions. In addition, Neal and Corrigan take seriously the affective consequences of religious intolerance, insisting that the targets of religious prejudice might experience broader cultural interactions as a form of violence. The volume presents complex and multiple locations for religious intolerance as an analytical lens in American religious studies, in which the authors ultimately define religious intolerance as a violent and intentional rejection of religious difference.

Taken as a whole, the scholars I discussed above demonstrate several common elements in episodes of religious intolerance. All note the influence of mainstream Protestant theology, praxis, and aesthetics on the understanding of "American religion" while noting that the effects and boundaries of an American Protestant majority resist definition. Most of these authors note the simultaneous appeal and danger of relying on assumed shared or common values in defining religious intolerance. Many point out the contradiction between popularly expressed allegiance to a uniquely American religious tolerance and the material realities of religious conflict. Several insist note the efficacy of intolerant rhetoric in justifying and inciting action against religions perceived as

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

intolerable. All suggest that fear, suspicion, and a sense of “other” religions as dangerous undergird interreligious hostilities and propose significant ties between religious intolerance and nationalist ideals. All conceptualize religious intolerance as intentional; most understand interreligious conflict in violent terms. Ultimately, the authors concur on the importance of religious intolerance as an analytical lens in American religious scholarship.

All of the authors I have explored above ultimately conceptualize religious intolerance in terms of deliberate or overt acts. These acts include assault, hate speech, and the production of material culture hostile to religious difference. In all of the definitions offered above, this hostility is motivated by a *deliberate* (if irrational, cf. Davis) rejection of religious difference. In Neal and Corrigan’s estimation, the religiously intolerant are “purveyors of *hatred* respond[ing] to perceived and real challenges to their religious, political, and social worlds with intolerance and violence.”<sup>47</sup> Theorists of intolerance have commonly located these “purveyors of hatred” either in America’s distant past, in extremist groups, or both. The religiously intolerant are always intentionally so, according to the definitions provided.

More, the authors locate the religiously intolerant as a quantifiable (if elusive) entity: the cartoons of Thomas Nast; the Ku Klux Klan; the bigot shouting religiously hostile epithets. Neal and Corrigan note that the definitions of religious intolerance provided in their volume stress “how religious beliefs and attitudes shape *negative interactions between persons and groups*...linkage between the perception of religious difference and the enactment of disrespect, intimidation, or violence toward others.”<sup>48</sup> These definitions offer a distinctive understanding of religious intolerance: that of negative and deliberate interactions between persons and groups.

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<sup>47</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 252 (emphasis added).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Most commonly, the authors define religious intolerance in violent terms. Neal and Corrigan do so explicitly: they suggest religious intolerance uses “religion as a weapon.”<sup>49</sup> Contributors to their documentary history all “define intolerance as a type of violence.”<sup>50</sup> Davis, Bellah and Greenspahn, and Sarna all incorporate physical violence as a major component in their definitions of intolerance. Bellah and Greenspahn go so far as to insist on the “*relatively* small proportions” of religious hostility throughout American history, because “despite the passion that often accompanies interreligious relations...religious persecution has caused fewer deaths in America than in most Western countries over a comparable period.”<sup>51</sup> Corrigan and Neal provide a more complex understanding of violence, insisting that “cross burning, vandalism, hate speech, public protests, threatening notes, written treatises, and the propagation of false allegations can also be viewed as religiously violent acts.”<sup>52</sup> But even these modes of violence are all still visible and intentional.

While my thinking builds on this scholarship, I argue that a comprehensive definition of religious intolerance requires a more nuanced engagement with the topic. That is, religious intolerance is at once broader and more endemic than these definitions indicate. I am concerned with a recurrent tendency to downplay the severity of interreligious hostility and propose that a more comprehensive definition of religious intolerance must complicate these assumptions.

As an analytical lens, “religious intolerance” must render visible not only physical violence and hate speech, but also tacit exclusion and more subtle maneuvers to police the boundaries of real/true American religion. The violence resulting from religious intolerance is neither necessarily

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 252, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Bellah and Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*, ix (emphasis in original). The authors problematically attribute this relative scarcity of religious violence to growing secularization of America. In contrast, Sarna proposes religious contentiousness as not only painful, but as opportunity for “wondrous creativity.” Sarna, *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Corrigan and Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 14.

visible nor intentional; we must also consider the lasting damage of epistemic violence resulting from interreligious hostility. Scholars of religious intolerance must engage the silences and unconscious exclusions of certain forms of belief and practice from the category of American religion. More: we must not limit our investigations of religious prejudice to ethnographies of extremism. Our interrogations must be at once more thorough and more reflexive.

The normalization of American identity as Christian—that is, the presumption of common “American” values informed by Christian theology, praxis, and aesthetics—often masks more subtle forms of religious intolerance. Religiously motivated or justified hate speech and violence can be easily identified as intolerant, but normalized American mainline Christianity informs and institutionalizes more subtle and diffuse modes of interreligious hostility. This hostility is not always and everywhere conscious or intentional; its perpetrators are not only zealots. Indeed, individuals and identifiable religious groups are not the only actors responsible for the perpetuation of American religious intolerance.

### *Many Silences: Expanding Definitions of Religious Intolerance*

Significantly, the authors I reviewed above have all defined religious intolerance in terms of interreligious conflict—a confessionally Protestant mainstream attempting to maintain its privileged status by discouraging religious difference. But this is not the sole or most important manifestation of religious intolerance. In this section, I engage authors who consider the influence of mainstream Christianity on America’s presumably secular public sphere. In conversation with these scholars, I note the persistence of mainstream Christian sensibilities informing Americans’ shared (secular) values as articulated in print culture, legal decisions, and historiographies of American religions.

A number of scholars have addressed the “the dominance of white, middle-class forms of Protestantism” in the formation of American religio-national identity, though none explicitly target

such exclusions and assumptions as modes of religious intolerance.<sup>53</sup> Ann Burlein, Lawrence Moore, and Robert Orsi have all delineated the mainline Protestant bias of both American culture broadly and American religious historiography more specifically. Terry Givens, Tracy Fessenden, and Sean McCloud highlight Protestant assumptions that have influenced American print culture. In addition, Winnifred Sullivan, Ann Pellegrini, and Janet Jakobsen demonstrate the Protestant ethics at work in the American legal system. In each case, a shared if unarticulated understanding of “good” or “true” American religion emerges, thus excluding “bad” or “false”—which is to say intolerable—modes of religiosity.<sup>54</sup>

In her 2001 *Lift High the Cross*, American religions scholar Burlein gestures towards something like religious intolerance in her concept of “ignore-ance.”<sup>55</sup> While Burlein’s chief concern is the Christian Right’s mobilization of false nostalgia to create religion as a form of protest, her “ignore-ance” or “ignorance-power” model has broader applications. Ignore-ance perpetuates intolerant or exclusionary models of power (and particularly religious power) “not just through what people say and know, but also and primarily through what people need not say and cannot afford to know: the fears and aggressions, silences and desires that circulate through what is best in people, their highest ideals and deepest hopes.”<sup>56</sup> Rather than address intolerance as something exclusive to extremists or reducible to “individual prejudices,” Burlein considers the “structural placement” of religious hostility, the ways silence, indifference, and exclusion work to normalize certain modes of Protestant Christianity in contemporary America.

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<sup>53</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*.

<sup>54</sup> On this point, see Robert A. Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 177–204.

<sup>55</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. In particular, Burlein concerns herself with the Christian Right’s mobilization of concern for children as motivation for such ignore-ance.

Ignore-ance operates primarily through the principle of familiarity – we often do not recognize rejections or exclusions of difference as such because such omissions are commonplace and reinforced by respected institutions.<sup>57</sup> “Ignorance haunts culture because it inhabits the structures of everyday life so deeply that it need not speak its name in order to take effect,” Burlein insists; American Protestant Christian hegemony “is articulated, supported, and produced by mainstream structures and relations of power.”<sup>58</sup> Burlein’s particular focus is the domestic training that occurs within nuclear families: she insists that “everyday [familial/domestic] practices that predicate bonding on ‘same-as-me-ness’ produce our very perceptions of intimacy and connection as threatened by difference rather than strengthened by it.”<sup>59</sup> I do not disagree. But as I will explore more fully below, courts, universities, and print media also contribute to a normalization of certain Protestant ethics as inherent to the category of American religion; these institutions reinforce the suspicion of difference.

Like several scholars addressed in the previous section, Burlein locates intolerance in the assumption of shared values, but Burlein proposes that religious intolerance is often less explicitly articulated and far more prevalent than Davis, Neal, and Corrigan imply. To listen to ultra-conservative Christian rejections of difference, Burlein insists, is to hear mainstream America talk to itself, interpellate itself, reproduce itself anew: as white, as male, as middle-class, as Protestant, as straight, as innocent.<sup>60</sup> The broad efficacy of appeals to “gut issues” (like the safety and welfare of American children) lies in the Christian Right’s claim to speak for a national majority: “to represent

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<sup>57</sup> Institutions that employ religiously intolerant rhetoric include the American legal system (cf. Sullivan; Jakobsen and Pellegrini), higher educational system (cf. Orsi, Moore), or print culture (cf. Fessenden, McCloud), as well as popular culture outlets (television, cf. Neal).

<sup>58</sup> Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 17, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 10. Burlein proposes specifically that the familiarity and/or familiarity instilled in the domestic sphere is extended into preference for and expectation of national homogeneity, one predicated on a shared feeling of familiarity among citizens of the same nation.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 195.



its authoritarianism as populism and thereby portray its politics as innocent, as not ‘politics’ really, simply an attempt to protect those specific folkways, commonsense values, and shared-origin narratives that constitute ‘Americanness.’”<sup>61</sup> Thus the intolerance, or ignore-ance, Burlein targets does not express itself as nativism or even politics, but merely innocent concern for America’s citizens at large. This type of rhetoric idealizes and normalizes certain modes of Protestant Christianity as necessarily American, effectively (even when silently or unintentionally) rendering alternate modes of religious belief and practice as abject or intolerable.<sup>62</sup>

Burlein argues that the religious mainstream is complicit in acts of exclusion, indifference, and discomfort toward (religious) difference. “Supremacy is articulated, supported, and produced by mainstream structures and relations of power,” Burlein contends. “We are never who we think we are.”<sup>63</sup> Most Americans would probably not categorize themselves as religiously intolerant, but omissions of religious difference “are ordinary and manifold but mostly unremarked on, *a string of everyday unsaid* dispersed across the surface of discourse.”<sup>64</sup> Burlein proposes that intolerant extremists like the Klan build their hateful rhetoric on such silences. Moreover, she insists that explicit hate speech and violence effectively obscure less intentional, more endemic forms of exclusion and indifference.<sup>65</sup>

Burlein’s model of ignore-ance adds important nuance to the definitions of religious intolerance explored above. Ignore-ance about religious difference informs not only recognized ways of knowing and deliberate speech and action, but also assumptions, indifferences, and unintentional exclusions of difference. Burlein attributes ignore-ance to institutional normalizations

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 200, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 196 (emphasis added).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 196 (emphasis added): “an in-your-face ignore-ance that blares and obscures by its very visibility. Such silences transcend individual intention, yet their *power is intimate*.”

of a Protestant Christian hegemony as “American religion,” suggesting that appeals to (presumably) shared American values create and reinforce assumptions that to be American is to be straight, white, middle-class, and Protestant. Like Neal and Corrigan, Burlein’s understanding of religious conflict accounts for violence and hate speech, but Burlein complicates the intentionality and overtness of religious intolerance. Mainstream institutions—like the nuclear family—unintentionally instill and reinforce silences about and exclusions of difference by defining intimacy and security in terms of “same-as-me-ness” – making difference something to be feared and avoided. Burlein attributes the efficacy of intolerant rhetoric to mainstream complicity in intolerance: hate speech and violence often overshadow the more subtle and pernicious institutional constructions of difference as dangerous.

Lawrence Moore and Robert Orsi have both explored the anxieties about and exclusion of difference in American religious historiography. Moore organized his 1986 *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* around a central question: “why do historians pay attention to some things in the past but ignore, or treat as sideshow events, other things that affected just as many people?”<sup>66</sup> Moore suggested that there were “some odd things about the pronounced and persistent habit of many historians to narrow the parameters of what constitutes significant or normal religious behavior in America.”<sup>67</sup> In spite of America’s marked and rich religious plurality, Moore notes that American religious historians and the American public at large have reacted to the realities of this diversity—“multiplying sects and excessive fervor for seemingly bizarre religious tenets”—with “something short of enthusiasm.”<sup>68</sup>

Moore attributes the marginalization of non-mainstream Protestant religions by historians to a fear of difference and to the desire to maintain dominance that Burlein explores. “Protestants may

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), x.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, viii

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* viii

have monopolized the writing of religious history, but we are beginning to ask how much of what they wrote grew from fear, never entirely suppressed in their books, that they were not in control [*i.e.* of the American religious landscape].”<sup>69</sup> In addition, Moore suggests such occlusions of difference overlook minority religions’ claims to “outsiderhood” as key ways of re-inventing a marginal group as innately American.<sup>70</sup> American religious historiography, Moore insists, is grounded in an understanding of itself as unique, set apart.<sup>71</sup>

While historians of American religion have become demonstrably more attentive to concerns of difference and exclusion, Robert Orsi insists in his 2005 essay “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies between Heaven and Earth” that religious alterity still faces suspicion and derision in American religious studies and in American culture more broadly.<sup>72</sup> “It is true that over the past twenty years in response to criticism from various quarters the discipline has intermittently made room for less socially tolerable forms of religious behavior within the scope of its inquiries,” Orsi allows.<sup>73</sup> “But the social and intellectual pressures against this are great and the odd inclusion of an anxiety-provoking ritual or vision has not fundamentally changed the meaning of ‘religion’ in religious studies.”<sup>74</sup>

The “religion” in religious studies, Orsi explains, is directly informed by “domesticated Christianity tailored ‘for use in public life.’”<sup>75</sup> Scholars of American religions have primarily concerned themselves with religion in the singular, identified as beliefs and practices of a

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 21; on this point, see also Ann Taves, “Sexuality in American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27–56.

<sup>70</sup> Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, xi.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., xv, 148.

<sup>72</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 178.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 186.

“denominationally neutral version of Christianity recast as an ethical system.”<sup>76</sup> These beliefs and practices constitute what Orsi terms good or true American religion, cast as “good, even necessary for democracy.”<sup>77</sup> He notes that

It seems to be virtually impossible to study religion without attempting to distinguish between its good and bad expressions, without working to establish both a normative hierarchy of religious idioms...and a methodological justification for it. These resilient impulses take on a special significance in light of the well-known inability of the field to agree on what religion is: *we may not know what religion is but at least we can say with certainty what bad religion is or what religion is not*. The mother of all religious dichotomies—us/them—has regularly been constituted as a moral distinction—*good/bad religion*.<sup>78</sup>

This is to say that religious studies, and American religious studies in particular, is never merely descriptive. Orsi contends that scholarly and popular efforts to define religion are essentially prescriptive and deeply invested in a hierarchical good religion/bad religion dichotomy.<sup>79</sup>

Popular and scholarly understandings of “good” or “true” American religion emphasize belief, coherence, emotional reserve (if not remove), rationality, and voluntarism:

In contemporary American popular culture...[good religion] is epistemologically and ethically singular. It is rational, respectful of persons, noncoercive, mature, nonanthropomorphic in its higher forms, mystical (as opposed to ritualistic), unmediated and agreeable to democracy...monotheistic (no angels, saints, demons, ancestors), emotionally controlled, a reality of mind and spirit not body and matter.<sup>80</sup>

By extension, then, bad religion is (or is perceived to be) multiple or mutable, irrational, disrespectful of persons, coercive, contrary to democracy, enthusiastic or emotionally uncontrolled, and embodied

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 183 (emphasis added).

<sup>79</sup> On the slippage between religious scholarship and popular religious knowledge, see Mary E. Hunt, *A Guide for Women in Religion: Making Your Way from A to Z* (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 106. Hunt notes that “religion is a topic that everyone thinks they know something about, [which] might be a product of both the view that ‘religion’ has to do with ‘personal experience’ and the difficulty many people have with thinking about ‘the social.’” In characteristically irreverent style, Hunt goes on to caution readers against mentioning their field of study on airplanes.

<sup>80</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 188.

or material. Bad religion might be “ugly, violent, or troublesome,” ambivalent or ambiguous; it blurs boundaries among races, genders, time periods, and/or states of existence.<sup>81</sup>

Orsi indicts the field of religious studies for routinely “otherizing” bad religion, those beliefs or practices its scholars find “disturbing, dangerous, or even morally repugnant.”<sup>82</sup> But Orsi maintains that the field does not merely ignore “troublesome” modes of religiosity:

The point here is not simply that the normative account of real religion that took shape within the academy or at the anxious intersection of the academy with the extravagance of American religious life excluded from the study of religion ugly, violent, or troublesome matters (although it certainly does this). Rather the entire notion of “religion” has been carefully demarcated to preserve it from ambivalence and ambiguity, from anything not in accordance with certain sanctioned notions of self and society.<sup>83</sup>

Orsi stresses that religious studies has been shaped and maintained by the exclusion of such troublesome modes as something other than religious. Religion, Orsi contends, “is a disciplinary word, built out of and for exclusion.”<sup>84</sup> He numbers Roman Catholics, Mormons, ghost dancers, “frenzied preachers and gullible masses” among those excluded, insisting that “‘religion’ as it took shape in the academy was explicitly imagined in relation to these others and as a prophylactic against them.”<sup>85</sup> Orsi thus identifies the primary conceptual strategy of religious studies as “otherizing.”<sup>86</sup>

Recent scholarship on “alternative” modes of religion is not innocent of this “otherizing.” While earlier American religious historiography largely ignored or marginalized non-mainstream Protestant religions, Orsi notes that scholars and American culture have increasingly attended to troublesome modes of religiosity. Orsi terms this the “compulsive attraction of otherness,” noting

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<sup>81</sup> See Bellah and Greenspahn’s “loose-boundedness.” Bellah and Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*, 222.

<sup>82</sup> Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” 198, 191.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

that “Americans have long been deeply fascinated by such powerfully complex religious figures, who blur gender or racial categories, for example, or do forbidden and dangerous things with their bodies or with others’ bodies.”<sup>87</sup> Such complex religious figures simultaneously attract and repel:

“Americans want to be protected from these [extreme or disturbing] religious actors, but at the same time they want access to some of their power, an unstable mix of desire and prohibition.”<sup>88</sup>

“Snakes Alive!” engages Dennis Covington’s ethnography of Appalachian Pentecostal “signs following” congregations, in which Covington narrates the allure of the ecstatic (and extreme, in the form of snake-handling and poison-swallowing) worship. Though his experiences with these congregations inspire Covington to consider abandoning journalism in favor of itinerant ministry, the (allegedly) jarring revelation of the congregations’ misogyny forces Covington’s last-minute apostasy. Orsi applauds the ways in which Covington presents his interlocutors as complex actors, worthy of scholarly attention.

But Orsi chastises Covington in the end for using those interlocutors to reinforce, rather than challenge, the good/bad religion dichotomy. “The religious figure” here, the snake-handling Pentecostal preachers Covington befriended, “[who] confounds us and challenges us with his or her difference is silenced and securely relegated to otherness.”<sup>89</sup> Orsi charges Covington with portraying renowned snake-handler Punkin Brown as sub-human in the final chapter of *Salvation on Sand Mountain*; in doing so (Orsi suggests), Covington reassures himself and his popular American readership that we, scholars and/or practitioners of good religion, are not they, the practitioners of the bad or false.

Religious studies as a field is similarly guilty of such boundary-buttressing, Orsi alleges. He attributes the scholarly policing of good religion’s boundaries to anxieties about the practices of

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 183.

“dark-skinned or alien peoples” presented the “Christian middle class.”<sup>90</sup> Such fears are “pervasive and characteristically American,” Orsi maintains.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, there is significant slippage between the academic study of religion and mainstream American understandings of true or good religion.<sup>92</sup>

The discipline reflects the religious politics of the United States as well as the particular history of American higher education. The *embedded, bidden others* against whom the “religion” in religious studies is constituted are the religions on the American landscape that appeared *so terrifying and un-American to the guardians of the culture*.<sup>93</sup>

The scholarly construction of religion as a simple and exclusive category has ominous echoes in American society. The “embedded, hidden others” considered “terrifying and un-American” include Mormons, Roman Catholics, and radical evangelicals Orsi discusses, as well as Muslims and religious witches (which Orsi neglects).<sup>94</sup> Orsi implicates American religious scholars in perpetuating a hierarchical religious dichotomy: he notes that scholars of American religions assured an anxious nation that 9/11 terrorists were not practitioners of good or true Islam and that the failure of the federal government and law enforcement to recognize and respond to the religious convictions of Waco’s Branch Davidian sect resemble religious studies’ scholars failure to take unconventional religions seriously.<sup>95</sup> Orsi’s “Snakes Alive!” thus implicates the academic study of religion itself in the construction and perpetuation of American religious intolerance.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 191-2, 188.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 188 (emphasis added).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 179, 191.

Orsi's identification of "otherizing" as the "basic move" in the academic study of religion is extremely relevant to my exploration of religious intolerance.<sup>96</sup> "Snakes Alive!" contends that religious studies as a field does not merely attend to mainstream Protestantisms to the exclusion of less prevalent forms of religion, but is also deeply invested in the exclusion of such "troublesome" modes. Religious studies "inscrib[es] a boundary between good and bad religions at the very foundation of the field...and enacts an important cultural discipline."<sup>97</sup> Good or true religion is modeled on "denominationally neutral" mainstream Protestantism; anything that escapes those boundaries meets with suspicion or derision, is considered bad religion. This disciplining of religion into a hierarchical binary—good over bad—has significant repercussions both within and beyond the academy, Orsi insists.<sup>98</sup> Thus the work of religious studies is never merely descriptive, but always prescriptive: the academic study of religion tells us not so much what "religion" is as what it should or can be. Until religious studies moves away from "otherizing," the field will remain complicit in institutionalizing religious intolerance.

Burlein, Moore, and Orsi all note a pervasive exclusion of non-mainstream Protestants from American religious history and the construction of "American religion." Burlein and Orsi attribute this exclusion to preferences for the familiar and safe: Burlein theorizes interreligious conflict as "ignore-ance," while Orsi locates such conflicts in scholarly practices of "otherizing." All three scholars indicate that fear of difference motivates the exclusion of religious others, and all three attribute these anxieties to concerns for defining "good" or "true" American religion exclusively in terms of denominationally neutral mainstream Protestantism. Orsi and Burlein both highlight the extent to which religious intolerance draws on and reinforces American gender and sexual cultural norms, a point to which I shall return.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



Orsi, Moore, and Burlein further suggest that scholars and citizens might not fully realize the fear motivating such definitions. Orsi's "otherizing" and Burlein's "ignore-ance" have less to do with explicit or overt action than with normalized assumptions of what does and does not count as "real" American religion. In addition, all three scholars note institutional as well as individual manifestations of religious intolerance, specifically within the academic study of religion. And all three note that the exclusion of religious others in the religious studies scholarship has broader ramifications in American culture.

Terryl Givens, Tracy Fessenden, and Sean McCloud note similar occlusions of religious difference endemic to American print culture.<sup>99</sup> Givens examines popular nineteenth century anti-Mormon novels to demonstrate the ways such narratives work to discourage minority religious practice. Fessenden and McCloud both highlight the Protestant assumptions that have historically informed print media, and Fessenden insists on the Protestant ethics underlying professedly secular media (and, indeed, secularism at large). While Givens proposes an "unarticulated orthodoxy" at work in American print culture and McCloud uses Bourdieu's habitus to theorize the excoriation of religious difference in terms of "heresiography," Fessenden targets secularism as an "unmarked category," one that conceals and perpetuates its normative Protestantism.<sup>100</sup>

Literary theorist and Mormon historian Terryl Givens' *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* notes the tensions between professed American ideals—particularly the ideal of religious tolerance—and the lived reality of religious intolerance (or the rejection of what Givens calls heresy).<sup>101</sup> *The Viper on the Hearth* "consider[s] how transgression

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<sup>99</sup> For a similar indictment regarding popular American television's treatment of new religious movements, see Neal, "They're Freaks!"

<sup>100</sup> Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 22; Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>101</sup> Terryl Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

comes to be represented when unacceptable difference manifests itself in the midst of a community or society that has already founded its identity on ideals of pluralism and tolerance.”<sup>102</sup> Givens’ project analyzes literary examples of attempts to police and reject perceived religious transgressions or heresies.

Givens suggests that the United States is deeply invested in an ideal of a religious tolerance that is uniquely American. “The American investment in the ideal of religious tolerance has been part of our self-presentation, our share American mythology, for two hundred years and more,” he notes.<sup>103</sup> How then to account for the “rhetoric of vituperation” and “practice[s] of exclusion” Givens identifies in anti-Mormon literature?<sup>104</sup> That is, “how are we to understand the acceptable range of religious innovation when orthodoxy and religious conformity are not part of a country’s heritage or ideology?”<sup>105</sup>

*Viper on the Hearth* argues that American public opinion negotiates its understanding of acceptable and intolerable modes of religion through the lens of an “unarticulated orthodoxy” – the weight of which is considerable when it falls on excluded forms of religion.<sup>106</sup> “In the absence of a state religion, and in spite of an American predilection for religious diversity,” Givens insists, “heresy has persisted as a category that transcends narrow denominational boundaries.”<sup>107</sup> While the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 78. On the difficulties of locating and defining mainline Protestant hegemony in America, see also Hutchinson, who insists that “historians of American religion have generally taken for granted the existence of a Protestant establishment...[these historians] have alluded to something that, even if real, is not at all definable.” Hutchinson sketches the boundaries of an “intra-Protestant entity, if fuzzy at the edges and changeable over time,” that includes (without being reducible to any of its parts) “Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and white divisions of the Baptist and Methodist families” and since 1900 “Disciples of Christ and United Lutherans,” while the Southern Baptist Conference is seen as “increasingly and intentionally removing itself” from the mainstream. William R. Hutchison, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3-4.

<sup>107</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 77.

boundaries of American religious orthodoxy remain vague, the rejection of heterodoxies “marks the limits of religious freedom from which any one particular community will tolerate.”<sup>108</sup> Thus in Givens’ estimation, polemics against Mormonism and other “heresies” emerge as sites for the definition and delimitation of American religion.

Givens engages religious intolerance in terms of a fiercely policed orthodoxy and vituperative, often violent, rejection of heresies. The significance of such rejection lies in the proportion of the response to heterodox groups and activities: while the groups themselves are relatively small and lacking in influence on a national scale, the backlash against these groups can be enormous.<sup>109</sup> An ill-defined but convicted religious majority, then, prides itself on religious intolerance while rejecting and persecuting minority religions for unacceptable transgressions against an unarticulated but nevertheless inviolable “American religion.”

The genre of popular literature provides particular insights into these expressions of religious intolerance, Givens proposes. “Representational patterns” in anti-Mormon literature demonstrate the simultaneous “construction of heresy” and the construction of a collective religio-national identity.<sup>110</sup> Religiously intolerant narratives “demonstrate the necessary conditions that religion must be subjected to, the *rhetorical strategies that must be deliberately and ingeniously applied*, in order to maintain intact the underlying value system of pluralism and religious toleration *while the aberrant group is proscribed*.”<sup>111</sup>

*Viper on the Hearth* contributes a nuanced definition of religious intolerance to American religious studies. Givens adeptly demonstrates the tensions between a professed American commitment to (and pride in) a unique form of religious tolerance and persistent American

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 21 (emphasis added).

rejections and persecutions of perceived heterodoxies. Givens particularly emphasizes the vehemence of religious exclusion in the face of an unarticulated American orthodoxy – that is, minority religions are frequently excluded and persecuted as essentially intolerable, but “American religion” is not reducible to a well-defined set of beliefs or practices. Givens further identifies intolerance in the disproportion of popular responses to such “heresies:” heretical groups are relatively small, but the public outcry against their beliefs and practices is considerable. Finally, Givens demonstrates the value of engaging popular literature as a prime site of religious hostility.

Sean McCloud’s 2004 *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993* demonstrates that in the four decades of materials McCloud examines print media depictions of marginal religions were deeply shaped by the journalists’ socioeconomic, demographic, and professional practical positions, or journalistic *habitus* (via Bourdieu). Mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century magazine coverage of the “religious fringe” emphasized marginal religions’ variations and deviations from the American Protestant mainstream, belittling or condemning those religious movements with “high levels of religious zeal, dogma, and emotion.”<sup>112</sup> Journalists became de facto “*heresiographers*,” positioning “emotional” religions that demonstrated “abnormal” levels of piety (“fringe” religions) against “rational” religions with “normal” piety levels (observable in mainstream Protestant denominations).<sup>113</sup> In this way, the national print media McCloud surveys acted as “an arena of symbolic production,” constructing and authorizing American racial and class inequality in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>114</sup>

*Making the American Religious Fringe* credits print journalists with constructing the category of marginal religions in contemporary America.<sup>115</sup> While noting that “changes in fringe depictions

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<sup>112</sup> McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe*, 22.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 5, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 6.

coincided with larger changes in society, culture, and the magazine industry,” McCloud demonstrates key patterns in journalistic depictions of the American religious fringe.<sup>116</sup> These magazine journalists “imagined the religious mainstream as white middle class and upper middle class,” which McCloud attributes to the writers’ similar social locations; the journalists in question imagined the members of the religious mainstream to be like themselves and their readers.<sup>117</sup> “Many (but of course not all) of the largest news and general-interest magazine writers and authors shared approximate dispositions, conscious opinions, professional obligations, and unconscious assumptions,” McCloud explains.<sup>118</sup>

These shared attitudes, opinions, and assumptions form what McCloud terms a “journalistic ‘habitus’”<sup>119</sup> Drawing on Bourdieu, McCloud suggests that a set of unconscious presuppositions and actions (or *doxa*, in Bourdieu’s framing) caused his subjects to authorize and police a particular definition of mainstream American religion – one whose practitioners closely resembled the journalists themselves. Thus, in McCloud’s analysis, mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century print media effectively served as a “spiritual apologetics for the dominant social order.”<sup>120</sup> Its journalists presented and reinforced a definition of the “normative American mainstream” that was white, upper-middle and middle class, male, religiously liberal or nonaffiliated – effectively normalizing and universalizing middle-class values and practices.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 6. On continuities among depictions of “subversives,” see David Brion, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature,” 208.

<sup>117</sup> McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993*, 7, 5. On the motivational force of familiarity and “just-like-me-ness” in operations of religious intolerance, see Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 195.

<sup>118</sup> McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993*, 8.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 4, 9; but see Fessenden regarding the normative Protestantism that has historically informed religious non-affiliation. Normative Protestantism also assumes shared educational background, gender conformity, and moderate binary marital reproductive heterosexuality (good sex). McCloud addresses the first but neglects the latter.

McCloud argues that the American religious fringe—groups and individuals who “demonstrated high levels of religious zeal, dogma, and emotion”—has served as a “negative reference group” in the journalistic construction of American cultural identity.<sup>122</sup> This is to say that journalists—white, middle-class, well-educated, who were religiously liberal or unaffiliated—defined the religious fringe as everything they themselves were (presumably) not: “fanatical, bigoted, parochial, emotional, and implicitly ethnic and lower class.”<sup>123</sup> In this way, McCloud contends, his subjects acted as “heresiographers”; their magazines identified “false or inauthentic religion and thus symbolically establish[ed] boundaries between a mainstream religious center and a suspect periphery.”<sup>124</sup> While McCloud primarily concerns himself with the ways in which the construction of the religious fringe authorized and reified class, racial, and cultural inequalities as “natural and inevitable,” I would argue such discursive constructions also functioned to establish and police expressions of “good religion.”<sup>125</sup>

*Making the American Religious Fringe* argues that print media participates in constructing the center and peripheries of mainstream American religion. Drawing again on Bourdieu, McCloud describes this participation as a “symbolic production” of the religious fringe, in which “magazines categorize groups as mainstream or marginal, orthodox or heterodox, religious or non-religious in ways that accord with the social locations of their producers.”<sup>126</sup> McCloud is particularly concerned with the capacity of print media to naturalize, maintain, and/or disrupt social hierarchies.<sup>127</sup> But while Bourdieu’s theory applied solely to the naturalization of class differences, McCloud’s

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 4, 6.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 4.

consideration of heresiography engages broader social inequalities, including those of race, education, and social location, as well as discrepancies in theology and geographical region.<sup>128</sup> The power of this symbolic production can be observed in the responses by alternative magazines to charges of being “fringe”:

Many alternative representations [of the religious fringe] failed to challenge the broader categories and characterizations that the largest magazines had established. Often, rather than question the categories themselves, journalists writing “from the fringe” strove only to improve or reverse their religious, racial, or economic group’s status within the existent classifications.<sup>129</sup>

That is, when marginal religious movements provided their own alternative narratives, they did not challenge the categorizations presented by popular media. Rather, these “fringe” groups only sought to improve their own status within the established categories.<sup>130</sup> Print media had so firmly established the boundaries of mainstream normalcy that “fringe” journalists essentially bolstered the categories of their own vilification, even while trying to improve the social standing of their specific groups – here again suggesting that religious exclusion is not always conscious or intentional.

Heresiography, then, serves as an important component of religious intolerance in print media constructions of the American mainstream. McCloud rightly notes that journalistic constructions of the mainstream and its fringe are never static: rather, “the American religious fringe is a constructed and contested category that is constantly in flux, reflecting certain interests, concerns, and power positions.”<sup>131</sup> At the same time, however, that category consistently reflects the interests, concerns, and power positions (or *habitus*) of those constructing particular modes of religiosity as marginal. *Making the American Religious Fringe* demonstrates the extent to which print media depictions of religious difference can reflect the experiences and assumptions (*doxa*) of their

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

authors; inasmuch as these *doxa* are normalized “unconscious actions and presuppositions,” McCloud’s theory of heresiography further problematizes the notion that religious intolerance must always and everywhere be intentional. *Making the American Religious Fringe*, then, demonstrates the significant role American print media plays in the symbolic production of religious intolerance.

Tracy Fessenden’s 2007 *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* argues that “public Protestantism”—that is, certain modes of Protestant religion, largely read as private beliefs—has emerged as an “unmarked category” in American religious and literary history.<sup>132</sup> This is to say that, according to Fessenden, American print culture has helped normalize Protestant ethics as secular values. Those beliefs and practices that do not conform to this normalized Protestantism are therefore more visible in the public sphere, and are often met with public suspicion. Fessenden insists that the purported secularism of the American public sphere is directly informed by particular assumptions and aesthetics of mainline reformed Christianity, that the assumptions of public American secularism are often demonstrably (if tacitly) Protestant. Fessenden further stresses the brutality of religious exclusion operant in the construction of national identity.<sup>133</sup>

While Fessenden acknowledges that Protestantism is not a historical, cultural, or theological monolith, she insists that the “convenient fiction” of shared American Protestant values has been “powerful and enduring,” as well as “ingeniously difficult to counter.”<sup>134</sup> In defining “Protestant,” Fessenden qualifies that “there has been no theologically, racially, economically, or politically homogenous culture named American Protestantism at any point in our history.” This is to say that “Protestant” operates as a blanket term for a set of values informed by multiple denominations of

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<sup>132</sup> Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*, 6.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 221, 5.



mainline Christianity, and that the persistence of an American Protestant majority has rendered these conservative Christian priorities unmarked.<sup>135</sup>

Qualifying Orsi's conclusions, Fessenden contends that good religion is marked by its inconspicuousness.<sup>136</sup> "Good' [American] religion is good in the measure that it tends toward invisibility, or at least unobtrusiveness," Fessenden observes.<sup>137</sup> She proposes that public understandings of American religion are the result of several elisions: specific modes of reformed Christianity into a monolithic Protestantism; Protestantism into Christianity; Christianity into religion. Specific forms of Protestant belief and practice [have] come enduringly to be subsumed under the heading of "Christian"—to the exclusion of non-Protestant and differently Protestant ways of being Christian—and...in many cases...the "Christian" come[s] to stand in for the "religious" to the exclusion of non-Christian ways of being religious.<sup>138</sup>

Thus *Culture and Redemption* proposes that "particular forms of Protestantism emerged as an 'unmarked category' in American religious and literary history."<sup>139</sup> "Religion" in the context of the American public sphere has come to imply specific modes of Protestant Christianity, though public figures will often ignore or deny this elision.<sup>140</sup>

Fessenden further maintains that the public sphere understands this unmarked category as specifically American. Fessenden proposes "'public Protestantism' [is] the 'one religion' of the United States, a dominant if tacit 'religious system' that gives 'cultural cohesion [to] American society.'"<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. See also Burlein's notion of "ignore-ance" on this point.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 5.

She suggests the “developmental narrative” of American religious historiography links good religion (that is, public Protestantism) to American national identity – effectively condemning all other modes of religiosity as “foreign to democracy,” “allegedly irrational, regressive, or inscrutable.”<sup>142</sup>

Since good religion must be unobtrusive, public Protestantism renders suspect any religious group whose beliefs or practices are out of sync with the American religious mainstream. Fessenden explains: “the salutary transparency of good religion and the attribution of anti-democratic leanings to any other kind made it inevitable that...*all* visible forms of religion might easily be regarded as irrational, regressive, and threatening to the democratic project.”<sup>143</sup> Religions beyond the boundaries of public Protestant ethics are not presumed not only “bad,” but un-American. Marginalized religions are “induced or compelled to assimilate themselves to Protestant norms in order to be recognized as legitimately American.”<sup>144</sup> Since traditions of public Protestantism align themselves with “democracy and personal freedom,” marginal religions are suspected of being antithetical to both.<sup>145</sup>

The narrative of public Protestantism, with its shared values and national identity (*i.e.* democracy and personal freedom), constructs a progression in which modern nations are always and everywhere becoming more tolerant of religious difference and less invested in religious identity.

Fessenden explains:

The assumption that some religions or aspects of religion have simply played themselves out, or ought to, or eventually will, is crucial to the developmental schema of good and bad religion—the first associated with freedom and enlightenment, the second with coercion and constraint—implicit in the progress narrative of democracy.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

Good religion, then, becomes synonymous with democratic values and ever-increasing tolerance.<sup>147</sup>

The secularization narrative thus presumes that the public sphere is necessarily secular—where “secular” is defined as an “unremarkable absence of once-dominant ‘religion’”—and that religious commitments will eventually dissolve into those of national identity.<sup>148</sup>

Fessenden insists that this kind of post-Protestant secularism is “blind to its own exclusions.”<sup>149</sup> We cannot understand secularism as a bland absence of religion, nor may we assume that a secular public sphere is void of religiosity.<sup>150</sup> The secularization narrative rather encodes specifically Protestant assumptions about what religion is (individual, belief-based) and where it belongs (in private), while normalizing those assumptions as the shared values of an American national identity. This narrative shifts occludes the Protestant ethics encoded in secularism: “the consolidation of a Protestant ideology... has grown more entrenched and controlling even as its manifestations have often become less visibly religious.”<sup>151</sup> Such an occlusion is possible, Fessenden contends, because Protestantism—having directly participated in the formation of the American public sphere—penetrates that sphere more easily than other modes of religion. “The secular sphere as constituted in American politics, culture, and jurisprudence,” she maintains, is “far from being a neutral matrix.”<sup>152</sup>

The presumed—and, Fessenden insists, false—neutrality of secularism effectively masks the operations of religious intolerance in the American public sphere. The “co-implication of secularism and reformed Christianity” has allowed that public sphere to construe Muslims, Catholics, Mormons,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 4.

Jews, and Native Americans (among other marginal religiosities) as threats to democracy or affronts to the “American way,” “all without apparent violence to” Americans’ “cherished notions of religious freedom.”<sup>153</sup> Thus “Christian religious polemic [can] remain compatible with America’s vaunted history of religious liberty and toleration by being cast in strictly secular terms.”<sup>154</sup> That is, the secularization narrative obscures the operations of religious intolerance in the public sphere while perpetuating the grand narrative of America’s unique commitment to tolerating religious difference.

Rather than fostering religious diversity and multiplicity, the secularization narrative actually constrains the conditions of religious possibility in American life:

When secularism in the United States is understood merely as the absence of religious faith, or neutrality in relation to religious faith, rather than as a variety of possible relationships to different religious traditions...then religion comes to be defined as “Christian” by default, and an implicit association between “American” and “Christian” is upheld even by those who have, one imagines, very little invested in its maintenance.<sup>155</sup>

To illustrate, recall the “fringe” journalists of McCloud’s archive, who failed to contest the terms on which mainstream American print media evaluated their respective “alternative” religious movements – terms directly informed by the Protestant ethics and aesthetics of good religion. As McCloud demonstrates, these fringe journalists only ever attempted to improve their position within an implied American religious hierarchy – thus reifying the categories of their own marginalization. This type of constraint on religious possibility has broader implications as well: Fessenden notes that secularism has become the prevalent critical practice in humanities scholarship, such that “religion therefore fails to warrant the kinds of attention we give to other social formations in American literary history, including gender, race, sexuality, and class.”<sup>156</sup> At the same time, “an implicitly Christian culture puts pressure on all who make claims on American institutions to constitute

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 2.

themselves as religious on a recognizably Protestant model.”<sup>157</sup> Fessenden demonstrates that participation in the American public sphere often requires religious agents to translate themselves and their messages into recognizably Protestant terms – effectively constraining religious possibility, rather than tolerating religious difference.

The normalization of Protestantism implicit in the public construction of American national identity is inherently violent, Fessenden insists. She cites instances of physical violence—such as Indian removals by Puritans—as well as of the epistemic violence implicit in internal and external colonizations, exercises of imperialism, and, most pertinent to my project, constructions of sexual and gender norms. Citing American Catholic historian Jenny Franchot, Fessenden underscores the relationship between “religious democratization” and “the practices of often brutal exclusion involved in the formation of American selfhood.”<sup>158</sup> The “American value” of religious freedom made possible by privatized religion and a secular public sphere “*hides the violence and coercion that have attended the formation of the American democratic space in the guise of the neutrality and universality of the secular,*” Fessenden contends.<sup>159</sup> Here again, the violence of religious intolerance is epistemic as well as explicit: the normalization of Protestant Christian ethics as American values subsumes, obscures, and constrains religious difference, while simultaneously congratulating itself on its unique and remarkable commitment to religious tolerance.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 4. Fessenden cites arguably mandatory confessions of faith in presidential elections as evidence on this point. Related to public Protestantism’s influence in American politics, she suggests that “the question of how conservative Catholics and Protestants have now come jointly to wield the authority of ‘true’ religion in American public life, all the while pressing their claims in ways that make religion seem anything but private and discretionary, bears thoughtful consideration.” Ibid., 220. Indeed, many fundamentalist Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Latter-day Saints currently participate in the political rhetoric of public Protestantism, often authorizing their candidacies for office on platforms of presumably common American morality. I noted in my introduction the extent to which religious regulations of or attitudes regarding sexuality are often elided into “morality” or “ethics” in the public sphere.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 217 (emphasis added).

Without explicitly addressing religious intolerance, Tracy Fessenden's work offers significant insight into its operations in the American public sphere. Her concept of "public Protestantism" suggests that "religion" has been elided into certain "good" modes of Protestantism (particularly those that prioritize voluntarism, individuality, privacy, progress, and religion-as-belief). In addition, Fessenden proposes that the popular understanding of American identity has aligned with this public Protestantism, rendering it an unmarked category of presumably American values. Thus visible religions become bad, suspicious, un-American. The progressive teleology of American identity presumes secularization—defined merely as the absence of religion—as inevitable, requisite in the formation of the modern public sphere. Fessenden contends that public Protestantism and the secular national identity that develops from it are blind to their own exclusions, effectively constraining religious difference while touting their unique religious tolerance. The false neutrality of secular national identity is inherently violent in its exclusions, Fessenden insists.

*Making the American Religious Fringe* and *Culture and Redemption* both investigate the Protestant assumptions underlying print media's construction of American identity—as well as the violent implications of such an exclusive construction. McCloud's heresiography and Fessenden's public Protestantism both help illuminate the operations of religious intolerance in the American public sphere. McCloud emphasizes the journalistic *habitus* that contributes to the marginalization of religious difference, but ultimately understands the trajectory of American national identity in terms of religious plurality. By contrast, Fessenden proposes a secularization narrative operant in modern national identity-formation, underscoring the Protestant assumptions that inform American secularism. Both Fessenden and McCloud's models challenge the notion that religious intolerance must be conscious or intentional, but Fessenden attends more directly to the epistemic violence of marginalization. Both approaches recognize unconscious motivating forces for institutional modes of religious intolerance – though McCloud emphasizes the *doxa* of individual journalists, while Fessenden stresses assumptions implicit in the assumptions of secular modernity. Most relevant for

my purposes here, only Fessenden discusses the relationship between normative Protestant ethics and gender and sexual regulations.

