CAPTIVITY AND CONFLICT: A STUDY OF GENDER, GENRE, AND RELIGIOUS OTHERS

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ABSTRACT

This project considers questions of religious othering in the contemporary United States through the lens of popular post-religious narratives. These narratives salaciously depict mistreated women in order to demarcate certain religions as deviant; authors and pundits then use these narratives in order to justify outside intervention in specific religious communities. By closely analyzing a selection of contemporary narratives written about women from Muslim and fundamentalist Mormon communities with special attention to both the feminist enactments and tropes of captivity which permeate these texts, this project challenges simplistic portrayals of religious Others. In doing so, the analysis draws the reader's attention to the uncanny imitations in many of these texts: in arguing that certain religions "capture" their female adherents, authors of contemporary captivity narratives silence the voices of women whose stories they seek to illuminate. The dissertation also explores the ambivalent content of many of these narratives. When read against the grain, captivity literature offers surprising opportunities for nuanced explorations of religion, gender and agency.

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introducing me to *God's Brothel*; reading that book solidified my interest in studying captivity literature. Tricia Way gets a special thank you for helping me get through the final push of dissertation writing and talking me off a ledge when I was faced with yet another rewrite for Laura. Vinnie Moulton, Ross Hennessy, Brett Krutzsch, Trish Kolbe, Elliott Ratzman, Amy Defibaugh, Patrick Denehy, John Dyck, Scott Strednak Singer and Adam Valerio helped make graduate school worthwhile. Hannah Mayne was a great writing partner as I negotiated doing work away from my Temple support network.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS 1