Winnifred Sullivan, Ann Pellegrini, and Janet Jakobsen all emphasize the normalization of Protestant ethics in American jurisprudence. Sullivan insists that the American legal system's inherently Protestant understandings of the category of religion, or what Sullivan calls "small-p Protestantism," essentially precludes religious freedom. Like Fessenden, Pellegrini and Jakobsen contend that American identity assumes and compels performance of Protestant ethics; they pay particular attention to the ways in which presumably secular legal regulations of sexual behavior rely on implicitly Protestant notions of appropriate sexuality.

Winnifred Sullivan's 2005 *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* demonstrates the extent to which American jurisprudence relies on an essentialized—and essentially mainline Protestant—definition of religion. A nationalistic understanding of religious practice, which Sullivan refers to as "small-p protestantism," informs this definition.<sup>160</sup> As with Fessenden's "public Protestantism," Sullivan's concept of protestantism elides American national identity and liberal Protestant commitments to individuality, tolerance, voluntarism, and progress. Sullivan argues that religious freedom is ultimately impossible to enforce legally, because courts require a clearly delimited and exclusive definition of "true" religion – an orthodoxy incompatible with the complexities of lived American religion.

Like Fessenden, Sullivan notes that American identity is characterized in large part by a professed commitment to religious freedom. Yet, Sullivan argues, religious freedom is easier to advocate than to enforce. The United States prides itself on this commitment as "one of the shining achievements of the United States."<sup>161</sup> Indeed, Sullivan expounds, "nowhere [in the world], as

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<sup>160</sup> Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Americans understand it, is religion so strong and so free.”<sup>162</sup> But the legal protection of religious freedom requires a legal definition of what constitutes religion – and, as Sullivan notes, “drawing a line around what counts as religion and what does not is not as easy as periodically recommitting ourselves politically to religious freedom. Defining religion is very difficult.”<sup>163</sup> The complexities of lived religion, then, complicate the American legal system’s professed commitment to defending religious freedom.

Sullivan contends that American jurisprudence requires an essentialized definition of religion so as to determine if a practice is “legally religious.”<sup>164</sup> That is, “in order to enforce laws guaranteeing religious freedom you must first have religion.”<sup>165</sup> In the absence of an articulated American religious orthodoxy, the courts rely, in large part, on individual judges’ assessments of particular instances of religious practice – the judge of the case Sullivan analyzes in *Impossibility* applied the “I know it when I see it” standard.<sup>166</sup> As she explains:

Religion, particularly American religion, fits uneasily into a legal scheme that demands such categories and such expert certainty. Rationalizing religion in the ways proposed by courts and legislatures in this country fails to capture the nature of people’s religious lives at the beginning of the twenty-first century, maybe of any century. Such rationalization also asks the government to be the arbiter of religious orthodoxy.<sup>167</sup>

Despite a presumed separation of church and state, American judges effectively codify American religious orthodoxy in their attempts to protect religious freedoms.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 1, 154-5.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 3, 4. See also Givens’ notion of “unarticulated orthodoxy.” Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 78.

<sup>167</sup> Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, 10.



Jurisprudential definitions of “true” American religion closely resemble mainline Protestant theology and phenomenology, Sullivan suggests.<sup>168</sup> According to the author, “secular law only *appears* secular.” “In fact, it is replete with ideas and structures that find their origin in and are parallel to, ideas and structures in religious traditions.”<sup>169</sup> In particular, the American legal system draws heavily on “protestant reflection and culture.”<sup>170</sup> Sullivan’s “small p” protestantism refers to “a set of political ideas and cultural practices that emerged in early modern Europe in and after the Reformation,” which understands “true” religion as “private, voluntary, individual, textual, and believed.”<sup>171</sup> As with Fessenden’s public Protestantism, Sullivan’s protestantism is an unmarked but crucial component of American national identity. Small-p protestantism “is religiously invisible, having been assimilated into ‘secular’ culture, though it may have enforcement power through legislation.”<sup>172</sup> It is “a kind of nationalism.”<sup>173</sup> By defining religion in protestant terms, the American legal system has normalized a mainline Protestant understanding of what does and does not count as “true” religion and rendered protestantism itself an unmarked category.

The courts’ normalization of protestant definitions of American religion bifurcates lived religions, Sullivan contends. If protestantism is true, believed, voluntary, and individual, non-protestant religions—“public, coercive, communal, oral, and enacted” religions—are by extension rendered false, or at least suspect.<sup>174</sup> Legal protections of religious freedom are similarly bifurcated, Sullivan suggests. “Crudely speaking, it is the first kind—the modern protestant kind—that is ‘free.’

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 148, 154.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 8.

The other kind is closely regulated by law” and “has been *carefully and systematically excluded*, both rhetorically and legally, from modern public space.”<sup>175</sup> Sullivan refers to this as the Janus-faced quality of American religion in relation to law: protestant religion is unmarked, invisible, assumed, while non-protestant religiosities are feared and kept separate.<sup>176</sup> Sullivan locates her book’s eponymous impossibility in this unstable dichotomy. “Religion,” she insists, “is not always, in fact, absolutely free, legally speaking. The right kind of religion, the approved religion, is always that which is protected, while the wrong kind, whether popular or unpopular, is always restricted or even prohibited.”<sup>177</sup> While American courts rely on protestant understandings of true religion to enforce the notion of religious freedom, non-protestant religions are constrained and excluded.

The American legal system’s “schizophrenia” in relationship to religion shapes its protections of religious freedom.<sup>178</sup> Thus Sullivan insists any attempt to protect religious freedom in the courts ultimately restricts the free exercise thereof – rendering judicial decisions at best contradictory and “theoretically incoherent,” and at worst unconstitutional.<sup>179</sup> I would argue that the protestant bias of American jurisprudence moreover authorizes and perpetuates religious intolerance through the reliance on protestant definitions of religion.

*The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* challenges both the secularism of the American legal system and the prospect of legally defending religious freedom. Sullivan proposes a religio-national identity directly informed by mainline Protestant sensibilities, which in turn informs legal understandings of which religions do or do not count as “true” (and thus deserving of legal protection). Sullivan identifies this religio-national identity as “small-p protestantism,” suggesting

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., (emphasis added).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 10.

that the courts' need for an essentialized definition of religion cannot accommodate the complexities of lived American religion. Religious modes that emphasize practice, community, and submission are suspect and not protected by American courts in the same way as mainstream religions. Sullivan concludes that courts should attempt to enforce *equality*, as legal assurances of religious freedom are impossible.<sup>180</sup> While American courts decide religious cases based on protestant notions of appropriate practice, those decisions have the effect of promoting religious intolerance.

Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's 2004 *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* illustrates this assertion. Jakobsen and Pellegrini address the normalization—and legislation—of Protestant sexual morality as “good old American values.”<sup>181</sup> Through an analysis of Supreme Court decisions, Pellegrini and Jakobsen argue that American assumptions about religion, values, and public interest are “crucially connected” to sexuality and its regulation.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, they suggest that “the secular state's regulation of the sexual life of its citizens is actually religion by other means.”<sup>183</sup> The authors problematize the rhetoric of both religious and sexual tolerance, suggesting that tolerance is an inherently hierarchical model. They conclude that tolerance is a limited and ultimately flawed model, arguing instead for legal protections of religious and sexual freedom.<sup>184</sup>

Jakobsen and Pellegrini insist that Protestant Christianity—and often conservative Protestant Christianity—serves as the measure of both religion and morality in America. “To be traditionally American is to be Christian in a certain way”; “[Protestant] Christianity is the de facto established

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>181</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 3.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>184</sup> See also Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, “Practicing Sex, Practicing Democracy,” *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, January 9, 2008, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/09/practicing-sex-practicing-democracy/>. This article further engages the American political “presumption that ‘values’ equals ‘sexuality,’ and conservative sexuality at that.” As with their previous work, Jakobsen and Pellegrini insist that religious and sexual freedom are mutually contingent. “Ironically,” the authors insist, “there might be more religious freedom if there were more sexual freedom.”

state religion.”<sup>185</sup> The elision of Protestantism and American values constitutes a religio-national identity, one the authors refer to as “stealth Protestantism.”<sup>186</sup> As they explain, the professedly secular Supreme Court of the United States has normalized stealth Protestantism specifically with regard to sexual regulations: Protestant sexual ethics directly inform the Supreme Court’s decisions on queer rights to privacy and other forms of enfranchisement. “Religion—specifically Christianity—shapes legislation, public policy, and even jurisprudence around sex... [T]he assumptions that underlie sexual regulation are so deeply embedded that people no longer recognize them as being derived from religious thought.”<sup>187</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini argue that secularism indicates, not the retreat, but the reinvention of religion in the public sphere, made possible by a “conflation of religion and morality.”<sup>188</sup>

As Fessenden and Sullivan note, the presumed secularism of the American public sphere renders Protestantism invisible. Jakobsen and Pellegrini argue in turn that “in the particular case of the United States, the dominant framework for morality is not simply ‘religious’ or even ‘Christian,’ but is specifically Protestant... the *unstated* religious assumptions of U.S. secularism are specifically Protestant.”<sup>189</sup> The authors attribute the elision of Protestant sexual ethics into secular morality to a “process of historical amnesia... [American values’] specific religious lineage is often forgotten.”<sup>190</sup> The occlusion of American values’ Protestant origin has made Protestant Christianity the de facto state religion.

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<sup>185</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 13, 104.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

The normalization of Protestantism as (secular) American values marginalizes religious and sexual difference. Those excluded by “stealth Protestantism”—non-Christians and “those who are Christian in another way”—“will always and only be ‘minorities’ to be ‘tolerated’ within the ‘general’ American public,” the authors maintain.<sup>191</sup> The constraint of religious difference establishes a hierarchical order of American religions, which Jakobsen and Pellegrini insist is perpetuated by the model of religious tolerance.

Religious tolerance is not synonymous with religious freedom, the authors explain:

Being the object of tolerance does not represent full inclusion in American life, but rather a grudging form of acceptance in which the boundary between “us” and “them” remains clear, sometimes dangerously so. This boundary is also elevated to a mark of moral virtue. The tolerant are generous and open-minded even as they are exclusionary.<sup>192</sup>

Tolerance assumes a hierarchical insider/outsider dichotomy, in which those in power tolerate those who do religion and/or sex differently.<sup>193</sup> Jakobsen and Pellegrini note that religious tolerance has grown more inclusive, but at the same time tolerance ultimately creates an exclusionary public.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, the rhetoric of “love the sinner, hate the sin” allows mainstream Americans to understand themselves as ethical and compassionate—that is, tolerant—while discriminating against other American citizens.<sup>195</sup> Because the notion of tolerance targets extremism rather than injustice, it can serve to justify hatred, exclusion, and domination.<sup>196</sup> Simply put, “tolerance is not enough.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 46, 50.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 58, 3, 41.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 150.

Jakobsen and Pellegrini advocate instead a model of religious and sexual freedom.

“Freedom allows for the production of moral alternatives,” they propose, creating a more expansive public space for secularism and for moral claims and public policy to be based on notions of freedom, rather than mere tolerance.<sup>198</sup>

It is the democracy of religious freedom in which one group's idea of sin does not limit the freedom of those who believe and practice differently, in which laws are based on democratic processes, not on particular religious beliefs. The majority of Americans do not hate anyone, but neither do they grant the same democratic freedoms to everyone.<sup>199</sup>

Freedom, they suggest, is a better means of creating justice.<sup>200</sup> Tolerance, ironically, has proved to perpetuate religious and sexual intolerance. Jakobsen and Pellegrini propose that religion should ground sexual freedom, rather than justify sexual regulation.<sup>201</sup> American laws should, according to the authors, begin by emphasizing individual rights rather than broad restrictions based on normalized Christian ethics.

Jakobsen and Pellegrini identify Protestant Christianity as the de facto established religion of the United States; Protestant sexual ethics directly shape the legal regulation of sexual behaviors. The presumed secularism of the American public sphere and American jurisprudence renders this “stealth Protestantism” invisible. The normalization of Protestantism as (secular) American values marginalizes religious and sexual difference, establishing a hierarchical order of American religions perpetuated by the model of religious tolerance. Because it targets extremism rather than injustice, tolerance can justify hatred, exclusion, and domination. Tolerance is an insufficient model; Jakobsen and Pellegrini rather advocate a model of religious and sexual freedom.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 17, 12.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 16.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for an understanding of religious intolerance that encompasses not only explicit hate speech and violence, but also normalized assumptions of good American religion. For the remainder of this dissertation, I will demonstrate the ways in which public sphere rhetoric relies both on assumptions that good religion resembles mainline Protestantism, and that religions outside the mainstream are necessarily suspect.<sup>202</sup>

In particular, I am concerned with the ways intolerant rhetoric uses normative American sexuality to police and discourage religious difference. I examine three narrativizations of contact with religious minorities—*Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers*—as examples of such rhetoric. These stories articulate anxieties about other-ness, often expressed as suspicions about sexual impropriety. Problematically, the actors in each case study emphasize their own religious tolerance while discriminating against religious minorities; the justification for this discrimination is consistently sexual.

My case studies identify minority religious communities as especially given to gendered and sexual exploitation, and thereby sanction interference into religious minority communities in efforts to liberate vulnerable American women and children. I present these case studies as participants in an ongoing public negotiation of the kinds of beliefs and practices mainstream Americans will and will not tolerate – and the extent to which normative American sexuality informs and bounds this

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<sup>202</sup> Scholarly theorizations on the Christian underpinnings of American secularism have largely emphasized influence of Protestant beliefs and practices on the constitution of the American body politic. However, the pan-Christian alliance of the late 1970s absolutely adopted Roman Catholic rhetoric on issues like abortion, premarital sex, and homosexuality. (See, for example, *Ibid.*, 5 regarding public appropriation of Catholic sexual morality to the exclusion of most other Catholic doctrines on social justice. Cf. Tracy Fessenden's argument that the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church has strengthened its alliances with conservative forces in the United States by continuing its hardline stance on contraception and abortion. See Tracy Fessenden, "Sex and the Subject of Religion," *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, January 10, 2008, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/10/sex-and-the-subject-of-religion/>.) For this reason, I refer to these religious influences as Christian, acknowledging both the extensive influence of Protestant dogma and the irreducibility of these ethics to any discreet denomination.

tolerance. Rhetorical constructions of religious outsiders as sexually predatory facilitate Americans' self-perception as simultaneously religiously tolerant and morally upright.



## An Unusual Place: Do Mormon Fundamentalists Really Need Saving?

that's Mormon  
territory and clearly  
there's work to be  
done.

Charles Bukowski, "an unusual place"

In 1999, mountaineer and author Jon Krakauer stopped for gas near Short Creek, Arizona. Across the highway, he saw a “hazy hodgepodge of half-built houses and trailers...like something out of a Steinbeck novel.”<sup>1</sup> Women working in vegetable gardens wore “pioneer-style dresses that reminded him of Muslim burqas” and inexpensive unisex sneakers.<sup>2</sup> When he drove in for a closer look at the settlement, Krakauer received “a Short Creek welcome”: “a large 4x4 pickup with darkly tinted windows loomed in his rear-view mirror and began aggressively tailing him.”<sup>3</sup> Krakauer “couldn’t shake the vigilantes following him” and claimed the encounter “scared the shit out of [him].”<sup>4</sup> Krakauer eventually located a National Park ranger, who allegedly dismissed Krakauer’s concerns.<sup>5</sup> “You were in Short Creek, the largest polygamist community in the country. That’s the way it’s been out there forever.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Brower, *Prophet’s Prey: My Seven-Year Investigation Into Warren Jeffs and the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Brower, *Prophet’s Prey*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., presumably paraphrased.

In 2004, Krakauer published *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*, which parallels the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and an account of two brutal murders committed by excommunicated Mormon fundamentalist zealots.<sup>7</sup> Krakauer's stated intention in writing *Under the Banner of Heaven* was "to grasp the nature of religious belief," "to cast some light on...the roots of [religious] brutality [and]...the nature of faith."<sup>8</sup> But according to private investigator Sam Brower's account in *Prophet's Prey: My Seven-Year Investigation Into Warren Jeffs and the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, *Banner* constitutes Krakauer's attempt to "portray Short Creek as it really was, a place without joy that is run by a Taliban-style theocracy."<sup>9</sup> Brower further notes that *Banner* "might never have been written if the xenophobic people of Short Creek had not run [Krakauer] out of town."<sup>10</sup>

Jon Krakauer is the author of several works of popular non-fiction. He is best known for his accounts of out-of-doors derring-do, including *Into Thin Air* and *Into the Wild*.<sup>11</sup> While he claims no investment in policing boundaries of American religion or nationalism—indeed, he professes an ardent agnosticism in his concluding "Author's Remarks"—Krakauer seems confident in his

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I have pluralized "Mormonisms" to indicate the complexity and variety among different branches of the religion founded by Joseph Smith Jr. in the early 1830s. The best known of these branches is the the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), which under the leadership of church president Wilford Woodruff publicly disavowed polygyny in 1890. Mormon fundamentalisms refers to those sects that retain tenets and practices abandoned by LDS, including but by no means limited to the practice of plural or plural marriage (*i.e.* theologically sanctioned polygyny). I provide a more detailed explanation of the differences among some of the largest Mormon fundamentalist groups later in this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (Anchor, 2004), 334, xxiii.

<sup>9</sup> Brower, *Prophet's Prey*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* (1997) is recounts Krakauer's experiences during the 1996 Mount Everest Disaster, during which eight climbers died and several others were stranded during a severe storm. *Into the Wild* (1996) chronicles the 119-day sojourn of Christopher McCandless into the Alaskan frontier before his death from unknown causes. Director Sean Penn later adapted *Into the Wild* into a feature film released in 2007. Krakauer also released *Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman* (2009), about an NFL player turned U.S. soldier who died in Afghanistan.

assessment of both the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its fundamentalist offshoots as irrational, violent, and sexually suspect.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is not to chronicle Krakauer's personal animosity toward Latter-day Saints, Mormon fundamentalists, or the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – though the author himself has dedicated significant time and personal resources toward the capture and imprisonment of former FLDS leader Warren Steed Jeffs (whom Krakauer uses interchangeably with FLDS and all Mormon fundamentalisms). Rather, I examine Krakauer's account of his contact with the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints, beginning with the publication of *Banner*, moving through Krakauer's self-confessed obsession with Warren Jeffs and testimony before the Texas House of Representatives' Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee, and concluding with the largest custodial seizure of American children in American history following a state-funded raid on an FLDS community in Eldorado, Texas in April 2008.<sup>13</sup> My goal is to demonstrate the significant influence Krakauer and his work have exercised in shaping public rhetoric and responses to FLDS beliefs and practices, particularly in regard to the practice of plural marriage (or theologically mandated polygyny).<sup>14</sup> More importantly, I hope to examine the ways Krakauer's prose

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<sup>12</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 341.

<sup>13</sup> HB 3006 (1:01:16).

<sup>14</sup> Polygyny is a form of marriage which unites one man and several women. *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some Additions by his Successors in the Presidency of the Church* (first published 1835, hereafter *Doctrine and Covenants*), as part of Mormonisms' open scriptural canon, includes a number of revelations made to Mormon prophets throughout Church history. Section 132 of *Doctrine and Covenants*, is a "revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Nauvoo, Illinois, recorded July 12, 1843, relating to the new and everlasting covenant, including the eternity of the marriage covenant and the principle of plural marriage" (Joseph Smith Jr., "The Doctrine and Covenants - Section 132," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, n.d., <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/132?lang=eng>). Section 132 lays out the principle of plural or plural marriage: that is, theological validation for the practice of polygyny. While LDS repudiated polygyny in 1890, many Mormon fundamentalists continue to observe "the Principle" by entering into plural marriages.

Though popular rhetoric regarding Mormon fundamentalism and sexual difference frequently refer to this practice as polygamy (*i.e.* marriage involving multiple partners), in the interest of specificity I refer to plural marriage throughout this chapter as polygyny unless direct quotes dictate otherwise.

and testimony promote responses to Mormon fundamentalism rooted in fear and suspicion of religious and sexual difference.

Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* fostered a highly visible and contentious debate about Mormon fundamentalism, polygyny, and the responsibility of the American public to intervene when religious minorities overstep the boundaries of American tolerance. Krakauer, Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff, the Texas House of Representatives' Committee for Juvenile Justice and Family Issues, and other public figures made stirring appeals to the American public about its obligation to save Mormon fundamentalist women and children. In this chapter, I argue that such discourse of liberation—exhortations to save women and children deemed defenseless and exploited—incited actions that ultimately did little to prevent abuse within this minority religious community and failed to address or even acknowledge far more common domestic abuses of American women and children. At the same time, these discourses, exemplified by *Banner* and sustained throughout the raid on Yearning for Zion, actively discouraged religious and sexual difference within the American body politic by vilifying Mormon fundamentalism and the practice of polygyny as inherently abusive and irrational.

This is to say that the public narratives concerning twenty-first century American Mormon fundamentalism—including *Banner*, the Texas House of Representatives' Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee proceedings, and the legal documentation surrounding the raid on Yearning for Zion—instantiates American sexual exceptionalism by insisting that child sexual abuse, multiple-partner sexual relationships, and coercive sexual practices are necessarily *other than* conventional American sexuality. The hypersexualization of the FLDS community, evident in the myopic focus on polygyny as the community's defining characteristic, necessarily marked Mormon fundamentalists as religious outsiders and legitimate targets for intolerance based on their religious and sexual nonconformity to America's "shared values."

## *“Common Sense is No Match for the Voice of God”*

*Under the Banner of Heaven* offers interweaves two narratives: an informal history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and an account of murders committed by Dan and Ron Lafferty, two former members of a Mormon fundamentalist sect. Krakauer’s account of Mormon history begins with the Church’s founding by Joseph Smith in the 1830s, his revelation of the doctrine of plural marriage in 1843, and Smith’s murder by mob in 1844.<sup>15</sup> Krakauer recounts Brigham Young’s succession as prophet and LDS church president in 1847 and the growing prevalence of plural marriage among Mormon communities.<sup>16</sup> The author then narrows to center on Mormon fundamentalism, and specifically the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) and its offshoots.<sup>17</sup> Krakauer’s account of 20<sup>th</sup> century Mormon fundamentalist history primarily focuses on the FLDS communities in Short Creek, Arizona/Colorado City, Colorado and Bountiful, British Columbia.<sup>18</sup>

The chapters of *Banner* not devoted to Mormon history recount in grisly detail the events surrounding the murders of Brenda and Erica Lafferty by Brenda’s brothers-in-law, Dan and Ron Lafferty.<sup>19</sup> Krakauer identifies Dan and Ron as excommunicated members of both LDS and a very

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<sup>15</sup> Krakauer attributes Smith’s murder in part to allegations of Smith’s lechery – see for example Krakauer’s references to Smith’s “frenzied coupling” and “sexual recklessness” with a number of women. Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> Historians contest the extent to which polygyny was practiced or endorsed among 19th century Mormons. See Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2002) and Terryl Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>17</sup> On the doctrinal and practical distinctions among Mormon fundamentalisms, see notes 73–77 in this chapter. See also Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” 180: in many writings and in the minds of many observers, *all Mormon fundamentalists are lumped in one negative pot*. The rich variability of lifestyles, beliefs, and behaviors is completely ignored by the public, government officials, and the press” (emphasis added).

<sup>18</sup> One of the oldest and largest FLDS communities in the United States is located on the border between Colorado and Arizona. This interstitial location has often complicated both states’ law enforcement efforts to operate within the community.

<sup>19</sup> Dan and Ron Lafferty murdered their youngest brother Allen’s wife, Brenda Wright Lafferty (24), and Allen and Brenda’s infant daughter, Erica, on 24 July 1984.

small radical FLDS splinter group, the School of Prophets.<sup>20</sup> Relying on interviews and news accounts, Krakauer suggests that Brenda was murdered for challenging an patriarchal religious system.<sup>21</sup> *Banner's* parallel structure, with its emphases on sexual predation and violence, present Brenda Lafferty's gruesome murder as the consequence of Mormon history and theology.<sup>22</sup>

For the purposes of this project, I am most concerned with Krakauer's consistent conflation of Mormon fundamentalist identity with the practice of polygyny, which the author portrays exclusively as predatory and abusive.<sup>23</sup> Thus in my analysis of *Banner*, I focus explicitly on the ways in which Krakauer provides evidence for the allegedly dangerous and irrational nature of sexual difference – here, the practice of religiously sanctioned polygyny. Krakauer repeatedly emphasizes that the members of FLDS, and especially the community's women and children, are *unable* to think for themselves and are thus in need of rescue.<sup>24</sup> For Krakauer, then, Mormon fundamentalist

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<sup>20</sup> The School of Prophets is an LDS splinter sect founded by Robert C. Crossfield in 1982. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: a History* (Signature Books, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> As I note above, Krakauer consistently blurs distinctions between FLDS, LDS, and other forms of Mormonisms, particularly with regard to the tradition(s)' alleged sexism and sexual transgressions. For example: "Mormonism is a patriarchal religion, rooted firmly in the traditions of the Old Testament. Dissent isn't tolerated. Questioning the edicts of religious authorities is viewed as a subversive act that undermines faith... [T]his holds true in both the mainstream LDS Church and in the Fundamentalist Church, although the fundamentalists take these rigid notions—of obedience, of control, of distinct and unbending roles for men and women—to a much greater extreme. The primary responsibility of women in FLDS communities (*even more than* in the mainline Mormon culture) is to serve their husbands, conceive as many babies as possible, and raise those children to become obedient members of the religion," (33, emphasis added). As throughout the dissertation, my concern here is not with Krakauer's assessment of Mormonisms as a patriarchal religious tradition, but rather with his implication that this kind of patriarchalism is in any way unique in contemporary American culture.

<sup>22</sup> Krakauer argues that religious belief "compel[s] an impassioned few, predictably, to carry that irrational belief to its logical end" – including Ron and Dan Lafferty, "apparently sane, avowedly pious m[e]n," *Under the Banner of Heaven*, xxi.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Krakauer quotes Utah county attorney David Leavitt: "the practice of polygamy is abusive to children, is abusive to women, is abusive to society" Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> See in particular Krakauer's emphasis on FLDS women being "brainwashed" (Ibid., 24, 52). Brainwashing refers to a process by which an individual's control over his own thinking, behavior, or emotions. While brainwashing was a popular explanation for an unprecedented number of young people joining new religious movements in the 1960s and 1970s, religious studies scholars and psychologists have largely discredited this theory as an explanation for membership in marginal religious communities. See Barker, *The Making of a Moonie* and David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Indiana University Press, 2003).

Through judicious use of subjects' quotes, Krakauer consistently stresses that plural marriages are not "a matter of religious freedom or a harmless sexual relationship [sic] between consenting adults" because women in plural

women's physical, spiritual, sexual, and psychological captivity is demonstrated by the continued practice of polygyny – a practice he describes as essentially irrational.

Krakauer's emphasis on the irrationality of Mormon fundamentalist belief is pronounced throughout his work. In fact, Krakauer concludes *Banner* with an anecdote to this effect. The reflections of DeLoy Bateman, an FLDS apostate and former polygynist turned atheist, comprise the final pages of the book:

It's amazing how gullible people are...but you have to remember what a huge comfort the religion is. It provides all the answers. It makes life simple. Nothing makes you feel better than doing what the prophet commands you to do... it's not having to make those critical decisions that many of us have to make, and be responsible for your decisions...

I think people within the religion—people who live here in Colorado City—are probably happier on the whole, than people on the outside...But some things in life are more important than being happy. Like being free to think for yourself.<sup>25</sup>

Krakauer, through Bateman, thus closes his reflection on “the nature of faith” by suggesting that people of faith are cheerful idiots<sup>26</sup>: note the observation about the gullibility and simplicity that accompanies their supposed happiness. This condescension echoes Krakauer's own account of time spent in the “happy company of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>27</sup> (“Happy” serves as a decidedly charged word, given this observation's proximity to Bateman's concluding remarks.)

The implication that pious submission—exemplified for Krakauer in the practice of plural marriage—is necessarily irrational is at the heart of Krakauer's thesis:

Although the far territory of the extreme can exert an intoxicating pull on susceptible individuals of all bents, extremism seems to be especially prevalent among those inclined by temperament or upbringing toward religious pursuits. *Faith is the very antithesis of reason,*

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marriages “from the cradle, knew no other life but polygamy” (23). Krakauer quotes Attorney David Leavitt extensively on this point: women in polygynous relationships “are victims of pedophiles, and they are the victims of the state of Utah, which turned its back on polygamy for sixty years” (23).

<sup>25</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 334.

<sup>26</sup> There is a similar condescension evident in Krakauer's “author's remarks” at *Ibid.*, 336: “I envied what seemed to be the unfluctuating certainty of the faith professed so enthusiastically by my closest Mormon pals, but I was often baffled by it.”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

*injudiciousness a crucial component of spiritual devotion. And when religious fanaticism supplants ratiocination, all bets are suddenly off. Anything can happen. Common sense is no match for the voice of God.*<sup>28</sup>

This is Krakauer's argument writ large: no person could willingly or rationally engage in an "extreme" form of religion like Mormon fundamentalism or an "extreme" practice like polygyny.

Krakauer also conflates Mormon fundamentalism with the practice of polygyny. The author refers to several Mormon fundamentalist groups—among them the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [FLDS, also affiliated with the United Effort Plan (UEP)],<sup>29</sup> the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB, also known as the Allreds),<sup>30</sup> the School of Prophets (to which the Laffertys formerly belonged), the Latter-day Church of Christ (also known as the Kingston Clan),<sup>31</sup> and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., xxiii (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> FLDS has roughly 10,000 members, largely concentrated in Hildale, Utah and Colorado City, AZ (Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 27). FLDS leadership, including church president Warren Jeffs, moved to the Yearning for Zion ranch in 2003. Roughly a thousand FLDS members reside in Bountiful, British Columbia, while others live in Colorado and South Dakota. The United Effort Plan is "a collective controlled by FLDS Church leaders that owns most of the property and businesses of members" (Ibid., 28). FLDS is more "rigidly patriarchal" than other Mormon fundamentalist groups; FLDS theology requires a man to have multiple wives to reach the highest level of paradise (thus "plural marriage"). Each FLDS man has an average of 3.5 wives, 8 children per wife (Ibid., 30). FLDS theology condemns interracial marriage, and the communities experience a high incidence of rare genetic disorders due to inbreeding (Ibid., 34). William Jeffs Jessop briefly replaced Warren Steed Jeffs as church president after Jeffs' arrest in 2006, but Jeffs regained leadership in February 2011.

<sup>30</sup> The Apostolic United Brethren split off from FLDS in 1950s and currently has about eight thousand members (Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 35). Janet Bennion estimates that between 1990 and 1996, six LDS families per month converted to the AUB; this "short-term conversion frenzy" slowed around 2000 (Ibid., 34). The church's headquarters are in Bluffdale, UT, and AUB communities are scattered throughout Utah, as well as in Pinedale, Montana, Lovell, Wyoming, Mesa, Arizona, Humansville, MO, and Ozumba, Mexico. There are also smaller AUB communities in Germany, the Netherlands, and England (Ibid., 34-35). Bennion notes that AUB is the "[Mormon] fundamentalist sect most similar to the LDS Church, and among the Mormon groups it has the most converts directly drawn from the mainstream Mormon community," (Ibid., 36). AUB also integrates with surrounding LDS communities more than FLDS or LeBarons (see note 75, below), which Bennion attributes to leaders' "desire to work with local law enforcement officials, especially to end rumors of arranged marriages with underage girls," (Ibid., 37). Bennion contends that AUB "is more progressive and law-abiding than other [Mormon fundamentalist] groups," (Ibid., 37). The Browns, the polygynous family featured on TLC's "Sister Wives," are AUB Mormon fundamentalists.

<sup>31</sup> The Latter Day Church of Christ, also known as the Kingston Clan or the Davis County Cooperative, is currently led by Paul E. Kingston. The LDCC is based in Salt Lake City but has branches in Davis County, Utah and scattered settlements along the Wasatch Front in Utah (Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 39). The Kingstons left Short Creek in 1935 and are, according to Bennion, "the most secretive of all [Mormon fundamentalist] polygamy groups," (Ibid., 39-40). Bennion notes that the Kingstons "are known for the large number of underage marriages they perform, the highest number of incestuous marriages, and the highest natural birth rate of any of the fundamentalist Mormon groups," (Ibid., 40). LDCC theology emphasizes "kingdom building" (millennialism; see note 84) through establishing a pure bloodline traced back to Jesus (Ibid., 40). The LDCC as an organization is



various LeBaron factions<sup>32</sup>—but does little to differentiate among these groups’ several theological and practical disparities.<sup>33</sup> *Banner* repeatedly identifies plural marriage as the single defining practice of contemporary Mormon fundamentalism, suggesting that the practice both signifies and motivates theologically sanctioned violence and duplicity among Mormon fundamentalists – particularly toward the communities’ women and children.<sup>34</sup>

In his introduction, Krakauer notes that LDS and Mormon fundamentalists “diverge on one especially inflammatory point of religious doctrine: unlike their present-day Mormon compatriots, Mormon fundamentalists passionately believe that Saints have a divine obligation to take multiple wives.”<sup>35</sup> Despite significant scholarship to the contrary, Krakauer insists that “polygamy was, in fact, one of the most sacred credos of Joseph [Smith]’s church”<sup>36</sup>: “the revered prophet described plural marriage as part of ‘the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to man on earth.’”<sup>37</sup> In his account of LDS history, Krakauer emphasizes Joseph Smith’s alleged “frenzied coupling” and

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wealthy, but “some families live in extreme poverty and must go on welfare or scrounge for their food and clothing,” (Ibid., 43).

<sup>32</sup> The LeBaron factions are fractious, but the primary group is The Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness [sic] of Times, established in 1955 in Mexico (Ibid., 43). Bennion emphasizes the church’s “tumultuous history,” which she attributes to “severe mental illnesses associated with the LeBaron gene pool,” (Ibid., 43). The Church of the Firstborn has several hundred members, most of whom reside in Galeana, Mexico; members also live in Baja and San Diego in California, as well as in parts of Central America and Salt Lake Valley (Ibid., 43). LDS excommunicated the LeBarons in 1944 for advocating and practicing plural marriage (Ibid., 44). Unlike most Mormon fundamentalist groups, the LeBarons engage in active proselytization among other Mormon fundamentalist groups as well as in regions of Mexico (Ibid., 50).

<sup>33</sup> Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 23. Bennion estimates the population of Mormon fundamentalists somewhere between 38,000 – 60,000, 75% of whom are affiliated with FLDS, AUB, or the Kingstons. The remaining 25% are independent or affiliated with the LeBarons.

<sup>34</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 5, 6, 11, 13, 18, 21, 24, 27, 28-9, 33, 46-9, 51-55, 85, 124, 150-6, 194, 203, 206, 325, 327-8, 330.

<sup>35</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Krakauer attributes this quote to Smith, though sources generally attribute the quote to an observer, William Clayton.

“sexual recklessness,” as well as how deeply opposed Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, Smith’s first wife, was to plural marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Krakauer presents polygyny as the defining doctrinal and practical crisis of the Mormon church(es).<sup>39</sup> In *Banner*’s penultimate chapter, Krakauer suggests an “ironic [sic] component” to LDS mainstreaming: “to whatever extent the LDS religion moves beyond the most problematic facets of Joseph Smith’s theology [read: polygyny] and succeeds at becoming less and less peculiar, fundamentalists are bound to pull more and more converts away from the Mormon Church’s own swelling ranks.”<sup>40</sup> Here Krakauer presents fundamentalism and its defining feature, polygyny, as an inevitable consequence of mainstream Mormon theology, consistent with his assertion that murder and sexual exploitation are the logical (if irrational) products of religious belief.

Krakauer recounts former FLDS leader Rulon Jeffs’ 75 wives, some of whom Jeffs married in his eighties, many of whom were younger than sixteen.<sup>41</sup> The author also notes that Rulon’s son, Warren Steed Jeffs, had at the time of *Banner*’s publication fathered children with at least two underage girls.<sup>42</sup> Krakauer dwells at length on the crimes and prosecution of Tom Green, who is unaffiliated with any of the three main branches of Mormon fundamentalism; Green was convicted

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>42</sup> Warren Steed Jeffs is the president and prophet of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and is currently serving a life sentence plus 20 years for convictions of aggravated sexual assault and sexual assault of a minor. (The Associated Press, “Texas: Polygamist Leader Convicted,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 2011, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/05/us/05brfs-Texas.html>.) Brent Jeffs alleged that his uncle had sexually molested him in the 1980s, and would later act as a witness for the prosecution during Warren Jeffs’ sentencing in August 2011 (<http://www.cnn.com/2011/CRIME/08/06/texas.polygamist.jeffs/index.html?iref=allsearch>). Brower was later retained by attorney Roger Hoole, who represented Elissa Wall in her civil suit against Warren Jeffs. (Wall also served as a witness for the prosecution of Jeffs in his initial conviction for accomplice rape in 2007.)

of bigamy in 2001 and first degree rape of a child in 2002.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Krakauer alleges that the AUB splinter sect, the LeBaron clan, is rife with sexual assault.<sup>44</sup> Krakauer further recounts Ruth Holm's allegations that she was coerced by family members and FLDS leaders into becoming the third wife of Officer Rodney Holm at the age of sixteen.<sup>45</sup> Krakauer's observation that "the Colorado City police department has not disciplined Officer [Rodney] Holm" for the statutory rape of Ruth Holm implies that Mormon fundamentalist culture not only condones sexual misconduct, but actually protects its perpetrators.<sup>46</sup>

Krakauer notes antipolygamist activist and former FLDS member Flora Jessop filed sexual abuse charges against her father at age fourteen, though "the judge presumed she was lying and dismissed the case."<sup>47</sup> Krakauer further reports that FLDS member Dan Barlow Jr., son and namesake of Colorado City's then-mayor, "was charged with repeatedly molesting five of his daughters over a period of ten years... [and] admitted that he viewed his daughters as 'wives.'"<sup>48</sup> However, Krakauer alleges that Colorado City residents, many of whom are FLDS members, "closed

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<sup>43</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 20-23. Green is a former member of the Righteous Branch of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, an offshoot of AUB. The Supreme Court of Utah upheld Green's conviction for bigamy in 2004. Elizabeth Neff, "Polygamist Green Loses Appeal of His Bigamy Convictions," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, September 24, 2004, <http://archive.sltrib.com/printfriendly.php?id=2407641&type=ngpsid>.

<sup>44</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 270.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 26. Krakauer notes that "Officer Holm...is acting like the aggrieved party" in the custody battle that followed Ruth Holm's "escap[e] from Colorado City," *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 26. See also the Barlow Jr. case below. Holm was convicted in 2003 of "unlawful sexual conduct with a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old and one count of bigamy for his marriage to and impregnation of plural wife Ruth Stubbs." Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 33. Krakauer did not include this conviction in list 2004 list of corrections to the hardcover edition of *Banner*. It's also worth noting that sexual assaults are notoriously difficult to prosecute. Even with an overwhelming amount of evidence, very few trials for sexual assault result in convictions. Here again, this is not to excuse Holm's actions but to demonstrate that the legal process for investigating and prosecuting his crimes were in no way unique to FLDS or Mormon fundamentalist communities. Matt Thacker, "Rape Cases Prove Difficult to Prosecute," *News and Tribune*, June 8, 2008, <http://newsandtribune.com/clarkcounty/x519380765/Rape-cases-prove-difficult-to-prosecute>; M. Wood, "City Attorney Shares Reality of Prosecuting Sexual Assault Cases," *University of Virginia Law School*, March 25, 2002, [http://www.law.virginia.edu/html/news/2001\\_02/zug.htm](http://www.law.virginia.edu/html/news/2001_02/zug.htm).

<sup>47</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 27.

ranks around [Barlow Jr.], and his father, the mayor, went before the court and pleaded for leniency.”<sup>49</sup> Like the Colorado City Police Department’s failure to prosecute Rodney Holms, Krakauer finds Barlow Jr.’s actions and the dismissal of Jessop’s suit indicative of a “documented pattern of sexual abuse in Colorado City.”<sup>50</sup>

Krakauer chronicles numerous instances of incest among Mormon fundamentalist groups. He highlights the Kingston clan as especial perpetrators: “even more than in other fundamentalist Mormon groups, incest is a common practice among the Kingstons.”<sup>51</sup> (Note the implication that incest is a common practice among all Mormon fundamentalist communities; Krakauer merely characterizes the Kingstons as the worst of a bad bunch.) Women who attempt to resist underage marriage and incestuous sexual assault are allegedly “re-educated,” a process Krakauer narrates in chilling detail:

After being married against her will to her uncle, David Ortell Kingston, at the age of sixteen, Mary Ann Kingston tried to run away twice...[her father] John Daniel then drove Mary Ann to an isolated ranch near the Utah-Idaho border, which the Kingstons used as a “re-education camp” for wayward wives and disobedient children. He took the girl into a barn, pulled his belt off, and used it to whip her savagely across the buttocks, thighs, and lower back, inflicting hideous injuries.<sup>52</sup>

Neither are such sexual abuses unique to the United States, Krakauer alleges. Debbie Palmer’s accounts of multiple sexual assaults comprise much of the “Bountiful” chapter in *Banner*.<sup>53</sup> Palmer

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 19. Mary Ann’s father, John Daniel Kingston, was arrested and imprisoned for seven months on charges related to this case. Her husband, David Ortell Kingston, was convicted of incest and unlawful sexual conduct and sentenced to four years in prison. Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 42. As I noted in my introduction, such focus on salacious details make this account both provocative and conservative: they present such abuses as both horrific and inevitable.

<sup>53</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 35. Palmer is a former FLDS member and the subject of the documentary film “Leaving Bountiful.” Palmer’s account is worth consideration. However, scholars have noted the fraught nature of apostate testimony in understanding new religious movements. See in particular David G. Bromley, *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998)..

insists that “incest and other disturbing behaviors are rampant” in the FLDS community of Bountiful, British Columbia.<sup>54</sup> In the chapter “Elizabeth and Ruby,” Krakauer juxtaposes the alleged assault of Ruby Jessop, Flora’s sister (mentioned above), with the kidnapping and rape of Elizabeth Smart.<sup>55</sup> Flora Jessop alleges that Ruby was “forced to marry an older member of her extended family, whom she despised...[and] was raped immediately after the wedding ceremony – so brutally that [Ruby] spent her ‘wedding night’ hemorrhaging copious amounts of blood.”<sup>56</sup> As with his description of the “re-education of Mary Ann Kingston,” note Krakauer’s emphasis on the sadism of the assault.

Likewise, the “Evangeline” chapter of *Banner* recounts at length the transnational misdeeds of Kenyon Blackmore, former bishop of the FLDS Bountiful community.<sup>57</sup> Blackmore’s first wife, Annie, recounted “bitterly” that “God had commanded Ken not to tell me” about Gwendolyn, Blackmore’s second wife, living in Mexico.<sup>58</sup> Gwendolyn’s oldest daughter, Evangeline, alleges that Kenyon “took her as his wife” on her twelfth birthday: “that is to say, he began raping her on a

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<sup>54</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 35. See also pp. 36-42, which includes accounts of several additional assaults on Debbie, including by her father (Ibid., 37), the molestation of her son and daughter by her husband, Michael (Ibid., 39), and her daughter’s concern that she would have to marry her molestor “because some of her friends in Colorado City had had to marry their stepfathers after being molested by them” (Ibid., 39). I do not challenge Debbie Palmer’s account of these events. I do note, however, that such abuses are unusual among Mormon fundamentalist communities in general. See Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” 180.

<sup>55</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 51. I have argued elsewhere that Krakauer fundamentally misreads the events surrounding Elizabeth Smart’s captivity and sexual enslavement. See Megan Goodwin, “Common Sense Is No Match for the Voice of God”: Krakauer’s Misreading of Elizabeth Smart,” in *The Mormon Heritage Industry: Reading Mormon the Mormon Past in Popular Medias* (presented at the American Academy of Religion National Meeting, Chicago, 2012) and “Don’t Stand So Close to Me: On Not Hearing Elizabeth Smart,” *The Juvenile Instructor*, May 15, 2013, <http://www.juvenileinstructor.org/dont-stand-so-close-to-me-on-not-hearing-elizabeth-smart/>.

<sup>56</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 51-2. This episode contains no direct quotes, making it unclear how Krakauer received this account.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 271-9. Krakauer misidentifies Blackmore as part of a LeBaron clan. Rulon Jeffs excommunicated Blackmore in the 1990s, causing a fracture in the Bountiful community. Roughly 700 members left to follow Blackmore. Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 30.

<sup>58</sup> Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 275.

regular basis.”<sup>59</sup> “According to Evangeline, her father believed that he should start having sexual intercourse with her when she turned twelve ‘because that is when Mary, the first mother of Jesus, was impregnated.’”<sup>60</sup> When Evangeline resisted, Kenyon “would throw [her] on the ground, punch [her], and cover [her] mouth when [she] would try to scream.”<sup>61</sup> “To keep from being beaten,” Krakauer reports, Evangeline “started yielding to her sixty-year-old father’s incestuous assaults.”<sup>62</sup> Krakauer concludes this extensive and sadistic abuse narrative by noting that “the oldest of Evangeline’s sisters had her twelfth birthday in May 2001, the next in February 2003; another will turn twelve in July 2004.”<sup>63</sup> Note the ominous foreboding of Krakauer’s concluding remarks.

As I have shown, Krakauer employs several strategies to discredit Mormon fundamentalists. Among these tropes are an overemphasis on polygyny, the depiction of plural marriage as necessarily the product of mental deception and coercion, the characterization of Mormon men as sadistic sexual predators, and the reduction of Mormon fundamentalist women to victims in need of rescue. As gender studies scholar Michelle Gibson notes in her 2010 “‘However Satisfied a Man May Be’: Sexual Abuse in Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints Communities,” portraying FLDS women as being in need of rescue from a religious organization that seems to threaten Americans’ “shared values” authorizes the American public—whether in the form of law enforcement, news media, or popular culture—to “wage war against the oppression of ‘other’ women—even if their salvation from sexual abuse and exploitation seems impossible.”<sup>64</sup> This is not to deny that abuses occur in Mormon

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 277-8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Here again, note Krakauer’s focus on the sadistic detail of these abuses.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>64</sup> Michelle Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be’: Sexual Abuse in Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints Communities,” *The Journal of American Culture* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 287.

fundamentalist communities, but rather to insist that polygyny does not always strip women of their autonomy or happiness.<sup>65</sup>

Krakauer's account places disproportionate emphasis on incidents of sexual predation, coercion, and abuse within Mormon fundamentalist communities.<sup>66</sup> The author portrays Mormon fundamentalist men as especially prone to sexual predation, violence, coerciveness, and deception. Throughout *Banner* Krakauer makes tacit appeals to "shared" American values – which, as I have argued, are informed by conservative Christian sexual ethics.<sup>67</sup>

*Under the Banner of Heaven* makes affective—and often misinformed—appeals to shared American values, meant to arouse sympathy and presumably inspire legal change.<sup>68</sup> The drama and polemicism of such writing lends itself to factual errors and superficial investigation into a multiple and complex network of Mormon fundamentalist communities. And, as Gibson notes, Krakauer's and similar works function to "shor[e] up of monogamous patriarchal marriage and mainstream Christian religious doctrine." Such discourses are performative: they incite the public to act against intolerable religiosities and sexual practices.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bennion, "The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West," 164.

<sup>66</sup> As Bennion inquires, "Why do we send United States troops against a small Texas community for teen pregnancy when the entire nation is plagued by similar issues?" Bennion, "The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West," 180. As Duffy notes, however, scholars can both attend to the religious intolerance at work in public attempts to regulate FLDS practices *and* note the public's sincere concern for the women and children of FLDS. Duffy, "Saints Under Siege," 554. Gibson notes the overemphasis of Mormon fundamentalist polygyny in public discourse more broadly. Gibson, "However Satisfied Man Might Be," 283.

<sup>67</sup> See the introduction to this dissertation, as well as Lori G. Beaman, "Church, State and the Legal Interpretation of Polygamy in Canada," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8, no. 1 (July 1, 2004): 32 and Song, "Polygamy in America," 145.

<sup>68</sup> Gordon, "War of Words," 748.

<sup>69</sup> Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 164-5. For the historical context of these kinds of anti-polygyny narratives, see Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 54.

## *“The Report Has to Come from the Inside”*

In this section, I examine religiously intolerant public discourse evident during the state of Texas’ response to an influx of FLDS members in 2004-2005. I note that legislature and law enforcement statements of religious intolerance echo (and in some cases, draw directly upon) Krakauer’s own intolerant rhetoric in *Banner*. In particular, I focus on two specific visible instances of religious intolerance in Texas law enforcement officials’ interactions with FLDS.

The first is a hearing before the Texas House of Representatives’ Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee on the matter of House Bill (HB) 3006, a bill that directly targeted the FLDS community of Eldorado, Texas, as sexually suspect.<sup>70</sup> This proceeding has, to my knowledge, received no scholarly attention within the field of religious studies. This lack of academic scrutiny is perhaps not surprising; HB 3006 was ultimately rolled into State Bill (SB) 6, which included amendments proposed by HB 3006’s author Rep. Harvey Hilderbran, but (unlike 3006) did not target FLDS by name. However, the hearing on HB 3006 before the Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee had direct bearing on the events surrounding Texas’ Department of Family and Protective Services’ raid on the FLDS Yearning for Zion ranch in April 2008. This hearing, which took place on April 3, 2005, includes Krakauer’s testimony on the evils of Mormon fundamentalism and Warren Jeffs.<sup>71</sup>

The second important instance of religious intolerance I will examine is the raid on Yearning for Zion itself. Like HB 3006, the raid itself has garnered scant academic attention.<sup>72</sup> My

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<sup>70</sup> *House Research Organization Bill Analysis (HB 3006)* (Texas: Juvenile Justice and Family Issues, May 12, 2005), 4. “CSHB 3006 would strengthen Texas’ laws against polygamy and election laws to protect communities from being infiltrated by fringe religious groups. A group of *Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints* is building a compound south of San Angelo where local residents are concerned that members may be forcing young girls to marry, engage in polygamist activities, and possibly marry their relatives,” (emphasis added).

<sup>71</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues* (Texas House of Representatives, 2005), <http://www.house.state.tx.us/video-audio/committee-broadcasts/committee-archives/player/?session=79&committee=340&ram=50413p24>.

<sup>72</sup> Duffy, “Saints Under Siege,” 551.



consideration of the public statements surrounding the raid includes examining the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) “Eldorado Investigation” report, as well as the department’s official statement regarding the raid and its “Original Petition for Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship” (hereafter the “Original Petition”), filed with the district court of Schleicher County, Texas, the day before the raid.

Public rhetoric surrounding both these incidents mimics and sometimes draws directly on the sensational claims of *Banner* – perhaps in part because of Krakauer’s own involvement with the HB 3006 hearing.<sup>73</sup> As with my analysis of *Banner*, I am particularly interested in examining these documents for equation of FLDS and/or Mormon fundamentalism with polygyny, characterizations of FLDS men as sexual predators, and assumptions regarding irrationality or coercion with regard to FLDS women in plural marriages. The documents I analyze in this section demonstrate a consistent conviction in the inherently abusive nature of polygyny and the inevitability of sexual misconduct among the FLDS community.<sup>74</sup> It is telling, then, that investigations following the raid yielded very little evidence of physical or sexual abuse at Yearning for Zion.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*.

<sup>74</sup> Diane Winston, “Texas Court Rules Against Polygamist Raid,” *Religion Dispatches*, May 23, 2008, [http://religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/262/texas\\_court\\_rules\\_against\\_polygamist\\_raid\\_\\_\\_politics\\_\\_\\_/](http://religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/262/texas_court_rules_against_polygamist_raid___politics___/).

<sup>75</sup> Several authors (Wright and Richardson, Palmer, Schreinert and Richardson, and Wright) have noted the relative lack of evidence for sexual abuse found during the raid on Yearning for Zion. Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*; Palmer, “Rescuing Children? Government Raids and Child Abuse Allegations in Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective;” Tamatha L. Schreinert and James T. Richardson, “Pyrrhic Victory? An Analysis of the Appeal Court Opinions Concerning the FLDS Children,” in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints*, ed. Stuart Wright and James Richardson (NYU Press, 2011), 242–264; James T. Richardson and Tamatha L. Schreinert, “Political and Legislative Context of the FLDS Raid in Texas,” in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints*, ed. Stuart Wright and James Richardson (NYU Press, 2011), 221–241; and Stuart Wright, “Deconstructing Official Rationales for the Texas State Raid on the FLDS,” in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 124–149. But as Duffy notes, “the courts did not exonerate the FLDS.” Almost 125 adults were classified as “designated perpetrators” of sexual abuse or neglect (though these charges were largely based on the adults’ association with FLDS as a suspect entity). Twelve men were also indicted on charges related to underage marriages. Duffy, “Saints Under Siege,” 553.

Like *Banner*, the HB 3006 hearing and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services' documents manifest an earnest desire to aid Mormon fundamentalist women and children whom Texas lawmakers and social service providers understood to be helpless victims.<sup>76</sup> These documents, like *Banner*, frequently refer to the practice of polygyny as evidence for the need to intervene into a minority religious community. But far from liberating these women and children, the raid resulted in the mass detention of FLDS women and children as well as increased legal and social services scrutiny of FLDS and other Mormon fundamentalist groups. Ultimately, then, the rhetoric of liberation—which consistently emphasized the need to save FLDS women and children—evidenced in HB 3006 and the DPFS documents resulted in actions that both limited the ability of FLDS women and children to leave their community and actively discouraged religious and sexual difference within the contemporary United States.<sup>77</sup>

### **“I Wouldn’t Recognize Them”: Texas House Bill 3006**

Texas State Representative Harvey Hilderbran authored House Bill 3006 in April 2005. Rep. Hilderbran intended the bill to “strengthen Texas’ laws against polygamy and election laws to protect communities from being infiltrated by fringe religious groups.”<sup>78</sup> Existent state laws classified bigamy as a class A misdemeanor and recognized the right of any person between the ages of 14 and 18 to marry with parental consent.<sup>79</sup> The Texas penal code prohibited “sexual contact between

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<sup>76</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Hilderbran (10:50 - 11:02) “But we know that Texans want to protect women and children, and we don't want to have all these child brides that they have in these communities in other states, and we feel like Texas law was weak and didn't anticipate addressing this problem, so that's why we brought the bill,” emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> On the ways legal intervention and social stigma regarding polygyny discourages Mormon fundamentalist women from leaving even abusive situations, see Song, *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, 160. For evidence of ongoing fears among other polygynous communities regarding the possibility of child seizures and arrests, see in particular Janet Bennion, *Evaluating the Effects of Polygamy on Women and Children in Four North American Mormon Fundamentalist Groups: An Anthropological Study* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

<sup>78</sup> *House Research Organization Bill Analysis (HB 3006)*, 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

certain individuals, including parents and children, stepparents and stepchildren, and siblings,” and classified such acts as third-degree felonies.<sup>80</sup>

HB 3006 would have elevated bigamy to a second-degree felony if the partner (presumably female) were older than sixteen and to a first-degree felony if the (again, presumably female) partner were younger than sixteen.<sup>81</sup> The bill also proposed raising the age of marriage with parental consent to sixteen.<sup>82</sup> The court could void marriages in which either party was younger than sixteen “or if there was a stepchild-stepparent relationship.”<sup>83</sup> The bill would further amend the Penal Code to prohibit sexual acts between first cousins by blood or adoption (making such acts a second-degree felony), and it would adopt gender-neutral language in “definitions of who is prohibited from engaging in sexual acts.”<sup>84</sup> Performing marriage ceremonies in which the marriage would be prohibited by law would have been punishable as a third-degree felony.<sup>85</sup>

As he explained, Hilderbran [proposed] the bill in response to

a group of Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints...building a compound south of San Angelo where local residents are concerned that members may be forcing young girls to marry, engage in polygamist activities, and possibly marry their relatives. Local residents also are concerned that members of the group will run for public office and will have moved a large enough group of voters into the area to take over local governance.<sup>86</sup>

Opponents of the bill noted that “there is no actual evidence that this group is doing any of the things accused by local residents” and insisted that “Texas should not endorse laws aimed at one specific group lawfully practicing its religious beliefs.”<sup>87</sup> But the bill analysis provided by the Texas

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 4.

House Research Organization stated that “the bill would not unfairly target any religious practice or philosophy.”<sup>88</sup> The bill analysis document suggested that HB 3006 “simply would clarify Texas’ laws on marriages.”<sup>89</sup> Despite these assertions, the document named FLDS as a “fringe religious group” and argued that the bill was necessary to “strengthen Texas’ laws against polygamy” and prevent “infiltrat[ion]” of Texas communities by such groups.<sup>90</sup> Rep. Hilderbran also publicly referred to the bill as “thirty ought-six,” “because it pack[ed] a serious punch.”<sup>91</sup>

As part of ongoing efforts to curb the activities and limit the financial resources of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints across state lines, former Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff,<sup>92</sup> private investigator Sam Brower,<sup>93</sup> and Jon Krakauer testified in favor of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> *House Research Organization Bill Analysis (HB 3006)*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> “Hilderbran’s 30-06 Bill Gathers Momentum in Austin,” *The Eldorado Success*, April 21, 2005. “Thirty ought-six” might refer either to the .30-06 Springfield rifle cartridge used by U.S. Army personnel from 1906 until the early 1970s or to Texas Penal Code section 30.06, which allows landowners to post signage forbidding licensed persons from entering the premises carrying concealed weapons. Gibson, “However Satisfied Man Might Be,” 287, in particular has noted the tendency of FLDS critics to use militaristic language in describing attempts to rescue FLDS women and children.

<sup>92</sup> Shurtleff served as Utah’s Attorney General from 2001 until 2013 and was actively involved in attempts to curb activities and financial resources of FLDS. However, Shurtleff and the Arizona Attorney General’s Office also worked with the AUB to produce “The Primer,” a resource for law enforcement and social workers to help “victims of domestic violence and child abuse in polygamous communities.” Mark Shurtleff, Tom Horne, and Bonnie Peters, *The Primer: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement and Human Services Agencies Who Offer Assistance to Fundamentalist Mormon Families* (Family Support Center, January 2011), [http://attorneygeneral.utah.gov/cmsdocuments/The\\_Primer.pdf](http://attorneygeneral.utah.gov/cmsdocuments/The_Primer.pdf). Shurtleff has also publicly stated his disinterest in prosecuting consenting adult polygamists who are not committing other crimes. Brian Skoloff, “Sister Wives’ Lawsuit: No Bigamy Charges For Kody Brown And Wives,” *Huffington Post*, May 31, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/01/sister-wives-bigamy-lawsuit-kody-brown\\_n\\_1561962.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/01/sister-wives-bigamy-lawsuit-kody-brown_n_1561962.html).

<sup>93</sup> Sam Brower is a private investigator and former bounty hunter who was originally retained by Baltimore attorney Joanne Suder for case preparation and process serving; Suder was herself hired by former FLDS member Dan Fischer and his Diversity Foundation, which assists displaced FLDS youth (77). Fischer hired Suder on behalf of Brent Jeffs, nephew of Warren Steed Jeffs and plaintiff in 2004 a civil suit accusing the FLDS prophet of sexual assaulting Brent as a minor. (<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/595087473/FLDS-church-leaders-sued-by-6-lost-boys.html>).

Brower claims he was later “asked by state and federal law enforcement agencies” to track down Warren Jeffs (*Prophet’s Prey*, 3). Throughout *Prophet’s Prey*, Brower credits himself as largely responsible for Jeffs’ capture and claims to have provided material evidence toward the prosecution and conviction of Warren Jeffs on felony counts of child sexual assault. In this anecdote, Brower seldom quotes Krakauer directly; and frankly, Brower’s personal

HB 3006 before the Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee on April 13, 2005.<sup>94</sup> Their testimony—coupled with that of Randy Mankin, publisher and editor of the local newspaper, the *Eldorado Success*—and the comments of members of the JJFI Committee, demonstrate religiously intolerant rhetoric similar to that evidenced by *Under the Banner of Heaven*.

Participants in the hearing for HB 3006 echo Krakauer's tendency to hypersexualize and overemphasize polygyny. Witnesses who testified in favor of the bill—there were no opposing witnesses present at the hearing—offered the Committee numerous horror stories of sexual assault, child molestation, incest, and sexual coercion.<sup>95</sup> Rep. Hilderbran warned that child abuse, child endangerment, and incest, as well as “underage marriage,”<sup>96</sup> domestic violence, “denial of equal education services,” and election and welfare fraud necessarily followed “the religious practices of bigamy and polygamy.”<sup>97</sup> “All these things are things that happen in polygamist communities, and we anticipate happening in Texas if they aren't already happening.”<sup>98</sup> Utah Attorney General Shurtleff regaled the committee with tales of lost boys—young men forced to leave FLDS communities to ensure sufficient plural wives—forced to turn to prostitution in Salt Lake and Las Vegas.<sup>99</sup> Krakauer insisted that polygyny was paramount among FLDS beliefs and practices. “They

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animosity toward Jeffs renders much of this book questionable at best. I am, however, assuming Brower is a credible witness with regard to Krakauer's involvement with this case. Krakauer wrote the preface to *Prophet's Prey* and avows that Brower is “the real deal” (xii). Brower likewise notes that *Prophet's Prey* “never would have happened without the help of Jon Krakauer” (313).

<sup>94</sup> *Witness List for HB 3006* (Texas: Juvenile Justice and Family Issues, April 13, 2005), <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/79R/witlistbill/html/HB03006H.htm>.

<sup>95</sup> Hannah Riddering (president) and Molly Solomon (former member, Young Feminists Task Force) both initially appeared to testify on behalf of the Texas National Organization for Women in favor of the bill, but left the committee chair called them. *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, 1:37:00 and 1:37:20.

<sup>96</sup> At the time of this hearing, the legal age of marriage with parental consent was fourteen in Texas. *House Research Organization Bill Analysis (HB 3006)*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Hilderbran (4:07 - 4:27).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, Hilderbran (9:30).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, Shurtleff (33:20).

[FLDS members] think they're the *true* Mormon church. They still believe that polygamy is key to entering the plural kingdom, to entering heaven, and it's the bedrock of their religion."<sup>100</sup> But the author warned the committee that "HB 3006 is no panacea. It's not by itself gonna abolish these abuses – and *these abuses seem to be part and parcel of every polygamous culture*. Or almost every polygamous culture."<sup>101</sup> Again, note that Krakauer and the other witnesses do not refer to the FLDS community or Mormon fundamentalists as religious people who practice polygyny, but rather as a uniform “polygamous culture.” Private Investigator Brower relayed similar tales of young boys being sexually abused and underage girls forced into marriage and subsequently raped.<sup>102</sup>

As in *Banner*, witness testimony in favor of HB 3006 characterized FLDS men as exclusively sexually predatory and/or coercive. The specter of FLDS prophet Warren Jeffs frequently functioned as a metonymy for FLDS men throughout the session. State Rep. Hilderbran warned that FLDS men were “having children with minors that the law, that we're not recognizing as their wives, so to me that's shouting child rapes, statutory rape, and everything, everything else associated with sexual assault,” but he lamented that such suspicions were “hard to enforce.”<sup>103</sup> In response to committee member Rep. Thompson’s question about whether the prophet had sexual access to any woman he wanted, Attorney General Shurtleff replied, “absolutely.” When Thompson replied that Jeffs enjoyed “the best of all worlds because of his unfettered access to FLDS women, Shurtleff laughed, saying that Jeffs might “get all the sex,” but wasn’t allowed to watch football.<sup>104</sup> Krakauer deployed the nightmare figure of Warren Jeffs, describing Jeffs as “a freak...a sick guy” who had

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (41:45).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (46:28), emphasis added – Krakauer’s claim to expertise in polygamous cultures beyond FLDS is unverifiable.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Brower (1:13:00, 1:25:48).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Hilderbran (12:28 - 38).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (32:20-26).

“raped and sodomized boys as young as five...and girls as well.”<sup>105</sup> Krakauer warned that Jeffs is “an evil, evil man – and he has moved into your state.”<sup>106</sup> The author moreover warned that Jeffs is “worst of these polygamists [Krakauer has] ever encountered, and there have been some really bad ones. [Jeffs] is really bad news, and he's not going away anytime soon.”<sup>107</sup> Sam Brower identified himself as part of the legal team attempting to bring a civil suit against Warren Jeffs for “rape and sodomy of a child,” explaining that the statute of limitations for criminal prosecution of the case had expired.<sup>108</sup> Attorney General Shurtleff ended the session by cautioning the committee that Jeffs could, “as we speak be having sex with minors, he could be sodomizing his young boys in that compound, and how do we know?”<sup>109</sup> Committee members were frequently invited to infer that all FLDS men want to behave as Jeffs did, as a sexually manipulative and coercive predator.<sup>110</sup>

Like *Banner*, the testimony in support of HB 3006 depicts FLDS men exclusively as sexually predatory and coercive. Witnesses dismissed the religious imperative of plural marriage, a key component of fundamentalist Mormon theology. These same witnesses consistently conflated the then-alleged felonies of Warren Jeffs with the presumed sexual misconduct of FLDS men generally. Members of the Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee were encouraged to presume that all FLDS men sought to emulate Jeffs – implying that all FLDS men are sexually predatory.<sup>111</sup> Having reduced Mormon fundamentalism to the practice of polygyny and presented a hypersexualized and predatory caricature of FLDS men, participants in the HB 3006 hearing proceeded to characterize

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (44:28, 44:30).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (44:47).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (47: 37).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Brower (1:04:04).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (1:40:04).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (20:35).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

FLDS women as helpless victims or brainwashed dupes. Witnesses frequently referred to FLDS women as “property” or “chattel.”<sup>112</sup>

Acknowledging the differences between current Texas law and the changes proposed by HB 3006, State Rep. Hilderbran noted that while Texas law allowed fourteen-year-old girls to be married with parental consent, “in Texas most parents have their children's interest in mind when they give consent. It's usually an unusual circumstance that causes that to happen. But when you're in one of these polygamy communities, of course, it's forced – and when it's not forced, it's certainly encouraged.”<sup>113</sup> Again ignoring both the theological complexity and lived experience of Mormon fundamentalism, Attorney General Shurtleff insisted that FLDS “women have two purposes in life in this community: and that is to please their men sexually and to have children.”<sup>114</sup> After quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, Shurtleff averred that “there is injustice in these communities. There are victims that are not being protected by the law.”<sup>115</sup> Shurtleff also attested that FLDS girls often flee their communities because “they were going to be forced to marry an old man,” but are sent back by law enforcement because “there wasn't an imminent threat of harm, which is required by law.”<sup>116</sup>

Krakauer corroborated Shurtleff's testimony:

To be a woman in this culture, you know, it's funny, they know nothing else...From birth, girls are told that the only way you can achieve salvation, to go to heaven—which for them is everything—is to be a polygamous wife to a man who has at least three husbands [sic]. So these girls think it's their only choice. They're pulled out of school; they're kept barefoot and pregnant...*This is an evil culture.*<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (1:03:38), Hilderbran (1:40:40), Shurtleff (17:30 - 18:38).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Hilderbran (5:54 - 6:27).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (18:37-8).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (27:54).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (35:15). Shurtleff is referring to the case of Ruby Jessop. Shurtleff alleges that “no one's ever heard from her again.” This assertion is inconsistent with Brower's testimony about Jessop, wherein he recounts that a Mohave County sheriff frequently checks in on her to make sure she's okay. Ibid., Brower (1:28:14).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (49:05 - 49:32, emphasis added).



Krakauer also insisted that “wives are doled out as rewards... They become...wives and kids are property. They're chattel, in this religion.”<sup>118</sup> At no point did any witness or committee member recognize the agency of FLDS women – witness testimony and committee commentary spoke of these women only as victims. Women’s participation in the practice of polygyny served as evidence of their irrationality or coercion.<sup>119</sup>

Witnesses and committee members also consistently compared the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with other minority religions – in particular, with Islamic extremism and new religious movements (or “cults”). Twice hearing participants aligned FLDS with Islam and Islamic extremism.<sup>120</sup> Shurtleff remarked that when discussing FLDS, “people, they say, ‘what are you talking about? Is this Afghanistan?’”<sup>121</sup> (His remark met with muffled laughter throughout the in hearing room.) Shurtleff testified that FLDS “women are kept under the thumb. They are not allowed outside; they're not allowed to speak unless spoken to; they're mostly kept indoors.”<sup>122</sup> They must be covered from their neck to their ankles and to their wrists, [in] 120, 130

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., Krakauer (1:03:09, 1:03:38).

<sup>119</sup> An exchange between Shurtleff and Thompson about welfare fraud reinforces the dichotomy of FLDS women-as-victims and FLDS men-as-criminals. At Ibid. 22:03, Shurtleff admits that FLDS women are *not* targets of any welfare fraud investigation despite evidence of their fraud. Thompson asked “so they [FLDS women] can violate the law as long as they're women, because you're focusing like that – you're focusing on the men.” Shurtleff confirmed, “the focus is on the men.”

<sup>120</sup> The elision of Mormon fundamentalism with Islam and especially Islamic fundamentalism is also characteristic of Krakauer’s work in *Under the Banner of Heaven*. As I noted in my introduction, the blurring of specificity in descriptions of religious minorities is common in religiously intolerant discourse. On this point, see David Brion Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1960): 213, as well as Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 7 and John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America: a Documentary History* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2010), 262. Disparaging comparisons between Mormons and Muslims are not unique to twenty-first century discourse. See Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 185 – 218.

<sup>121</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Shurtleff (19:35).

<sup>122</sup> This is inconsistent with the documented agricultural activities on Yearning for Zion. See Brower, *Prophet’s Prey*, 79.

degree weather."<sup>123</sup> To which Rep. Thompson responded, "Almost like a burqa."<sup>124</sup> Shurtleff concurred, nodding: "absolutely. That's exactly right."<sup>125</sup>

Rep. Hilderbran explicitly referred to FLDS as a cult.<sup>126</sup> Attorney General Shurtleff and Rep. James Dunnam linked FLDS with the Branch Davidian fiasco that occurred in Dummerston district. Shurtleff averred that in FLDS

there has not been, in this particular group, any evidence of violence against another human being that we can put our finger on, but there is a pattern I think Mr. Krakauer can talk to you about, about people like Warren Jeffs who get, uh, get into this "I'm talking to God and I am the one mighty and great [sic]"<sup>127</sup> and I am a polygamist and I control everything."<sup>128</sup>

Rep. Dunnam responded: "we have some experience with that in my district." When the Attorney General confessed "I don't know which district that is," several committee members responded, "Waco." The chamber filled with awkward, subdued laughter, after which Rep. Dunnam informed Shurtleff that "god is coming back in Mt. Carmel, not this place. Somebody needs to tell 'em that."<sup>129</sup> Later in the hearing, Krakauer attested that the committee must "take [Jeffs] seriously. I personally think the possibility of another Waco, or even...except it's going to be much bigger. It's going to be like Jonestown, in Guyana, where almost a thousand people were killed. I think it's

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<sup>123</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Shurtleff (20:03 - 18).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, Thompson (20:19).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, Shurtleff (20:20). See Gibson on this point as well. "The issue is not so much whether or not the comparison of Jeffs' rule in Colorado City to the Taliban is apt; the problem is that the comparison seems to imply that a reasonable course of action to rectify the problems in this FLDS sect is liberation by aggression or force." Gibson, "However Satisfied Man Might Be," 291.

<sup>126</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Hilderbran (6:27).

<sup>127</sup> Shurtleff is alluding to Joseph Smith's 1832 prophecy of "the one mighty and strong." Joseph Smith Jr., "The Doctrine and Covenants - Section 85," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, November 27, 1832, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/85.7-8?lang=eng>.

<sup>128</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Shurtleff (38: 36 - 56).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, Dunnam et alia (38:57 - 39:08). On the efficacy of the label "cult" to authorize anxiety and ridicule, see Lynn S. Neal, "'They're Freaks!': The Cult Stereotype in Fictional Television Shows, 1958-2008," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 3 (February 2011): 81-107.

huge."<sup>130</sup> Krakauer repeated, "the potential for violence is huge," and he worried that "I don't know how you're going to get him out of there without another Waco or Jonestown."<sup>131</sup> Brower escalated Krakauer's concerns, noting that FLDS "beliefs are so ingrained from birth. Unlike other sects and cults and things of that sort, this starts at birth...this is deeply ingrained. They have no phase of normalcy to go back to. This is how they've grown up."<sup>132</sup> Testimonial comparisons of FLDS to Islam and Islamic extremism and marginal new religious movements framed the former as a legitimate target of ridicule and anxiety, while reinforcing assumptions of polygyny's inherent violence, lasciviousness, irrationality, and coerciveness.

These strategies of marginalization—the conflation of FLDS identity with the practice of polygyny; the hypersexualization and overemphasis of that practice; the characterization of FLDS men as sexually predatory and coercive; and the insistence that practitioners of polygyny (particularly women and children) are necessarily coerced or duped—show the precedence of religiously intolerant rhetoric in the proceedings regarding HB 3006. And as I have argued, this religious intolerance is deeply informed by “shared values” shaped by a normalized conservative Christian sexual ethic.

When Shurtleff apologized for “basically export[ing] our [that is, Arizona’s] problem to Texas,” Rep. Dunnam’s response question (“How did you get them [FLDS] out of Utah?”) met with sustained laughter from the audience and committee members alike. When Rep. Strama asked the Attorney General if there were any FLDS witnesses present, committee chair Dutton replied, “I wouldn't recognize them,” eliciting further laughter from the audience. Shurtleff qualified: “They [FLDS] won't be here. I guarantee it.”<sup>133</sup> Strama further inquired as to whether the facts of the case

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<sup>130</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Krakauer (45:20).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, Krakauer (45:57, 1:01: 43).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, Brower (1:09:08).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, Strama et alia, (36:30).

were being disputed; Shurtleff responding by alleging that FLDS representatives had been in his office and had “outright lied” about their polygamist activities.<sup>134</sup>

Informal exchanges between committee members and witnesses occasionally made light of the alleged FLDS threat, but witnesses and committee members also frequently engaged in hostile and adversarial language as well. Several members vowed they would “get” or “go after” the FLDS during these proceedings. As I mentioned above, bill author Rep. Hilderbran referred to HB 3006 as “thirty ought-six,”<sup>135</sup> which might refer either to the .30-06 Springfield rifle cartridge used by U.S. Army personnel from 1906 until the early 1970s or to Texas Penal Code section 30.06, which allows landowners to post signage forbidding licensed persons from entering the premises carrying concealed weapons.<sup>136</sup> Both imply hostile connotations for the bill. Krakauer confessed to being “quite obsessed” with Jeffs and the FLDS, as well as to “spen[ding] thousands and thousands of dollars of [his] own money” tracking Jeffs.<sup>137</sup> No committee member raised concerns that Krakauer, a private citizen, was essentially stalking Jeffs.<sup>138</sup> In the midst of Brower’s testimony, Rep. Goodman interjected:

I hope this sect doesn't think it's going to come to Texas, which is kind of a law-and-order state, and commit child abuse or sodomy and not be prosecuted by the state of Texas and the full resources that are available to this state... I mean *this state will literally go after these people*

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Shurtleff (37:15).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Hilderbran (2:45).

<sup>136</sup> “.30-06 Springfield,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 31, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=.30-06\\_Springfield&oldid=564700426](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=.30-06_Springfield&oldid=564700426) and “Gun Laws in Texas,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 24, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gun\\_laws\\_in\\_Texas&oldid=565570231](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gun_laws_in_Texas&oldid=565570231).

<sup>137</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues* (Texas House of Representatives, 2005), <http://www.house.state.tx.us/video-audio/committee-broadcasts/committee-archives/player/?session=79&committee=340&ram=50413p24>, (1:01:16). Sam Brower also describes several encounters during which Krakauer helped him search for Warren Jeffs. These incidents included Krakauer flying a private airplane over the Yearning for Zion ranch on 1 January 2005 to catch a glimpse of Jeffs and sneaking onto FLDS property with Brower at night using night-vision goggles so that Krakauer could “watch [Brower’s] back” while Brower attempted to serve Jeffs with a summons. Brower, *Prophet’s Prey*, 165-6, 153-5.

<sup>138</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Krakauer (1:01: 16). See also Brower’s account of sneaking onto Yearning for Zion with Jon Krakauer, both of them wearing night-vision goggles. Brower, *Prophet’s Prey*, 155.

if they commit those kinds of acts and they have the kind of evidence that you're telling us you have.<sup>139</sup>

Goodman then directly addressed Rep. Hilderbran, noting that State Bill 6 was on the House floor the following week; Goodman insisted that whether HB 3006 went through or not, the state representatives would “go after these people” by amending SB 6 with provisions from HB 3006.<sup>140</sup> Goodman reiterated: “well, if they come down here, we'll try to help you... down here, *we'll get 'em*.”<sup>141</sup>

After further inquiries about the lack of criminal prosecution of FLDS, Rep. Hilderbran clarified that Texas “[hasn’t] had it [the alleged abuses] happen here yet, we don't have any reports yet here.”<sup>142</sup> Hilderbran insisted that “the report” [of abuse] “has to come from inside, so *we've got to be a little more creative in how we get the report*.”<sup>143</sup> Goodman responded that “there's no reason that we can't take the reports that have already been generated and say this is a dangerous situation for a child.”<sup>144</sup> Again, the hostility and suspicion of such exchanges, coupled with the certainty of sexual misconduct, demonstrates high levels of religious intolerance.

I am struck by the inconsistency of these proceedings. As I discuss below, it was entirely lawful in Texas before September 1, 2005 for fourteen-year-old girls (and boys, presumably) to marry adults, including their own uncles (or aunts). Rep. Hilderbran stated repeatedly his conviction that

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<sup>139</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Goodman (1:21:11), emphasis added.

<sup>140</sup> Ultimately, the Texas House of Representatives tabled HB 3006. Many of its provisions, including increasing penalties for polygamy and bigamy were strengthened, and raising the age of marriage with parental consent to 16, were included in State Bill 6. Jane Nelson, *State Bill 6*, 2005, <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=79R&Bill=SB6>.

<sup>141</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Goodman (1:40:30), emphasis added.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, Hilderbran (1:22:17).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, Hilderbran (1:22:04), emphasis added.

<sup>144</sup> Contra Daniel Mach and Lisa Graybill, *BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE, American Civil Liberties Union & American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, IN OPPOSITION TO RELATOR'S PETITION FOR MANDAMUS* (Supreme Court of Texas, May 29, 2008), 1. “Because the law recognizes the parents’ paramount right to raise their children without unjustified intrusion by the State, the State bears the statutory burden of demonstrating that the removal of a child from his or her parents is necessary to prevent imminent harm to the child.”

most Texas parents in such cases “have the child’s best interest in mind.”<sup>145</sup> However, he insisted that within FLDS, “when you're in one of these polygamy communities, of course, it's forced – and when it's not forced, it's certainly encouraged. And that's the culture of the community of the cult.”<sup>146</sup> Hilderbran offers no reflection about the voluntarism of the former marriages, but is convinced that the latter must always be coerced. Such claims render the witnesses’ frequent assertions that “this [HB 3006] isn’t about religion” suspect.<sup>147</sup>

A number of participants in this hearing emphasized that their desire to “get” the local FLDS community did not unfairly target any religious group. Shurtleff addressed absent FLDS members during his testimony, arguing “this isn't about religion. We don't want to persecute your religious beliefs. *It's not about religion.* It's about crimes and civil rights violations that you are committing in the name of your religion that we have a problem with, and we're not going to stand for it.”<sup>148</sup> Krakauer counseled committee members to think of FLDS “not in terms of religion, although religion is the bedrock of their beliefs and their practice, but think of them as organized crime.”<sup>149</sup> These statements stand in stark contrast to the wording of the bill itself, which explicitly targets FLDS, and the general tone of the hearing, during which members of the Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee and their witnesses frequently derided FLDS beliefs and practices.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Hilderbran (1:40:40). See also (5:54 - 6:27), as well as Hilderbran’s insistence that, unlike FLDS, “Texas *does* care about its women and children and its communities and its families” (1:43:48).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, Hilderbran (5:54 - 6:27). Note the tension between Hilderbran’s condemnation of FLDS marriages and Dutton’s insistence that the current marriage age (14 years old) is sometimes necessary, because parents “who have the children’s best interest in mind” think marriage is warranted (1:40:40).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, Shurtleff (24:30).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, Shurtleff (24:30), emphasis added.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, Krakauer, (51:17).

<sup>150</sup> *House Research Organization Bill Analysis (HB 3006)*.

Though committee members and witnesses consistently emphasized that their concern was “not about religion,” several speakers did express concern that religious freedom could mask sexual misconduct. In particular, Hilderbran insisted that “some Texas laws have allowed for alleged crimes to be committed under the practice of religious freedoms.”<sup>151</sup> Krakauer also noted that FLDS “guys are really good at raising, at you know claiming that their religious freedom's been violated; they're really good at going on camera when need be and acting like victims.”<sup>152</sup> Such statements highlight the tension in these hearings between a professed commitment to religious freedom and a pervasive suspicion about sexual predation among a minority religious community.

The Texas House of Representatives shelved HB 3006, but incorporated many of its proposed changes into Texas State Bill 6 (passed June 6, 2005, effective September 1, 2005). Notable among these were amendments that raised the legal age for marriage with parental consent from fourteen to sixteen,<sup>153</sup> elevated bigamy to a first degree felony if one partner is younger than sixteen,<sup>154</sup> adopted stricter prohibitions against stepchild/stepparent marriages,<sup>155</sup> and proscribed marriage between uncles/aunts and nieces/nephews by blood or adoption as second degree felonious offenses.<sup>156</sup> Again, before September 1, 2005, it was entirely lawful in Texas for fourteen-year-olds to marry adults, including their own uncles or aunts. While SB 6 lacks HB 3006's language identifying FLDS as a “fringe religious group,” the state bill directly adopted many of HB 3006's

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<sup>151</sup> *Committee on Juvenile Justice and Family Issues*, Hilderbran (3:45). Note the implication that “religion” provides cover for sexual and other crimes.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, Krakauer, (1:00:11) Note again Krakauer's implication of FLDS members' inherent disingenuousness.

<sup>153</sup> Nelson, *State Bill 6*, 247, lines 12-17. See also *Ibid.*, 253, lines 9-10.

<sup>154</sup> Nelson, *State Bill 6.*, 242, lines 11-12. Bigamy is otherwise a second degree felony. *Ibid.*, 242, lines 9-10.

<sup>155</sup> Nelson, *State Bill 6.*, 242, lines 15-22.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 243, lines 1-7 and *Ibid.*, 243, lines 5-7. See also *Ibid.*, 253, lines 11-13. Other HB 3006 provisions included in SB 6 were making knowingly providing parental or guardian consent for marriage younger than sixteen or for someone already married a third degree felony (*Ibid.*, 248, lines 1-3), and making the conducting of a marriage of “minor whose marriage is prohibited by law” or of currently married (or appearing to be married) person a third degree felony (*Ibid.*, 248, lines 10-14).

proposed amendments aimed at the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living in Eldorado, Texas.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, Rep. Hilderbran's statement that Texas law enforcement would have to "*be a little more creative in how we get the report*" of sexual abuse from "inside" Yearning for Zion would prove prescient with regard to the events of spring 2008.<sup>158</sup>

### **"It Has Never Been About Religion:" The Raid on Yearning for Zion**

From March 29 to April 3, 2008, a woman identifying herself as Sarah Jessop made calls to the Newbridge Family Shelter Hotline in San Angelo, Texas.<sup>159</sup> "Jessop" said she was sixteen years old, living in FLDS' Yearning for Zion ranch in Eldorado, and had been beaten and raped by her "spiritual husband" "Dale Barlow," whom she claimed was more than thirty years her senior.<sup>160</sup> She also claimed that "Barlow" had three other wives.<sup>161</sup> "Jessop" reported that Barlow had on several occasions choked her, broken her ribs, and forced himself on her sexually.<sup>162</sup> She further insisted that she had been forced to marry "Barlow" at age fifteen, had an eight-month-old child, and was

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<sup>157</sup> *House Research Organization Bill Analysis (HB 3006)*, 4 and Harvey Hilderbran, "Press Release: HILDERBRAN AMENDS SB 6 TO ADDRESS POLYGAMIST ACTIVITIES," April 25, 2005.

<sup>158</sup> Regarding the implicit targeting of FLDS in SB 6, see Richardson and Schreinert, "Political and Legislative Context of the FLDS Raid in Texas," 226-7 and Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 14-15.

<sup>159</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 1. Swinton also conducted 30-40 hours of phone calls with former FLDS member and antipolygamy activist Flora Jessop. *Ibid.*, 3. On the circumstances surrounding the calls, see *Ibid.*, 3-6, as well as "Rozita Swinton's Bad Call," *Newsweek Magazine*, July 26, 2008, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/07/26/rozita-swinton-s-bad-call.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 1. Reports differ as to whether the alleged husband was 49 or 50. *Ibid.*, 19. Regarding spiritual marriage, see also Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 3-4, which notes that a Dale Barlow had been indicted in Mohave County, AZ on criminal charges of sexual charges with a minor and conspiracy to commit sexual charges with a minor "in connection to a purported marriage to a minor in Arizona, with whom he had conceived a child," plead no contest, and was convicted in August 2007.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 4.

<sup>162</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 1. See also Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 3.



currently pregnant.<sup>163</sup> “Jessop” maintained that she was being held at Yearning for Zion against her will, and requested help from the NewBridge Family Shelter and Family and Protective Services.<sup>164</sup>

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DPFS) received a report of this alleged abuse on March 30, 2008.<sup>165</sup> According to the DPFS “Eldorado Investigation” report, Child Protective Services and law enforcement officers raided the Yearning for Zion Ranch on April 3 to investigate “Jessop”’s allegations. In their 2011 *Saints Under Siege: The Texas Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints*, sociologists Stuart Wright and James Richardson note that “the heavily armed raid force included SWAT teams with automatic weapons and agents festooned in camouflage, Kevlar helmets and vests, and flanked by helicopters, dozens of law enforcement vehicles, and an armored personnel carrier.”<sup>166</sup>

During the two-day investigation that followed the raid, DPFS interviewers and Texas state police officers failed to locate either “Sarah Jessop” or “David Barlow” on ranch premises.<sup>167</sup> However, DPFS interviewers reported that “several underage girls had been ‘spiritually united’ with adult men.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 1, and corroborated by Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 2.

<sup>164</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 1 and Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 4.

<sup>165</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 1, contra Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 2, which dates the report 29 March at 11:32pm.

<sup>166</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 7.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 1; this was not mentioned in DPFS’ *Eldorado Investigation*. A 33-year-old Colorado Springs resident named Rozita Swinton made the calls. Barbara L. Walther, Michael Emack, Appellant v. The State of Texas, Appellee (Texas Court of Appeals, Third District, at Austin 2011). Swinton has been arrested in two other cases for making false reports of abuse and has a history of mental illness. “Rozita Swinton’s Bad Call.” Swinton has never been a member of FLDS; she joined LDS in the mid-1990s. *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 1.

The DPFS “Eldorado Investigation” report, prepared on December 22, 2008, alleges a “pattern of deception” among the girls and women interviewed.<sup>169</sup> On the evening of April 3, following the raid, DPFS took custody of eighteen girls.<sup>170</sup> The department took hundreds of additional children into protective custody in the days following the initial raid.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services continued their investigation for three days. DPFS interviewers “saw wedding photos involving young girls” and “found records indicating a pattern of underage marriages and births.”<sup>171</sup> Based on this evidence, DPFS filed an “Original Petition for Protection of Children” on April 7 with the Schleicher County District Court on behalf of the “330 unidentified children” the department had removed from the Yearning for Zion ranch.<sup>172</sup> The petition alleged that “there is a substantial risk that the children will be the victims of sexual abuse in the future and/or there is evidence that the household to which the children would be returned to includes a person who has abused or neglected another child in a manner that caused serious injury to another child and/or sexually abused another child.”<sup>173</sup> DPFS and law enforcement officials treated the entire Yearning for Zion Ranch community as a single household, “under the theory that the ranch community was ‘essentially one household comprised of extended family subgroups’ with a single, common belief system and there was reason to believe that

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. Regarding allegations of “deceptiveness” – “Women and children frequently said that they could not answer questions about the ages of girls or family relationships. Children were moved from location to location in an apparent attempt to prevent investigators from talking to them. Documents were being shredded.” Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> DPFS also ordered FLDS to pay for the childrens’ temporary support in state custody. Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 50.