    Context: Secular Positions and the "Clash of Civilization" 7

    Text: The Political Implications of Language 11

    Reflexivity: Locating Myself 18

    Chapter Outline 21

PART I

LENSES OF ANALYSIS: GENDER AND GENRE 29

2. DEFINING FEMINISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS WOMEN 30

    Liberal Feminism 33

    Liberal Feminism and the Study of Religion: Reclaiming Religion as Feminist 38

    Illiberal Results of Liberal Feminism 45

    Reconfigurations: Redefining Feminism through the Study of Religious Women 52

    Breaking Down Binaries 58

3. THE TROPES OF CAPTIVITY 60

    Overview of Historical Examples 65

    Genre Overview: Politics and Poetics 68

    Tropes of Captivity 73

Capture 73

Suffering in Barbaric Wilderness 79

Held against One's Will 84

Redemption: escapes and the Victims for Whom They Speak 86

The Captive's Position: Both / And 89

PART II

CLOSE READING OF TEXT 92

4. CONSTRUCTING THE AUTHENTIC VICTIM: *I AM NUJOOD, AGE 10 AND DIVORCED* BY NUJOOD ALI WITH DELPHINE MINOUI 93

I am Nujood: An Overview 97

Constructing Nujood's Voice 100

Child Marriage as Captivity 106

Foreign Signals: Victims are Over There 111

Narrative Occlusios: Shortcomings of the Authentic Mask 118

Interventions and their Shortcomings: The Draw of Human Rights 121

The Fraught Question of Giving Women a Voice 125

5. FEMINIST HEROINES: THE ESCAPPES OF ANDREA MOORE-EMMETT'S *GOD'S BROTHEL* 127

Textual Overview 131

Starting Assumptions: The Dangers of Polygamy 133

Clamining Feminism 140

Tropes of Captivity 150

The Opposition of Religion and Feminsim 155

Creating a Unified Image 161

Perpetuating Violence against Women 166

6. ALTERNATIVE ARTICULATIONS OF FEMALE POWER: THE AMBIVALENT CAPTIVITY OF SUSAN RAY SCHMIDT IN *FAVORITE WIFE* 169

Overview of Text 173

Alterantive Articulations of Female Power 177

Capture / Courtship 181

Suffering I / Early Marriage: Into the Wilderness 190

Suffering II / Submissive Marriage: Acclimation or Brainwashing? 194

Escape 199

The Allure of Captivity 205

7. THE LIMITS OF LIBERAL INCLUSION: *INFIDEL* BY AYAAN HIRSI ALI 208

Textual Overview 212

Monolithic Categories: Islam and the West 214

The Importance of Captivity 222

Symbols of Captivity: The Power of the Veil 229

Ambivalence and its Erasure 232

Negotiating Boundaries: Somali and Western, Apostate and Citizen 236

The Limits of Liberal Inclusion 243

8. AMBIVALENT READINGS: AVOIDING STARK DICHOTOMIES 246

Uncanny Imitations 247

Slave Narratives and the Question of Political Efficacy 252

The Promise of Ambivalence 255

APPENDIX 259

BIBLIOGRAPHY 264

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

I first came across *Favorite Wife: Escape from Polygamy*, Susan Ray Schmidt's memoir detailing the years she spent in a polygamous Mormon community in Mexico, during my first semester as a graduate student at Temple University in the fall of 2009. Though I picked up the book on a whim, once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. I was both fascinated and repulsed by Schmidt's story. Despite my strong reaction to Schmidt's narrative, at first I saw little connection between salacious pot-boilers featuring religious extremism and my own research interests. I had grand plans to delve into medieval mysticism or the politics of Islamic faith, foreign iterations of religious intensity which seemed to have no connection to my happily unquestioned secular existence. To quote religious historian Stephen Prothero, I was "crazy for people who are crazy for God."[1] That is, as long as there was no chance that their craziness could impact me: the antics of these religious others were certainly fascinating, but part of the attraction lay in the frisson of revulsion I felt in discovering them.

Yet in eventually confronting my ambivalent desires to study religious practitioners so distant from myself, I found myself returning to Schmidt's memoir. In writing her life story, Schmidt offered a mediated glimpse of a particular version of being crazy for God. This layer of mediation provided me with a way in: not to talk about religious others *per se*, but to talk about the discursive framework used to mark certain

[1] Stephen Prothero, "Belief Unbracketed: A Case for the Religion Scholar to Reveal More of Where He or She Is Coming From," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Winter/Spring 2004), 10.

religions as other and the political implications thereof. More specifically, I read Schmidt's narrative, along with several other narratives written by post-religious women, in order to hone in on the ways in which the mistreatment of women serve as a signal of religious deviance.[2] These texts, which I argue constitute a distinctive genre of writing across different religious affiliations, describe an individual's suffering within and escape from a religious group; the most popular post-religious narratives are those written by women who tap into the prevailing rhetoric that female practitioners are oppressed specifically by their religion.

I self-identify as a feminist in both my political and theoretical leanings. As such, I find myself focusing my mental and emotional energy on issues that serve as markers of inequality, particularly systemic issues that have a wide-ranging effect on American society. However, the way in which many feminist activists talk about religious women makes me deeply uncomfortable. Well-meaning American and European women who simply want to make the world a better place often embrace the discourse that bad religions are recognizable through their mistreatment of women; these liberal feminists stand up against the "oppression of women" worldwide. However, in doing so, they may ignore the voices of the very women they wish to protect.

The problem with the pervasive connection between deviant religion and mistreated women is that it allows liberal Americans to assume that all problems that a woman might face are due to her religious affiliation. However, religious practitioners do

[2] I borrow the term "post-religious" from Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, who refers to Ayaan Hirsi Ali as a "post-Muslim." This underscores the implication that in denouncing her religion, the author / subject has developed a more evolved understanding of the world; she has not only denounced her religion, she has actively moved beyond it. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Rescued by Law? Gender and the Global Politics of Secularism," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 213.

not hold the monopoly on oppressing women, and secularization does not necessarily bring gender equality.[3] Furthermore, such a stance homogenizes religious practitioners, particularly those who are marked as conservative. There are vast differences between Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Indonesia, just as there are vast differences between polygamous Mormons who affiliate with the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB) and those who have joined the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints (FLDS)[4]; these differences are frequently occluded by rhetoric that links progress to liberation from outdated religious idioms. Demonizing a religion wholesale fails to take into account the nuances of life in these communities; the women who do choose to stay with groups termed "patriarchal" or "oppressive" are marked as brainwashed victims, rather than people who find meaning