<sup>171</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 1.

<sup>172</sup> Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 1. Early reports from the DPFS varied with regard to the actual number of children removed from Yearning for Zion. Scholars have put the final number at 439 children, less the 29 adult women DPFS took into protective custody as children.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 4.

a child had been sexually abused in the ranch 'household.'"<sup>174</sup> In what it called "the largest child protection case documented in the history of the United States," the Department for Family and Protective Services took custody without a court order of 468 persons believed to be children – twenty-nine of whom were legally adult women.<sup>175</sup> Between August and November 2008, a Schleicher County grand jury charged twelve FLDS men from Yearning for Zion with twenty six counts of charges related to sexual assault of a minor.<sup>176</sup>

On May 22, 2008, the Third Court of Appeals ruled that DPFS had not met the burden of proof required to conduct an emergency removal of children; the Supreme Court of Texas declined to overturn the court of appeals decision.<sup>177</sup> On June 2, 2008, the District Court ordered the return of all the children to their parents, but allowed Child Protective Services to continue its investigations.<sup>178</sup> DPFS reported that all children returned to their parents by 2 p.m. on 4 June 2008.<sup>179</sup> However, one child remained in foster care – her mother refused to sign a "safety plan" promising to protect her daughter from sexual abuse.<sup>180</sup>

Both the DPFS' "Original Petition" and its "Eldorado Incident" report deploy rhetorical strategies similar to those evident in *Banner* and the HB 3006 proceedings. Again, the FLDS (here,

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<sup>174</sup> In re Sara Steed, et al. (Texas Court of Appeals, Third District, at Austin 2008). See also Mach and Graybill, *BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE, American Civil Liberties Union & American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, IN OPPOSITION TO RELATOR'S PETITION FOR MANDAMUS*, 8: "Despite the basic principle that legal standards must be proved on an individual basis, and the clear accordant requirement in the Texas Family Code, and despite the varied circumstances different ages, sexes, families, and living situations of the children before it, DPFS failed to provide evidence sufficient to show that each child was in danger, relying instead upon testimony about beliefs ascribed to the group as a whole and assertions of broad cultural harm."

<sup>175</sup> Smith, "Child Protection Law and the FLDS Raid in Texas," 304. See also Mach and Graybill, *BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE, American Civil Liberties Union & American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, IN OPPOSITION TO RELATOR'S PETITION FOR MANDAMUS* and Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 19.

<sup>176</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 1.

<sup>177</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 3-4.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

specifically its Yearning for Zion contingent) are defined by the practice of polygyny, which is hypersexualized and overemphasized in DPFS statements. Both the petition and the report portray FLDS men as unrepentant sexual predators and FLDS women and children—between whom the FLDS fails to meaningfully distinguish—as victims. Though DPFS eventually returned all FLDS children to their mothers, the department insisted that all FLDS families provide “safety plans to protect their children from sexual abuse” and DPFS retains the right to take the children back into protective custody without notice or court order if future need presents itself.<sup>181</sup> The state of Texas further classified almost 125 FLDS adults—primarily mothers—as “designated perpetrators” of sexual abuse or neglect; this designation levies civil restrictions on FLDS community members so designated, including restricting members’ right to adopt.<sup>182</sup> Thus the DPFS findings following the raid continue to mark the people of Yearning for Zion as religiously and sexually suspect.

The DPFS’ “Original Petition” states that

while searching for the teenaged mother [“Jessop”] and her infant child, investigators at the YFZ Ranch observed a number of young teenaged girls who appeared to be minors and appeared to be pregnant, as well as several teenaged girls who had already given birth and had their own infants. Investigators determined that there is a wide-spread pattern and practice among the residents of the YFZ Ranch in which young minor female residents are conditioned to expect and accept sexual activity with adult men at the ranch upon being spiritually married to them. Under this practice, once a minor female child is determine [sic] by the leaders of the YFZ ranch to have reached child bearing [sic] age (approximately 13-14 years old) they are then “spiritually married” to an adult male member of the church and they are required to then to [sic] engage in sexual activity with such male for the purpose of having children.<sup>183</sup>

The “Original Petition” further alleges that

it is the pattern and practice of the adult males to have more than one spiritual wife resulting in them having sexual relationships with a number of women, some of whom are minors. Minor boy children are expected, after they reach adult age and when their spiritual leader

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Duffy, “Saints Under Siege,” 553.

<sup>183</sup> Original Petition for the Protection of Children in an Emergency and for Conservatorship in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship, Peggy Williams, Clerk (District Court of Schleicher County, TX 2008), 5.

determines appropriate [sic], to enter into a spiritual marriage with a female member of the church designated by the leader, which female [sic] may be a minor.<sup>184</sup>

(It should be noted that, as I explored at length above, marriage to a minor per se is not illegal under Texas state law.)

DPFS' "Original Petition" further interpreted the practice of polygyny as a "pervasive pattern and practice of indoctrinating and grooming minor female children to accept spiritual marriages to adult male members of the YFZ ranch resulting in them being sexually abused" and that "minor boys residing on the YFZ Ranch, after they become adults, are spiritually married to minor female children and engage in sexual relationships with them resulting in them becoming sexual perpetrators."<sup>185</sup>

This petition reduces the theology and culture of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to a "a wide-spread pattern and practice among the residents of the YFZ Ranch in which young minor female residents are conditioned to expect and accept sexual activity with adult men at the ranch upon being spiritually married to them."<sup>186</sup> The petition uses bizarre language to discuss male children—"minor boy children...after they reach adult age"—implying that these boys are raised to be "sexual predators," as stated above. Likewise, the petition asserts that FLDS "groom[s] minor female children" for sexual abuse. As with *Banner* and the proceedings concerning HB 3006, then, the "Original Petition" conflates FLDS with polygyny and exaggerates the importance of its practice in FLDS communities. The petition also characterizes FLDS men as hypersexualized predators (and male children as predators-in-training), while failing to meaningfully distinguish between FLDS women and children, both of whom the petition suggests have been "indoctrinate[ed] and "groom[ed]" to accept sexual abuse.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 16 – affidavit of Lynn McFadden.

The DPFS' final report on the "Eldorado Incident" likewise defines the FLDS by the practice of polygyny and, more significantly, finds that practice evidence of "neglectful supervision" of children.<sup>187</sup> DPFS found that the parents of 274 children (including twelve who DPFS determined had been sexually assaulted) had subjected their children to neglect because they failed to "remove their child from a situation in which the child would be exposed to sexual abuse committed against another child within their families or households."<sup>188</sup> This is to say that DPFS charged 124 people from 91 families with "neglectful supervision" because they allowed their children to live at the Yearning for Zion Ranch.<sup>189</sup> DPFS alleged that "in significant ways, the community functioned as a single household with a *pervasive belief system that groomed girls to become future victims of sexual abuse and boys to become future sexual abuse perpetrators.*"<sup>190</sup>

FLDS mothers were largely responsible for agreeing to implement "safety plans" to protect their children from sexual abuse – again implying that FLDS men were suspected of rampant sexual predation and coercion.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, the only mother to refuse to sign such a plan was forced to remand her child to the state.<sup>192</sup> As with *Banner*, the hearings on HB 3006, and the "Original Petition," the "Eldorado Incident" report reduces FLDS to the presumably abusive practice of

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<sup>187</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 19.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. This finding directly contradicts that of the Texas Third Court of Appeals, which stated that "[t]he existence of the FLDS belief system as described by the Department's witnesses, by itself, does not put children of FLDS parents in physical danger." "ACLU Submits Brief In Texas FLDS Case Saying State Can't Separate Families Based Solely On Beliefs" (American Civil Liberties Union, May 29, 2008), <http://www.aclu.org/print/religion-belief/aclu-submits-brief-texas-flds-case-saying-state-cant-separate-families-based-solely->.

<sup>189</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 3, 14-15, and Duffy, "Saints Under Siege," 553-4. If upheld, persons thus charged have their names entered into Child Protective Services' abuse/neglect registry, are not allowed to work in some areas of child welfare, and may not be foster or adoptive parents in Texas. Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 14-15.

<sup>190</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 7.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

polygyny, portrays FLDS men as predators (and FLDS boys as predators-in-training), and FLDS women/girls as “groomed” to be “victims of sexual abuse.”

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services remains adamant that the seizure of FLDS women and children was not motivated by religious intolerance. The “Eldorado Incident” report states twice that “it [the raid and subsequent proceedings] has never been about religion.”<sup>193</sup> As with *Banner* and the hearings on HB 3006, however, it seems evident that notions of “bad religion” informed the actions of DPFS and Texas law enforcement officials. Wright and Richardson comment on the “hawkish, military-like style of the raid force” sent to investigate the original report of abuse.<sup>194</sup> Wright and Fagen propose that FLDS and Texas law enforcement were “predisposed to believe sensational tropes” about FLDS; the authors suggest that “intrinsic narratives” about marginalized religions—including sexual assault, child abuse, brainwashing, and the stockpiling of weapons—might have prejudiced official actions toward FLDS.<sup>195</sup> Richardson and Schreinert argue that Yearning for Zion had for some time been the target of surveillance, in an attempt by law enforcement to prepare for the eventuality of such a raid; the authors link these activities to SB 6 and Rep. Hilderbran’s earlier attempts to make FLDS feel unwelcome in Eldorado.<sup>196</sup>

As the “Eldorado Incident” report notes, Texas state law requires DPFS to “investigate all reports of abuse or neglect ‘allegedly committed by a person responsible for a child’s care, custody,

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 5, 16.

<sup>194</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 7. Cf. Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 287.

<sup>195</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 13. See Ross on this point as well: “mass child protection efforts, like all attempts at mass justice, violate the basic requirement of individualized fault and tend to rely on stereotypes rather than evidence and analysis.” Ross, “Legal Constraints on Child-Saving,” 409. Cf. Wessinger, “‘Culting,’” “the fact that the media names these religious groups ‘cults’ creates a climate in which the public accepts what might actually be excessive action or force against these communities... the public perception of small religious groups and their behaviors as deviant is intensified when the ‘cult’ stereotype is applied.”

<sup>196</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 15. See also “Texas Authorities Defend Polygamous Sect Raid,” *Msnbc.com*, accessed August 2, 2013, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/24014376/ns/us\\_news-crime\\_and\\_courts/t/texas-authorities-defend-polygamous-sect-raid/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/24014376/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/texas-authorities-defend-polygamous-sect-raid/).

or welfare.”<sup>197</sup> Rather, like the ACLU and the Supreme Court of Texas, I take issue with the excessive and unwarranted actions that followed that initial investigation.<sup>198</sup>

Scholars are just beginning to offer sustained analysis of these events; the existent scholarship has made much of DPFS’ failure to prove systemic sexual abuse in the Yearning for Zion community.<sup>199</sup> In their contribution to *Saints Under Siege*, Richardson and Schreinert note that “for all the YFZ children, except a handful of pubescent girls who, between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, were found to have had children, no other evidence has been submitted of any abuse or neglect, physical or sexual.”<sup>200</sup> But this analysis does not fully account for the findings of the DPFS.

DPFS removed twelve girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen from the Yearning for Zion Ranch; they confirmed 12 girls as victims of sexual abuse and neglect because those girls had been married between the ages of twelve to fifteen. As the “Eldorado Incident” report notes, these findings indicate that “more than one in four pubescent girls on the ranch was in an underage marriage.”<sup>201</sup> Twelve men were indicted on charges of various charges. Warren Jeffs has since been convicted of child sexual assault and aggravated child sexual assault.<sup>202</sup> Eight of those accused have

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<sup>197</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 1.

<sup>198</sup> The Supreme Court of Texas rejected DPFS’ petition for mandamus: “On the record before us, removal of the children was not warranted.” (though authorized to remove suspected perpetrator(s)). See also ACLU statement. On arguably constitutionality of action, see Ross, “Legal Constraints on Child-Saving,” 369, which notes that *Stanley v. Illinois* 1972 determines that “a state may not deprive a parent of his or her parental rights without an individualized determination of the parent’s fitness.” At *Ibid.*, 409-10, Ross further observes that “mass child protection efforts, like all attempts at mass justice, violate the basic requirement of individualized fault and tend to rely on stereotypes rather than evidence and analysis. Episodes like [the raid on] the [YFZ] Ranch in 2008 are particularly dramatic... They remind us that *suspicion of those who live differently may impermissibly threaten important constitutional values* and harm individual children... And it bears repeating that there is little risk in following the strictures of the law. Children who are removed from their families without sufficient basis or process, and subjected to disruption and instability...suffer unnecessarily as a result of state action. Gratuitous disregard of parents’ rights does not serve vulnerable children well, whether the household contains one child or roughly 468.”

<sup>199</sup> Duffy, “Saints Under Siege,” 553-4.

<sup>200</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 258.

<sup>201</sup> *Eldorado Investigation*, 3.

<sup>202</sup> The Associated Press, “Texas.” Warren Jeffs has since been convicted of child sexual assault and aggravated child sexual assault.



been convicted of bigamy and/or sexual assault of a child. Additionally, Frederic Merrill Jessop was convicted of performing an unlawful marriage ceremony involving a minor (that of his twelve-year-old daughter), and Dr. Lloyd Barlow was convicted of failure to report child abuse because he delivered the babies of three underage girls.

Obviously, even one case of child sexual assault discovered among the FLDS community at Yearning for Zion warrants official investigation – though not the militaristic and disproportionate response of Texas law enforcement, nor the unwarranted violation of family integrity or parental rights.<sup>203</sup> But scholars have expressed surprise that DPFS found so little evidence and so few incidents of child sexual abuse among the Eldorado FLDS community, and that many women who had left Yearning for Zion with their children chose to return to the ranch of their own volition.<sup>204</sup>

In raiding Yearning for Zion, Texas law enforcement and Family and Protective Services Department stigmatized this FLDS community. In their excessive and militaristic actions, these agencies emphasized that FLDS in its entirety—not the single alleged perpetrator originally investigated or the nine men eventually convicted of bigamy and sexual assault of children—was religiously and sexually suspect, “bad religion.” In doing so, these agencies invested in protecting victims of domestic and sexual abuse inadvertently discouraged FLDS women who might want to leave the community from seeking out state services, exacerbating the community’s isolation.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ross, “Legal Constraints on Child-Saving,” 410. “Suspicion of those who live differently may impermissibly threaten important constitutional values and harm individual children. The case of Yearning for Zion Ranch may seem sui generis, but it powerfully illustrates what happens to children when child protective services workers disregard-or do not understand-the principles of family integrity and parental rights.” Cf. Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” 180.

<sup>204</sup> Winston, “Texas Court Rules Against Polygamist Raid.” “Admit it: you were surprised by the unanimous Texas court ruling that the state had insufficient warrant to remove children from the Yearning for Zion ranch (a.k.a. polygamous Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ compound) in Eldorado. If so, you were hardly alone.” See also Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*. Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 291, also notes that a third of women who were removed during the raid have left YFZ, though FLDS representatives claim these women are still with the church.

<sup>205</sup> Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 289.

The documents and statements I have analyzed here promote the constraint of religious and sexual difference, as evidenced by the “unprecedented” act of “mass detention,” the seizure of more than 400 FLDS children.<sup>206</sup> While authorities phrased their actions in terms of protecting children, it is significant that women and children—not the men suspected of sexual assault—were the ones removed from Yearning for Zion. The raid was indisputably a rescue mission.<sup>207</sup> In this chapter’s final section, I suggest tropes of “liberating” women and children can work to constrain the religious and sexual freedom of religious minorities.

As American religious historian John-Charles Duffy argues in his review of *Saints Under Siege*, there is an inherent tension between the state’s duty to prosecute child sexual abuse and the FLDS understanding of young adolescents as marriageable.<sup>208</sup> In the final section of this chapter, I want to think more concretely about this tension, and how it might shape considerations of agency and voluntarism in the practice of marginalized, even unpopular, American religions.

### *Women and Children First*

The Texas Department of Protective and Family Services and law enforcement officials forcibly removed 439 children from the Yearning for Zion Ranch in Elodorado. DPFS also removed twenty-nine “children” later determined to be adult women.<sup>209</sup> This is perhaps understandable, given the size and haste of the raid.<sup>210</sup> However, DPFS’ inability to meaningfully distinguish between

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<sup>206</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, ix.

<sup>207</sup> Gibson, “However Satisfied Man Might Be,” 284.

<sup>208</sup> Duffy, “Saints Under Siege,” 554.

<sup>209</sup> Wright and Richardson, *Saints Under Siege*, 19.

<sup>210</sup> The Third Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Texas found the size and haste of raid effort indefensible. *In re Sara Steed, et al.* (Texas Court of Appeals, Third District, at Austin 2008).

FLDS women and children illustrates a problem systemic to public rhetoric about and treatment of religious minorities: portraying them as in desperate need of rescue.<sup>211</sup>

The characterization of religious minorities—and particularly women members of unpopular religions—as “trapped” or “brainwashed” is, of course, not unique to Texas, its State House of Representatives, law enforcement officials, or other civil servants. The American public’s eagerness to consume narratives of religio-sexual abuse among Mormon fundamentalist communities is evident in the popularity of books like *Under the Banner of Heaven*, as well as that of Carolyn Jessop’s autobiographical *Escape* (2007), the Oprah-distributed and award-winning documentary “Sons of Perdition” (2010),<sup>212</sup> and Sam Brower’s *Prophet’s Prey: My Seven Year Investigation into Warren Jeffs and the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-day Saints* (2011). Neither are such stigmatizing depictions unique to Mormon fundamentalist women, as I shall show with my subsequent case studies. America loves a rescue story,<sup>213</sup> and discourse surrounding FLDS and the Yearning for Zion raid is rife with protectionist discourse.<sup>214</sup>

Such protectionist discourse is most evident in the language framing FLDS women as the victims or dupes of their husbands, fathers, and prophets. Recall DPFS’ depiction of FLDS female

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<sup>211</sup> Gibson comments on “portray[als of] the FLDS as the internal ‘other’ threatening both American freedoms and mainstream Christian values, and FLDS women as in need of rescue, most often in the form of militaristic intervention.” She insists such characterizations imply that “it is our responsibility as an ‘evolved’ nation is to wage war against the oppression of ‘other’ women—even if their salvation from sexual abuse and exploitation seems impossible.” Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 287.

<sup>212</sup> Tyler Measom and Jennilyn Merten, *Sons of Perdition*, Documentary, N/A. On the significance and impact of Oprah in American culture, see Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>213</sup> On the gender dynamics of the rescue theme, see Emily S. Rosenberg, “Rescuing Women and Children,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (2002): 460. “Historians have recognized that the rescue theme often works to display and reinforce notions of the superior manliness of the rescuer nation, indeed to cast the nation itself in a manly role. The nation itself is summoned to provide protection to women or to a country—emblematically feminized—that rival men are violating.”

<sup>214</sup> Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 284. Academic discourse is not immune to this tendency. See, for example, Stephen Kent’s extended review of *A Matter of Principle*, in which he argues at length that the “abuses [of human rights are] maladaptive, and systemic to the most prominent forms of fundamentalist Mormon polygamy,” without reference to Bennion’s work or any ethnography among Mormon fundamentalist communities on his own part from which to draw. Stephen A. Kent, “A Matter of Principle: Fundamentalist Mormon Polygamy, Children, and Human Rights Debates,” *Nova Religio* 10, no. 1 (August 2006): 21.

children being “groomed” for sexual assault.<sup>215</sup> This language served as the overt justification for the largest state custodial detention of children in U.S. history, and the removal of an additional 139 women – presumably from the abuses DPFS and Texas law enforcement officials considered intrinsic to the “pervasive belief system” of Yearning for Zion.

The protectionist discourse regarding Mormon fundamentalist polygyny is problematic for several reasons. First, the rhetoric portrays FLDS, its people and its problems, as somehow outside the boundaries of contemporary American culture, as though women and children were not abused in other contexts. In addition, this rhetoric fails to take seriously women’s first-hand accounts of lived Mormon fundamentalism and thus disregards the complexity of these women’s religious and sexual agency. Finally, attempts to act on protectionist discourse—to rescue religious minorities—may actually work against the ability of abuse victims to seek out or receive assistance.

As Michelle Gibson notes in her 2010 “‘However Satisfied a Man May Be:’ Sexual Abuse in Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints Communities,” the protectionist discourse surrounding Yearning for Zion and Warren Jeffs suggests that abuses within FLDS are unique to the community. Gibson cites Attorney General Shurtleff as insisting that “*the kind of abuse and isolation inflicted on women and children by Jeffs and his followers results from polygamy and is therefore exceptional, contained in the sect.*”<sup>216</sup> Here Shurtleff attributes the sexual assaults that occur within FLDS directly to the *practice of polygyny*, rather than to the fact that one-third to one-half of all sexual abuse “committed against girls in the United States is perpetrated by family members.”<sup>217</sup> By attributing the abuses at Yearning for Zion to polygyny, Gibson suggests that Shurtleff “exonerat[es] (monogamous) mainstream families

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<sup>215</sup> This sort of rhetoric is not unique to legal discourse. See Gibson “Cooper makes a clear intellectual distinction between the prophet’s followers, who are portrayed as dupes who think Jeffs ‘speaks for God on earth,’ and ‘others [including Krakauer, interviewed by AC on segment in question] who’ve studied his sect,’ who see Jeffs as ‘pure evil.’” Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 288.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 290 (emphasis added).

<sup>217</sup> Finkelhor, “Current Information on the Scope and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse,” 46-48.

from patriarchal attitudes that place women and children at risk.”<sup>218</sup> Depicting FLDS as exceptional shifts the blame for abuse and coercion to a non-normative sexual practice (polygyny), a maneuver Gibson considers “prurient focus on imagined sexual activity.”<sup>219</sup>

The problem with such blame shifting is three-fold. First, if we see these abuses as isolated in polygamous communities, then the solution to the problem becomes controlling the behavior of one deviant man, or one deviant group of men, or one deviant community, not about “calling into question an entire culture’s attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>220</sup> I have commented at length about the tendency to conflate Mormon fundamentalism with sexual predators and the practice of polygyny; the American media and legal system’s fixation on Warren Jeffs speaks to a conviction that removing the FLDS president would resolve the “problem” of Mormon fundamentalist polygyny. But perhaps more importantly, Gibson insists that “placing the ‘blame’ for abuse and autocratic control on polygyny is *tantamount to placing the blame on nonnormative sexual practice*, a move which finally supports the oppression of any number of sexual minorities.”<sup>221</sup> Discourse that identifies religious minorities as especially prone to sexual predation ignores larger systemic issues that perpetuate the abuse of women and children in broader American society. Gibson urges scholars to engage FLDS women and children as part of a larger national citizenry rather than as outsiders.”<sup>222</sup> Gibson observes that the voices of FLDS women and children are “lost in the righteous indignation” of protectionist exceptionalism, for their stories are mediated by producers, publishers, and audiences unwilling to

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<sup>218</sup> Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 290.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> See Jakobsen and Pellegrini on the implications of increased religious freedom creating space for increased sexual freedom. Janet R Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, “Practicing Sex, Practicing Democracy,” *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, January 9, 2008, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/09/practicing-sex-practicing-democracy/>.

<sup>222</sup> Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be,’” 288.

confront the fact that FLDS attitudes about gender and sexuality reflect patriarchal attitudes deeply embedded in US society and culture.”<sup>223</sup>

Anthropologist Janet Bennion has emphasized in numerous publications the importance of taking seriously Mormon fundamentalist women’s accounts of their own lived religious experience.<sup>224</sup> In her 2011 “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” Bennion insists that Mormon fundamentalist women’s experiences of plural marriage are “rich and varied.” Her ethnographic work among the AUB communities in British Columbia has led Bennion to conclude that polygyny cannot be “uniformly and directly tied to abuses against women and children,” and she attributes findings to the contrary to a lack of data collection on women’s experiences.<sup>225</sup> Bennion moreover insists that

Like any other alternative family form, polygamy does not easily fit into mainstream society... [S]ome groups may be at higher risk than the others, this does not mean that entire communities should be held at gunpoint, nor does it mean that all underage marriage is “abusive”... [I]n certain circumstances, when a young woman is trained to take on the duties of wife and mother and has full choice in whom she marries, *she may not interpret underage marriage as sexual abuse.*<sup>226</sup>

Many of Bennion’s interlocutors insist that they are content in their marriages and deeply value their relationships with their sister-wives.<sup>227</sup> Bennion’s interlocutors often emphasize the stability,

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 292 and Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” 180.

<sup>224</sup> Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West”; *Women of Principle: Evaluating the Effects of Polygamy on Women and Children in Four North American Mormon Fundamentalist Groups; Polygamy in Primetime*. Gibson also argues for taking women’s accounts seriously. Gibson, ““However Satisfied Man Might Be,”” 288, 291-2.

<sup>225</sup> Bennion, “The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West,” 180.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 166. “It is essential to examine the full and variable impact of polygamous family life on the health and well-being of women and children based on satisfaction levels, sexuality, economic activities, living arrangement, leisure and autonomy, financial stability, socialization, and the presence or absence of abuse.” Bennion, *Women of Principle*, viii, also notes that some of interlocutors would leave their communities if it didn’t mean losing their children.

financial advantages, and friendship promoted by plural marriage.<sup>228</sup> Consistent with Bennion's observation of Mormon fundamentalist modesty, few women commented on the sexual benefits or detriments of plural marriage. This corroborates my assertion that outsider accounts of Mormon fundamentalism overemphasize the sexual aspects of polygyny; silencing the experiences of Mormon fundamentalist women contributes to this persistent misrepresentation.<sup>229</sup>

The failure to account for Mormon fundamentalist women's lived religious experience also ignores the complexity of these women's religious and sexual agency. I concur with Bennion's observation that "there are ample illustrations of female autonomy, achievement, and contentment within a polygamous context."<sup>230</sup> However, the cases I have examined in this chapter demonstrate the necessity for more nuanced considerations of gendered religious agency. In her influential 2004 *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Saba Mahmood argues compellingly that neoliberal societies (and particularly feminist scholars) define women's agency too narrowly. Mahmood insists that agency cannot and should not be understood solely in terms of resistance to patriarchal systems – that the ability to act must also be recognized in the act of submission, a concept she calls "negative freedom."<sup>231</sup> Gibson's analysis supports Mahmood's argument:

The war against the sexual abuse and exploitation of FLDS women and children is unwinnable precisely because it is framed as war, and FLDS women are unsavable precisely because they are viewed as in need of salvation. Narratives in which patriarchal saviors wage war on behalf of women position those women as passive characters whose lives are always already subject to control by others.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Bennion, "The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West," 166.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Carrie A. Miles, "'What's Love Got to Do with It?' Earthly Experience of Celestial Marriage, Past and Present," in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton (Oxford University Press, 2011), 185–207.

<sup>230</sup> Bennion, "The Many Faces of Polygamy: An Analysis of the Variability in Modern Mormon Fundamentalism in the Intermountain West," 164.

<sup>231</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 10-12.

<sup>232</sup> Gibson, "However Satisfied Man Might Be," 291.

I concur with Mahmood's assertion that accounts of gendered religious agency must acknowledge the possibility and appeal of religious submission. However, the case studies I have addressed in this chapter require further consideration of American assumptions regarding individual autonomy in religious and sexual practices.

As demonstrated in the public rhetoric about contemporary Mormon fundamentalism, participation in bad sex is often interpreted as coerced or irrational. The inverse also pertains: bad religion is assumed to be irrational or forced as well. As Gibson notes, this leads to a contradiction in public rhetoric about Mormon fundamentalism: "FLDS women and children are portrayed as 'innocent' to the sexual permissiveness of mainstream US society at the same time that mainstream US society sees the group's practice of polygamy as sexually permissive."<sup>233</sup>

If, as Bennion suggests, we take seriously the lived experience of contemporary Mormon fundamentalists, it seems necessary to conclude that some Americans choose to participate in transgressive religio-sexual practices. Attempts to act on protectionist discourse—to rescue religious minorities—may actually work against the ability of abuse victims to seek out or receive assistance. Gibson raises the concern that "overt militaristic action against polygamous sects will... engender greater isolation and secrecy, thereby increasing the risk to FLDS women and children."<sup>234</sup> Gibson acknowledges the reality of abuses in FLDS culture, though she refuses to credit their exceptionality; she moreover insists that FLDS women "deserve support and intervention on their behalf—as long as that intervention comes in forms defined and controlled by them."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Gibson, "However Satisfied Man Might Be," 286.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 289. Cf. Song, *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, 162: "The current ban on polygamy leaves polygamous wives and their children even more vulnerable to domination by driving polygamous communities into hiding." It follows that polygynous communities feel an increased sense of vulnerability following the raid and custodial seizure.

<sup>235</sup> Gibson, "However Satisfied Man Might Be," 288.



In her 2007 *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, political scientist Susan Song argues for the qualified legal recognition of polygamy to secure such support and intervention. Recognizing polygamy, Song suggests, might secure a “realistic right of exit” for Mormon fundamentalist women who wish to leave their marriages but retain custody of their children or who experience physical or sexual abuse within their communities. In this, Song proposes a more nuanced understanding of religious agency:

The central claim here is that religious and cultural groups should be let alone as long as membership in these groups is voluntary. Not voluntary in the sense that a religious belief and cultural attachments are experienced as choices, but rather that individual members can, if they wish, exit groups.<sup>236</sup>

Securing the right for individual exit not only protects individuals, Song notes. In addition, the *threat* of mass exits might have significant effect on policies and practices within minorities religions such as the FLDS.<sup>237</sup> Legal recognition of polygamy would allow state and federal agencies to help ameliorate the barriers to leaving Mormon fundamentalism, including educational and employment opportunities and “other material benefits” issuing from group membership.<sup>238</sup> Song concludes that focusing efforts on ensuring women’s reasonable right to exit through a qualified legal recognition of polygamy “can better protect the basic rights of Mormon women and children in polygamous households” than legal proscriptions.<sup>239</sup>

## *Conclusion*

Texas state legislators, law enforcement, and civil servants insistence that the raid on the Yearning for Zion ranch was “never about religion” precisely exemplifies my larger argument: the rhetorical emphasis on sexual impropriety discourages both religious and sexual difference while upholding a

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<sup>236</sup> Song, *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism* 160.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-1.

<sup>238</sup> Song, *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism.*, 161.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

professed national commitment to religious tolerance. 'These officials' desire to protect victims of sexual assault and coercion is laudable, but the conviction that sexual assault *must* be occurring at the ranch *because* its residents practice polygyny displays a demonstrable, if unconscious, intolerance of minority religions and unconventional sexual practices. Such cases are *precisely* about religion.

As religious studies scholars, we must resist attempts to reduce Mormon fundamentalism—marked as it is by communalism, apocalypticism, poverty, and isolation—to the practice of polygyny. So too must we challenge the reduction of plural marriage to sexual predation. We must acknowledge the complexities of a theology and community that understand as “marriage” a practice considered “sexual abuse” by state and federal law enforcement agencies.<sup>240</sup> We must recognize both that Mormon fundamentalists are a vulnerable religious minority who encounter overt and subtle religio-sexual intolerance and that some of these same individuals suffer and perpetuate sexual coercion and abuse.<sup>241</sup> The operations of state and federal law enforcement toward Mormon fundamentalists demonstrate subtle and overt religious intolerance informed by a normalized conservative Christian sexual ethic. Moreover, the rhetoric surrounding the “need” to liberate Mormon fundamentalist women and children discouraged religious and sexual difference in the contemporary United States.

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<sup>240</sup> Duffy, “Saints Under Siege,” 554.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

## “Daddy, Do I Hate Americans?” Domestic Terrorism and American Sexual Exceptionalism in *Not Without My Daughter*

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.

“Not Without My Daughter,” dir. Brian Gilbert (1991)

“He hugged me. Then he kissed me. And 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.”

Betty Mahmoody with William Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter* (1987)

The 1987 international best-seller *Not Without My Daughter* chronicles Betty Mahmoody's harrowing escape with her daughter, Mahtob, from captivity and abuse in post-revolutionary Iran. 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. Sayyed Bozorg 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 northern Iran to escape into Turkey and freedom.

Betty Mahmoody's tale of captivity and liberation sold 15 million copies internationally and has been translated into 20 languages.<sup>1</sup> Mahmoody also told her story to Barbara Walters, Larry

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<sup>1</sup> Farzaneh Milani, *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 215.

King, Phil Donahue, Sally Jessie Raphael, and Oprah Winfrey – and through them, to millions of American viewers.<sup>2</sup> The book was selected as a Literary Guild alternate and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1987.<sup>3</sup> Sally Field portrayed Mahmoody in the poorly reviewed but oft-referenced 1991 film adaptation of *Not Without My Daughter*. 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, 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.”<sup>4</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that *Not Without My Daughter* made Betty Mahmoody an international feminist icon, the poster girl for women’s liberation from oppressive—and notably religious—patriarchal abuse.

Yet Mahmoody’s account is not uniformly accepted. As film scholar Nacim Pak-Shiraz notes, “on the Iranian screens, the victim was Mahmoudy [sic] and not his wife.”<sup>5</sup> In the Finnish documentary “Without My Daughter” (2002), Dr. Sayyed Bozorg Mahmoody, family members, and acquaintances refute a number of Betty Mahmoody’s assertions.<sup>6</sup> “I am a beast and a criminal in the eyes of the world,” Dr. Mahmoody told his documentarians.<sup>7</sup> “I have been portrayed as a liar, a woman-beater, and a kidnapper... My sin, my only sin was that I loved my child, my daughter.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>3</sup> 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, “most journalists know that all it takes to be ‘nominated’ for a Pulitzer is a \$50 and an entry form.”

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Ruth Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Nacim Pak-Shiraz, *Shi’i Islam in Iranian Cinema: Religion and Spirituality in Film* (London; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). 1.

<sup>6</sup> “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.

<sup>7</sup> Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217. Bozorg Mahmoody died in 2009 without seeing his daughter Mahtob again.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

*Without My Daughter* also includes interviews with the Mahmoodys' American friends still living in Iran, who accuse Betty of fabricating much of her story.

But the veracity of Betty Mahmoody's account is largely beside the point. Despite its contested content, *Not Without My Daughter* stands not merely as a personal memoir of domestic discord, but as "an authoritative manual on Iran."<sup>9</sup> As literature and gender scholar Farzaneh Milani emphasizes, "no book about Iran has achieved the phenomenal success of *Not Without My Daughter*."<sup>10</sup> In the relative absence of other narrative portrayals of Islam and Iran during the mid-1980s to early 1990s, the book and film "enjoyed a monopoly in circulating [their] perspective on Islam and Muslims to a broad popular audience."<sup>11</sup> Mahmoody's account has shaped American popular imaginings, not only of Iran, but of Muslim masculinity writ large.

*Not Without My Daughter* characterizes Bozorg Mahmoody as a domestic terrorist: abusive, irrational, and consumed by religious fanaticism – but the expressions of his religiously-motivated rage and violence are limited to the domestic sphere, notably his American wife and daughter.<sup>12</sup> This domestic terrorism, *Daughter* implies, is a microcosmic instantiation of the hostility, irrationality, and fanaticism inherent to Iran, and by extension, Islam, toward 1980s America. Milani observes that Betty Mahmoody's portrayal of her husband "leaps from one man to a whole nation, from one country to a whole faith," and invites her audiences to make similar cognitive leaps.<sup>13</sup> Mahmoody's accounts of interactions with other Muslim men in Iran also portray them as primarily abusive,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 233, 217.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, 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.

<sup>12</sup> Here, "domestic" signals both the private (home, family, American normative sexuality) and the public (sovereign national identity).

<sup>13</sup> Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217. See also Miles on the ways the film rewards audiences for sympathizing with Betty Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, 91.

sexually voracious (particularly when in contact with western women), and religiously fanatical.

*Daughter* functions not merely as one woman's account of a harrowing escape from captivity and abuse, but rather as a cautionary tale against exogamy: a warning against marrying and mating with a racialized, hypersexualized religious other.

In this chapter I argue that *Not Without My Daughter* articulates and authorizes religious intolerance by framing Betty Mahmoody's captivity in terms of anxiety about exogamy. *Daughter* pits the frustrated religious and sexual excess of Bozorg Mahmoody against the sexual exceptionalism (informed by the moderate, private, Protestant religiosity) of his American wife. The doctor's excessive 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 religious and sexual exceptionalism, despite her dalliance with a hypersexualized and racialized religious outsider, finally redeem her – allowing her to escape from captivity in Tehran. Thus *Daughter* functions not merely as a narrative of captivity, but also as one of atonement and redemption: Betty Mahmoody suffers for her sexual transgression and escapes to freedom only when she has fully and finally rejected her illicit liaison with a racially and sexually perverse religious outsider.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, *Daughter* expresses a religious intolerance informed by “good sex,” in this context, the assumption that appropriate or culturally validated sex should occur between two members of a single cultural group (in this case, among white Protestant] Americans). By portraying Bozorg Mahmoody as a racialized and hypersexualized foreigner and allowing his character to function synecdochically for Muslim masculinity, *Daughter* insists that—despite close to three centuries of Muslim presence in what is now the United States—Islam itself can never be a truly American religion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xiii.

<sup>15</sup> On presence of Islam in colonial and early republic Americas, see Thomas A. Tweed, “Islam in America: From African Slaves to Malcolm X,” n.d., <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/islam.htm> and Edward E. Curtis, *The Columbia Sourcebook Of Muslims In The United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

During the mid-1980s and early 1990s, American public approval for Islamophobic rhetoric—particularly following the 1979-1981 Iran hostage crisis—facilitated Mahmoody’s argument against exogamy to a greater extent than might have been permissible in a pre-crisis context.<sup>16</sup> Such an overt indictment of exogamy in late 20<sup>th</sup> century America might have otherwise proved contentious. However, public suspicion regarding Islam, essentialized as violent and hostile (particularly toward women), facilitated Mahmoody’s racialized and hypersexualized characterization of Muslim masculinity as domestic terrorism and her attendant critique of exogamy.

This is to say that religious and sexual intolerance, in such contexts as that of *Daughter*, perform a sort of recursive legerdemain: each term simultaneously builds on and distracts from the other. The threat of “bad” or excessive sex facilitates the articulation of religious intolerance and its construction and constraint of “good” or “real” American religion, while the specter of “bad religion” both authorizes and directs attention away from subtle public regulations of “good” or socially acceptable sex – in this case, religio-nationally endogamous procreative marital intercourse.<sup>17</sup> *Daughter’s* emphasis on and essentialization of the frustrated lasciviousness of Muslim masculinity—and its logical product, the oppression and abuse of women—exemplifies public anti-Muslim rhetorics. At the same time, Mahmoody’s construction of Islam as essentially un-American at once authorizes her denunciation of exogamy.

Betty Mahmoody portrays her husband as a domestic terrorist: one who tried and failed to Americanize himself, who “backslid” into Islamic fundamentalism, ultimately unleashing the madness and violence that she had long suspected lurking within him.<sup>18</sup> As I shall show,

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<sup>16</sup> On the public sphere’s discursive shift toward the consolidation of America as a “Christian nation” following the Iran hostage crisis, 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), 147. Obviously, Islamophobic rhetoric (and public approval thereof) by no means limited to late 1980s and the early 1990s. As this chapter establishes, however, American Islamophobia following the Iran hostage both precedes and informs early 21st century (which is to say post-9/11) Islamophobic rhetorics.

<sup>17</sup> Endogamy refers to engaging in marital (and therefore sexual) relations outside one’s cultural group.

<sup>18</sup> Betty Mahmoody and William Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 20, 3.

Mahmoody's portrayals of other Iranian men mirror her characterizations of her husband as abusive, hypersexualized, and religiously obsessed. Mahmoody attributes these characteristics to a "primitive" and "irrational" religiosity, Shi'i Islam (which she fails to meaningfully distinguish from Islamic fundamentalism or Islam as a whole). Her flight from Iran, portrayed as the triumph of the female will over a primitive and irrational religious patriarchy, encourages her audiences to fear and shun Muslim men as potential domestic terrorists. Her account also warns the American reading public—largely ignorant of the histories and cultures of Central Asia and the Middle East—about the dangers of "sleeping with the enemy."<sup>19</sup>

In this chapter, I read Mahmoody's account of captivity and escape as a narrative of American sexual exceptionalism's triumph over the domestic terrorism of her Muslim husband.<sup>20</sup> In analyzing the sexual exceptionalism in *Daughter*, I build on Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai's 2002 "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots. Puar and Rai note that rhetorical constructions of Muslim masculinity combine tropes of monstrosity, terrorism, and sexual deviance; I show that Betty Mahmoody's characterization of her husband and other Muslim Iranian men precisely exemplifies this "monster-terrorist-fag" concept. For the purposes of this chapter, "sexual exceptionalism" refers to an understanding of American sexuality as separate from and superior to the presumed racialized perversity of the religious outsider.<sup>21</sup> The liberatory rhetoric of Mahmoody's narrative underscores her exceptionalism while reiterating the lascivious impotence of domestic terrorists who capture and abuse her – which is to say, Muslim men. Mahmoody's discursive construction of Muslim masculinity as domestic terrorism articulates and authorizes public religious intolerance of Islam, while her example of American sexual exceptionalism justifies her

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<sup>19</sup> Jane Campbell, "Portrayal of Iranians in U.S. Motion Pictures," in *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*, ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 179.

<sup>20</sup> Puar's work in *Terrorist Assemblages* directly informs my understanding of the term; I theorize "American sexual exceptionalism" more fully in the following section.

<sup>21</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 3.



denunciation of exogamy. In this way, discursive constructions of “good” American sex and “good” American religion simultaneously inform, reinforce, and distract from each other.

In pursuing this argument, I first demonstrate the extent to which the book and film versions of *Not Without My Daughter* characterize Bozorg Mahmoody—and by extension, Muslim men—as domestic terrorists. I read this form of domestic terrorism as a pre-9/11 instantiation of Jasbir Puar’s “monster-terrorist-fag,” a characterization of Muslim masculinity as racially, sexually, and religiously perverse.<sup>22</sup> Next, I show that Betty Mahmoody’s character in book and film embodies an American sexual exceptionalism, simultaneously authorizing anti-Islamic sentiment and demonstrating the perils of exogamy. Finally, I consider the ways in which the dual discourses of domestic terrorism and American sexual exceptionalism continue to fascinate and disturb the American public sphere. Pulp nonfiction “hostage narratives” and American foreign policy alike mobilize exceptionalist language to portray Muslim masculinity as something that women the world over need saving from. The discursive construction of Muslim masculinity as racially, sexually, and religiously perverse collapses the theological and practical complexities of lived Islam, occludes the prevalence of American domestic abuse absent any supposed religious motivation, and forecloses the complexity of women’s agency within non-Protestant religions.

### *Sleeping with the Monster-Terrorist-Fag: Muslim Masculinity as Domestic Terrorism*

*Not Without My Daughter* portrays Dr. Sayyed Bozorg Mahmoody as a domestic terrorist: an abusive and irrational racially and sexually perverse religious other whose violence is necessarily limited to the domestic sphere. This domesticity neither negates nor diminishes Mahmoody’s menace. Indeed, *Daughter* depicts his domestic terrorism as all the more terrifying for its appearance of assimilation, of

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<sup>22</sup> Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text* 20, no. 3 72 (September 21, 2002): 117–148.

“normalcy.” Moreover, Bozorg Mahmoody’s character comes to function as a synecdoche for Muslim masculinity throughout *Daughter*. His character is merely the most visible and best developed instantiation of the racialized impotent lasciviousness and religious fanaticism Mahmoody suspects of all Muslim men.<sup>23</sup>

My reading of Bozorg Mahmoody’s character as domestic terrorist is informed by Jasbir Puar’s concept of the Muslim man as “monster-terrorist-fag.” Puar introduces this concept in an eponymous article written in collaboration with Amit Rai (2002), and she expands on the concept in her 2007 *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. The construction of Muslim masculinity as monster-terrorist-fag, Puar suggests, is a specific mode of orientalism,<sup>24</sup> one that collapses Muslim masculinity into a hypervisible racially, sexually, and religiously perverse other in need of regulation and quarantining by western civilization.<sup>25</sup> The notion of the monster-terrorist-fag, Puar insists, functions both to marginalize Islam and to produce “normalized and docile” American patriots.<sup>26</sup>

The portrayal of Bozorg Mahmoody as a domestic terrorist offers a vivid demonstration of Puar’s monster-terrorist-fag. The portrayal also functions as a synecdoche for Muslim masculinity.<sup>27</sup> I therefore use Puar to analyze *Daughter*’s portrayal of Muslim masculinity. I suggest that Bozorg Mahmoody’s domestic terrorism is best considered in three parts: his monstrosity, indicated by the character’s uncanniness and racialization; his terrorism, indicated by his violent religious fanaticism;

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<sup>23</sup> Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217.

<sup>24</sup> Orientalism refers to the “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture” that authorized western imperialism, as famously theorized by Edward Said. For further discussion of orientalism’s relationship to western constructions of religion, see Richard King’s 1999 *Orientalism and Religion*. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Random House Digital, Inc., 1979); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East”* (Routledge, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 117; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xi.

<sup>26</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 117.

<sup>27</sup> Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which the term for part of something is used to refer to the entire entity. Here, “Bozorg Mahmoody” stands in for Muslim masculinity.

and his faggotry, indicated by his impotent lasciviousness.<sup>28</sup> Bozorg Mahmoody functions as a synecdoche for Muslim masculinity becomes clear in the context of Mahmoody's depiction of other Muslim men. The characterization of Bozorg Mahmoody (and by extension, all Muslim men) as domestic terrorist(s) portrays Muslim masculinity as essentially and incontrovertibly un-American.<sup>29</sup>

## Monster

Mahmoody first achieves the vilification of Muslim masculinity by characterizing her husband and his fellow countrymen as monstrous. She is not subtle in rendering Bozorg as grotesque:

Mahmoody refers to her husband as “a sleeping ogre” whose “eyes held the pent-up rage of a thousand tortured demons.”<sup>30</sup> She “retch[es] with the effort” of feigning affection for him.<sup>31</sup>

Mahmoody characterizes her husband, Iranian men, and Muslim men in general as monstrous throughout *NWMD*. As novelist Porochista Khakpour recounted to the *Los Angeles Times*:

When I was 13, “Not Without My Daughter” came out... I still remember my family's naïve moment of rejoicing at the trailer — Gidget had married an Iranian! But...Gidget's “crime of being an American” was being met with the horrific punishment of living in Iran forever! ...It was a horror movie about Iran. *We were Freddy Krueger*.<sup>32</sup>

In this subsection, I demonstrate and problematize Mahmoody's construction of Muslim masculinity as monstrous. These rhetorics of monstrosity deploy the tropes of uncanniness and racialization.

Mahmoody characterizes Muslim men as terrifyingly familiar violators of domestic spaces, as beasts,

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<sup>28</sup> Note that these characteristics do not fall into neatly separable categories; rather, the monster-terrorist-fag assembles ‘a cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity’ narratives. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 222.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>30</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 304-5, 184.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>32</sup> 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.”

and as figures whose very bodies betray their foreignness – thus suggesting Islam has always already been un-American. This monstrous rhetoric marks Muslim men as legitimate subjects of discipline, containment, and even violence.

In “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” Puar and Rai identify the monstrosity of Muslim masculinity as uncanny.<sup>33</sup> My understanding of the “Muslim monster” as uncanny builds on Freud’s theory of the *unheimlich*: an anxiety intensified by the familiarity of its subject.<sup>34</sup> In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Freud explained that uncanniness—literally unhomeliness—both draws a subject in through familiarity and discomforts that subject through a sense of strangeness. The uncanny monster can never be entirely foreign, being familiarly strange and strangely familiar. The attraction and fear Bozorg Mahmoody inspires in his wife demonstrates this sense of the uncanny. Bozorg’s menace lies in his discomfiting intimacy and in his violation of the domestic sphere. In her treatment of *Daughter*, political scientist Anne Norton notes that Muslim “hyper-masculinity is, in every sense, a domestic matter” and that “the figure of the bad father has acquired almost archetypal status in contemporary American cinematic representations of ‘the enemy.’”<sup>35</sup> Bozorg Mahmoody’s character demonstrates such uncanniness in his degradation from loving and attentive husband and father into terrifying—yet familiar—madman.

The print version of *Daughter* does more to establish Bozorg Mahmoody’s uncanny monstrosity than its cinematic complement. As Margaret Miles observes in her 1997 *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, “perhaps the most dramatic of many divergences from the

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<sup>33</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 124, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Sigmund Freud, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> 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>. Norton underscores the prevalence of media accounts emphasizing the “dictatorial domestic rule” and an “unrestrained use of domestic violence” by Muslim leaders like Hafiz al-Asad, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar Qaddafi. As her title implies, Norton is primarily concerned with the construction of Arab Muslim masculinity; however, she notes that (as in the case of *Not Without My Daughter*), “the ascription of a threatening masculinity extends...to Muslim Persians as well as Arabs.”

novel [sic] is the omission of the book's description of Moody's disintegration from happy and relatively successful young husband and father to domestic tyrant."<sup>36</sup> But the film's early depictions of idyllic suburban American domesticity—Mahtob and Betty fighting over “Moody's” lap; Bozorg reading Persianate fairy tales to his daughter; Betty's description of Mahtob as “such a daddy's girl”—haunt later scenes of domestic violence in chaotic Tehran. The husband's affectionate and passive demeanor throughout the film's opening sequence evaporates abruptly at the 34 minute mark. Bozorg curtly informs his wife their family won't be returning to Michigan and slaps her when she protests. His behavior is abusive and erratic for the remainder of the film.

Such an uncanny disruption of the domestic sphere is, the film implies, implicit in Muslim marriages. When a Swiss embassy worker asked Betty why she came to Iran, Betty replies: "I don't know. I was afraid to come. I wanted to please him. I trusted him. I was frightened to come but I never thought this could happen. *I thought of him as an American. He's changed.* Oh god, he's changed."<sup>37</sup> Sally Field's dramatic interpretation of Betty Mahmoody's account underscores the frightening intimacy of her marriage in Iran. The man with whom she has been most closely connected has proved to be a terrifying “demon.”<sup>38</sup> The Swiss embassy representative informs Betty that many American women in Iran share her plight, implying that such violent domesticity is intrinsic to marriage with Muslim men. Betty's American friend, Ellen, confirms this assertion. Her Muslim husband never abused her in America, but became violent when they relocated to Tehran.<sup>39</sup> The *Daughter* film insists volatile affections and the unsettling intimacy of domestic violence are

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<sup>36</sup> Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Brian Gilbert, *Not Without My Daughter*, 1991 (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> However, as Betty's foil, Ellen insists that this violence is not inherent to Islam. “[Muslim men] are not supposed to [be violent toward their wives], you know. It's not Islamic. Marriages do work out here. They can be good. It can be hard at times, but you've got to give it time, Betty. Islam has such beauty in it. I mean, I'm glad my kids are growing up as Muslims.” Ellen converted in an attempt to promote domestic harmony; however, she admits her marriage is still tense and occasionally abusive. Mahmoody discusses Ellen's “negative example” more fully in the pulp nonfiction version of *Daughter*. Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 281.

intrinsic to Muslim marriage, thus insinuating that an uncanny monstrosity lurks within Muslim masculinity.

Bozorg Mahmoody's disturbing disruption of the domestic sphere is more pronounced in the pulp nonfiction version of *Daughter*. This tension is marked by Mahmoody's insistence that even when her relationship with Bozorg was going well, she suspected something was not quite right. Though initially "honored as the queen of [Bozorg's] life," Betty found her husband's personality "paradoxical."<sup>40</sup> She attributes his internal tension to warring internal factions: "His mind was a blend of brilliance and dark confusion. Culturally he was a mixture of East and West; even he did not know which was the dominant influence in his life."<sup>41</sup> Mahmoody insists that once they entered Iran, Bozorg's personality conflicts violently resolved themselves in favor of the "East." Her description of their initial argument over returning to America captures this uncanny shift:

With Mahtob watching, unable to comprehend the meaning of this dark change in her father's demeanor, Moody growled, "I do not have to let you go home. You have to do whatever I say, and you are staying *here*." He pushed my shoulders, slamming me onto the bed. His screams took on a tone of insolence, almost laughter, as though he were the gloating victor in an extended, undeclared war. "You are here for the rest of your life. Do you understand? You are not leaving Iran. You are here until you die."<sup>42</sup>

After seven years of avoiding marital conflict, two weeks in Iran transformed Bozorg into a "venomous stranger who had once been a loving husband and father."<sup>43</sup> Note both the violence and the implied inevitability of this character shift. Mahmoody frequently refers to this uncanny tension: Bozorg became "a jailer now rather than a husband"; Mahtob's "daddy was suddenly our enemy."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41. On this point, see also 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): 55.

<sup>44</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 56.

Ironically, Betty maintains that Bozorg “was simply not the man [she] had married.”<sup>45</sup> And yet she insists that “for years [she] had seen the shadow of madness descend upon him.”<sup>46</sup>

As in the film, the pulp nonfiction version of *Daughter* implies that such unsettling, violent behavior is inherent in Muslim masculinity. Despite Betty’s protests, Bozorg’s niece insists “all men are like this.”<sup>47</sup> Ellen, Betty’s American friend who converted to Islam to please her husband, suggests that her captivity and abuse taught her to become a “dutiful Moslem wife.”<sup>48</sup> (She admits, though, that her husband still beats her and her children.) This disturbing resignation to intimate violence underscores the monstrous quality of Muslim masculinity.

*Daughter*’s depiction of Muslim men’s monstrosity is also demonstrably racialized.<sup>49</sup> Bozorg’s character aspires to Americanize himself but ultimately fails. He “reverts” to oppressive, abusive behavior that Mahmoody qualifies as Muslim almost immediately upon returning to Iran. Mahmoody depicts Bozorg’s failure to fully assimilate to American culture as something inherent to Iran and Islam, categories she elides and discusses in quasi-racial terms.

Puar and Rai insist that the character of the monstrous Muslim man is always racialized, marking male Muslim bodies as legitimate foci of public scrutiny and regulation.<sup>50</sup> For my purposes,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 145-7.

<sup>49</sup> The racialization of the monstrous is, of course, not unique to Mahmoody. See, for example, scholarly analysis of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* as an expression of anxieties about exogamy. Cf. Stephen D. Arata, “The Occidental Tourist: ‘Dracula’ and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization,” *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (July 1, 1990): 621–645; John Allen Stevenson, “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula,” *PMLA* 103, no. 2 (March 1988): 139.

<sup>50</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 117, 131; see also Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 13. On this point, see also Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: the Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 75: “Integral to [racism as a] set of linked discursive, economic, and political histories were constructions of masculinities and femininities along racially differentiated lines. Foremost was the construction in racist discourses of the sexuality of men and women of color as excessive, animalistic, or exotic in contrast to the ostensibly restrained or ‘civilized’ sexuality of white women and men.”

“racialization” refers to the assigning of supposedly indelible qualities to a group of disparate people based on an assumption of shared behaviors and physical attributes.<sup>51</sup> That *Daughter* is set in Iran should complicate Mahmoody’s racialization of Islam, as many Iranians are phenotypically white.<sup>52</sup> Mahmoody circumvents this complication by eliding Persian and Arab masculinities.<sup>53</sup>

Mahmoody’s racialization of her husband and Islam supports her insistence that both are indelibly foreign, almost biologically incapable of assimilating to American culture.<sup>54</sup> As literary scholar Farzaneh Milani observes in her 2011 *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*, narratives like *Daughter* portray anti-Americanism as “written in the Iranian nation’s collective DNA.”<sup>55</sup> Ethnic studies scholar Sylvia Chan-Malik further 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

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<sup>51</sup> Khyati Y. Joshi, “The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (2006): 211–2.

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, “Portrayal of Iranians in U.S. Motion Pictures,” 179; though she notes that “paradoxically, at the same time that Iranians are often confused with Arabs, they are erroneously perceived as having white privilege rather than occupying a marginalized ethnic status.”

<sup>53</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 6-7, 47. On this point, see also Norton, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Iraq of Our Imagination.”

<sup>54</sup> Such an assertion is deeply ironic, as Sylvia Chan-Malik observes in her excellent “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): 112 – 140. Chan-Malik points out that “from Betty’s perspective, [Bozorg] appears to be the only Muslim in Michigan, an exotic anomaly” (115). However, “by the early 1980s...Detroit had already become home to a large diaspora of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East (including many Iranians), as well as being the birthplace and a central headquarters for the Nation of Islam (NOI)... The multilayered history of Islam within various immigrant and African American communities does not exist in Betty’s America—only the singular image of a violent, two-faced, and irrevocably foreign Moody” (115).

<sup>55</sup> Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 216. More: “There is no mention of the long history of friendship between the two nations that predated the Islamic Revolution. Nothing is said about the decades of valued alliance between the two governments before the hostage crisis. Instead, an angry sea of chest-pounding, fist-shaking mobs burn effigies of the American president, trample on the American flag, and scream anti-American slurs and ‘death to America’ like a mantra” (216).



love the United States and partakes in all of its privileges while secretly harboring the mind and soul of a fanatical fundamentalist.”<sup>56</sup>

Mahmoody racializes her monstrous depiction of Islam and Muslim masculinity by implying 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:

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.<sup>57</sup> His “reversion” to monstrous Muslim behaviors seems inevitable.

The film’s depiction of this monstrous racialization is, with the exception of the exchange noted above, at once omnipresent and ephemeral. The actors cast as Iranians are phenotypically Arab for the most part. Alfred Molina, who plays Bozorg “Moody” Mahmoody, is of Spanish and Italian descent. The film depicts Iranians as cacophonous, chaotic, irrationally devout and loyal to a fanatical political regime. Betty Mahmoody’s character, played by Sally Field, insists that her husband’s desire to remain in Iran is somehow a reversion to his biological roots: “I know what's been going on. They've got no right. You've got to resist it.” Bozorg’s character replies: “I'm a Muslim. This is where I should be. This is where my family should be.” Note that he identifies as

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<sup>56</sup> Chan-Malik, “Chadors, Feminists, Terror The Racial Politics of U.S. Media Representations of the 1979 Iranian Women’s Movement,” 115.

<sup>57</sup> 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.

*Muslim*, rather than Iranian –an elision of Islam and foreign identity, suggesting that Muslims cannot also be Americans.

The racialization of Muslim masculinity as monstrous is more overt in the pulp nonfiction version of *NWMD*. Both Bozorg Mahmoody's foreignness and his frustrated desire to assimilate to American culture are refrains throughout the book. When she met him, Mahmoody recounts, Bozorg aspired to be an American. He claimed to never want to return to Iran and even applied for American citizenship.<sup>58</sup> But reassurances from friends that he had been "thoroughly Americanized," Mahmoody remained doubtful.<sup>59</sup> She attributes their domestic disputes—his failure to put her name on their joint checking account; his expectation of "unquestioning obedience" from her sons—to their "cultural differences."<sup>60</sup>

The 1979 revolution in Iran exacerbated Bozorg's foreignness: "the revolution took place in our home as well as in Iran. Moody began to say his Islamic prayers with a piety I had not witnessed in him before. He made contributions to various Shiite groups."<sup>61</sup> The expatriot Iranians of her acquaintance "proved to be stubborn about assimilating western culture. Even those who lived in America for decades often remained isolated, associating mainly with other expatriate Iranians. They retained their Islamic faith and their Persian customs."<sup>62</sup> Note Mahmoody's lack of reflection on motivations for expatriate Iranians remaining isolated in the wake of transnational conflict between the United States and Iran. She even goes so far as to suggest that Bozorg deserved prejudicial treatment because of his public identification with Iran's political upheaval. While she admits

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<sup>58</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 47-49, 211.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Bozorg faced “racial prejudice,” she insists that “much of it was self-inflicted.”<sup>63</sup> An extended visit from Bozorg’s nephew Mammal finally reveals the indolent authoritarianism of Muslim masculinity. Not only does Mammal boss and spy on Betty, but he exacerbates Bozorg’s supposedly inherent laziness and authoritarianism.

These racialized allegations allow Mahmoody to portray Bozorg’s abuse and authoritarianism as a reversion to his “true” nature. Her husband “unAmericanized” his speech during their first days in Tehran<sup>64</sup>; “the longer [they] remained in Iran, the more [Bozorg] succumbed to the unfathomable pull of his native culture.”<sup>65</sup> Mahmoody insists that the longer they stayed in Iran, Bozorg “reverted more and more to his Iranian personality.”<sup>66</sup>

I saw my husband, who had lived in the United States for so many years, *backslide* more and more into his old Iranian thinking and behavior. . . . I had married the American Moody and the Iranian Moody was an unwelcome stranger to me.<sup>67</sup>

Note the language of reversion, of “backsliding,” in this passage. Mahmoody depicts her husband’s behavior, not as a desperate attempt to relocate their family, but as an inevitable reversion to his monstrous, racialized, essentially foreign identity. She further observes this transformation while Bozorg prays: “once more, before my eyes, he changed from an American into an Iranian.”<sup>68</sup> The linking of “reversion” to Iranian identity and the act of prayer further reinforces Mahmoody’s racialization of Islam.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 349; emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 351.

Puar and Rai note that the construction of Muslim men as monstrous functions “as a screen to project both the racist fantasies of the West and the disciplining agenda of patriotism.”<sup>69</sup> These monstrous portrayals of Muslim men infantilize the audience, insisting that “the monster is the enemy. The enemy must be hunted down to protect you and all those women and children that you do not know, but we know.”<sup>70</sup> In this way, Puar and Rai argue, discourses of monstrosity render Americans docile, willing to accommodate foreign policies they might find otherwise objectionable.<sup>71</sup> This version of Muslim masculinity at once renders Muslim men legitimate targets of containment and discipline while reifying American domesticity as imperiled and in need of saving.<sup>72</sup>

Mahmoody is at some pains to insist that the racialized and uncanny monstrosity imperiling American domesticity is religious in nature. As Puar notes in *Terrorist Assemblages*: “religious belief is thus cast, in relation to other factors fueling terrorism, as the overflow, the final excess that impels monstrosity – the ‘different attitude toward violence’ signaling these uncivilizable forces. Difference itself is pathological. *In the liberal-secular imaginary, religion is also always already pathological.*”<sup>73</sup> Thus in the figure of the domestic Monster-Terrorist-Fag, the monstrosity of domestic terrorism is necessarily linked to an excessive and violent religiosity.

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<sup>69</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 131.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> See also Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 232-3 on this point: “Books hailed as authoritative windows into the Islamic world carry political as well as ethical responsibilities...Perhaps we should question distortions of truth and betrayals of history as well as the politics of publishing and image making. Perhaps we should ask why we are so easily seduced by plots that resemble fairy tales, with monstrous wardens on one side and helpless prisoners on the other. We live in a time when 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.”

<sup>72</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 135-6.

<sup>73</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 51; emphasis added.

## Terrorist

Rhetorical constructions of the Muslim man as terrorist—which is to say violent and religiously excessive—are perhaps the most conspicuous and familiar of the tropes Mahmoody uses to marginalize Islam as necessarily un-American.<sup>74</sup> However, the terrorists in *Daughter* are domestic; the primary targets of masculine, Muslim violence are American wives and daughters.

Both the film and pulp nonfiction versions of *NWMD* are rife with domestic violence. The cinematic depictions of abuse are less graphic and shorter. The Bozorg Mahmoody character begins hitting his wife at the 34 minute mark in the film. He slaps Betty and shakes his fist in her face, shouting “you listen to me. You’re in my country now. You’re my wife. You do as I say, you understand me? We’re staying here.” When Betty returns from a covert visit to the Swiss embassy, Bozorg punches her in the face, slaps her, and pushes her against the wall, vowing that should Betty “try anything like this again, I’ll kill you. I’ll kill you.” When Betty and Mahtob arrive late to Mahtob’s school, Bozorg beats them both in front of school officials, shoving Betty against a wall, hitting his daughter, and throwing his wife to the ground. He then drags her out the door, threatening that “I’ll kill you. I’m going to cut you up. You’re going to be dead.” These scenes of domestic violence frequently pan to static images of the Ayatollah, soldiers frantically shouting and kissing the Qur’an. Betty watches Friday prayers at the University of Tehran from the terrace of Bozorg’s family home, the backdrop for which is a mural depicting bloody swords labeled Israel, USA, Saudi, and USSR. In this way, the film connects the domestic violence Bozorg inflicts upon his wife and the political and military violence occurring in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The *Daughter* book provides more detailed accounts of Bozorg’s domestic violence. According to Mahmoody’s account, Bozorg “slammed [Betty] onto the bed” while threatening to

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<sup>74</sup> On this point, see Norton, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Iraq of Our Imagination:” “The particular form of masculinity ascribed to Arab men in general, and to the holders of Arab power in particular, emphasizes violence. Arab ‘strongmen’ and ‘madmen’ are identified with the making of war and the sponsorship of terrorism, with military rule, and with the violent repression of dissent. This is confounded, in academic and political discourse and in popular culture, with reiterations of Arab masculinity.”

keep her in Iran until she died.<sup>75</sup> He rigidly controls her access to the phone when she contacts her parents: “he told me what to say, and he listens carefully to the conversation. His demeanor was threatening enough to make me obey.”<sup>76</sup> His behavior is “erratic,” keeping Betty “off balance.”<sup>77</sup> Bozorg kicks Mahtob in the back for disobeying him, and then screams, curses, and beats both Betty and Mahtob after they return from the Swiss embassy.<sup>78</sup> Mahmoody provides detailed accounts of her husband’s violence and death threats; she recalls that her “body felt like one huge bruise.”<sup>79</sup> She fears for her life: “the severe beating intensified the risks that lay ahead; my injuries were proof that Moody was, indeed, crazy enough to kill me—kill us—if anything set off his anger.”<sup>80</sup> When Betty and Mahtob try to resist this abuse, Bozorg’s attacks become animalistic: he scratches and bites them.<sup>81</sup>

Bozorg’s abuse is an instantiation of the domestic abuses Betty fears from Iran’s Islamic government. A note on the book’s copyright page explains that *NWMD* “is a true story. The characters are authentic, the events real. But the names and identifying details of certain individuals have been disguised in order to protect them and their families against the possibility of arrest and execution by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”<sup>82</sup> Mahmoody rips her IUD from her cervix because she fears execution should an Iranian doctor or official find it.<sup>83</sup> Thus *Daughter*

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<sup>75</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 40.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-101, 185-7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* copyright page. See also Milani, *Words, Not Swords* on the fraught verifiability of such accounts – which becomes all the more problematic when those narratives are they’re ahistorical and/or just incorrect, but are read as factual and authoritative.

<sup>83</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 230.

implies that the domestic terrorism of Muslim masculinity enacts 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 depiction of) Islam.

Excessive and violent religiosity invades Mahmoody's domestic sphere throughout the film; the material culture of Islam is everywhere linked with state-sanctioned violence and militarization. The car that takes them from the airport passes intimidating military vehicles on the way to Bozorg's family home. Cacophonous calls to prayer resound through the house. Soldiers kiss the Qur'an on the television she watches; the *pasdar* (religious police) menace her when she fails to cover properly in public. Bozorg's nephew chides her, explaining "you must not to be careless! Every single hair that is not covered is like a dagger that you aim at the heart of our martyrs." Calls to prayer within the home disturb the Mahmoody marital bed. When Betty good-naturedly tries to cajole him into ignoring an early morning call, Bozorg responds angrily: "What's the matter with you? I'm with my family. They're sayyeds. Do you know what that means? They're direct descendants of Mohammed. They deserve a little respect. Of course, to the sophisticated American that all must seem so incredibly primitive."<sup>84</sup> As Bozorg imprisons and abuses his wife, "he seems to do so in the name of Islam as when he slaps her face, boasting, 'I'm a Muslim!'"<sup>85</sup> 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."<sup>86</sup> The film intersperses Betty's final flight out of Tehran with menacing images of Ayatollah Khomeini. The message is clear: the audience should understand that Bozorg, Iran, and Muslim masculinity are intimately connected through an excessive, overwhelming, and incomprehensible mode of religiosity.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> This is an unusually nuanced moment for the film, but the moment's nuance is negated by Bozorg's own early characterization of family as primitive.

<sup>85</sup> Jack G. Shaheen, "Hollywood's Muslim Arabs," *Muslim World* 90, no. 1/2 (Spring 2000): 22.

<sup>86</sup> Here again Mahmoody implies that American and Muslim identities are mutually exclusive.

The pulp nonfiction version of *Daughter* is more explicit about linking violent masculinity and excessive religiosity. Mahmoody “marveled at the power their society and their religion held over” Iranians.<sup>88</sup> Bozorg’s family condones and even facilitates his abuses, “clad in the self-righteous robes of fanaticism”<sup>89</sup> When she wants to condemn religious regulations of women’s behavior and dress, Betty finds herself silenced: “I was ready to launch into a tirade against the oppression of women in Iran, but all around me hovered insolent, superior-looking men fingering their *tassbeads* and mumbling ‘*Allahu akbar*,’ as women wrapped in *chadors* sat in quiet subservience.”<sup>90</sup> Betty 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.”<sup>91</sup> In these ways, Mahmoody’s narrative constructs Muslim masculinity as domestic terrorism, enacting intimate violence authorized by excessive religiosity.

## Fag

The “monster-terrorist” Puar and Rai theorize is also a “fag,” represented by a sort of “failed heterosexuality.”<sup>92</sup> The excessive and violent religiosity of the domestic terrorist is also sexualized as perverse, pitted against what Puar and Rai call an “aggressive heterosexual [American] patriotism.”<sup>93</sup> “Terrorist masculinities,” Puar proposes, are “failed and perverse”; rhetorics of monstrous terrorism

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<sup>87</sup> Muslims are literally incomprehensible throughout the film – the Persian and Arabic dialogue is unsubtitled. Cf. Shaheen, “Hollywood’s Muslim Arabs”: “The editing implies that the offensive actions of Muslims towards American women and the behavior of Iran’s late Ayatollah are clearly connected.”

<sup>88</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 181, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 124. Puar moreover notes historical linkages b/w periods of national crisis and pathologization of sexuality (2007 xiii). In the case of Gilbert’s *Not Without My Daughter*, both the Iran hostage crisis and the first Gulf War serve as context for the film.

<sup>93</sup> Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 117.



render “Muslim masculinity ...simultaneously pathologically excessive and yet repressive...virile yet emasculated, monstrous yet flaccid.”<sup>94</sup> Thus the domestic terrorism of Muslim masculinity is at once lascivious and impotent.

Mahmoody confesses that she initially found her husband’s racialized foreignness exotic and desirable.<sup>95</sup> Bozorg “was a gentle lover, caring for my pleasure as much as his own. I had never experienced such a strong physical attraction. We could not seem to get close enough to each other. All night long we slept in an embrace.”<sup>96</sup> When they arrive in Iran, however, Bozorg’s sexuality becomes monstrous.<sup>97</sup> Even after captivity and violence mar their relationship, Bozorg occasionally 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. “During the next several minutes [of intercourse] 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.”<sup>98</sup> Mahmoody accommodates her husband’s repellant desires to facilitate her escape attempts. “Sex with Moody was merely one of many ugly experiences I knew I would have to endure in order to fight for freedom.”<sup>99</sup> 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.”<sup>100</sup> Yet Mahmoody notes that this “feigned affection” heightens her anxiety about becoming pregnant “by a man [she]

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<sup>94</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xxv.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. de Hart, “Not Without My Daughter: On Parental Abduction, Orientalism, and Maternal Melodrama,” 55. The fetishization of non-westerners as exotic and sexually desirable is, of course, standard trope of orientalism. On this point, see Said’s discussion of Flaubert. Said, *Orientalism*, 6, 8, 11, 15, etc.

<sup>96</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 50-1.

<sup>97</sup> de Hart, “Not Without My Daughter: On Parental Abduction, Orientalism, and Maternal Melodrama,” 55.

<sup>98</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 83.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

loathed.”<sup>101</sup> She later classified these “horrid act[s]” as instances of marital rape.<sup>102</sup> It is also possible to read the detailed and extensive narratives of domestic abuse as having sexual connotations: Mahmoody refers to her husband’s “sadistic fantasies,” and beating-as-penetration is an established storytelling trope.<sup>103</sup> The monstrosity of Bozorg’s sexuality marks these events as “perverse” instantiations of Muslim male sexuality.<sup>104</sup>

Mahmoody portrays Bozorg’s monstrous sexuality as conforming to broader Iranian/Muslim culture. Those sympathetic with her plight warn her that those who promise to smuggle foreigners out of Iran often rape and murder the people they’ve been hired to help.<sup>105</sup> Betty eventually dismisses these concerns, as she “had already been robbed, kidnapped, and raped” by her own husband.<sup>106</sup> In her interactions with other Iranian men, Betty finds herself molested by a “particularly pungent Iranian” bus driver<sup>107</sup>; she and her friend Alice are both groped by Iranian taxi drivers.<sup>108</sup> The film and pulp nonfiction versions of *Daughter* also portray 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.”<sup>109</sup> Here again we see connections

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>103</sup> 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.

<sup>104</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xxv.

<sup>105</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 136, 332, 367.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 274-5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 264, 300-1.

drawn between sexual predation and religious fanaticism, also evidenced in repeated reports of the *pasdar* (Iranian religious/military police) kidnapping, raping, and execute women, as well as men from other Muslim countries (notably Iraq and Afghanistan) raping and murdering Iranian girls.<sup>110</sup> The cumulative effect of these anecdotes is to construct Muslim masculinity as sexually predatory, lascivious, and abusive.<sup>111</sup>

But in keeping with Puar's analysis, the rapacious sexual desire of Muslim masculinity is rendered impotent in *Daughter* – primarily through Betty's own American sexual exceptionalism, as I will explore in the following section. In the film, constant calls to prayer disrupt the Mahmoody marital bed; Bozorg turns vicious when Betty tries to lure him into staying. In the book, Mahmoody's descriptions of their conjugal relations are unflinchingly denigrating. Her accounts of their sexual encounters emphasize that sex between her and her husband 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.<sup>112</sup> Even in the United States, the Mahmoodys faced marital troubles while Bozorg was unemployed; Betty reports that they went five months without even kissing.<sup>113</sup> The birth of his daughter further emasculated him: "'Why is she a girl' was the accusation he had meant to level at me. His Islamic manhood wounded at the arrival of a firstborn daughter, he left us on our own that night, when he should have been at our side. *That was not the kind of manhood I wanted.*"<sup>114</sup> In Iran, Mahmoody forces herself to make sexual overtures in an attempt to make peace, but Bozorg refuses her – again implying a failed and flaccid masculinity:

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 386, 276, 291-2, 293.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Norton, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Iraq of Our Imagination."

<sup>112</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 83, 258.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 218; emphasis added.

“On those nights that Moody chose to stay with me, we slept in the same bed, but he was distant. A few times, desperately fighting for freedom, I edged close to him and put my head on his shoulder, nearly retching with the effort. But Moody was uninterested anyway. He groaned and turned over, away from me.”<sup>115</sup> The clearest construction of Bozorg’s impotence is Mahmoody’s use of contraception without her husband’s knowledge. She has an IUD inserted without his knowledge, and after she removes it out of fear of execution, she smuggles oral contraceptives out of Bozorg’s medical supplies.<sup>116</sup> Though he threatens to take another wife to provide him sons, these threats amount to nothing.<sup>117</sup> Severe infant deformities among Bozorg’s extended family bear further testament to the thwarted virility of his Muslim masculinity: his niece and nephew, having prayed for a son, must go on a religious pilgrimage every year of their lives – even though the hoped-for son was born with brain damage and his feet twisted backwards.<sup>118</sup> Mahmoody remarks on several occasions about the prevalence of infant deformity in Tehran. Without evidence, she attributes said deformities to “inbreeding” and “intermarriage.”<sup>119</sup> In these ways, Mahmoody renders Muslim sexuality simultaneously impotent and horrifying.

This understanding of Muslim sexuality as simultaneously excessive and impotent contributes to Mahmoody’s construction of Muslim masculinity as monstrous, terrorist, and sexually perverse – marking the targets of that sexuality as imperiled and in need of rescue. In addition, as Diaz argues in his review of *Terrorist Assemblages*, such a construction of hypersexualized Muslim masculinity “negates and disavows the multiple ways that the United States itself limits particular

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 133, 225.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 228-9.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 16, 32.

sexualities and sexual practices within its border.”<sup>120</sup> Mahmoody relegates sexual violence and abuse to a foreign, racialized, and religiously fanatical sphere.

Mahmoody’s construction of Muslim masculinity as domestic terrorism corresponds with Puar and Rai’s concept of the monster-terrorist-fag. *Daughter* portrays monstrosity as uncanny and racialized, terrorism as violent and religiously excessive, and sexual deviance as paradoxically lascivious and impotent. Mahmoody’s characterization of Muslim men as monsters-terrorists-fags corresponds with “stagings of US nationalism via a praxis of sexual othering, one that exceptionalizes [American sexual] identities...vis-à-vis Orientalist constructions of ‘Muslim sexuality.’”<sup>121</sup> As we proceed, I next explore the construction of Betty Mahmoody’s own American sexual exceptionalism that takes shape through the characterization of Muslim masculinity as domestic terrorism.

### *Body Fashioning Freedom: Betty Mahmoody’s Sexual Exceptionalism*

In sharp contrast to her monster-terrorist-fag of a husband, Betty Mahmoody constructs self as sexually exceptional throughout *Daughter*. In this section, I will first engage sexual exceptionalism as Puar theorizes the concept in *Terrorist Assemblages*. I will then examine Mahmoody’s rhetoric of American sexual exceptionalism throughout *Daughter*, which I suggest is mostly clearly demonstrated through her attempts to protect and liberate the product of that exceptionalism, her daughter. Finally, I will problematize this exceptionalist rhetoric, noting in particular the ways her arguments for exceptionalism bolster Mahmoody’s indictment of exogamy. *Daughter* articulates and authorizes American religious intolerance of Islam by insinuating that Muslim men are sexually perverse. At the

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<sup>120</sup> Robert Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” *Criticism* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 537.

<sup>121</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 4. Note that American sexual exceptionalism as it functioned during the 1980s to early 1990s in conflicts with Iran and Iraq did not deploy the kinds of homonationalistic rhetorics Puar describes in the early 21st century.

same time, the narrativization condemns exogamy by suggesting that Muslims are excessively religious.

## Defining Sexual Exceptionalism

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar argues that exceptionalism “paradoxically signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority).”<sup>122</sup> She maintains that discourses of sexual exceptionalism produce the United States as “an exceptional nation-state,” one whose policies and moralities emerge as somehow unique and universally applicable.<sup>123</sup> Sexual exceptionalism may be read as a discourse of “moral superiority,”<sup>124</sup> but such a reading must account both for conflation of morality with a conservative Christian sexual ethic and for the permission the state grants itself to enforce or suspend that morality during a perceived (but ultimately false) “state of exception.”<sup>125</sup>

Discourses of American sexual exceptionalism produce and require an Other: what Puar calls “terrorist bodies” – the bodies of Muslim men marked as monstrous, terrorist, and sexually perverse. Thus rhetorics of American sexual exceptionalism construct themselves as “liberated,” in opposition to a “perverse” and monolithic Muslim sexuality.<sup>126</sup> Puar suggests that sexual

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 3, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>125</sup> Puar’s most telling example is the public discourse surrounding the Abu Ghraib torture photos that circulated in popular media in 2006. She notes that even those who condemned the sexual humiliation practices depicted consistently emphasized that such practices were *especially* humiliating for Muslims, thus producing singular definition of “Muslim sexuality” and reifying that sexuality as somehow more repressed than its western/American counterpart. This encapsulates the particular mode of American sexual exceptionalism that forms the core of Puar’s argument in *Terrorist Assemblages*: Americans understand themselves to be at once exceptionally heterosexual, and yet more accepting of (certain kinds of) homosexuality than their Middle Eastern/Central Asian enemies. The incorporation of limited acceptance of queerness is what Puar terms homonationalism. *Terrorist Assemblages* demonstrates that American sexual exceptionalism in post-9/11 America relies on discourses of homonationalism to construct Muslim men as terrorist bodies; she also argues that homonationalism necessarily excludes and occludes many queers from its protections, particularly on the basis of race, class, and sexual practices.

<sup>126</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xxiv; see also Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” 537.

exceptionalism defines this singular Muslim sexuality through “discourses of sexual repression,” American sexual exceptionalism understands “Muslim sexuality” as necessarily repressive and repressed.<sup>127</sup> This ideology of sexual exceptionalism moreover also serves to mask internal American “policing of the boundaries of acceptable gender, race, and class formations,” which is to say that the construction of “Muslim sexuality” as repressive—in opposition to “American sexuality” as “liberated”—obscures the ways in which American heteronormativity constructs and compels certain raced, classed, and gendered attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors.<sup>128</sup> I also include the mutually reinforcing regulation of religion and sexuality as key to American sexual exceptionalist discourses.<sup>129</sup> Inasmuch as American heteronormativity developed within and depends on a normalized Protestant sexual ethic, sexual exceptionalism likewise constructs and compels religiously-informed attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors among contemporary Americans.

Identifying the Muslim man as monster-terrorist-fag is crucial to the construction of America as sexually exceptional. “Sexual deviancy is linked to the process of discerning, othering, and quarantining terrorist bodies, but these racially and sexually perverse figures also labor in the service of disciplining and normalizing subjects worthy of rehabilitation *away from* these bodies.”<sup>130</sup> In *Daughter*, Mahmoody’s construction of herself as sexually exceptional (and her daughter as a product of that exceptionalism) produces her husband (and Muslim men) as monster-terrorist-fag. But, as Puar explains, such exceptionalist rhetoric further disciplines and normalizes American sexuality as something distinct and precious, in need of protection or rehabilitation from the perverse and racialized sexuality of Muslim masculinity. In this way, *Daughter’s* dual construction of Muslim

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<sup>127</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 9.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> On this point, cf. Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Beacon Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>130</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 38.

masculinity as domestic terrorism and American femininity as sexually exceptional articulates and authorizes both anti-Muslim religious intolerance and sexually regulatory scripts against exogamy.<sup>131</sup>

## Betty Mahmoody's American Sexual Exceptionalism

Mahmoody's "authorial self-mythologizing" does not limit discourses of exceptionalism to explicitly sexual behaviors.<sup>132</sup> Rather, the author filters her entire experience in Iran through Muslim masculinity's attempts to constrain her exceptionalism.<sup>133</sup> Mahmoody emphasizes her own heroic agency by touting her remarkable resolve in the face of beatings and marital rape, as well as her ability to protect and redeem the product of her contact with the monstrous sexuality of Muslim masculinity – that is, her daughter Mahtob. Mahmoody presents her daughter as the final and most compelling evidence of her own exceptionalism. Despite her half-monstrous parentage, Mahtob emerges from captivity and abuse as resolutely and exceptionally American as her mother.

The character Mahmoody constructs for herself is rooted in a deeply embodied, private (which is to say apolitical), and individualistic heroic agency. Mahmoody establishes this heroic agency by narrating her own courageous resolution in the face of domestic abuse and marital rape; she provides the most graphic example of this resolve in the narration of removing her intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD). She constructs this heroic degree of agency in contrast to Tehran,

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<sup>131</sup> On exceptionalism as regulatory script, see *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>132</sup> Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 218.

<sup>133</sup> Mahmoody's frequent and vicious invectives against covering provide ample evidence of this point. The film makes this explicit as Betty Mahmoody's character challenges her husband: "to cover them up and hide them away – are they so afraid of women's sexuality or what?" (It is worth noting that the film briefly introduces complexity around covering through Mahmoody's response: "No, no, no. That's not the reason. Iranian women like to wear the chador. It's a mark of respect." However, this complexity is ultimately negated by Bozorg's abuses.) Scholarship on popular culture and Islam flooded with conversations about covering; for an excellent analysis of multivalent function of covering in Islam, see Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," in *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Anne Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 420–446. On the appropriation and commodification of the material culture of covering by western feminists, see Ellen McLarney, "The Burqa in Vogue: Fashioning Afghanistan," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 1–23, 120; Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2002): 339–354; and 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.



which she characterizes as a dangerously hypersexualized environment. She emphasizes her privacy, individualism, and agency, which readers are led to infer is inherent to all “normal Americans.” 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 religious state.

Mahmoody consistently narrates her determination in response to domestic abuse (which, as I argue above, can be read as carrying sexual connotations) and marital rape. One page after her husband threatens to kill her, Mahmoody is resolute about her ability to save herself and her daughter:

I was sick, enervated, depressed, losing my tenuous hold on reality. Moody seemed satisfied that I was cornered, confident that I would not, could not, stand up and fight for my freedom... Before I knew it, the seasons—time itself—would merge into nothingness. The longer we remained here, the easier it would be to acquiesce... Even if I had the will, who had the way to help us? I wondered. Was there anyone who could get me and my child out of this nightmare? Gradually, despite the haze brought about by my illness and the drugs Moody was giving me, the answer came to me. *No one could help. Only I could get us out of this.*<sup>134</sup>

Despite beatings, isolation, and the prescription medication her husband provided her that exacerbated her “haze,”<sup>135</sup> Mahmoody is confident in her ability to free herself and her daughter from captivity in Iran. This resolution becomes a refrain throughout the book. Despite insomnia and fatigue, Mahmoody refuses the medications her husband offers her. She affirms that “my spirits brightened when I took myself off Moody’s medication and *stealed my will* to the perilous task ahead of me.”<sup>136</sup> The author consistently employs this dual rhetorical form, which emphasizes both the direness of her circumstances and the tenacity of her indomitable spirit. After a particularly severe beating she incurred while trying to prevent her husband from removing her daughter from their

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<sup>134</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 72 (emphasis added).

<sup>135</sup> It is worth noting that Bozorg was providing this medication at her request and in no way, even by Mahmoody’s own admission, was he forcing her to take it.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 81 (emphasis added).

apartment, Mahmoody insists “I wanted to scream in agony from the pain in my back that was accentuated by the effort of standing on tiptoe [to see out her daughter from the window], but *I could not give in to my own hurt now.*”<sup>137</sup> And again, after her husband has forcibly removed her daughter from their apartment, Mahmoody is resolute: “Darkness encompassed me now and I wrestled with my faith. *Somehow I had to muster courage and resolve.*”<sup>138</sup>

Mahmoody couples these frequent affirmations of her own determination with statements highlighting her sexual commodification of her body. That she is willing and able to trade her “affections” to lure her abusive husband into complacency again functions to emphasize her sexual exceptionalism. “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]”<sup>139</sup>

Mahmoody narrates 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. 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.*”<sup>140</sup> 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.*”<sup>141</sup> Narrating instances of what Mahmoody describes as marital rape in terms of

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<sup>137</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 199 (emphasis added).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 208 (emphasis added).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 84, (emphasis added).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 258, (emphasis added).

commodification —the exchange of sex for freedom—emasculates Bozorg and allows Mahmoody to reclaim her sexual agency, once more reaffirming her sexual exceptionalism. 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.

Mahmoody provides the most graphic description of her sexual exceptionalism by narrating the removal of her intrauterine contraceptive device, or IUD. While still in the United States, the author and her husband experienced many months of domestic discord after Bozorg was suspended 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.<sup>142</sup> She records that her husband warned her that using "preventing conception against the husband's wishes...was a capital offense."<sup>143</sup>

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.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> 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.

<sup>143</sup> 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." (<http://www.ivansahar.com/general-principles-of-iranian-constitution.htm>) The 1979 IRI 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.

<sup>144</sup> 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."<sup>145</sup> Here again, the IUD is evidence of Mahmoody's sexual exceptionalism and 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.<sup>146</sup>

Mahmoody's vivid narration of a relatively straightforward medical procedure dramatizes both the danger she thinks herself facing and her professedly 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 professed fear of hemorrhaging. 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 United States (birth control) renders the "Muslim sexuality" of Iran repressive and gruesome in contrast to America's allegedly "modern" and "liberated" sexuality. That the author would go to such lengths to protect herself—only to brave her sister-in-

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 230.

law's wrath to steal oral contraceptives a short time after—garishly illustrates Mahmoody's American sexual exceptionalism in the face of a purportedly life-threatening "Muslim sexuality."<sup>147</sup>

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 here again embodies American sexual exceptionalism.