[3]See, for example, Joan Wallach Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 26-31.
I discuss the links between secularism and feminism, and the limitations of these connections, in more detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[4] The distinction between these groups may seem more opaque than that between Muslims in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. While the AUB and the FLDS share some similarities of doctrine and practice, the FLDS has recently gained attention as an especially deviant version of polygamous Mormonism. Their leader, Warren Jeffs, is currently serving time for child sexual assault; their communities in Colorado City, AZ; Bountiful, British Columbia; and El Dorado, TX, were reported to be hotbeds of underage marriage and the trafficking of young girls across state and national borders. In contrast, scholars generally paint the AUB as the least conservative of the polygamous Mormon sects; for example, they eschew underage marriage and do not follow a recognizable dress code.
For general information about the different polygamous groups and their histories see: Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat, *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43-60; Janet Bennion, "History, Culture, and Variability of Mormon Schismatic Groups" and "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 & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Brian C. Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006); Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton, "Prologue: The Incident at Eldorado, Texas," in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); D. Michael Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31.2 (Summer 1998): 12-23; Anne Wilde, "Fundamentalist Mormonism: Its History, Diversity, and Stereotypes, 1886-Present," in *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2007).

in their lives, though perhaps along different avenues than those lauded by liberal feminists.

Although individual narratives might offer glimpses of diversity within religious communities, their marketing encourages readings that reinforce negative stereotypes, particularly when texts are read in tandem with one another.[5] Generally speaking, a narrative which falls into this category includes detailed descriptions of a woman's suffering while within a specific religious and cultural milieu. The author / subject describes her suffering in terms of entrapment, as she is subject to the capricious whim of those who would circumvent her autonomy. Eventually, she escapes, and is able to tell her story from a newly embraced position of freedom. Her freedom is usually embodied by a new religious or physical location from whence she is able to reflect on her experiences; in writing as an atheist or Protestant Christian within the United States or Western Europe, she has gained a new perspective on the deviance of her previous religious affiliation. Yet even though the authors / subjects write from outside their

[5] Dohra Ahmad, in her analysis of a cross-section of what she calls the "oppressed Muslim woman" genre, notes the packaging of, omissions within, and reader responses to specific texts in order to highlight the ways in which the particularity of each story is overridden by the overarching narrative that marks Islam as oppressive. She concludes her analysis by noting that "whatever their individual content, their readers form these books into linked narratives that add up to a consolidated indictment of Islam." Dohra Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil: Muslim Women in American Popular Literature," *Social Text 99* 27.2 (Summer 2009): 124.
Mohammad Hassa Khalil and Mucahit Bilici confirm Ahmad's findings. In their overview of memoirs describing conversion away from Islam, they note that the most common factor cited for leaving the religion was the mistreatment of women. They conclude that "in describing their departure from Islam, former Muslims often fall into tropes that have widespread acceptance or circulation." Mohammad Hassan Khalil and Mucahit Bilici, "Conversion out of Islam: A Study of Conversion Narratives of Former Muslims," *The Muslim World* 97 (January 2007): 120. See pages 117-118 for more details on the breakdown of the data they gathered.
This is also the case with memoirs written by practitioners of other religions. Ezra Glinter notes that ex-Orthodox writers are "compelled to confirm outside expectations of extremism." Ezra Glinter, "Ex-Hasidic Writers Go Off the Path and Onto the Page: How OTD Literature Became Its Own Literary Genre," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, May 27, 2014, http://forward.com/articles/198622/ex-hasidic-writers-go-off-the-path-and-onto-the-pa/?p=all.

former faith, the narratives purport to show insiders' perspectives into closed religious communities. I focus specifically on narratives written in the first decade of the 21st century; although there are some older examples of the genre, such as *Not Without My Daughter* by Betty Mahmoody (1987) or *Sold* by Zana Muhsen (1994), in the past ten years or so the genre has exploded in popularity.[6] While narratives written by or about ex-Muslims dominate both the market and the little scholarly attention these texts have garnered, books written by former Scientologists, Orthodox Jews, Mormons (both mainstream and polygamous), Amish men and women, and Evangelical Christians have developed avid readerships.[7]

In this dissertation, I closely read a selection of post-religious narratives in order to explore the tensions inherent in the study of religious others. These narratives reinforce the link between the mistreatment of women and bad religions through two parallel lines of reasoning: that religion is captivity, and that escape is feminist. Because my work stems from tensions, I organize my analysis around the tensions inherent in the texts, as authors negotiate their multiple identities as simultaneous victims and escapees, insiders and outsiders.