I argued above that Mahmoody constructs Tehran as a hypersexualized masculine environment. She recounts being molested by public transportation workers on two separate occasions and witnessing the molestation of an American friend on another occasion. 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.<sup>148</sup> (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 Iran.) Mahmoody forbears these molestations to escape the family home. This mode of sexual exchange echoes her interactions with her husband, as I note above. It also foreshadows the extreme risks Mahmoody purports to take in escaping Iran. When friends warn her about the "terrible and sinister smugglers of northwest Iran" (the same smugglers who ultimately secure her freedom), the author avows that "they could pose no dangers more frightful than those threatened by my husband. I had already been robbed, kidnapped, and raped."<sup>149</sup> Mahmoody's accounts of her bravery in moving throughout greater Tehran further underscore her American sexual exceptionalism by emphasizing the repressiveness of "Muslim sexuality."

It is worth noting that 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

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 367.

aid. Rather, Mahmoody's American-ness 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."<sup>150</sup> Mahmoody's self-characterization is professedly individualistic and apolitical, something inherent to her nationality but separate from the acting government.<sup>151</sup>

*Daughter* includes frequent asides puzzling over how one "normal" woman could stumble into such dire straits: "how could an otherwise average American woman find herself in such an improbable predicament?"<sup>152</sup> (Here again notice Mahmoody's frequent allusions to her own nationality contrasted with the improbable hardships she faces in Iran.) Mahmoody's emphasis on her relative normalcy underscores her extraordinary resolve in overcoming such daunting and foreign circumstances while reifying her husband, his family, his country, and his religion as *abnormal*, in binary opposition to her American normalcy. Mahmoody's narrative also pits her individual privacy against Iranian/Muslim attempts to control her (American) body.<sup>153</sup> The author's construction of herself as "an otherwise average American woman" designates a demonstrably *private*, individual sexual exceptionalism – making that exceptionalism independent of the historically relative power of a particular governmental regime.

Sexual exceptionalism rather emerges in Mahmoody's narrative as a quality inherent to American identity. Finally, constructing herself as a private citizen exacerbates the degree of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 127. See also McAlister, "Iran, Islam, and the Terrorist Threat, 1979 - 1989," 146-7.

<sup>151</sup> On the "depoliticization of the individual" in captivity narratives, cf. McAlister, specifically regarding the Iran hostage crisis. Ibid. 145

<sup>152</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 386.

<sup>153</sup> McAlister, "Iran, Islam, and the Terrorist Threat, 1979 - 1989," 146-7.

violation the author alleges. Americans have commonly identified “‘the sexual’ as properly the domain of personal privacy and individual ownership and thus the ultimate site of violation.”<sup>154</sup> By locating her violation in the private—which is to say domestic—sphere, Mahmoody increases the affective efficacy of her narrative while establishing her American sexual exceptionalism as necessarily individualistic and (professedly, if not practically) apolitical.

Mahmoody’s American sexual exceptionalism is finally evident in her ability to rescue her daughter from Iranian captivity, and in the person of that daughter herself. The author confesses that she will risk almost anything to get herself and Mahtob out of Iran, but Mahmoody is unwilling to submit to her husband’s tyrannical rule. “Could I submit to life in Iran in order to keep Mahtob out of danger?” Mahmoody asks rhetorically. Her answer: “Hardly.”<sup>155</sup> But the author confesses that she will—indeed, *has*—stopped at nothing else to ensure her daughter’s safety. Indeed, Mahmoody reveals in the penultimate chapters that she only consented to visit Iran to forestall a seemingly inevitable divorce, which she feared would result in Bozorg stealing Mahtob away to Iran permanently. “The real reason I took Mahtob to Iran was this: I was damned if I did, but Mahtob was damned if I didn’t.”<sup>156</sup> Mahmoody explains that she risked her freedom and possibly her life to bring Mahtob to Iran for a visit, in the hopes of dissuading her husband from relocating there permanently with their daughter. When his abuse and captivity dash those hopes, she braves “the most dangerous” escape route from Iran through Turkey.<sup>157</sup>

Mahtob herself finally instantiates Mahmoody’s own American sexual exceptionalism. Though earlier the author worried about her daughter assimilating to Iranian/Muslim subservience,

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<sup>154</sup> 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.

<sup>155</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 103.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

Mahtob ultimately reveals herself to be as resolute as her mother. “I saw in the eyes of my six-year-old daughter a growing sense of determination, and I knew instantly that Moody had not beaten her into submission. Her spirit was bent, but not broken. She was *not* a dutiful Iranian child: *she was my resolute American daughter*.”<sup>158</sup> Mahtob’s youth only heightens this sense of resolution. Indeed, Mahmood’s daughter avows that while she “hate[s] Daddy for making us do this,” “*I can do anything I have to do to go to America*.”<sup>159</sup> Mahtob serves as the product and proof of Mahmood’s American sexual exceptionalism – as well as damning evidence of the dangers of exogamy – specifically the mixing of incompatible religious and national cultures.

### **Mahmood’s Jeremiad Against Exogamy**

Mahmood’s rhetorical self-construction as sexually exceptional serves two purposes. First, American sexual exceptionalism reifies the production of a singularly repressive (and religiously excessive) Muslim sexuality. Second, the author’s narration of herself as sexually exceptional authorizes her invective against exogamy – specifically against the combination of seemingly incompatible religio-national cultures.

Puar reads such discourses of exceptionalism in terms of transnational secularist discourses. *Terrorist Assemblages* suggests that “exceptionalism serves as a strategic and effective means of furthering violence against postcolonial populations by legitimizing secularism as the key ethical standard of communities in the global north.”<sup>160</sup> Puar is by no means alone in emphasizing the role of secularism in postcolonial violences: Talal Asad, Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, Charles Taylor, and William Cavanaugh have all made similar arguments.<sup>161</sup> Of these, however, Puar is alone

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 359 (emphasis added).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 394 (emphasis added).

<sup>160</sup> Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” 535.

<sup>161</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” Charles Taylor, “Sex &



in noting the role of sexual exceptionalism in shaping transnational secularist policies.<sup>162</sup> She insists that “it is precisely these secularist values that make the United States more ‘progressive,’ and what arguably makes *the country’s population more deserving of biopolitical preservation than ethnic and religious minorities within and outside its borders.*”<sup>163</sup> Unlike Charles Taylor and Pellegrini and Jakobsen (whom I discussed in my introduction), Puar does not acknowledge the normalized Protestant sexual ethic embedded in these transnational discourses of secularism. However, Puar’s point regarding the religiously and racially informed impulse toward biopolitical preservation of white middle-class politically moderate Christians is well-made.

I read *Not Without My Daughter* as an active participant in an (arguably unconscious) effort to preserve and protect America’s sexual exceptionalism at the expense of ethic and religious minorities – that is, as an invective against exogamy. As Chan-Malik notes in “Chadors, Feminists, Terror,” *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.’”<sup>164</sup>

Betty deHart highlights Mahmoody’s anti-exogamy rhetoric in her 2001 “Not Without My Daughter: On Parental Abduction, Orientalism, and Maternal Melodrama.” DeHart identifies *NWMD* as paramount in a popular publication trend, one produced by “orientalist discourse on mixed marriages.”<sup>165</sup> She attributes the genre’s appeal to western animosity toward Islam and to the

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Christianity: : How Has the Moral Landscape Changed?,” *Commonweal* 134, no. 16 (2007): 12 – 18, William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>162</sup> Pellegrini and Jakobsen do, however, note role of normalized Protestant sexual ethic in formation of specifically American secularism. See Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, “Introduction,” in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1–38.

<sup>163</sup> Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” 535, (emphasis added).

<sup>164</sup> Chan-Malik, “Chadors, Feminists, Terror: The Racial Politics of U.S. Media Representations of the 1979 Iranian Women’s Movement,” 134, (emphasis added).

<sup>165</sup> de Hart, “Not Without My Daughter: On Parental Abduction, Orientalism, and Maternal Melodrama,” 51.

articulation of “western superiority.”<sup>166</sup> In addition, deHart insists that Mahmoody’s exceptionalist rhetoric constructs white American women as “the most liberated and superior group of women on earth.”<sup>167</sup> The author further argues that tales of contact between white women and “the oriental male” effectively racialize the female protagonist, who must redeem (“de-racialize”) herself through “self-sacrificing conduct in helping the child return to its own, *i.e.* western, society.”<sup>168</sup> Thus we may read *Daughter* not only as a tale of captivity, but of atonement. Betty Mahmoody narrates her repentance of exogamy and is redeemed through the exceptional and heroic rescue of her child.

While for the most part I concur with deHart’s reading of *Daughter*, she fails to acknowledge Mahmoody’s subtle construction of her own secularized religiosity as at once “normal” and universally applicable. This construction is consistent throughout the book, though Mahmoody only identifies herself as Protestant (specifically as Free Methodist) once.<sup>169</sup> Her universalizing tendencies are evident in the elision of her Christian god with “the Moslem Allah.”<sup>170</sup> Her normalizing tendencies are most evident in the sharp narrative disparity between descriptions of the loud, disruptive, rote prayers of her Muslim in-laws and her private, improvised, heartfelt entreaties that her God return her and her daughter to America. A more secularized Christian ethic emerges in Mahmoody’s consistent indictments of Islam: too political, too loud, too material (especially with regard to clothing – see chador), too practice-based, too ecstatic, too irrational – altogether too much.<sup>171</sup> Islam, in short, instantiates bad religion for Mahmoody, and her readers are encouraged to

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 54, 59-60.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>170</sup> Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 51.

<sup>171</sup> On secularized Protestantism, see Janet R Jakobsen, “Queer Relations: A Reading of Martha Nussbaum on Same-Sex Marriage,” *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 19 (2010): 133–178 and Robert A. Orsi, “Snakes Alive! Religious Studies Between Heaven and Earth,” in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 177–204.

read *Daughter* similarly. Mahmoody's sexually exceptional discourse reifies Islam as irretrievably foreign and its adherents unsuitable for sexual congress.

## Conclusion

*Not Without My Daughter's* Islamophobic rhetoric produces Bozorg Mahmoody as a domestic terrorist (a monster-terrorist-fag, to be specific) and Betty Mahmoody as a paragon of American sexual exceptionalism. These parallel discourses operate to set perverse, repressive, racialized, religiously-excessive Muslim sexuality against liberated and secular American sexuality. In short, *Daughter* deploys language of American sexual exceptionalism to marginalize Islam as essentially un-American. Betty Mahmoody uses racialized American sexual norms, which as I argued in my introduction are informed by conservative Christian ethic, to articulate and authorize anti-Muslim religious intolerance, while deploying anti-Muslim sentiment to discourage exogamy.

Such exceptionalist language is problematic for several reasons. In addition to facilitating religious and sexual intolerance in contemporary America, discourses that pit American sexual exceptionalism against a singular "Muslim sexuality" collapse the practices, moralities, and beliefs of millions of people into a terrifyingly perverse entity easily dismissed as foreign. These discourses 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.

Books like *Not Without My Daughter* perpetuate orientalist attitudes toward the countries and peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia.<sup>172</sup> Such works capitalize on very real violences toward

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<sup>172</sup> 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.

women under oppressive regimes, Islamic or otherwise.<sup>173</sup> Mahmood'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.<sup>174</sup> Such rhetoric also precludes the possibilities of Muslim women's "negative freedom" or conservative agency, as argued by Saba Mahmood.<sup>175</sup> 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 (monster-terrorist-fag) male counterparts.<sup>176</sup> Such exceptionalist discourses moreover work "to suggest that, in contrast to [presumably white mainstream Christian] women in the United States, Muslim women are, at the end of the day, unsavable."<sup>177</sup>

Were *Daughter* an isolated incident, a single memoir of questionable facticity, we as scholars might be able to dismiss it as irrelevant. But *Daughter* represents much larger and more alarming trends: the overwhelming proliferation of pulp nonfiction and documentary accounts of women's Muslim captivity; and 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 rhetorics of domestic terrorism and American sexual exceptionalism serve to constitute one another, and in this interdependence, they demonstrate (as

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<sup>173</sup> 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.

<sup>174</sup> 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.

<sup>175</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 12.

<sup>176</sup> On this point, see especially Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"

<sup>177</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 5.

Diaz has suggested) “constant mobilization of sexuality as a policing mechanism that justifies state violence” – and, more insidiously, articulate and authorize religious and sexual intolerance.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” 537.

## Play Me Backwards: Feminist Complicity in the Satanic Panic

*You don't have to play me backwards<sup>1</sup>  
To get the meaning of my verse  
You don't have to die and go to hell  
To feel the devil's curse  
  
I'll stand before your altar  
And tell everything I know  
I've come to claim my childhood  
At the chapel of baby Rose*

Joan Baez (1992)

Scholars have widely credited Michelle Smith's accounts of satanic ritual abuse as shaping and even inciting America's "Satanic Panic."<sup>2</sup> Michelle Pazder, née Proby, aka Michelle Smith, first met with Dr. Lawrence Pazder in 1973 to discuss "problems that were rooted in her family background and upbringing."<sup>3</sup> They renewed their therapeutic relationship in 1977 when Smith became depressed

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<sup>1</sup> Baez's "Play Me Backwards" is a presumably fictional account of satanic ritual abuse. The title of the song refers to "backmasking," the suspected practice of rock bands hiding nefarious subliminal messages that fans (often assumed to be impressionable adolescents) could reveal by playing songs or whole albums in reverse. See James Richardson, "Satanism in the Courts: From Murder to Heavy Metal," in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. Joel Best, David G. Bromley, and James T. Richardson, Social Institutions and Social Change (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1991), 212, 213, 215. For more on public Christianity's conceptualization of popular music, and particularly heavy metal, as dangerous, see Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89-128.

<sup>2</sup> "Satanic Panic" refers to a period of widespread popular anxiety about demonic influences infiltrating childcare facilities, schools, the entertainment industry, and all levels of government. The Satanic Panic began in North America during the 1980s with the publication and dissemination of *Michelle Remembers* and eventually spread to the United Kingdom and much of northern Europe. At its height, this period of public anxiety encompassed suspicions of an international conspiracy involving wealthy and powerful figures who were abducting and abusing children for demonic sacrifices, prostitution, and pornography. The Satanic Panic faltered in the mid-1990s, in part due to an FBI report that found no such evidence of ritual abuse or occult activity. See Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Open Court Publishing, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder, *Michelle Remembers* (Pocket, 1989), 5. Smith's maiden name was Proby, and having married her former therapist, she is now Michelle Pazder. For the sake of continuity, I refer to her as Smith throughout this chapter. Despite the wide discreditation of *Michelle Remembers*, for the sake of narrative flow I have also omitted the word "allegedly" when referring to the events recounted in this book.

and physically ill after suffering a miscarriage.<sup>4</sup> Smith's general practitioner contacted Pazder with his concerns about the Smith's "extremely severe and persistent" grief and a possible "psychogenic aspect" to her extensive hemorrhaging.<sup>5</sup> During her first visits with Pazder, Smith expressed frustration:

There's still something bothering me... I still feel blocked. We talk about the things I *think* are the problems, and then I go home and spend half the night...wishing I could...I know there's something I want to tell you, but I don't know what it is! I know there's something there...and it's important – I know it's important!<sup>6</sup>

Smith struggled for weeks to access the "something" she wanted to tell Pazder. Finally, she arrived at Pazder's office, clad all in black, and for the first time, lay down on his couch.<sup>7</sup> After fidgeting and staring for several minutes, Smith's eyes widened into a look of "frozen terror."<sup>8</sup> She lay supine "locked in fear" for more than an hour, until Pazder reassured her that she could tell him about what was frightening her.<sup>9</sup>

Both agreed that unconventional methods were required to access this hidden, terrifying set of memories. They agreed to meet almost daily and to tape record their interactions so that Pazder could focus on "be[ing] totally there with [Smith], completely available to [her]."<sup>10</sup> This was important, Pazder insisted: "you can't go back all alone... you've got to have someone you trust go with you, someone you know it's safe with." Smith concurred: "I think I'm going to need you... It's safe with you. I feel safe with you. But it's so horrible..."<sup>11</sup> During their next meeting, Pazder "sat

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9 (original emphasis).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

quietly” with his hand on her head while Smith screamed for twenty-five minutes.<sup>12</sup> And then she began to remember.

Under Pazder’s ministrations, Smith accessed memories of trauma and abuse that Pazder identified as satanic.<sup>13</sup> In 1980, Smith and Pazder published these recollections in a “lurid, disturbing, and unforgettable” pulp nonfiction volume entitled *Michelle Remembers*.<sup>14</sup> Though now widely discredited, the book served as evidence in police seminars on alleged occult activity, senate testimony on the growing presence of “evil” in the United States, and the longest and most expensive criminal trial in US history of its time. *Michelle Remembers* and its authors had a direct and lasting influence on American law enforcement, juridical proceedings, psychological and psychiatric treatments, and news reporting during the 1980s and early 1990s. New religious movement scholars and sociologists of religion have gone so far as to identify *Michelle Remembers* as the catalyst for the decade-long, transnational period of moral anxiety commonly referred to as the Satanic Panic.

The Satanic Panic evidenced widespread popular fears about a centuries-long conspiracy of devil worshippers dedicated to the eventual destruction of organized government on a global scale. The machinations of these satanists allegedly manifested in animal mutilations, encouragement of adolescent fascinations with the occult, and perhaps most disturbingly, religiously motivated child sexual abuse. A vocal minority of journalists and therapists challenged these allegations and met with public suspicion and ridicule.<sup>15</sup> But following an eight-year federal investigation that cost

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>13</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 77. In describing the targets of accusations regarding ritual abuse throughout this chapter, I refer to these as satanists with a lowercase s. These satanists, of which no evidence exists, should not be confused with Satanists, members of the Church of Satan or the Temple of Set.

<sup>14</sup> Gareth Medway, *Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism* (New York University Press, 2001), 176.

<sup>15</sup> Nathan and Snedeker in particular describe the challenges of early criticism toward satanic ritual abuse allegations. As they note, “there was a time when publicly expressing skepticism about small children being ceremonially raped and tortured by organized groups was...practically an indictable stance. We can testify to this: in the late 1980s, [Nathan] had the police at her door, on a maliciously false report of child maltreatment, after publishing an article suggesting the innocence of a day-care teacher convicted of ritual abuse.” Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (iUniverse, 2001), ix.



taxpayers \$750,000, federal investigator Kenneth V. Lanning found no evidence to corroborate claims of what became known as satanic ritual abuse, or SRA.<sup>16</sup> By then, however, the Satanic Panic had already caused significant damage.

Rhetorics of satanic ritual abuse—shaped by *Michelle Remembers* and disseminated by the authors themselves and the genre they inspired—shifted accusations of child sexual abuse from the American households into the realm of the supernatural during the 1980s and early 1990s. Popular attributions of child sexual abuse to a fantastical and wholly imaginary international satanic conspiracy effectively removed that abuse beyond the domestic boundaries of normative American sexuality.

While I have discussed public understandings (and often misunderstandings) of minority religions throughout this dissertation, this chapter is unique in that the mode of religiosity most frequently discussed—that is, satanism—does not actually exist. There are, of course, Americans who identify as Satanists, members of the Church of Satan, the Temple of Set, and others influenced by the *Satanic Bible*.<sup>17</sup> There are those who practice witchcraft, usually identified as Neopagans or Witches, but these are earth-reverent and feminist modes of religiosity, actively opposed to the harming of living things.<sup>18</sup> There is no credible evidence to suggest that any group of Americans has ever practiced Satanism in the ways described by Pazder and Smith, or by the child-witnesses in the

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Wright, *Remembering Satan* (Random House Digital, Inc., 1995), 8, and Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 1. See also Kenneth V. Lanning, *Satanic Ritual Abuse* (National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (HarperCollins, 1976). Anton Szander LaVey founded the Church of Satan in 1966. Members emphasize the sanctity of human desire and animal instinct. Michael Aquino, formerly a member of the Church of Satan, founded the Temple of Set in 1975. Setians espouse elements of western esotericism; their practice is generally more formal and ritualized than that of Satanists. See James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism* (Prometheus Books, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Neopaganisms, Goddess worship, and other modes of feminist spirituality became popular in North America during the 1970s. See in particular Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America* (Penguin, 2006), Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-pagans in the United States* (Univ of South Carolina Press, 2003), and Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess: 10th Anniversary Edition* (HarperCollins, 2011).

McMartin trial and the adult women who recovered memories of childhood satanic ritual abuse, whom I will discuss later in this chapter.<sup>19</sup>

This is to say that the specter of satanism that haunts this case study is just that: a specter, an imaginary entity that reverses and defiles familiar religious practices, instantiating Americans' fears about child abuse, changing gender roles, and increasing religious difference. But in calling this satanism imaginary, I do not dismiss it as inconsequential. The American public's fear of an international conspiracy of devil worshippers preying on American children was very real and had substantial and lasting material consequences. In addition to the cost and duration of the nearly one hundred trials that followed allegations of satanic ritual abuse, people lost their jobs on the basis of such suspicions. American citizens were imprisoned, sometimes for years, on the basis of such accusations.<sup>20</sup> Religious minorities were harassed, and aspersions cast—sometimes by feminist activists—on feminist modes of religiosity.<sup>21</sup> In referring to an imaginary satanism, then, I gesture only toward the absence of evidence for the kinds of practices discussed in accounts of satanic ritual abuse.

I am particularly concerned with feminist tensions in the dissemination of the satanic ritual abuse moral panic – specifically the extent to which feminists employed the religious language and symbols of the Satanic Panic to promote activism against child sexual abuse.<sup>22</sup> Sharply diverging

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<sup>19</sup> Lanning, *Satanic Ritual Abuse*.

<sup>20</sup> In the Kern County child abuse cases, for example, at least 36 people were convicted and imprisoned on children's accusations of satanic ritual abuse. Thirty four were released upon appeal; two of the convicted died in prison. Maggie Jones, "Who Was Abused?," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2004, sec. Magazine, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/19/magazine/19KIDSL.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Temple of Set founder Michael Aquino was a particular target of popular speculation and police suspicion during this time. He and his wife Lilith were accused of child abuse during the late 1980s; the charges were later dropped for lack of evidence. See "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground," *The Geraldo Rivera Show* (NBC, October 22, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> As I noted in my introduction, "moral panic" refers to an intense public reaction to an issue or group perceived to threaten a culture's social order. On this issue, see in particular Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Taylor & Francis, 2011) and Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

from feminist anti-abuse campaigns of the 1970s, feminist anti-SRA advocates located incest and child sexual abuse not in the home, but in the religious and sexual machinations of satanists. These feminists invested extraordinary amounts of effort to spread awareness of the threat of satanic ritual abuse and the psychological diagnoses that often accompanied such abuse: multiple personality disorder and repressed memory syndrome. Ironically, these feminists' efforts promoted diagnoses that infantilized adult women abuse survivors, occluded domestic child sexual abuse (the victims of which were and are largely female), criminalized the (again, largely female) daycare workers who facilitated an unprecedented influx of mothers into the workforce, and cast aspersions on an emphatically feminist mode of emerging spirituality – religious witchcraft. Thus I argue that feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activism, directly informed by *Michelle Remembers* and its authors, both reinforced popular suspicions regarding religious minorities' sexual predation and restricted American women's religious and sexual freedoms.

In this chapter, I present *Michelle Remembers* as the earliest evidence of and a direct catalyst for widespread accusations of satanic ritual abuse in the United States throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s. I shall first introduce and contextualize *Michelle Remembers*, paying particular attention to the text's infantilization of Smith and construction of child abuse as a distinctly religious phenomenon, as well as to the relative paucity of sexual elements in the abuse Smith remembers. Next, I shall explore feminist responses to the book. I note the ways in which some feminists, in an attempt to combat child sexual abuse, used the religious language of satanic ritual abuse to relegated such abuses beyond the American domestic sphere, as acts foreign to and beyond the boundaries of normative American sexuality. I shall also examine the rampant sexualization of satanic ritual abuse in these feminist discourses. Finally, I shall problematize the feminist complicity in articulating and authorizing satanic ritual abuse accusations, demonstrating the extent to which feminist anti-SRA efforts complicated American women's participation in the workforce and in feminist modes of religiosity.

## *“You Can’t Go Back All Alone:” Michelle’s Memories of Ritual Abuse*

In her sessions with Pazder from the summer of 1976 until late November 1977, Michelle Smith recounted being terrorized and abused by a group of shadowy figures that “sound[ed] to [her] like witches.”<sup>23</sup> Several days a week, often for five to six hours a day, Smith narrated gruesome and sometimes impossible incidents of abuse. She related being beaten, thrown in the air, sodomized, restrained, forcibly contorted, smeared with filth, and made to assist in infanticide-by-crucifix and the murder of an imaginary friend.<sup>24</sup> Months into counseling, Pazder identified Smith’s molesters as satanists, and specifically as members of the Church of Satan.<sup>25</sup> Following this identification, Smith’s memories took on a decidedly demonic cast.

*Michelle Remembers* was the earliest instance of satanic ritual abuse memoirs, a genre that became extremely popular and influential in the decade following the book’s publication. *Michelle Remembers* shaped the satanic ritual abuse memoir in several key ways: most notably in the construction of child abuse as a supernatural religious phenomenon rather than a problem endemic to American households; the insistence on therapists as necessary for uncovering such abuse and the subsequent infantilization of the analysand-survivor; and the connection drawn between satanic ritual abuse and child sexual abuse (though this last is far less pronounced in *Michelle Remembers* than in subsequent satanic ritual abuse narratives). These elements would markedly inspire and shape the allegations of satanic ritual abuse that emerged throughout the United States and beyond in the 1980s and into the early 1990s.

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<sup>23</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 116-7. As I observed earlier, there is no evidence to support Smith and Pazder’s allegations of satanic ritual abuse. Indeed, Church of Satan founder and high priest Anton LaVey threatened the authors with a lawsuit for libel following the publication of *Michelle Remembers*. Pazder withdrew the allegation. Medway, *Lure of the Sinister*, 175 and Mary de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic* (McFarland, 2004), 24-5. It’s also worth noting that the events Smith remembered took place in 1954. LaVey did not found the Church of Satan until 1966.

Child advocates from the mid-1960s through the 1970s had located child abuse as an emphatically domestic and all too common concern, but the extraordinary abuses Michelle Smith recounted occurred predominantly at the hands of strangers, almost exclusively in unfamiliar and often sacrilegious settings, and held fantastical religious significance for her, her therapist, and the perpetrators of the alleged abuse. In her earlier sessions with Pazder, Smith detailed her parents' "stormy" and abusive marriage.<sup>26</sup> Her father "erupted in drunken rages" and frequently disappeared for "long periods."<sup>27</sup> Her mother was "sharply impatient" with Smith and "disconcerted" by her daughter's affection.<sup>28</sup> Smith's "world fell apart when she was fourteen," following her mother's sudden death.<sup>29</sup> Her father left Smith in the care of her maternal grandparents, who sent her to a Roman Catholic boarding school.<sup>30</sup> Smith would not convert to Catholicism for more than a decade (during her later sessions with Pazder), and she "fe[lt] like an outsider" at the boarding school.<sup>31</sup> While at university, she "began to realize that with a violent, alcoholic father in her past and a passive, somewhat distant mother, she ran the risk of falling into unwholesome patterns and repeating their problems."<sup>32</sup> It was at this point that she sought Pazder's psychiatric counsel for the

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<sup>26</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. The text fails to account for the whereabouts of Smith's two sisters, Charyl and Tertia, both of whom have disavowed the author's memories. See Denna Allen and Janet Midwinter, "Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth," *The Mail on Sunday*, September 30, 1990 and Paul Grescoe, "Things That Go Bump in Victoria," *Maclean's*, October 27, 1980.

<sup>31</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 7-8. This is according to Smith's account. Her father claims that all three Proby daughters were confirmed, and that Michelle "went to church every Sunday with her mother and sisters." Allen and Midwinter, "Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth."

<sup>32</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 7-8.

first time.<sup>33</sup> The two met once a week for the next four years; Smith and Pazder presumably ended their therapeutic relationship several months before Smith miscarried and resumed their sessions.<sup>34</sup>

Though her mother was present and complicit in this subsequently remembered abuse, the account that emerged over the next eighteen months presented a decidedly eerie portrait of violence and coercion. Smith's alleged abusers were mostly unknown to her. She first identified a shadowy man named Malachi, who choked and hit her, improbably tossing her upside down and spinning her around in the air.<sup>35</sup> Her mother was absent during this first remembered incident, though Smith remembered other "people" watching and laughing as Malachi abused her.<sup>36</sup> She next remembered being naked with a group of "some women," one of whom kissed Smith and "st[uck] her tongue in [Smith's] mouth...like a snake."<sup>37</sup> Smith reiterated that this woman who kissed her was "not a mommy."<sup>38</sup>

Later, Smith recounted sneaking through a room full of strangers copulating; here again, she was insistent about trying to locate her mother: "you see, my inside always tried to find my mom... Because I knew...when I found my mom...it'd be okay."<sup>39</sup> Pazder clarified: "Michelle reasoned that if they'd hurt her, [her as-yet unidentified assailants] might have also hurt her mother and that

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 8. The text is consistent with regard to the timing of events. The narrative implies that Smith had been out of psychotherapy for some time when started meeting with Pazder again, but the timeline provided contradicts that implication. Smith and Pazder met for four years starting in 1973; their sessions lasted at least until mid-1976. Given this timeline, Smith was out of therapy for only a few months when she miscarried. It is also worth noting that nowhere in the text do the authors mention their romantic relationship. After the sessions related in *Michelle Remembers*, Smith and Pazder divorced their spouses to marry each other. See Allen and Midwinter, "Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth."

<sup>35</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 17-19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 17-18, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

perhaps her mother was in trouble too.”<sup>40</sup> When Smith finally located her mother, her mother had become improbably monstrous. Smith found a humanoid “lump” under her mother’s skirt. This lump had “red shoes!” and bled when Smith smashed it with a bottle.<sup>41</sup> After Smith destroyed the lump under her mother’s skirt, Smith’s mother mocked her, struck her, and recoiled from her, insisting that Smith be taken “out of [her mother’s] sight!”<sup>42</sup>

Smith conveyed a consistent anxiety about her mother’s rejection throughout her counseling sessions. Throughout these recollections, her mother kept trying to get rid of Smith: by locking her in a car with a dead woman dressed as her mother, which “Malachi” intentionally crashed<sup>43</sup>; in a bizarre rebirthing ceremony, after which her mother revealed that “she never *wanted* me...she wasn’t a mother anymore...she didn’t love me, that there wasn’t any part of me that was a part of her”<sup>44</sup>; and by giving Michelle to the devil, who celebrated his power over Michelle in doggerel verse<sup>45</sup>:

There is no mother who’ll always care.  
There’s only me to burn and scare.  
There is no mother who walks on the earth.  
There is no mother that gives birth.  
There is no mother whose name is right.  
There’s only me with my fiery light.<sup>46</sup>

Her mother’s attempt to give Smith away ultimately fails. Satan rejects Smith for making the sign of the cross at an inopportune moment and insists her mother take her back:

You have to live with this ugly little one!  
Until you can bring me a dutiful son.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 37-38, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 54-5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 91-2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 227. At Ibid., 239., Pazder insists that Smith (and their readers) not dismiss the doggerel as insignificant, citing Hannah Arendt’s theory regarding the banality of evil.

It's your mistake, you'll have to pay.  
I give her back. You can't give her away.<sup>48</sup>

Smith's abuse cannot be termed domestic, despite the alleged presence and complicity of her mother. That mother is herself rendered foreign and monstrous.

With the exception of "Malachi" and the devil, Smith never named her other assailants, though she identified a few by their roles (*e.g.* the satanic "nurse" who attended Smith during her post-car crash hospitalization).<sup>49</sup> Indeed, most abusive incidents featured a "new and different group of people who were going to hurt her."<sup>50</sup> Notably, with the exception of Satan and Malachi, Smith's abusers are overwhelmingly female.<sup>51</sup> "It's like the men are losing power," Smith explained.<sup>52</sup> While "Malachi" led the strange rites that required Smith's abuse, women filled most of the ceremonial roles, often inflicted abuse, and were solely responsible for supervising Smith.

The perpetrators of the abuse Smith alleges were usually female, often fantastical, and occasionally the Father of Lies himself. "These people aren't people," Smith insisted. "People who do things like that are monsters."<sup>53</sup> As such, the abuse Michelle Smith remembered diverges drastically from accounts provided by child protection advocates in the 1960s and 1970s, but maps directly onto the abuses frequently alleged by satanic ritual abuse victims during the 1980s' Satanic Panic.

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<sup>47</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers.*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.



Likewise, the locations of Smith's alleged abuse are unfamiliar to her. Her memories begin in a small room in an unknown house.<sup>54</sup> She is moved to a "room with green walls," to a strange car, and then to a hospital after Malachi deliberately crashed the car.<sup>55</sup> Smith was forced to stay with her "nurse" after being released from the hospital.<sup>56</sup> She allegedly participated in an eighty-one day ritual with hundreds of strangers in the Ross Bay Cemetery in Victoria, BC,<sup>57</sup> and her captors also confined her in an old grave in the same cemetery.<sup>58</sup> Smith recalled being beaten and forcibly manipulated in a round room that "looked like a church, except [she] never saw a church with a great big bed."<sup>59</sup> As with the identities of her abusers, the locations of Smith's alleged abuse are unfamiliar and occasionally fantastic, in sharp contrast to most available reports of child abuse from the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, Smith's abuse seemed motivated not by systemic gendered inequalities played out on small domestic stage, but by a *Grand Guignol* religious melodrama in which international satanic conspirators warred for control of Smith's soul and the very Earth.<sup>61</sup> Smith's memories evince conviction both in her abusers' wicked satanic motivations and actions and in the ontological reality and importance of a (distinctly Roman Catholic) Christian theology.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 24-25, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 61, 54-5, 60-61.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 88-9 (photo inserts).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>60</sup> As Medway notes, it seems unlikely that an eighty-one day ritual held in a public cemetery surrounded by residential neighborhoods would go unnoticed by the surrounding community. See Medway, *Lure of the Sinister*, 176.

<sup>61</sup> *Grand Guignol* refers to a theatrical display of graphic, amoral horror. The theatricality of SRA accounts emphasizes distance between satanic ritual abuse accusations and domestic child sexual abuse. See Mary de Young, "Breeders for Satan: Toward a Sociology of Sexual Trauma Tales," *Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 2 (1996): 115 and Louise Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest* (Women's Press, 1996), 250-1.

Smith did not identify the first incidents of abuse as explicitly satanic, though her captors muttered that “they’d show God” while they sodomized her and smeared her with filth.<sup>62</sup> Smith thought that there were “possibly thirteen” people who participated in this first incidence of abuse.<sup>63</sup> She recalled observing many adults engaging in “ritual sex, apparently,” and the abuse and ritual sex led Smith to conclude that her captors “sound[ed] to [her] like witches.”<sup>64</sup> She worried about revealing these memories to Pazder, because Pazder was a Roman Catholic and “witches are against the church.”<sup>65</sup> At this point in her sessions, Smith was still uncertain about her captors’ identities: “maybe they weren’t witches or anything, but they were doing some funny things... All the things they did to me – they did them for a reason.”<sup>66</sup> Smith remained convinced of the deliberate nature of the abuse; the elaborate ritualism and grotesque severity of the abusive incidents reinforced her convictions.<sup>67</sup> It was Pazder, though, who insisted that “Michelle’s tormentors...were not ordinary cultists.”<sup>68</sup>

Though her memories included exhortations to “denounce God” and revere Lucifer, Smith did not independently identify her captors as satanists. Months into their sessions, Pazder explained that this group had “carr[ied] out a calculated assault against all that [was] good in [Smith]” and that “the only group [he knew] about that fits [Smith’s] description is the Church of Satan.”<sup>69</sup> Satanism

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<sup>62</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers.*, 26-7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 36, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 16, 51, 84. The descriptions Smith provides regarding the symbolism of the colors of candles, ritual objects like the chalice, the robes, and physical correspondence to compass directions do not reflect Satanic or Setian ritual practice, though they do recall some Wiccan practices. Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 134-5. Animal and fetus mutilation, such as that described by Smith and Pazder, do not comprise any part of Satanic, Setian, or Neopagan practice. See Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 107, 109-10), contra Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers.*, 77

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 116-7.

became the explanatory framework for Smith's abuse: "for Michelle, it was a great relief to begin to see the pattern."<sup>70</sup> Once Pazder identified them as satanic, Michelle's memories took on a decidedly satanic quality. She recalled "defecating on the cross and the bible" and being abused in a room that looked like a church.<sup>71</sup> In the final quarter of Smith's account, the devil made a personal appearance. Emerging from a bonfire, Satan wrapped his tail around Smith's neck and middle (Smith's "body memories" of this contact would emerge as localized dermatitis two decades later).<sup>72</sup> The Virgin Mary appeared and identified Smith's assailant by name: "he is called Satan."<sup>73</sup> Her captors celebrate "the feast of the Beast" by sacrificing a virgin.<sup>74</sup> Smith's memories conclude with the recollection that Satan had sworn to return to earth in 1982.<sup>75</sup>

The satanic activity Smith remembered is essentially an inverted Christianity – which is consistent with popular imaginings of Satanism, though not with the ceremonial practices of the Church of Satan. Pazder and Smith draws conclusions about Smith's abuse as inverted Christian practice early in the memoir: "rationally Michelle knew that Father Leo's Mass was as different from the ritual of that awful night as, literally, white was from black. Still, it was a ceremony, and the correspondences for Michelle afflicted her with deep visceral panic."<sup>76</sup> Her captors deny her access to and shun the crucifix in her hospital room.<sup>77</sup> When Smith recounted that she was forced to eat ashes, Pazder noted that

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 116, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 230, 254.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 242-3, 249.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 77.

if the ashes they tried to make her eat...were really the ashes of the woman who had been killed—the lump [that is, the humanoid growth under Smith’s mother’s skirt, which Smith smashed with a bottle]—[her captors] may have been trying to pass on, symbolically, the spirit of that person... In the Christian Holy Communion, there was great emphasis on consuming the body and blood of Christ. Perhaps this business of the ashes had some relation to that, in a contrary sort of way.<sup>78</sup>

Here again, the notion of an inverted sacrament mimics popular folklore about satanic practice, but not the practices of the Church of Satan.<sup>79</sup> Smith and Pazder noted that her tormentors observe the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar in reverse.<sup>80</sup> Her chief abuser, Malachi, used the crucifix Smith brandished against him to stab a baby.<sup>81</sup> In discussing these incidents with the local parish priest, Pazder explained that Smith’s captors “were involved in something very definitely anti-Christian.”<sup>82</sup> Under hypnosis, Smith recalled a ritual in which her tormentors “sang like a priest does...but weird.”<sup>83</sup> When Satan emerged from the flames during “the feast of the Beast,” he first drew the Christian cross in the air and crossed it out in mid-air, destroying it: “the fire billowed into the space where the other cross had been.”<sup>84</sup> In these ways, *Michelle Remembers* establishes the religious elements of Smith’s ritual abuse as satanic, which is to say inverted Christian symbols and practices.

Smith was allegedly both areligious and uncertain of Pazder’s religious affiliations when sessions began.<sup>85</sup> Pazder emphasized Smith’s religious ignorance repeatedly, often coupling his assertions with her “discovery” of allegedly unfamiliar religious objects, like the crucifix and the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 96. This is a specifically Roman Catholic understanding of the eucharist, though Pazder’s elision of Roman Catholic theology with Christianity writ large is worth noting.

<sup>79</sup> Phillips Stevens Jr., “Satanism: Where Are the Folklorists?,” in *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*, ed. G. Bennett (Taylor & Francis, 1996), 341, 354.

<sup>80</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 117, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 96.

Bible. After being doused in blood, Smith unconsciously—but deliberately, Pazder insisted—smeared the blood onto her tormentors in the shape of a cross:

“When you were reliving it – do you know what your hands were doing while you were telling me about wiping the blood on them?” [Pazder asked.] “No, I don’t understand what you mean.” Dr. Pazder took her hands and helped her to an erect sitting position. “Okay, now I want you to show me how you wiped it on them. Show me again, now.” Michelle...hesitantly began to move her hands in front of her, up and down, side to side. “I just...wiped it one them...like this...and this...” “What are you making on them?” “Making on them? I don’t know. You mean...I don’t understand. Oh, I see. Crosses.” “Yes, crosses.” “I didn’t realize I was making crosses them.” “You were very clearly making crosses on all of them.”<sup>86</sup>

As with his identification of her tormentors as satanists, Pazder here provided an explicitly religious framework through which Smith interpreted her memories.<sup>87</sup> He insisted that because Smith came from as “harsh, devastated family [in which] there had been no religious observance whatsoever,” her impulse to make the sign of the cross on her captors must have “come from a very deep part of [Smith.] It is a very symbolic and powerful thing to do,” he explained.<sup>88</sup> The Satanists’ aversion to the crucifix, and Smith’s own unconscious religious sense, are what reveal the symbol’s significance.<sup>89</sup> Thus in *Michelle Remembers*, Smith’s religious ignorance underscores the ontological potency of Christian, specifically Roman Catholic, symbols against forces of an ontological evil.<sup>90</sup>

The inverted Christianity of her satanic tormentors ultimately proves no match for Smith’s innate religiosity. Smith braided crosses into her own hair for protection, even though she was allegedly uncertain of what the symbol represented.<sup>91</sup> Even Malachi, her primary abuser, cannot take

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 49-50. Pazder also gave her a cross and offered to facilitate a conversation between Smith and with Pazder’s parish priest. On this point, see also Kelly Jo Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows: Religion, Feminism, and Fundamentalism in the Satanic Panic” (Ph.D., Duke University, 2000), 103.

<sup>88</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 45. Again, this narrative contradicts Smith’s father’s account of their family’s religiosity. See Allen and Midwinter, “Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth.”

<sup>89</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 104.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 142.

the crucifix from Smith.<sup>92</sup> Her satanic captors somehow neglected to remove a “white book” (the Bible) from Smith’s room, which Smith felt inexplicably drawn to. “She really didn’t know that the book was or why it was important, except that it was white and [her captors’] world was black. [Smith] sensed that, like the crosses she had made, the white book would keep them away from her.”<sup>93</sup> To prevent her abusers from burning the whole Bible, Smith “tore some pages out and stuffed them in her mouth.”<sup>94</sup> When the Satanists burned the book, “all they got was the cover, not the insides.”<sup>95</sup> Receiving an exorcism and baptism from her parish priest finally allowed Smith access to her most vivid and fantastic memories of ritual abuse during “the feast of the Beast.”<sup>96</sup> Smith was finally delivered from torment by visions of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.<sup>97</sup> “Ma Mère” (*i.e.* the Virgin Mary) hides the memories of this abuse from Smith until she “can hear someone” (presumably Pazder).<sup>98</sup> Smith and Pazder’s account of Satan’s insufficiencies against the ontological power of Christian symbols and figures establishes Smith’s abuse as irrefutably religious in nature.

Smith’s memories also emphasize the role of the therapist as vital in accessing repressed trauma and demonstrate the extensive infantilization of the analysand that characterizes subsequent satanic ritual abuse accounts. The Virgin Mary herself conveniently insisted upon the necessity for Smith to seek assistance in accessing these memories: “everybody needs to cry, but not alone. Don’t cry about this alone,” “Ma Mère” exhorted Smith.<sup>99</sup> *Michelle Remembers* insisted that this process was

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 137-8, 166.

<sup>97</sup> In this vision, Jesus inexplicably appears in the form of a rabbit. Ibid., 211.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

nearly as arduous for Pazder as it was for Smith: he wept during her sessions; “he had entered her pain and was there inside it with her.”<sup>100</sup> This moment of empathy was vital for Smith’s progress. “Dr. Pazder would conclude that it was this sharing of the pain—this manifest evidence of being cared for—that enabled Michelle to go on from there.”<sup>101</sup> Pazder was emphatic on his crucial role in Smith’s recollection and recovery. “You can’t go back alone,” he insisted. “You’ve got to have someone you trust go with you, someone you know it’s safe with.”<sup>102</sup> Smith concurred with his assessment: “I think I’m going to need you.”<sup>103</sup> In her tape recorded monologues, Smith expanded on Pazder’s critical contribution to her recovery: “remember all those times I’ve begged you to help me put it together? Well, it’s not just understanding it and putting things together that way. I am beginning to realize that it is a much more literal request – help put me, my body, the parts of my body, my memories...back together.”<sup>104</sup> Pazder recounted that the satanic “pattern” of Smith’s memories “had been apparent to [him] for some time, and he was pleased [when] Michelle be[gan] to recognize it.”<sup>105</sup> As I noted above, Pazder—not Smith—identified the abuse as explicitly satanic, providing a Roman Catholic lens through which to make meaning of her experiences. And when Smith expressed fraught ambivalence about their undertaking, Pazder “commanded her to continue” their sessions.<sup>106</sup>

That Pazder felt empowered to “command” Smith in this way underscores the flagrant infantilization of his analysand – a mindset that dramatically shaped subsequent satanic ritual abuse,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 114-5.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 174.

multiple personality disorder (MPD, now known as Dissociative Identity Disorder), and repressed memory syndrome diagnoses and treatments. Pazder exclusively referred to Smith by her first name throughout *Michelle Remembers*, whereas he was always “Dr. Pazder.” During Smith’s initial bout with unidentified terror, Pazder held her hand and then placed his hand on her head while she screamed.<sup>107</sup> Smith recounted her memories of abuse in a child’s voice, often with her head on Pazder’s shoulder or holding his hand: “there was no mistaking it: a girl of perhaps no more than five lay on the couch before him.”<sup>108</sup>

Pazder explained that he “realized that the only way he could assist the child—and therefore the woman whom the child had become—was to allow her to relive the entire ghastly experience.”<sup>109</sup> Pazder gave Smith a doll as part of their work together, encouraging her to “*embrace that little girl [i.e. herself]—that little girl who was so abandoned and wounded.*”<sup>110</sup> Pazder gave her his “old coat” to use as a blanket; Smith referred to it as her “comforter.”<sup>111</sup> Pazder frequently thought of Smith as a girl or a child: “the child was having new experiences that were propelling her on.”<sup>112</sup> Smith and Pazder had an emphatically hierarchical relationship in which Pazder behaved *in loco parentis* toward a 27-year-old woman.<sup>113</sup> Pazder’s infantilization of his analysand was pronounced, and this dynamic would shape subsequent accounts of and treatment schemes for satanic ritual abuse.

*Michelle Remembers*’ most lasting influence on satanic ritual abuse accounts is also among the least pronounced in the book: the connection of satanic ritual abuse with child sexual abuse.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 19, 17.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 19, 32, 46.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 63 (original emphasis).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 66-7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 82, see also 71, 114, 195.

<sup>113</sup> This is particularly troubling, given that the two later divorced their spouses to marry each other. Allen and Midwinter, “Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth.”



Scholars of satanic ritual abuse contest the extent to which the abuses Smith recounts *were* sexual. De Young observes that “Michelle had never remembered sexual abuse by her satanic captors,” which (de Young suggests) explains why Pazder’s original definition of satanic ritual abuse as “repeated physical, emotional, mental and spiritual assaults” omitted sexual elements.<sup>114</sup> A number of others emphasize how lurid the descriptions of abuse throughout *Michelle Remembers* are.<sup>115</sup> There are fewer than ten pages of *Michelle Remembers* that describe emphatically sexual assaults, and none of these incidents are as graphic as later accounts of satanic ritual abuse would be. Ultimately, however, it is as inaccurate to claim that Smith and Pazder’s account is lurid or pornographic as it is to assert that Smith did not recount any explicitly sexual abuse. However fantastic these memories were, they irrefutably contained sexual elements. Malachi held her by her “neck and groin” while throwing her up into the air.<sup>116</sup> She was kept naked against her will.<sup>117</sup> Smith was allegedly kissed by an adult woman and raped and sodomized with “colorful sticks:” “they stuck those sticks not just in my mouth. They stuck them everywhere I had an opening... They are putting *ugly* in me.”<sup>118</sup> One incident left her bleeding “between her legs.”<sup>119</sup> She was exposed to group “ritual sex, apparently.”<sup>120</sup> During another incident, “a woman inserted something into her bottom.”<sup>121</sup> The satanic “nurse” who supervised Smith in the hospital gave Smith enemas: “it’s such a terrible pain

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<sup>114</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 32. So too Medway, *Lure of the Sinister*, 177.

<sup>115</sup> Medway, *Lure of the Sinister*, 177 and Mike Hertenstein, Michael Hertenstein, and Jon Trott, *Selling Satan: The Tragic History of Mike Warnke* (Cornerstone Press, 1993), 280.

<sup>116</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*., 18.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 125.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26 (original emphasis).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

down there...I felt like I'd lost control down there."<sup>122</sup> Smith was forced to "helplessly defecat[e]" on a crucifix and a Bible; "when Michelle saw that she had soiled them, she was horrified."<sup>123</sup> It is worth noting that the sexual abuse Smith remembers is perpetrated by strangers, and almost exclusively by women, in sharp contrast to the finding of child protection advocates but in keeping with 1980s satanic ritual abuse memories.<sup>124</sup> The anal focus of Smith's accounts likewise diverges from most domestic child sexual assault, but corresponds to later satanic ritual abuse accounts.<sup>125</sup> Though the sexual elements of the recounted abuse were by no means the most violent or most frequent, *Michelle Remembers* set the stage for the 1980s moral panic that indelibly connected satanic ritual abuse with child sexual abuse.

*Michelle Remembers* articulated (and, according to new religious movement scholars and sociologists of religion, initiated) the satanic ritual abuse phenomenon, if not the entirety of repressed/recovered memory diagnoses. In particular, the construction of child abuse as a supernatural religious phenomenon rather than a domestic problem, the insistence on therapists as necessary for uncovering such abuse and the subsequent infantilization of the analysand-survivor, and the connection drawn between satanic ritual abuse and child sexual abuse shaped popular imaginings of satanic ritual abuse. The Satanic Panic would cast doubt and suspicion on non-Christian religions (particularly indigenous traditions and new religious movements), locate child abuse in an international religious conspiracy rather than in domestic settings, and at once criminalize and infantilize women. In the next section, I will explore the ways in which some feminists

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>124</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 76.

<sup>125</sup> See Debbie Nathan, "Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare," in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. Joel Best, David G. Bromley, and James T. Richardson, Social Institutions and Social Change (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1991), 85 on the role of witness contamination and coercive interview techniques, both influenced by *Michelle Remembers*, in producing testimony of satanic ritual abuse. Nathan and Snedeker report that under intense and leading questioning, child witnesses often told interviewers "the worst things they could think of," usually involving vomit and excrement. Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 139-143.

contributed to and exacerbated this moral panic, to the detriment of American women's sexual and religious freedoms.

*Curiously Accommodating Transformations:  
Feminist Anti-Satanic Ritual Abuse Deployments of Michelle Remembers*

It is perhaps not surprising that the trauma of one woman, raised in a Roman Catholic household, enrolled in a parochial school, and under the therapeutic guidance of a devoutly Roman Catholic man, would find expression in the language and symbols of Roman Catholic mysticism.<sup>126</sup> The significance of *Michelle Remembers* lies in the fact that so many non-Catholics took this "Satanic phantasmagoria" as gospel.<sup>127</sup>

Even before its publication, *Michelle Remembers* caught the attention of an ostensibly secular public. Pazder and Smith secured a \$100,000 advance for the book and an additional \$242,000 for the paperback rights.<sup>128</sup> *People Magazine* promoted *Michelle Remembers* in a pre-publication feature story; *The National Enquirer* printed an abridged version of the story.<sup>129</sup> The book was a Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club Alternate selection, and there was talk of a movie deal.<sup>130</sup> *Publisher's Weekly* noted that *Michelle Remembers'* publisher, Pocket Books, planned for a 100,000 volume first printing, designated a \$75,000 promotional/advertising budget for Smith and Pazder's demonic tell-

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<sup>126</sup> *Michelle Remembers* was published under the imprimatur of Remi de Roo, the bishop of Victoria, British Columbia. Mary de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 23 and Jarrett, "Strange Bedfellows," 72.

<sup>127</sup> Smith and Pazder, *Michelle Remembers*, 284.

<sup>128</sup> Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 82.

<sup>129</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 24.

<sup>130</sup> Barbara Fister, "The Devil in the Details: Media Representation of 'Ritual Abuse' and Evaluation of Sources," *SIMILE: Studies In Media & Information Literacy Education* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 2003): 5. Smith's father filed "notice of intent" against Smith and Pazder's publisher, informing Pocket Books of his intent upon any extensions of the book's contents beyond the original literary contract. See Allen and Midwinter, "Debunking of a Myth," in *Mail on Sunday* (1990).

all, and scheduled a book tour for the authors – as *Publisher's Weekly* suggested, “code words for ‘this will be big.’”<sup>131</sup>

As media scholar Barbara Fister notes, “clearly, the climate seemed right for [*Michelle Remembers*], and whether the events it depicted actually happened or not was less important than the fact that it was a story that would appeal to many readers.”<sup>132</sup> The book’s international popularity was no coincidence. Pazder and Smith travelled across North America to promote their work, appearing on television talk shows (including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Donahue*, *Geraldo*, and *20/20*) and giving radio interviews.<sup>133</sup> *Maclean's*, a popular Canadian magazine, published a scathing article shortly after the publication of *Michelle Remembers*, in which Smith’s father and sisters challenged and denounced Smith’s memories.<sup>134</sup> But this attempt to debunk Smith and Pazder’s work had little impact on the book’s growing popularity.<sup>135</sup> *Michelle Remembers* would eventually sell hundreds of thousands of copies, despite the absence of independent verification for any of Smith’s memories or the international satanic conspiracy she alleged.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Fister, “The Devil in the Details,” 5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Grescoe, “Things That Go Bump in Victoria.”

<sup>135</sup> Fister, “The Devil in the Details,” 5. Several scholars have noted the tenacity of SRA accusations in spite of attempts to debunk the phenomenon. Indeed, Ellis notes that attempts to debunk such myths only disseminate the stories to a broader audience. Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 125. So too Lewis and Petersen, *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism*, 20. Bottoms and Davis further note that allegations of satanic ritual abuse consistently affect juries’ decisions, whether the allegations were substantiated or not. Bette L. Bottoms, Kathleen R. Diviak, and Suzanne L. Davis, “Jurors’ Reactions to Satanic Ritual Abuse Allegations,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 21, no. 9 (September 1997): 845.

<sup>136</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 45. “There is no record of her prolonged hospitalization, no newspaper or police report on the staged car crash that supposedly resulted in the death of a woman; there is no corroboration of any of the story’s details by her teachers, former classmates, neighbors, pediatrician, or her father and two sisters, never even mentioned in this story, who have publicly branded her a fantasist. There are, however, photographs of Michelle Proby, her nom de famille, in the St. Margaret’s Elementary School yearbook, chubby-cheeked and smiling, taken about the same time she remembers being confined by Satanists in the dank basement of an abandoned house.” Ibid., 24. Cf. James M. Wood et al., “Child Sexual Abuse Investigations: Lessons Learned from the McMartin and Other Daycare Cases,” in *Children as Victims, Witnesses, and Offenders: Psychological Science and the Law*, ed. Bette L. Bottoms, Cynthia J. Najdowski, and Gail S. Goodman (Guilford Press, 2009), 82; David G. Bromley and Diana Gay Cutchin, “The Social Construction of Subversive Evil: The Contemporary Anticult and Anti-Satanism

Indeed, the publication of *Michelle Remembers* conferred “the immediate status of ‘experts’ in this horrific form of child abuse that Pazder, in a 1981 meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, was the first to call ‘ritual abuse.’”<sup>137</sup> In the course of their promotional tour, Smith and Pazder popularized “ritual abuse” as a concern among psychologists and psychiatrists, law enforcement officers, child protection advocates, and popular news media audiences throughout North America.<sup>138</sup> Suddenly, signs of satanic “ritual abuse” began cropping up all over the country.

Scholars are nearly unanimous in identifying *Michelle Remembers* as the spark that lit the torches Americans would carry against their imaginary satanic foes, but the book resonated differently among diverse interest groups.<sup>139</sup> And as journalists and renown satanic ritual abuse skeptics Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker note, “like any grand social panic, the ritual child-abuse scare of the 1980s and 1990s did not spring full-blown from one incident.”<sup>140</sup> Scholars of this moral panic have identified a number of diffuse factors that contributed to the transnational dissemination of Satanic Panic: the emergence of confessional Satanists, most notably those associated with Anton LaVey’s Church of Satan and its breakaway counterpart, Michael Aquino’s

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Movements,” in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, ed. Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 202; and Jeffrey S. Victor, “Moral Panics and the Social Construction of Deviant Behavior: A Theory and Application to the Case of Ritual Child Abuse,” *Sociological Perspectives* 41, no. 3 (January 1, 1998): 545.

<sup>137</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 24.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> On the role of *Michelle Remembers* in inciting the Satanic Panic, see: Mary de Young, “One Face of the Devil: The Satanic Ritual Abuse Moral Crusade and the Law,” *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 12, no. 4 (1994): 391; “The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious-Studies Data,” *Numen* 50 (1) (January 1) David Frankfurter, “The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious-Studies Data,” *Numen* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 110; James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism*, 16; Philip Jenkins, “INVESTIGATING OCCULT AND RITUAL CRIME: A Case for Caution,” *Police Forum: Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Police Section*, January 1992, 4; Joel Best, David G. Bromley, and James T. Richardson, “Satanism as a Social Problem,” in *The Satanism Scare*, Social Institutions and Social Change (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1991), 11; James Richardson, “The Social Construction of Satanism: Understanding an International Social Problem,” *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 31, no. 1 (February 1997): 66; Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 14; and Wood et al., “Child Sexual Abuse Investigations: Lessons Learned from the McMartin and Other Daycare Cases,” 83.

<sup>140</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 11.

Temple of Set<sup>141</sup>; the consolidation and increased visibility of conservative evangelical Christianities, which detected an ontological Satan at work in the present world<sup>142</sup>; child protection activists, mobilized in the 1960s and 1970s by an increased awareness of the prevalence of domestic child abuse; public identification with Michelle Smith's memories of ritual abuse, resulting in a number of similar (though more sexually explicit) satanic ritual abuse "survivor" accounts<sup>143</sup>; a growing therapeutic industry that sprung up around diagnoses of "repressed memories" of satanic ritual abuse, again similar to Smith's; anti-cult activism redirecting its focus, energy, and resources toward combatting this imagined Satanism; mass media reporting on the phenomenon (most notably 20/20's "The Devil Worshippers" and Geraldo's "Satan's Underground," which reached almost twenty millions viewers in a single broadcast)<sup>144</sup>; workshops and training sessions, many of which drew on *Michelle Remembers*, which educated social workers, law enforcement officers, and psychotherapists on the phenomenon; and second-wave feminism's investment in disrupting the systemic inequalities that contributed to child sexual abuse.<sup>145</sup>

It is a remarkable phenomenon that could inspire cooperation among psychotherapists, anti-cult activists, conservative evangelicals, law enforcement officials, and second-wave feminists. The threat of satanic ritual abuse did just that.<sup>146</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I am most interested in

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<sup>141</sup> See Gunn on the role of LaVey's "cultural topoi" in shaping the Satanic Panic. Joshua Gunn, "Prime-time Satanism: Rumor-panic and the Work of Iconic Topoi," *Visual Communication* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 95.

<sup>142</sup> On the pan-Christian alliance of conservative evangelicalisms around a conservative Christian sexual ethic, see 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/>.

<sup>143</sup> See in particular Lauren Stratford's account of forced pregnancy and delivery to provide infant human sacrifices for her satanic captors. Lauren Stratford, *Satan's Underground* (Pelican Publishing, 1991). Cf. de Young, "Breeder for Satan."

<sup>144</sup> "Devil Worship," and "The Devil Worshippers," 20/20 (ABC, May 16, 1985).

<sup>145</sup> Cf. James T. Richardson, Jenny Reichert, and Valerie Lykes, "Satanism in America: An Update," *Social Compass* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 554, and Thomas Robbins, "Social and Cultural Context of Satanic Ritual Abuse Allegations," in *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism*, ed. James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Prometheus Books, 2008), 143.

<sup>146</sup> See Jarrett, "Strange Bedfellows," 6.

the ways second-wave feminist investments in protecting children from sexual abuse served to disseminate the Satanic Panic. Religious studies scholar Kelly Jo Jarrett has identified two main “waves” of feminist thought and activism regarding satanic ritual abuse during the 1980s and early 1990s. The earlier surfaced as anxieties about satanic ritual abuse occurring in daycare facilities (earliest and most notably the McMartin Preschool trial); the latter as numerous diagnoses of adult women as survivors of satanic ritual abuse. *Michelle Remembers* and its authors directly informed activists in both “waves” of feminist involvement.

In this section, I detail the ways in which *Michelle Remembers* shaped and directed feminist anti-SRA activism. I contextualize second-wave feminist investments in child protectionism and suggest that these investments demonstrate feminist complicity in spreading the satanic ritual abuse moral panic. I engage popular anxieties surrounding satanic ritual abuse as evidenced in daycare investigations and satanic ritual abuse survivor diagnoses. Given the popularity of *Michelle Remembers* and its authors’ active involvement in promoting both concerns about the prevalence of satanic ritual abuse and the reality of “repressed memories” of such abuses, it follows that both the investigations of childcare facilities and the diagnoses of SRA survivors would follow the book’s precedent. Indeed, in both instances we see the projection of abuse onto external (and suspiciously religious) rather than domestic actors, an emphasis on the need for therapeutic intervention, and frequent parallels drawn between satanic ritual abuse and child sexual abuse. I focus particularly on the irony in feminist efforts ultimately limiting conditions of possibility for American women’s sexual and religious freedoms.

## Feminist Investments In Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

There are two key factors to consider when examining feminist complicity in the satanic ritual abuse moral panic.<sup>147</sup> The first is pre-existing feminist commitments in increasing awareness of and preventing child sexual abuse, which activists had shown to be a matter of grave concern in the latter half of the twentieth century. The second is feminists' contributions toward the sexualization of satanic ritual abuse.

There is much in survivors' accounts of satanic ritual abuse that would have concerned America's second-wave feminists. As folklorist Bill Ellis notes in 2000 *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*, "the satanic religion described [in *Michelle Remembers*] is one that privileges males [and] allows the degradation of women and abuse of children."<sup>148</sup> In particular, many feminist activists who had been involved in anti-violence efforts in the 1970s attempted to combat incest and child abuse the early 1980s, "bringing with them a wealth of political organizing experience and well developed critiques of how the family, religion, gender, and sex function as sites and agents of social control."<sup>149</sup> These feminists forged connections between the child abuse and anti-violence movements and produced a grass-roots incest survivor movement.<sup>150</sup>

Kelly Jo Jarrett argues that the child protectionist angle of the emerging satanic ritual abuse coalition "represented an opportunity to extend the feminist struggle against battering, rape, and incest with a reduced risk of engendering anti-feminist backlash."<sup>151</sup> Feminist alliances with anti-

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<sup>147</sup> While Victor discusses the role of what he calls the "feminist demonology" in the satanic ritual abuse moral panic at some length, his reading of feminist activism is cursory, reductive, and paternalistic – particularly with regard to his dismissal of patriarchy as a "feminist demonology" rather than a systemic pattern of gendered inequality in American culture. Victor, "Moral Panics and the Social Construction of Deviant Behavior," 556.

<sup>148</sup> Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 115.

<sup>149</sup> Jarrett, "Strange Bedfellows," 242, 18.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. As Nathan and Snedeker observe, the early 1980s was "a time when feminism was increasingly vilified as a threat to morality, family, and the national welfare. Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 248.



satanic ritual abuse advocates also provided opportunities for public support and popular momentum for these anti-violence issues at time when the Reagan administration had drastically reduced funding for domestic abuse prevention.<sup>152</sup>

While many feminists had abandoned traditional religion, a number took often fantastic and supernatural allegations of satanic ritual abuse very seriously. As Jarrett notes:

satanic ritual abuse allegations were incredible and bizarre, but then, so was the level of violence against women and children that the feminist anti-violence movement had helped bring to light. For feminist satanic ritual abuse proponents, satanic ritual abuse represented an extreme expression of the physical and sexual abuses perpetrated upon so many women and children in American society.<sup>153</sup>

Scholars largely concur that feminist efforts toward ending historical denial of child abuse “may have paved the way for belief in ritual abuse as well,” though some qualify that “the centrality of [feminism’s] role is difficult to specify.”<sup>154</sup> Tracing feminist involvement in disseminating the satanic ritual abuse moral panic is, of course, complicated by the fact that feminism has from its inception been extremely diverse. Nathan and Snedeker argue that anti-pornography and “victimology” feminists contributed most directly both to the dissemination of satanic ritual abuse and the sexualization of the phenomenon.<sup>155</sup>

Feminists incontrovertibly contributed to the sexualization of satanic ritual abuse allegations. As Nathan and Snedeker note, “incorporating claims of physical and sexual abuse with concerns over missing children, child pornography, and emerging allegations of Satanism, satanic ritual abuse

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<sup>152</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 77.

<sup>153</sup> Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows,” 200.

<sup>154</sup> Bette L. Bottoms and Suzanne L. Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 16, no. 2 (June 1997): 2. Contra Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows,” 3, which is quite explicit about feminist activism’s role in the Satanic Panic, as well as broad public condemnation of this activism after the dissipation of this moral panic.

<sup>155</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 247, 4. In particular, Nathan and Snedeker note the anti-SRA activism of feminists Gloria Steinem and Catharine MacKinnon.

seemed to provide a plausible explanation for the apparent rise in sex abuse cases.”<sup>156</sup> Nathan and Snedeker suggest that feminists anti-violence activists “were particularly susceptible to sex-abuse conspiracy theories.”<sup>157</sup> The willingness of feminist anti-violence advocates to credit allegations of sexualized satanic ritual abuse might follow from feminist efforts in the mid-to-late 1970s to emphasize the threat of domestic child sexual abuse.<sup>158</sup> Such feminists were particularly concerned at the prevalence of adult male abusers and girl-child victims.<sup>159</sup> As sociologist Mary de Young explains, “noting the stark asymmetry in gender in its perpetration and victimology, the feminist ideology redefined sexual abuse in terms of male dominance and contextualized it within the routinized, culturally sanctioned interactions between men and women, parents and children, fathers and daughters.”<sup>160</sup> Feminist activists against child sexual abuse were particularly adamant in their insistence on treating incest and other child sexual abuse victims, previously silenced, as “credible witnesses to their own victimization.”<sup>161</sup>

While Pazder’s initial definition of “ritual abuse” omitted the sexual aspects of Smith’s memories, the concept underwent a “curiously accommodating transformation” in conversation with emergent accounts of satanic ritual abuse.<sup>162</sup> As I noted earlier, the sexual elements of Smith’s alleged satanic ritual abuse were neither the most lurid nor the most frequent modes of abuse.<sup>163</sup> But

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<sup>156</sup> Stuart Wright, “Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt,” in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 132.

<sup>157</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 4.

<sup>158</sup> Robbins, “Social and Cultural Context of Satanic Ritual Abuse Allegations,” 147 and Victor, “Moral Panics and the Social Construction of Deviant Behavior,” 550.

<sup>159</sup> Mary de Young, “Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers,” in *Critical Readings: Moral Panics and the Media*, ed. Chas Critcher (Open University Press, 2006), 287.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. On the silencing of both child sexual assault survivors and satanic ritual abuse survivors, see Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics*, 252.

<sup>162</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 32.

the literary genre inspired by Smith's memoirs unflinching recounted extensive and disturbing incidents of sexual assault. De Young observes that "in the linguistic economy of the moral panic [SRA accusations] soon would spark, ritual abuse became synonymous with sexual abuse – but not with the 'ordinary' kind of sexual abuse that occurs within families. With its ceremonial trappings, costumes and rites, ritual abuse was something altogether different."<sup>164</sup> Pazder quickly modified his definition of "ritual abuse" to incorporate this extraordinary prevalence of supernatural child sexual abuse. "Sensing the *Zeitgeist*, perhaps, Pazder now tagged 'sexual' to his list of ritually abusive assaults."<sup>165</sup> This emphasis on believing sexual abuse survivors would play heavily into investigations of satanic ritual abuse allegations in daycare facilities.

### **Demonizing Daycare<sup>166</sup>**

During the early 1980s, most investigations of satanic ritual abuse stemmed from alleged sexual molestation in daycare facilities.<sup>167</sup> An unprecedented influx of mothers into the workforce gave rise to this new cultural phenomenon – a generation of women raised by stay-at-home mothers elected or needed to entrust the care of their children to unknown and often unregulated childcare facilities.<sup>168</sup> In part, the increase of working women, and particularly working mothers, can be attributed to feminist activism, but double-digit inflation and plummeting median incomes for young families also contributed to this dramatic surge.<sup>169</sup> Sociologists of religion Stuart Wright and David

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<sup>163</sup> Contra de Young, who argued that *Michelle Remembers* contains no incidence of child sexual assault.

<sup>164</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 32.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> David G. Bromley, "Satanism: The New Cult Scare," in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. Joel Best, David G. Bromley, and James T. Richardson, Social Institutions and Social Change (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1991), 64-5.

<sup>167</sup> Wright, *Remembering Satan*, 72.

<sup>168</sup> Bromley, "Satanism: The New Cult Scare," 66 and Wright, "Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt," 133.

<sup>169</sup> Bromley, "Satanism: The New Cult Scare," 68 and Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 34.

Bromley have both argued that satanic ritual abuse allegations against daycare workers may be attributed to parental, and particularly maternal, anxieties about leaving their children in the care of strangers. Wright proposes that “the conflict between family economic needs and maternal responsibility for the socialization of children produced understandable tension.”<sup>170</sup> Bromley goes further:

The satanic subversion narrative gives human shape to the sense of danger and vulnerability, in this case the tension between family and economy, that individuals experience. Allegations of satanic cults infiltrating childcare facilities coincided closely with a sharp increase in the number of women with young children in the labor force who faced a pressing need for reliable daycare. The individuals making the initial allegations of satanic subversion were family members who entrusted their children to daycare facilities about which they had significant reservations and apprehensions.<sup>171</sup>

These anxieties manifested, in part, as accusations of sexual misconduct lodged against daycare employees. Pazder defined Smith’s experiences as “ritual abuse” during the American Psychiatric Association’s national meeting in 1981 as “‘repeated physical, emotional, mental and spiritual assaults’ that are carried out through the ‘systematic use of symbols, ceremonies, and machinations designed and orchestrated to attain malevolent effects.’”<sup>172</sup> During *Michelle Remembers*’ extensive promotional tour, Pazder and Smith had popularized the “ritual abuse” diagnosis in training seminars for law enforcement officers, child protection advocates, psychologists and psychiatrists.<sup>173</sup>

De Young notes that Pazder and Smith “consult[ed] on the suspected cases of day care ritual abuse that began cropping up like pernicious weeds in the wake of the publication of the book,” fostering anxiety about a massive satanic conspiracy bent on abusing children for nefarious

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<sup>170</sup> Wright, “Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt,” 133.

<sup>171</sup> Bromley, “Satanism: The New Cult Scare,” 68. Victor also attributes Satanic Panic to class, but as American religions scholar Sean McCloud notes, Victor’s reduction of class to deprivation lacks nuance. See Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 45-6, 142-3, 152-3 and Sean McCloud, “Putting Some Class into Religious Studies: Resurrecting an Important Concept,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 842.

<sup>172</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 24, 32.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

purposes.<sup>174</sup> These concerns spread broadly: by 1987, Pazder claimed to that he had consulted on more than a thousand satanic ritual abuse cases and was currently spending a full third of his time on such cases.<sup>175</sup> In a 1990 interview on the aftermath of the book's publication, Robert Hicks of the US Justice Department noted that "before *Michelle Remembers* there were no [s]atanic prosecutions involving children. Now the myth [was] everywhere."<sup>176</sup>

The most familiar and certainly most expensive and arduous investigation into daycare employee misconduct was the McMartin daycare trial. In August 1983, Judy Johnson alleged that Raymond Buckey, an employee at the McMartin Preschool in Manhattan Beach, California, had sodomized her son.<sup>177</sup> Her insistent allegations incited an inquiry at the school. Local police opened an investigation of the preschool in September 1983. Over the course of a years-long investigation, seven current and former employees of the McMartin preschool—including the owner, Virginia McMartin, her daughter Peggy McMartin Buckey, and her husband Raymond Buckey—were charged with 52 counts of felony child abuse.<sup>178</sup> As de Young relates, the children's interviews included tales of

the ritualistic ingestion of feces, urine, blood, semen, and human flesh; the disinterment and mutilation of corpses; the sacrifices of infants; and the orgies with their day care providers, costumed as devils and witches, in the classrooms, in tunnels under the center, and in car

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 230 and Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 113.

<sup>176</sup> Allen and Midwinter, "Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth."

<sup>177</sup> Mary de Young, "The Devil Goes to Day Care: McMartin and the Making of a Moral Panic," *Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 1 (1997): 20. Judy Johnson was an alcoholic and was later diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. She made a number of improbable claims about the alleged abuse, including that Buckey had flown through the air. Doctor who examined Johnson's son later admitted under oath that he had no experience diagnosing sexual abuse. Though Johnson's judgment might have been compromised, her suspicions of satanic ritual abuse were by no means unique. See Nathan and Snedeker: "countless child-protection people [re: McMartin] had been exposed to the television programs, radio talk shows, and supermarket tabloids and books like *Michelle Remembers*, with their breathless accounts of satanic child-molester cults. For a culture and profession on the cusp of panic, the more bizarre Judy Johnson sounded, the more sensible she seemed." Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 85.

<sup>178</sup> Wright, "Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt," 133.

washes, airplanes, mansions, cemeteries, hotels, ranches, gourmet food stores, local gyms, churches, and hot air balloons.<sup>179</sup>

Investigators identified three hundred and sixty-nine current or past enrollees in the McMartin preschool as victims of abuse over the course of the previous two decades.<sup>180</sup>

The case received national attention in February 1984. At this point, Lawrence Pazder and Michelle Smith involved themselves in the investigations.<sup>181</sup> “The role of the devil as *agent provocateur* was not introduced until [1984],” sociologist Mary de Young observes. “Enter Lawrence Pazder.”<sup>182</sup> Pazder, as well as Smith and several other satanic ritual abuse “survivors,” consulted with therapists and parents of children enrolled in the McMartin preschool as well as the law enforcement officers and district attorneys investigating the case.<sup>183</sup> Police reports show that Pazder was convinced of a massive international satanic conspiracy: “anybody could be involved in this plot,” Pazder insisted, “including teachers, doctors, movie stars, merchants, even...members of the Anaheim Angels baseball team.”<sup>184</sup> By this point, Pazder’s definition of satanic ritual abuse incorporated sexual elements, corroborating Judy Johnson’s initial claims.<sup>185</sup> The McMartin case’s initial prosecutor, Glenn E. Stevens, argued that Smith and Pazder’s involvement in the investigation influenced the testimony of child witnesses.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> de Young, “The Devil Goes to Day Care,” 21.

<sup>180</sup> de Young, “Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers,” 280 and Nathan, “Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare,” 75.

<sup>181</sup> Nathan, “Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare,” 81.

<sup>182</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 32.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 32 and Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 14-15.

<sup>184</sup> Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*, 117. Cf. de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 32.

<sup>185</sup> David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 62.

<sup>186</sup> Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 15.

Perhaps even more than its authors, *Michelle Remembers* directly influenced the investigation and prosecution of the McMartin daycare trial. Police investigators and prosecutors used the book as a checklist for confirming the satanic/ritualistic nature of the alleged abuse.<sup>187</sup> The satanic ritual abuse survival genre inspired by *Michelle Remembers* further informed the investigation. As de Young emphasizes, “with its preoccupation with diabolical cults, monastic institutions, subterranean spaces, live burials and secret rooms, double lives, possession, rape, madness and death, this genre of literature lent clinical authority to the accounts of young children during the day care ritual abuse moral panic.”<sup>188</sup> The genre was further disseminated and popularized through television talk shows, radio programs, and tabloids, all of which contributed to a growing sense of panic among those invested in the protection of children.<sup>189</sup>

These imaginary Satanists supposedly preyed on children for a number of reasons: indoctrination; ritual sacrifice; cannibalism; torture; and sexual defilement of the innocent – all of which had been detailed in *Michelle Remembers* and which Pazder and Smith had insisted were occurring right under the noses of parents and other child protection advocates.<sup>190</sup> The children of the McMartin preschool accused their teachers of these ghastly and sexually depraved acts. Three and four year olds testified to having been molested during satanic rituals, forced to participate in animal mutilations, even taking part in infanticides.<sup>191</sup> McMartin became the first of more than one hundred cases in which children alleged coercion into “devil worship, open graves, cannibalism, airplane trips, nude photography, being urinated or defecated on, and murdering babies.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. and Nathan, “Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare,” 82.

<sup>188</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 25.

<sup>189</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 85.

<sup>190</sup> Victor, “Moral Panics and the Social Construction of Deviant Behavior,” 544 and de Young, “The Devil Goes to Day Care,” 19.

<sup>191</sup> de Young, “The Devil Goes to Day Care,” 19.

<sup>192</sup> Wright, *Remembering Satan*, 73.

Despite bizarre and sometimes impossible allegations, some feminists and child protection advocates rallied behind the McMartin prosecution.<sup>193</sup> The children's claims of abuse "resonate[d] with concerns many contemporary feminists [had] about violence against women, and about authorities' traditional disbelief when women reported sexual assaults."<sup>194</sup> Skepticism regarding the reality of these abuses became tantamount to participating in the abuse itself.<sup>195</sup> Feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activists collaborated with McMartin parents to insist that the American public "believe the children" – under the assumption that children would not fabricate testimony or lie about their experiences of such ghastly abuses.<sup>196</sup>

Except it appears that the children did lie – or rather, were coerced into making elaborate claims about satanic ritual abuse through suggestive interviewing techniques. The alleged child victims in the McMartin case accused their former teachers of unthinkable horrors, which scholars now believe to be the product not of satanic sexual predation but of coercive interviewing techniques on the part of McMartin investigators. Lead investigator (and former child protection advocate for the National Organization of Women) Kee MacFarlane, the McMartin parents, and other child advocates involved in the case became convinced of satanic influences following their meetings with Pazder.<sup>197</sup> De Young maintains that Pazder's emphasis on the prevalence and severity

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<sup>193</sup> For example, Judy Johnson's allegations that "at the church, Peggy [McMartin Buckey] drilled a child under the arms" and that "Ray [Buckey] flew through the air." See Lael Rubin, "Notes from an Interview with Judy Johnson," February 1984, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mcmartin/johnsoninterview.html>.

<sup>194</sup> Nathan, "Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare," 80. See also Nathan and Snedeker: "For the young accusers in ritual-abuse cases, the acts of speaking constituted a profound irony, because the more they said, the more their efforts to describe their reality were silenced by adult projections and fantasies." Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 3.

<sup>195</sup> Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics*, 252.

<sup>196</sup> "Believe the Children" was an organization started by the parents of the McMartin trial that advocated for widespread public credence in their children's testimony. The organization became a cause celeb and clearinghouse for information on satanic ritual abuse. See de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 38. Philip Jenkins further notes that feminist Gloria Steinem offered support to the survivors of ritual abuse and donated to the project to excavate the tunnels in which the McMartin child witnesses alleged they had been abused. Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (Yale University Press, 2004), 186.



of satanic ritual abuse “colonized [the] imaginations” of McMartin parents and investigators alike.<sup>198</sup>

Following their interactions with Pazder and Smith,

all of the interrogators, including the parents, began asking the children different kinds of questions, sometimes using devil puppets as props, and comparing answers against checklists of satanic rituals, roles, ceremonies and holidays put together by New Christian Right crusaders. With the ‘ultimate evil’ of ritual abuse as the rudder of their imagination, anything the children revealed was deemed plausible.<sup>199</sup>

According to Nathan and Snedeker, McMartin investigators and parents, convinced as they were of satanic ritual abuse’s reality and severity, “whether consciously or unconsciously, fashioned a subculture of fanatical belief that enveloped their children and demanded their total participation.”<sup>200</sup> The children’s “elaborately detailed satanic ritual abuse accounts” were “elicited over repeated and suggestive interviews by social workers now convinced of a satanic influence in the case.”<sup>201</sup> As de Young explained, during the proceedings, prosecutors argued that the children’s accounts be taken at face value “because children cannot imagine what they have not experienced.”<sup>202</sup> The defense argued that the children’s testimony might have been shaped by popular culture, parental influences, and interviewing techniques.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> de Young, “Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers,” 280 and *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 34.

<sup>198</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 34.

<sup>199</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 34. The checklists used by SRA investigators were often shaped by *Michelle Remembers*. Ibid., 46, and Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 82.

<sup>200</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 85.

<sup>201</sup> Victor, “Moral Panics and the Social Construction of Deviant Behavior,” 554 and de Young, “Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers,” 280. On the coercive interview techniques used to elicit the testimony of child witnesses, see also Nathan, “Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare,” 85. So too Victor, “Moral Panics and the Social Construction of Deviant Behavior,” 554: “Interaction research has shown how commonly used conversational patterns during interrogations between child protection workers and children suspected of being sexually abused, can easily prompt a child’s false confirmation of abuse, due to the adult’s authority and child’s fear of coercion.”

<sup>202</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 38-9.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 39.

McMartin, McMartin Buckey, and Buckey all vehemently denied having abused the children in their care.<sup>204</sup>

The trial lasted twenty-eight months, heard 124 witnesses, reviewed 900 pieces of evidence, produced 64,000 pages of transcripts, and ultimately ruled on sixty-five charges of child sexual abuse (reduced from 100 after some parents refused to let their children testify).<sup>205</sup> On January 18, 1990, the jury for the *People v. Buckey* returned its verdict: Peggy McMartin Buckey was acquitted of all charges; Raymond Buckey was acquitted of 29 of the 52 charges laid against him, with the jury deadlocked on the remaining thirteen charges.<sup>206</sup> Buckey was retried on eight of the remaining charges, but the jury deadlocked again. De Young explains that “with the words, ‘All right, that’s it,’” the judge dismissed all charges against Raymond Buckey.”<sup>207</sup> After six years and fifteen million dollars, the longest and most expensive criminal trial of its time had ended.<sup>208</sup>

But the damage was already done. The McMartin trial had popularized and defined satanic ritual abuse, and, as de Young argues, “in doing so, gave the ensuing moral panic its content.”<sup>209</sup> Hundreds of daycare workers, a majority of them low-paid women unrelated to the children in their care,<sup>210</sup>

joined a growing population...of people whose lives were shattered by allegations of ritual sex abuse. The lucky ones were tried and acquitted, or if not indicted, only bankrupted by legal fees. Others were fired from their jobs, run out of their communities, or had their children taken away from them. Dozens more, including the El Paso, North Carolina, and Austin defendants [of similar satanic ritual abuse daycare cases], were convicted and imprisoned for crimes whose only substantiation was words.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 40-1.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 42. The case against Virginia McMartin was dropped in 1986 for lack of evidence.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>209</sup> de Young, “Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers,” 280.

<sup>210</sup> Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows,” 69.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint the extent to which feminist activism factored in this moral panic, feminists engaged in anti-satanic ritual abuse child protectionism efforts inarguably contributed both to the dissemination of satanic ritual abuse as a child-specific threat and to the sexualization of the phenomenon.<sup>212</sup> Ultimately, the daycare portion of America's Satanic Panic was an important element in what became "a veritable industry [that] developed around the effort to demonstrate the existence of ritual abuse."<sup>213</sup>

## Diagnostic Demonologies

While feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activism in the early 1980s largely focused on identifying incidences of ritual abuse in daycare facilities, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a shift toward the popularization (some would say creation) of psychiatric diagnoses and treatment of satanic ritual abuse-related mental illnesses, including repressed/recovered memory syndrome and multiple personality disorder (MPD-SRA).<sup>214</sup> Feminist activism constituted a significant portion of the energy behind what became a passionate nation-wide effort to spread belief in ritual abuse.<sup>215</sup> Nathan and Snedeker note that by the mid-1980s, satanic ritual abuse accusations were being made "not by children but by adults receiving psychotherapy who, as a result of pressure and suggestion by their

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<sup>211</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 3.

<sup>212</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 78-9.

<sup>213</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 5.

<sup>214</sup> Repressed or recovered memory syndrome is a condition under which the patient suppresses traumatic memories; psychiatric professionals are now more likely to diagnosis patients with "false memory syndrome," a condition often caused by repressed memory therapy that produces "memories" of events that never occurred. Multiple Personality Disorder is now categorized as Dissociative Identity Disorder and is no longer associated with satanic ritual abuse (though it is closely associated with child sexual abuse). On the close connection between satanic ritual abuse memories and Multiple Personality Disorder, see in particular Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*, 89.

<sup>215</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 5.

therapists and from self-help books, were remembering family-based childhood ritual abuse they supposedly had forgotten for years.”<sup>216</sup>

Sociological studies of the satanic ritual abuse survivor phenomenon reveal that survivors are predominantly white women whose average age range is in the mid-forties.<sup>217</sup> While almost 90% of satanic ritual abuse survivors surveyed attended college, studies indicate a lower-than-average participation in white-collar occupations.<sup>218</sup> Several scholars have suggested that satanic ritual abuse survivors become increasingly socially dysfunctional (experiencing depression or isolation) following their diagnoses, which may also contribute to a high incidence of marital problems.<sup>219</sup> Most satanic ritual abuse survivors engage in therapy sessions more than once a week; medical insurance usually does not cover these treatments.<sup>220</sup> An extraordinarily high proportion of satanic ritual abuse survivors (86%) have also been diagnosed with MPD; and the average number of multiple personalities per diagnosed individual is one hundred.<sup>221</sup> Most significantly, the majority of satanic ritual abuse survivors (87.5%) had no memories of ritual abuse prior to therapeutic intervention.<sup>222</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, then, psychiatric hospitals and mental healthcare providers had begun to capitalize on the massive proliferation of recovered memory diagnoses.<sup>223</sup> A minority of

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>217</sup> Christopher D. Bader, “Supernatural Support Groups: Who Are the UFO Abductees and Ritual-Abuse Survivors?,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 673-4. Indeed, Bader records no incidence of SRA reports made by people of color. Cf. Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 4 and Bromley, “Satanism: The New Cult Scare,” 63.

<sup>218</sup> Bader, “Supernatural Support Groups,” 675.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 675, 677. Cf. Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 7.

<sup>220</sup> Bader, “Supernatural Support Groups,” 675, 676.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 675, 677.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 675, 676.

<sup>223</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 236. Cf. Sherrill Mulhern, “Satanism, Ritual Abuse, and Multiple Personality Disorder: A Sociohistorical Perspective,” *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 42, no. 4 (1994): 266.

mental health professionals was responsible for this escalation of satanic ritual abuse-related diagnoses: between 11- 13% of surveyed therapists had direct experience with even one case of alleged satanic abuse.<sup>224</sup> An even smaller number accounted for a huge proportion of reported cases: two percent of therapists surveyed had seen hundreds of cases each.<sup>225</sup> Therapists who reported cases of satanic ritual abuse “were especially likely to have attended special workshops dealing with ways to identify and treat ritual abuse and repressed memories.”<sup>226</sup> Therapists who reported satanic ritual abuse cases were also more likely to diagnose clients with “controversial maladies” like Multiple Personality Disorder.<sup>227</sup> Significantly, “memories of satanic blood rituals only emerge[d] after a patient ha[d] been involved in the process of recovering memories for an extended period of time.”<sup>228</sup> This is to say that very few women identified themselves as satanic ritual abuse survivors without therapeutic intervention.

Social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists helped satanic ritual abuse survivors recover memories of abuse using contentious techniques. Here again, satanic ritual abuse-awareness seminars encouraged therapists in the use of such techniques. As Stuart Wright notes: “by putting patients in an altered state of consciousness, some therapists believed they were uncovering repressed memories of ritual abuse, usually involving family members. Some of these patients were

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<sup>224</sup> Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 112.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. See Ibid., 1: Multiple Personality Disorder diagnoses were controversial in part because so few doctors and therapists were responsible for so many of the diagnosed cases. Therapists working on MPD cases were likely to have attended workshops on identifying and treating satanic ritual abuse, which encouraged caregivers to use suggestive memory recovery techniques that were later proved to produce false memories and iatrogenic symptoms in clients.