In my analysis, I argue that contemporary post-religious texts are one form of the larger genre of the captivity narrative. Broadly defined, captivity narratives feature a

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[6] Saba Mahmood states (somewhat hyperbolically), that at least one such account can be found on any major bestseller list at a given moment. Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War of Terror," in *Women's Studies on the Edge*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 83.
After reading this, I did check the *New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list; the week of Dec 1, 2013, both *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai (#7) and *My Story* by Elizabeth Smart (#25) appeared on the list for the 6th week in a row.

[7] While post-Muslim books often develop international followings, becoming particularly popular in France in the past decade, other post-religious memoirs seem to be a uniquely American phenomenon.

person, most commonly a woman, who is held against her will by a barbarous group; in relating her experiences after escaping, the captive emphasizes the suffering she underwent during her imprisonment. While the term "captivity narrative" is most commonly used to describe stories about being captured by Native Americans, many of the conventions deployed in contemporary texts about Muslims or polygamous Mormons would be familiar to a 17th reader of Indian captivity narratives or to a 19th century reader of anti-Catholic ones. Deploying captivity allows authors writing about religion to explain the problems they or their subjects faced as self-evident, as obviously linked to their barbarous religious context.

My emphasis on genre allows me to recognize commonalities in the ways that different religious groups are discursively marginalized. In reading stories written by women who come from both Muslim and fundamentalist Mormon contexts, I can move away from the emphasis on Islam as uniquely othered; in reading stories that illuminate one another, I hope to "break open dominant discourses"[8] about the special role of Islam as America's opposite. To speak only about Islam and Islamophobia reifies it as a unique phenomenon, rather than a historically and culturally rooted one. Reading books by both ex-Muslim and ex-Mormon women allows me to address cross-cultural issues about religious tolerance in America, rather than supporting the idea that either of these religions holds a unique place as America's Other. In addition, focusing on the genre of captivity helps me to point to and denaturalize the discursive moves which mark certain religions as deviant.

[8] Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, "Introduction: Times Like These," in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 14.

I also read these captivity narratives in light of the gender politics of religious othering. The tropes of captivity that define these narratives gain weight precisely because of the horrors of women's suffering. While these narratives represent only one avenue along which discourse about religious deviance is created and reinforced, the emphasis on female victimhood in these texts powerfully highlights the role that the oppression of women plays in marking a given religion as bad.

Context: Secular Positions and the "Clash of Civilizations"

The scholarly emphasis on post-Muslim women's narratives is linked to the current apocalyptic – and deeply problematic – language about the "clash of civilizations" which prevails in popular discourse. The clash of civilizations thesis, popularized by Samuel Huntington in the early 1990s, argues that in a post-Cold War world, conflict will stem from religious or cultural differences, rather than ideological ones. More specifically, the two civilizations of "Islam" and "the West" are frequently placed in monolithic opposition to each other.[9] Despite the widespread critique of this worldview by academics and public intellectuals along a range of axes,[10] the idea of clashing civilizations defining international interactions remains prevalent, particularly given the surge in such ideology in the wake of 9/11. A specific type of Islamophobia,

[9] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72.3 (Summer 1993): 31-33.

[10] See for example: Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003); Jonathan Fox, "Paradigm Lost: Huntington's Unfulfilled Clash of Civilizations Prediction into the 21st Century," *International Politics* 42.4 (Dec 2005); Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker, "Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 45.2 (June 2001); Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Denisa Mindruta, "Was Huntington Right? Testing Cultural Legacies and the Civilization Border," *International Politics* 29.2 (June 2002); Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 4, 2001, http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance; Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10.3 (July 1999).

linked to national protection, has become broadly accepted in the U.S, as anti-Muslim sentiment takes on nationalist importance in the American context.[11]

Adherence to Islam is ultimately equated to bad citizenship; the stereotype of the bad Muslim (who uses violence to support his goals, wishes to destroy democracy, and oppresses women) defines what makes a good American, who must be the opposite. Because the past decade has been marked by public hysteria about Islam in the United States, it is easy to see this trend as exceptional. However, Muslims are only the latest in a series of religious groups who have been marked as ineligible for American citizenship because of their religion. Rather than an exceptional case, the current American Islamophobia is demonstrative of long trend in the American ethos of religious othering.