<sup>228</sup> Mulhern, “Satanism, Ritual Abuse, and Multiple Personality Disorder,” 278-9. A 1986 informal survey of Chicago conference participants revealed that 25% of patients in treatment for MPD alleged satanic ritual abuse, “recalling that they had been tortured in ritualized satanic sex orgies where adults and children had been murdered and cannibalized.”

confined involuntarily for extended periods of time and heavily sedated by powerful drugs.”<sup>229</sup> Over and above the ethics of so traumatic a treatment course, psychologists Bette Bottoms and Suzanne Davis note in their 1997 “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse” that the techniques these satanic ritual abuse seminars promoted—“suggestive ‘memory recovery’ techniques such as hypnotic age regression” (such as Pazder used in therapy described in *Michelle Remembers*)—“can produce false memories and iatrogenic symptoms in clients.”<sup>230</sup> Despite the complete absence of corroborative evidence for recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse, very few therapists challenged clients’ allegations of satanic abuse.<sup>231</sup> Satanic ritual abuse claims, then, emerged almost exclusively in therapeutic contexts, and were often elicited using controversial techniques since proven to produce false memories and treatment-related illnesses like increased social anxiety, depression, and isolation.<sup>232</sup>

The repressed/recovered memory industry was initiated and energized by Lawrence Pazder’s work with Michelle Smith. In numerous public appearances, Pazder and Smith publicized the core diagnosis in *Michelle Remembers*, the idea that “the trauma of ritual abuse allegedly experienced early in life was so severe that memories of it had been deeply repressed” and were only accessible through extensive therapeutic intervention.<sup>233</sup> Wright observes that “this pioneering account was significant because it incorporated virtually all the charges that would become popular among anti-Satanists in the eighties—Satanic worship, ritual child abuse, blood sacrifices, murder, cannibalism—and thus effectively shaped the whole occult survivor genre.”<sup>234</sup> *Michelle Remembers* thus became a “milestone

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<sup>229</sup> Wright, “Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt,” 123-4.

<sup>230</sup> Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 112.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>232</sup> Bader, “Supernatural Support Groups,” 675, 677.

<sup>233</sup> Richardson, “The Social Construction of Satanism: Understanding an International Social Problem,” 66.

<sup>234</sup> Wright, “Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt,” 132.

publication,” a model through which middle-aged, middle class white women in therapy came to identify themselves as satanic ritual abuse survivors.<sup>235</sup> As Bottoms and Davis assert, “only after the [SRA] phenomenon was well known (after seminal accounts such as *Michelle Remembers*) did many individuals...decide that they too suffered from [satanic ritual abuse].”<sup>236</sup> By reading *Michelle Remembers*, or (more likely) seeking treatment with therapists who had attended satanic ritual abuse seminars directly influenced by Pazder and Smith’s work, thousands of American women came to identify themselves as survivors of satanic ritual abuse.

Pazder and Smith’s work created the paradigm for satanic ritual abuse symptoms and traumas; therapists who specialized in satanic ritual abuse diagnoses and treatments acted as a “conduit of information” for this paradigm, passing the model along to other therapists and thus other patients.<sup>237</sup> The American Psychiatric Association published the third volume of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1984 and for the first time, the DSM included Psychogenic Amnesia (Repressed/Recovered Memories) and Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) as recognizable diagnoses and additional criteria for diagnosing multiplicity pursuant to satanic abuse (MPD-SRA).<sup>238</sup> In the wake of *Michelle Remembers* and DSM-III, “cult-survivor stories proliferated, as did the survivors themselves.”<sup>239</sup>

Many feminists emphatically defended the credibility of these survivor accounts. As psychologists Bottoms and Davis indicate, “the women's movement swept the abuse of women and children into the public eye, enabling real victims to gain deserved public belief and recognition...

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<sup>235</sup> Richardson, “The Social Construction of Satanism: Understanding an International Social Problem,” 66; Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 82; and Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*, 116.

<sup>236</sup> Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 112.

<sup>237</sup> Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*, 116-7.

<sup>238</sup> Robert D. Hicks, *In Pursuit of Satan: The Police and the Occult* (Prometheus Books, 1991), 142.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. Hicks further notes that while Smith was never diagnosed with MPD-satanic ritual abuse, “on the...lecture circuit, Smith present[ed] herself as an MPD exemplar.” Ibid., 147.

[A]t the same time, it may have paved the way for belief in ritual abuse as well.”<sup>240</sup> The DSM-III validated women’s claims of repressed/recovered memories of ritual abuse; feminist support for these claims’ credibility echoed earlier decades’ impetus to “believe the victim.” Gender studies scholar Barbara Fister suggests that

one of the compelling arguments for believing in ritual abuse (despite its sensational and incredible elements) was that the evidence was typically presented as actual, first-hand experience. To doubt the victim’s account was to participate in the abuse... Anything short of uncritical acceptance could be interpreted as betrayal of an entire class of victims.<sup>241</sup>

First-hand accounts of satanic ritual abuse were given further credibility by such popular psychology handbooks as Bass and Davis’ best-selling *The Courage to Heal*, which strongly discouraged skepticism toward recovered memories. “Be willing to believe the unbelievable... No one fantasizes abuse... Believe the survivor,” such texts exhorted therapists and self-identified survivors alike.<sup>242</sup>

*The Courage to Heal* included “an influential section on ritual abuse,” including selections from *Michelle Remembers*.<sup>243</sup> Despite inconsistencies of satanic ritual abuse accusations with earlier scholarly findings on child sexual abuse—most notably the frequency with which women were accused as satanic ritual abuse perpetrators—some feminists rallied to defend survivors in a political drama of feminism against religion writ large.<sup>244</sup>

The feminist support for anti-satanic ritual abuse activism was not without cause. Kelly Jo Jarrett suggests that “recovered memories spread so far and so fast throughout American society because patriarchal family structures and male-dominated society are sexually traumatic for a great many children and adult women” in contemporary American culture.<sup>245</sup> Jarrett and other scholars of

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<sup>240</sup> Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 2.

<sup>241</sup> Fister, “The Devil in the Details,” 3.

<sup>242</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (Yale University Press, 2004), 182.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows,” 294 and de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 78.



the American satanic ritual abuse moral panic have suggested that *Michelle Remembers* and the satanic ritual abuse allegations which followed its publication held metaphorical, if not verifiable, truth for survivors.<sup>246</sup> Jarrett also rightly points out that, with conservative evangelicals, second-wave American feminists are often left “holding the bag” for the Satanic Panic, when (as I discussed above) a range of factors contributed to the panic’s broad dissemination. However, as Bottoms and Davis correctly assert, “feminist support of a culture in which questioning adult survivors’ stories in anathema must be placed on the list of factors contributing to the spread of belief in ritual abuse.”<sup>247</sup>

Therapeutic suggestion leading to false memories of satanic ritual abuse created further complications as well. The victimization and infantilization of women are chief among these complications.<sup>248</sup> As reporter Louisa Thomas asserts, “requiring women to assume the role of ‘victim,’ a person who is perpetually in recovery, has been criticized for being disempowering as well as being a suppression of women’s rights to sexual, psychological, and economic freedom.”<sup>249</sup> Therapists encouraged women to speak in child-voices, to identify as “adult children,” and to locate their identities in early (and often completely fabricated) experiences of abuse.<sup>250</sup> As a result, marriages were destroyed, families torn apart, and often the women in therapy became less able to

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<sup>245</sup> Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows,” 294.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. Cf. Hicks, *In Pursuit of Satan*, 146 and Allen and Midwinter, “Michelle Remembers: The Debunking of a Myth.”

<sup>247</sup> Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 3. Compare Louise Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest*, 252.

<sup>248</sup> As de Young demonstrates, infantilization was also an issue in the McMartin trial. Indeed, mothers sometimes testified AS their children in daycare trials: “The mothers testified not only for their children, but often *as* their children, switching between first and third person pronouns and using puerile language to describe body parts and functions. A mother on the witness stand in the Fran’s Day Care case, for example, when asked what her daughter had told her about being abused by Dan Keller, replied, ‘Danny took his pee-pee and put it in her hole and got glue all inside her and it was yucky.’” de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 136.

<sup>249</sup> Louisa Thomas, “Plurality Tale,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2008, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/31/books/review/Thomas-t.html>, 151.

<sup>250</sup> Jenkins, *Moral Panic*, 182. Cf. Wendy Kaminer, *Sleeping with Extra-terrestrials: The Rise of Irrationalism and Perils of Piety* (Vintage Books, 2000), 209.

function socially than they had been before beginning treatment.<sup>251</sup> As Wright observes, “Tragically, patients were victimized by their therapists, suffering unnecessarily from false or implanted memories of incest, murder, cannibalism, and sexual abuse. Scores of patients accused parents of being Satanists and ritually abusing them in ceremonies of initiation or blood sacrifice.”<sup>252</sup> In this way, the deleterious consequences to satanic ritual abuse-related psychological diagnoses negated the metaphorical truth and psychological benefits to women articulating their discontentment in the language of satanic ritual abuse.

In this section, I have demonstrated the role *Michelle Remembers* and its authors played in popularizing discourses of satanic ritual abuse. I have emphasized in particular the extent to which feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activists were complicit in the dissemination of America’s Satanic Panic. In the final section of this chapter, I shall briefly problematize feminist complicity in spreading this moral panic. I suggest that feminist participation in anti-satanic ritual abuse activism reinforced notions of American sexual exceptionalism, ultimately constraining American women’s sexual and religious freedoms.

### *Feminist Complicity in Moral Panic*

Second-wave feminist activism energized attempts to combat child sexual abuse during the 1970s and 1980s. However, feminists’ willingness to mobilize discourses of satanic ritual abuse contributed to the dissemination of a religio-sexual moral panic during the 1980s and early 1990s. Feminist complicity in the exclusion of child sexual abuse from the domestic sphere reified notions of American sexual exceptionalism. Feminists’ willingness to locate child sexual abuse in a religiously and sexually predatory satanic conspiracy rather than in “good old American” homes worked

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<sup>251</sup> Wright, “Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt,” 123-4.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

ironically to constrain the sexual and religious freedoms of American women in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Unlike their conservative evangelical counterparts, feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activists tended to downplay the satanic element of ritual abuse allegations.<sup>253</sup> As Barbara Fister observes, many anti-satanic ritual abuse feminists “were uncomfortable with the religious interpretation of the conflict and...were quick to drop the ‘satanic’ from the name of the problem and from its etiology.”<sup>254</sup> De Young and Jarrett both note feminists’ willingness to emphasize the sexual elements of satanic ritual abuse while minimizing the supernatural aspects. As de Young observes, “ritual abuse, childsavens started saying as if they had meant to all along, is not always an expression of a satanic belief system, but is more often an act of sexual perversity.”<sup>255</sup>

De Young rightly notes the extensive involvement of feminist investments in anti-satanic ritual abuse activism. I take issue, however, with her insistence that the language of sexual perversity necessarily secularized the public rhetoric surrounding ritual abuse.<sup>256</sup> De Young contends that the feminist language of child sexual abuse was more familiar and more meaningful to the American public than the religious language of satanic intent. The author does note the role of the New Christian Right in tying public concerns about vulnerable children to demonic predation, but is largely dismissive of the role religious language and symbolism played in disseminating the Satanic Panic.<sup>257</sup> In particular, I suspect de Young grossly underestimates the American public’s indignation at the inversion of recognizably Christian symbolism and practice. As Jarrett argues, the religiosity of satanic ritual abuse allegations was not merely significant to evangelical anti-SRA activists, and the

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<sup>253</sup> Fister, “The Devil in the Details,” 3.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>255</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 97.

<sup>256</sup> See Ibid., 94-7.

<sup>257</sup> See Ibid., 13-4.

efficacy of Satanic Panic rhetoric cannot be exclusively attributed to Americans' sentimentality about children. Indeed, as Armstrong has argued, feminist activism against child sexual abuse during the 1970s was largely ineffective – it was the introduction of a satanic (which is to say inverted religious) element that the public began to attend to child sexual abuse accusations. I assert that the efficacy of feminist anti-SRA rhetoric depended in no small part on a judicious mobilization of prejudice against minority religions and particularly on the persistent public suspicion of religious outsiders' sexual predation.<sup>258</sup> To fail to account for the role religious intolerance played in the efficacy of SRA rhetoric's appeal to the American public is to misunderstand this phenomenon.<sup>259</sup>

Contrary to de Young, Jarrett emphasizes the crucial role religion played in facilitating feminist alliances with other anti-SRA activists, most notably conservative evangelicals. Jarrett argues that feminist activists colluded with evangelicals concerned about the phenomenon of satanic ritual abuse through a "politics of substitution." As she explains:

The politics of substitution obscured the conservative and fundamentalist Christian influence in the satanic panic by rendering their investments in religious and moral crusades against religious pluralism and sexual deviance invisible. The politics of substitution enabled feminist and progressive activists to join hands with conservatives in the struggle to 'protect children' from satanic ritual abuse, suppressing the differences between them by deflecting attention away from feminist analyses of sexual violence and sexual abuse as an instrument of social control perpetuated by gender roles and power relations of the traditional family.<sup>260</sup>

This is to say that feminist activists disregarded conservative evangelicals' attempts to discourage religious diversity, gender equality, and sexual difference, as well as evangelical rhetoric about satanic ritual abuse's demonic origins. Feminist activists joined the efforts of decidedly anti-feminist conservative evangelicals in attempts to stop satanic ritual abuse.

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<sup>258</sup> See Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media*, 285.

<sup>259</sup> Fister notes that *Michelle Remembers*' claim to religious authority helped bolster the book's appeal to American audiences. See Fister, "The Devil in the Details," 5.

<sup>260</sup> Jarrett, "Strange Bedfellows," 6.

Jarrett theorizes that focusing on the abuse rather than its satanic etiology allowed feminist activists to enter into such contradictory and ultimately deleterious conservative alliances. Despite a seeming feminist indifference to religious rhetoric, Jarrett insists that the religious aspects of the Satanic Panic were crucial to the widespread acceptance of this social anxiety.<sup>261</sup> She is adamant about the role religion played in perpetuating the moral panic, a point disputed or disregarded by most scholars of the phenomenon.<sup>262</sup>

I concur with Jarrett's emphasis on how deeply mainstream American religiosity shaped the Americans' concerns about satanic ritual abuse. I contend, however, that Jarrett's analysis does not place sufficient weight on the extent to which religion, and specifically religious intolerance, played in disseminating the Satanic Panic. As I have established throughout this dissertation, minority religions—lived or imagined—are frequently the targets of sexual suspicion. The American public *expects* sexual misconduct from religious minorities.<sup>263</sup> Feminist anti-SRA rhetoric capitalized on the persistence and prevalence of the American conviction that religious nonconformity accompanies sexual transgression. In doing so, feminist participation in disseminating the Satanic Panic both fostered suspicion of non-Christian religions—particularly religious witchcraft and other emergent feminist spiritualities—and limited American women's sexual options, most specifically American women's ability both to mother children and participate in the workforce.

Moral panics require folk devils; the role of folk devil is often filled by the religious outsider.<sup>264</sup> Sociologists Goode and Ben-Yehuda moreover emphasize the role sexuality plays in the

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>262</sup> See de Young's argument about "secularizing by sexualizing" in particular. de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 94-7.

<sup>263</sup> Diane Winston, "Texas Court Rules Against Polygamist Raid," *Religion Dispatches*, May 23, 2008, [http://religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/262/texas\\_court\\_rules\\_against\\_polygamist\\_raid\\_\\_\\_politics\\_\\_\\_/](http://religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/262/texas_court_rules_against_polygamist_raid___politics___/).

<sup>264</sup> Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 117-8.

construction of moral panics.<sup>265</sup> I suggest that in instances where the folk devil is a religious outsider, moral panics are informed and fuelled by anxieties about that folk devil's religio-sexual predation.<sup>266</sup> As Nathan and Snedeker note, "the United States has a long tradition of demonizing unconventional religions by condemning them as politically subversive, brutal, authoritarian, *sexually immoral*, and endowed with supernatural powers."<sup>267</sup> Intentionally or not, anti-SRA feminist activists exploited popular anxieties about the sexually transgressive nature of religious minorities in their attempts to fight child sexual abuse. In this way, feminist complicity in the satanic ritual abuse moral panic mobilized and reinforced discourses of American sexual exceptionalism.

## Sexual Exceptionalism

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, "sexual exceptionalism" removes and protects American normative sexuality from culpability for sexual wrongdoing. In particular, I have suggested that American sexual exceptionalism identifies nationally systemic problems, like child sexual abuse, as the sole purview of outsiders – particularly religious outsiders.<sup>268</sup> American sexual exceptionalism presents normative American sexuality as both unique to Americans and intuitively enacted by all those who share Americans' "common values." As Puar argues in her 2007 *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), discourses of sexual exceptionalism produce the United States as "an exceptional nation-state," one whose policies and moralities emerge as somehow unique and universal.<sup>269</sup> American sexual exceptionalism vaunts the moral superiority of

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare* (Beacon Press, 1981), x.

<sup>267</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 35 (emphasis added).

<sup>268</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 3, 8.

normative American sexuality and condemns those who fail to conform to normative identities and practices.

The Satanic Panic America experienced during the 1980s and early 1990s instantiates rhetorics of American sexual exceptionalism. Discourses of American sexual exceptionalism produce and require an Other: in the context of a moral panic, the folk demon (here, imaginary satanists) emerges as predatory and perverse, particularly toward children.<sup>270</sup> In the context of moral panics, rhetorics of American sexual exceptionalism (“good sex”) inform and authorize condemnation of the folk demon’s imagined predatory perversity (satanic ritual abuse). American sexual exceptionalism at once condemns and marginalizes these imagined sexual transgressions. Such rhetorics exculpate the American body politic by insisting that such sexual misdeeds are horrifying and (more importantly) fundamentally other-than normative American sexuality.

In the context of the moral panic in question, American sexual exceptionalism offered normative American sexuality as moral, decent, and restrained in comparison to the monstrous licentiousness of the imaginary satanists. Construction of non- or rather anti-Christian religion as necessarily perverse and predatory distracted from the larger problem: the sexual abuse of American children. At the same time, the literal demonization of non-Christian religions deployed a normalized conservative Christian sexual ethic, which suspects religious outsiders of sexual predation.

This is to say that discourses of American sexual exceptionalism are necessarily protectionist discourses. This rhetoric informs and authorizes actions during a state of exception (moral panic) to protect vulnerable citizens (women and children coerced and duped by dangerous religions). But rhetorics of American sexual exceptionalism ultimately function to confirm and protect the exceptional nature of normative American sexuality. Such discourses locate sexual abuse and

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<sup>270</sup> Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 117-8.

predation outside the American mainstream, rendering (for example) child sexual abuse visible in imaginary and horrific contexts while obscuring the lamentable prevalence of child sexual abuse in mainstream domestic settings. Discourses of American sexual exceptionalism authorize good/real Americans to regulate and condemn religious outsiders for sexual transgression while obscuring or ignoring the sexual crimes happening in their own homes and families. American sexual exceptionalism purports to protect vulnerable citizens from extraordinary (here, religious) predators while occluding the domestic abuses of those same vulnerable populations.

In short, American sexual exceptionalism is a protectionist discourse that protects no one and nothing, short of the discourse and its assumptions about a particular vision of America. At the same time, American sexual exceptionalism informs and authorizes intolerant rhetoric and actions on the grounds of protecting vulnerable Americans from the sexual predation of religious outsiders. American sexual exceptionalism accuses religious outsiders of sexual deviancy for the purpose of “discerning, othering, and quarantining” folk demons.<sup>271</sup> Such exceptionalist rhetoric further disciplines and normalizes American sexuality—informed as it is by a conservative Christian sexual ethic—as something distinct and precious, in need of protection or rehabilitation from the perverse sexuality of imaginary religious predators.

Aligning child sexual abuse with anti-Christian religious practice lent further credence to satanic ritual abuse accusations while inadvertently reifying American sexual exceptionalism. I noted above that many feminists were drawn to anti-satanic ritual abuse activism through early efforts to fight the sexual abuse of women and children. As de Young explains:

When the feminist movement encouraged survivors of rape to speak out, bear witness, and break their silence, a woman’s tale of rape finally entered public discourse. Its emplotment was, and is, profoundly political. It describes rape as an act of violence so common to the everyday lives of women that the pervasive fear it creates affirms those cultural ideologies that have historically functioned to keep women in their place. In making manifest the

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<sup>271</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 38.



relationship between biography and history, the personal and the political, this women's rape tale set the agenda for a whole generation of sexual politics.<sup>272</sup>

De Young here notes the profoundly political nature of women's testimonies to surviving sexual assault. But she also observes that "sexual trauma tales can sustain the status quo by simply reiterating, without critique, the dominant cultural discourse about sex and gender."<sup>273</sup> Satanic ritual abuse allegations function in just this way: by placing the sexual abuse of women and children outside normative American sexuality, rendering it demonic and outside the boundaries of American domesticity.

During the Satanic Panic, de Young argue that "ritual abuse became synonymous with sexual abuse – but not with the 'ordinary' kind of sexual abuse that occurs within families. With its ceremonial trappings, costumes and rites, ritual abuse was something altogether different."<sup>274</sup> While the abuse feminist activists rendered visible in the 1970s was undoubtedly regrettable, it was also incredibly common: "in the moral economy of the 1980s, sexual abuse was horrible, shameful – but ritual abuse was evil. And evil acts require evil actors."<sup>275</sup> Satanic ritual abuse perpetrators were not family members or trusted friends, but members of a powerful and malicious religious conspiracy. The abusive acts themselves were more horrific than domestic incest and child sexual abuse:

The fondling and oral-genital contact that are the preferred acts of sexual abuse almost pale in comparison to the rape and sodomy that supposedly are the preferred acts of ritual abuse. The idiosyncratic practices to heighten the abusers' arousal in sexual abuse almost fade to insignificance in contrast to the infant sacrifices, blood-drinking and cannibalism that are the alleged rituals of ritual abuse. And the bribes, coercions, and manipulations that keep sexual abuse secret simply cannot hold a candle to the death threats, brainwashing, forced drug ingestion and induction of multiple personalities that are said to guarantee the silence of ritually abused children.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> de Young, "Breeders for Satan," 111.

<sup>273</sup> de Young, "Breeders for Satan," 111.

<sup>274</sup> de Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, 32.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

In every way, satanic ritual abuse abuses exceeded and eclipsed the prevalent horrors of domestic sexual abuse. Anti-incest activist Louise Armstrong elaborates: “[satanic ritual abuse] was a truly epic distraction from the humdrum business of ordinary men allowed to molest children in the normal, routine course of events. In fact, as dialogues, speculation, and passion zoomed over that was variously called satanic, cult, or ritual (or ritualized or ritualistic) abuse, incest plain and simple was left behind to eat dust.”<sup>277</sup> Or, Armstrong suggests, “you could also look at it this way: The tormenting and raping of children by ordinary familial human agency just hadn’t been *bad enough*.”<sup>278</sup>

The media circus surrounding satanic ritual abuse allegations emerging from daycare facilities and therapists’ couches made child sexual abuse visible. But the extreme and supernatural (not to mention unverifiable) nature of these accusations configured the root problem—sexual abuse of children—foreign and aberrant, fundamentally other-than American sexuality and American domesticity. Locating child sexual abuse in the supernatural robs these stories of important forms of political content and efficacy, reinforcing dominant cultural ideologies about the inevitability of women’s sexual victimization and removing all commentary about the social causes of that victimization.<sup>279</sup> Satanic ritual abuse accusations placed child sexual abuse outside normative American sexuality, voiding these stories of any disruptive or subversive potential.<sup>280</sup> As de Young notes:

For all their horror, [these stories] are conservative and preservative. Their depiction of female victimization and helplessness so resoundingly resonates with dominant cultural ideologies that the stories, themselves, are pitiable yet provocative tales about the inevitability of sexual violence in the lives of females. As hegemonic tales, they offer no solutions, map out no trajectory for social change. They can only be listened to, not acted upon.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics*, 244.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>279</sup> de Young, “Breeders for Satan,” 115-116.

<sup>280</sup> de Young, “Breeders for Satan,” 115-116.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 116. So too Jarrett, “Strange Bedfellows,” 91.

I would qualify de Young's assessment here, as I have argued in this chapter that stories about satanic ritual abuse can be and have been acted upon. However, de Young's basic assertion is correct. Public responses to satanic ritual abuse accusations did little to prevent the root problem: the prevalence of child sexual abuse. At the same time, lurid accounts of supernatural violence against women and children reinforced hierarchical gendered assumptions about women's inherent vulnerability and limited the conditions of religious possibility in late 20<sup>th</sup> century America. In this way tales of satanic ritual abuse *are* preservative and conservative. Stories like *Michelle Remembers* protect and maintain normative American sexuality as exceptional—as inherently moral, exemplary, and worthy of emulation—while consigning child sexual assault to supernatural and nefarious enemies of the American public.

Notably, the Satanic Panic began to decelerate at roughly the same time middle-class women's satanic ritual abuse accusations began to prompt lawsuits against their similarly middle-class, presumably Satan-worshipping, family members.<sup>282</sup> That the Satanic Panic faltered at roughly the same point it began to indict white American middle-class families is further evidence of the extent to which these protectionist discourses bolstered an ideology of American sexual exceptionalism.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, locating child sexual abuse in predatory marginal religions effectively absolved mainstream Americans of their responsibility for this systemic social problem while confirming the superior morality of normative American sexuality.<sup>284</sup>

## Constraining Freedoms

In addition to reifying the ideology of American sexual exceptionalism, feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activism also served to constrain American women's sexual and religious freedoms. Notably,

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<sup>282</sup> Cf. Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 236 and Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics*, 251.

<sup>283</sup> Bromley, "Satanism: The New Cult Scare," 68.

<sup>284</sup> Gunn, "Prime-time Satanism," 115.

the satanic ritual abuse moral panic fostered psychiatric diagnoses that placed the onus of child sexual abuse on supernatural assailants rather than domestic care-givers, criminalized daycare workers (the majority of whom were female) who facilitated an unprecedented influx of mothers into the workforce, and cast aspersions on a demonstrably feminist mode of spirituality – religious witchcraft.

As active participants in efforts to disseminate the satanic ritual abuse moral panic, feminist activists helped place the blame for child sexual assault on imaginary satanists rather than on domestic childcare providers. During an eight-year inquiry into satanic ritual abuse accusations, federal investigator Kenneth V. Lanning failed to produce any substantive evidence of an international satanic conspiracy set on abusing children for religious or sexual purposes. He moreover expressed concern that state and federal focus on these extraordinary allegations shifted vital attention and resources from domestic incidents of abuse. “I’m greatly concerned that this issue is distorting the issue of child sexual abuse and is going to cause serious problems for this movement down the road and affect the credibility of victims,” Lanning said. “I’m also extremely concerned because I believe, all across this country, people are getting away with molesting kids because we can’t prove they’re satanic devil-worshippers.”<sup>285</sup> Indeed, publicity surrounding false satanic ritual abuse claims did undermine the credibility of child witnesses and fostered skepticism among journalists, law enforcement officials, and jurors alike with regard to cases alleging child sexual abuse.<sup>286</sup> Though child sexual abuse is regrettably common, its circumstances are neither supernatural nor demonstrably religious. In direct contrast to satanic ritual abuse accusations, perpetrators of most child sexual abuse are male, usually family members, “and they do not seem to

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<sup>285</sup> Quoted in Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics*, 258.

<sup>286</sup> Bottoms and Davis, “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse,” 8.

need the help of satanists to inflict serious damage.”<sup>287</sup> Feminist focus on child abuse in the context of satanic ritual abuse thus distracted from far more prevalent incidents of domestic abuses.<sup>288</sup>

Feminist complicity in the satanic ritual abuse moral panic further limited American women’s sexual choices by criminalizing daycare workers, making it more difficult for women with children to enter the workforce. I noted above that the 1980s saw an unprecedented influx of mothers into the American workforce and the institution of childcare facilities—largely staffed by working-class women—facilitated this influx.<sup>289</sup> During the Satanic Panic, satanic ritual abuse accusations targeted precisely these women who made it possible for middle-class mothers to *remain* middle-class.<sup>290</sup> As de Young notes, satanic ritual abuse claims further depoliticized allegations of child sexual abuse in identifying women as the primarily folk devils of the early Satanic Panic,

thus weakening the link between sexual abuse and male dominance, and forging a new one between bizarre and sadistic sexual abuse and women as perpetrators. [The satanic ritual abuse moral panic] loosened the embeddedness of sexual abuse within the routine and the familiar by mystifying its context with claims that children were being abused not only in their day care centers but in other unusual or unrecognizable places, during the course of meaningless rituals and incomprehensible ceremonies performed not only by their day care providers but by robed and hooded strangers.<sup>291</sup>

Discourses of American sexual exceptionalism during the Satanic Panic located child sexual abuse outside the domestic sphere placed that abuse within public daycare facilities. Anti-satanic ritual abuse feminist activists were complicit in the “arrest, trial by ordeal, and lifelong incarceration of

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 1 and Nathan, “Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare,” 84.

<sup>288</sup> Nathan, “Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare,” 81 and Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 6.

<sup>289</sup> Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 556.

<sup>290</sup> Scholarly analysis of the Satanic Panic has largely omitted—and would benefit greatly from—more nuanced attention to issues of class (cf. McCloud, “Putting Some Class into Religious Studies”). Nathan and Snedeker rightly observe that accusations of satanic ritual abuse-based child sexual abuse fail to account for the demonstrable link between child sexual abuse and poverty, but do not explore the matter in detail. See Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 249, as well as Michael Kenny, “Setting a Wolf to Catch a Wolf: Psychiatry, Satanism, and the Anti-Cult Movement,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 37, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 612.

<sup>291</sup> de Young, “Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers,” 287-8.

accused [working-class] women”; these feminists “have remained silent as convicted mothers and teachers are sent to prison. Or some have admitted that a handful of defendants are probably innocent, but dismissed their fate as the inevitable casualties of a war in which the claims of truly abused youngsters cannot be threatened by talk of even one false accusation.”<sup>292</sup> By contributing to the criminalization of (again, mostly female) daycare workers, allowing these workers to be demonized for social anxieties arising from women’s social mobility, feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activists impeded American women’s sexual freedoms.<sup>293</sup>

Finally, feminist complicity in disseminating the satanic ritual abuse moral panic constrained American women’s religious freedom by fostering suspicion toward an emergent mode of feminist spirituality – that is, religious witchcraft. Witchcraft emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to more established, demonstrably patriarchal religious traditions. During the 1980s, public rhetoric surrounding the Satanic Panic often elided the imaginary satanism with the lived practices of religious witches, Wiccans, and other Neopagans.<sup>294</sup> The latter groups bore little resemblance to the much-feared satanic folk devil, and practitioners took some pains to distance themselves from the “public hysteria about abductions, sacrifices, and mutilated babies” – as well as from avowed religious Satanists, such as members of the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set.<sup>295</sup> Yet law enforcement officers, jurors, and media pundits seldom bothered to differentiate between the groups.<sup>296</sup> Failure to distinguish between the imaginary “satanic witches” supposedly conspiring against American children and progressive feminist religious practice effectively constrained

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<sup>292</sup> Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence*, 247.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>294</sup> Sarah M. Pike, “Dark Teens and Born-again Martyrs: Captivity Narratives after Columbine,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 653.

<sup>295</sup> Hicks, *In Pursuit of Satan*, 114.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-5, 122, 137.

American women's religious freedom during the 1980s and early 1990s; witches today still face public suspicion and confusion about their ties to the "baby-eating Satanists."<sup>297</sup>

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have interrogated feminist tensions in the dissemination of the satanic ritual abuse (satanic ritual abuse) moral panic – specifically the extent to which feminist efforts foreclosed conditions of possibility for American women in the 1980s and early 1990s. I used the public reception and mobilization of the satanic ritual abuse memoir *Michelle Remembers* to demonstrate the ways in which feminist satanic ritual abuse advocates located incest and child sexual abuse not in the home, but in the religious and sexual machinations of Satanists. Such feminists invested extraordinary amounts of effort to spread awareness of the threat of satanic ritual abuse and the psychological diagnoses that often accompanied it: multiple personality disorder and repressed memory syndrome. Ironically, these feminists' efforts reified diagnoses that infantilized women abuse victims, occluded domestic child sexual abuse (the victims of which were and are largely female), criminalized the (largely female) daycare workers who facilitated an unprecedented influx of mothers into the workforce, and cast aspersions on an emphatically feminist mode of emerging spirituality, religious witchcraft. Thus I have argued that feminist anti-satanic ritual abuse activism both reinforced American sexual exceptionalism and restricted American women's religious and sexual freedoms.

The rough decade between 1980 and the early 1990s comprises an important moment in contemporary American history: one in which lawmakers of a presumably secular state expressed concerns about the embodied influences of evil on American citizens; in which reputable mainstream journalists reported on the dangers of creative material (including music, books, and

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 115.

games that encouraged the players to imagine themselves in fantastic situations and surroundings); in which the American public was actively and articulately afraid of the devil, who emerged during this time period as a threat to *Americans*, rather than merely to Christians. This period is important to understanding late 20th century American culture, as moral panics provide crucial insights into a culture's values and commitments – particularly with regard to that culture's sexual norms.<sup>298</sup> But this period is also important to American religious studies, though scholars outside the subfields of sociology of religion and new religious movements have largely ignored the phenomenon.

The Satanic Panic, despite its fatuous rhyming moniker and often scarcely credible events, deserves closer scrutiny within the field of American religions. Many American religious historians have devoted significant energy toward chronicling the rise of the New Christian Right, but most ignore that the public rhetoric of conservative evangelicalism during the 1980s included consistent fear-mongering about demonic influences at work in contemporary America.<sup>299</sup> The significance of the Satanic Panic is not limited to the study of American evangelicalism, however. As I have shown, public figures during this decade consistently used religious symbolism and language in public sphere discourse. Such rhetoric and symbols shaped court cases, social work, psychology, and feminist activism.

Of my three case studies, this chapter best exemplifies the traditional “moral panic,” defined in time and space, forgotten, ignored, or dismissed once public hysteria died down. But as I argued in my introduction, this narrativization is also indicative of a broader, endemic response to religious difference in American public sphere: the casting of sexual aspersions on a minority religion—or in this case, an imagined mode of minority religiosity—to resolve public anxieties about violations of

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<sup>298</sup> Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 18.

<sup>299</sup> Notable exceptions include Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* and Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 172-7.



normative sexuality and the willingness of the American body politic to address sexual misconduct occurring outside the American home.

## Conclusion: Good Neighbors

He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

Robert Frost  
"Mending Wall"

**September 2000**

In Dallas, forty-four former students of *gurukulas*, boarding schools operated by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, file a federal lawsuit alleging decades of abuse at the hands of instructors. From 1972 – 1990, many American members of ISKCON (colloquially known as "Hare Krishnas") left their children in the indifferent care of fellow devotees less suited to public proselytization and fundraising. The plaintiffs testify that physical, emotional, and sexual abuse was widespread and common at these educational institutions. The abuses they allege are severe: their attorney, Windle Turley, describes incidents as "the most unthinkable abuse and maltreatment of little children which we have seen. It includes rape, sexual abuse, physical torture and emotional terror of children as young as three years of age."<sup>1</sup> Though federal attempts to prosecute ISKCON under the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) will fail, by the end of these proceedings ISKCON will agree to a \$9.5 million settlement to compensate 535 former *gurukuli* abuse survivors.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Brandt, "Holy Abuse," *Salon*, July 2, 2001, <http://www.salon.com/2001/07/02/krishna/>.

<sup>2</sup> E. Burke Rochford, Jr. "The Hare Krishna Movement: Beginnings, Change, and Transformation," in *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, ed. Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft (Westwood, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 36.

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Religious studies scholarship on ISKCON frankly acknowledges these abuses and the Society's efforts toward making amends.<sup>3</sup> Despite state and federal legal proceedings against ISKCON, there has been little public awareness of or popular outcry against this minority religious community. There have been no public exposés about the evils of ISKCON on major news programs. Oprah did not visit Alachua, Florida.<sup>4</sup> Despite relatively narrow strictures for members' dress, sexual practices, and diet, no public figure called ISKCON "the American Taliban."<sup>5</sup> At no point did state officials propose that ISKCON theology perpetuates and mandates the victimization of children. Krishna Consciousness is by no means mainstream American religion, but neither does the American public equate ISKCON with gendered exploitation, abuse, or sexual impropriety in ways comparable to the rhetoric regarding FLDS or even Islam. Why should this be so?

*Gurukulas* separated children as young as three and four years of age from their families and familiar domestic settings, to an even greater extent than the daycare facilities that received so much public scrutiny during the Satanic Panic. ISKCON theologically prizes celibacy over procreative binary monogamy, making its members sexually nonconformist in degrees arguably comparable to the plural marriages of Mormon fundamentalists. As with Islam, a great many members of ISKCON are racial or ethnic minorities within the United States. Nevertheless, the International

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<sup>3</sup> David Wolf, "Child Abuse and the Hare Krishnas: History and Response," in *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin Francis Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 332-3.

<sup>4</sup> Alachua, FL, is home to one of the larger ISKCON communities in the United States. See John M. Bozeman, "ISKCON's Extensive Reform Efforts," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 3.2 (April 2000): 385.

<sup>5</sup> Laura Palmer, a correspondent for CNN's "Anderson Cooper 360°," referred to the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as "the American Taliban" in the segment "Escape from Polygamy" (April 4, 2008). "I had heard the FLDS described as the American Taliban. I had thought that was hyperbole. It was not." <http://ac360.blogs.cnn.com/2008/04/04/escape-from-polygamy/>

Society for Krishna Consciousness met with a far less acrimonious public response to substantiated allegations of sexual abuse than did the communities which comprise my case studies.

The simplest explanation for these discrepancies is that the schools in question no longer exist. Though some Krishna temples run day schools, the last *gurukula* in the United States closed in 1996. But ultimately this explanation is unsatisfying in its facility.

That ISKCON has become less foreign-seeming to the American mainstream might provide some insight.<sup>6</sup> “Hare Krishnas” met with much suspicion and abuse when the movement emerged in the mid-1960s, but as American ISKCON enters its sixth decade, much of its shock value seems to have faded. We might attribute the lack of popular response regarding ISKCON’s sexual abuse and scandal to a relative indifference bred by familiarity with this once “exotic” movement.

The “mainstreaming” of Krishna Consciousness might also be traced to a demographic shift in membership: whereas devotees in the 1960s and 1970s were primarily young middle-to-upper class white converts, today’s Krishnas are most often of transnational Asian descent. It is perhaps not unreasonable to suspect that the American public is less outraged by—or even interested in—abuses perpetrated against non-white children.

The absence of exoticism surrounding ISKCON has also made “Hare Krishnas” less frequent targets of popular culture lampooning. The absence of a well-marketed pulp nonfiction narrative to popularize and corroborate public suspicions of religious difference might also have contributed to the lack of response to these reported abuses.

Whatever the cause(s) of Americans’ public disinterest in ISKCON’s sex scandal, the indifference itself serves as evidence of the movement’s relative innocuousness in the nation’s understanding of religion. ISKCON has become a “good neighbor,” in ways FLDS, Islam, and satanism have not and might never.

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<sup>6</sup> Eileen Barker, “Perspective: What Are We Studying?,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8.1 (July 2004): 99.

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In this dissertation, I have argued that public rhetoric about minority religions demonstrates the ways notions of normative sexuality have shaped and constrained popular understandings of American religion since the early 1980s. I engaged several popular narratives that portray minority religions (Islam, Mormonism, and witchcraft) as predatory, coercing or duping vulnerable American women and children into religious nonconformity and sexual transgression. In these narratives, normative sexuality—understood as binary, marital, moderately procreative, and heterosexual—marks the boundaries of acceptable American religiosity and the limits of American religious tolerance. At the same time, a popular intuitive sense of “good” sex (and its regulation) authorizes the surveillance and regulation of minority religious practices without violating Americans’ professed commitment to religious pluralism and freedom. In this way, public rhetoric discourages religious nonconformity while encouraging normative sexual practices. This strategy’s efficacy lies in its claim to protect America’s most vulnerable citizens, women and children.

As I have shown, normative American sexuality constructs and compels certain raced, classed, and gendered attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors.<sup>7</sup> Narratives like *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *Not Without My Daughter*, and *Michelle Remembers* identify the people and problems of religious minorities as somehow outside contemporary American culture – as though women and children were not abused in other contexts; as though such abuse were the product of peculiar theologies rather than broader systemic inequalities.

This kind of intolerant rhetoric authorizes *real* Americans, in their *common* sense, to regulate and condemn religious outsiders for sexual transgressions (real or imagined) while masking or ignoring the sexual crimes happening in their own homes and families. Authors like Jon Krakauer, Betty Mahmood, and Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder identify minority religions as legitimate

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<sup>7</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 9.

targets of intolerance—and the women and children of marginal religions as especially vulnerable populations—while ignoring more mundane incidents of abuse.

I have presented three case studies—Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2003), Betty Mahmoody’s *Not Without My Daughter* (1987), and Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder’s *Michelle Remembers* (1980)—as paradigmatic of religiously intolerant discourse. Krakauer’s work elides Mormon fundamentalist identity with the practice of polygamy, and directly informed the 2008 raid of the FLDS Yearning for Zion ranch, which resulted in the largest state custodial detention of children in U.S. history and further isolated and alienated abuse victims within the community while failing to prevent systemic abuses of women and children. Mahmoody essentialized Muslim masculinity as a frustrated sexual predation that oppresses and abuses women, thus fostering public anti-Muslim sentiment and isolating American Muslim women. Finally, Smith and Pazder’s work served as a direct catalyst for the Satanic Ritual Abuse moral panic of the 1980s and early 1990. In particular, feminist anti-abuse activists responding to *Michelle Remembers* played a pivotal role in the literal demonization of minority religions and childcare providers during this period.

Religious intolerance does not exist in a vacuum – it capitalizes on other systemic inequalities. By locating the abuse of women and children in America’s religious margins, these rhetorics encourage normative practices without violating a professed national commitment to religious freedom or holding the nation accountable for the domestic and far more prevalent abuses of women and children. Paradoxically, this rhetoric often work to constrain Americans’ religious and sexual freedoms while doing little to prevent violence against women and children.

Such discourse promotes intolerant rhetoric and actions on the grounds of protecting and saving vulnerable Americans from the sexual predation of religious outsiders. This rhetoric disciplines and normalizes American sexuality as something distinct and precious, in need of protection or rehabilitation from the perverse sexuality of imaginary religious predators. This discourse—predicated on the need of the American body politic to protect and liberate its women

and children—ultimately protects no one and nothing except the boundaries of acceptable American religiosity and sexuality.

The narrativizations that have constituted my case studies simultaneously condemn the abuse of women and children while doing little, if anything, to prevent or disrupt such violence. The authors consistently recount tales of horrific sexual violence against women to demonstrate the barbarity of religious minorities, and ostensibly the need for commonsense Americans to intervene. But as I have demonstrated, narratives that exploit dominant cultural assumptions about sexual and gendered inequality are fundamentally conservative and preservative: such tales do little either to prevent the abuses they recount, or to protect the stories' sentimentalized subjects.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, these exotic and damning portrayals of marginal religions exclude religious minorities from common sense and American values, constraining conditions of religious possibility and complicating the lived practices of American minority religions.

Narratives like the ones I have critiqued are never just stories. Such contributions to popular culture shape American religious landscape – compelling normative religious and sexual practices, eliding differences among minority religious communities to present said communities as equally foreign and threatening to truly American way of life. These terrible stories, these atrocity tales, are ultimately deleterious both to mainstream Americans' understandings of religious diversity and to members of minority religious communities. Such tales, as de Young notes, make abuses seem inevitable and do little to prevent abuses. Rather, atrocity tales confirm what we already “know” about minority religions, act as evidence for condemnation of difference, and compel normative religious and sexual practices. These tales of abuse, horror, and woe do little to prevent abuse and victimization of the women and children of minority religious communities. Such stories do,

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<sup>8</sup> Mary de Young, “Breeders for Satan: Toward a Sociology of Sexual Trauma Tales,” *Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 2 (1996): 116.

however, inform the American public that suspicion of and discrimination against minority religious communities is necessary, justified, and inevitable.

Public rhetoric that constructs minority religions as necessarily insidious, irrational, and perverse neither reflects the lived experience of many members of these minority religions nor protects the survivors or the potential targets of domestic and sexual abuses. As scholars of American religions, then, we must attend to the consequences of narrativizing contact with social outsiders and take seriously the expressed desires, needs, and recounted experiences of religious minorities themselves.



**APPENDIX: Robert Frost, "Mending Wall" (1975)**

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows?  
But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

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