This ethos is deeply rooted in American self-understanding of the United States as a modern, secular space. In *Formations of the Secular* (2003), Talal Asad argues that the secular is not an empty category, but rather, like religion, it is historically and spatially rooted; in doing so, he expands on his analysis in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), in which he argues that "religion" is a weighted category which relies on Christian understandings of the world.[12] Religion and secularism are both proscriptive categories that are based on a Christian worldview. However, Asad places all of Christianity into

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[11] Nationalist Islamophobia is also widespread in Europe, but it takes on a different tenor, primarily due to the visible and substantial Muslim minority populations in many European countries. While there is vibrant scholarship dealing with Islam in Europe, this project is focused more narrowly on the United States, rather than "the West" writ large. For more on Islam in Europe, see for example: Nilüfer Göle, *Islam in Europe: The Lure of Fundamentalism and the Allure of Cosmopolitanism*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2011); Tariq Modood, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ricard Zapata-Barrero, ed., *Multiculturalism, Muslims, and Citizenship: A European Approach* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2006); S. Sayyid and AbdoolKarim Vakil, ed., *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (London: Hurst & Company, 2010).

[12] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

one category. I follow Tracy Fessenden, Timothy Fitzgerald, and Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini in arguing that religion and secularism, as they are most commonly defined, particularly in the United States, stem from Protestant Christianity.[13] The political stance of American secularism – that religion is a private matter – is rooted in Protestant notions of religion as predicated on beliefs, rather than, for example, rituals. "The ultimate issue of Protestantism is freedom of conscience, a freedom that leads inevitably to the democratic liberty thought to be the mark of secularism. This is a standard secularization narrative, one in which secularism is dependent on Protestantism and associated with freedom."[14]

Religions which fail to remain clearly demarcated in the private sphere or which do not readily follow the rubric of religious belief marked by the rational choice associated with secularism are thereby marked as deviant. This drawing of boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable religions is not limited to popular conversations. Indeed, religion is widely denigrated in academia more broadly – particularly those religious idioms which refuse to remain in the private sphere. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini note that "religion is taken to be one of the primary roots of 'terrorism'… religion is written about much more frequently than economics, racism, or the aftereffects

[13] Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (London: Equinox, 2007); Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Secularisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[14] Tracy Fessenden, "Disappearances: Race, Religion, and the Progress Narrative of U.S. Feminism," in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 139. See also Laura Levitt, "Other Moderns, Other Jews: Revisiting Jewish Secularism in America," in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

of colonialism as an explanation for terrorist violence."[15] Speaking more generally, secularism is taken as the presumed context for many fields of study; in other words, "religion can be looked *at*, but the secular was the perspective moderns looked *from*."[16]

Noting the roots of this long trend in a universal vision of the secular – which is predicated on an invisible and normalized Protestant understanding of the world – underscores the rhetorical precedent for American Islamophobia. Islam is certainly not the first religion marked as definitively deviant by the American public; 19th century anti-Catholic[17] and anti-Mormon[18] rhetoric and activism have both been extensively studied.

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[15] Jakobsen and Pellegrini, "Introduction: Times Like These," 2.

[16] Kathleen Sands, "Feminisms and Secularisms," in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 309. See also: Jakobsen and Pellegrini, "Introduction: Times Like These," 4-9.
Tracy Fessenden addresses this trend at a micro-level, noting the secular rubric as applied specifically in the field of literary studies. Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 2; Fessenden, "Disappearances," 156.

[17] See, for example: Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press,1972), 555-568; Jay Dolan, "Catholicism and American Culture: Strategies for Survival," in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 60-108; Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 92-99 & 145-148; William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1-58; John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003). Anti-Catholic anxiety continued well into the 20th century, as evidenced by John F. Kennedy's need to explicitly note his allegiance to America over the Pope during his presidential campaign. John F. Kennedy, "Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association," (Houston, TX, 12 September 1960), http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkhoustonministers.html.

[18] See, for example: Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 44-65; J. Spencer Fluhman, *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Terryl Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Christine Hutchison-Jones, "Reviling and Revering the Mormons: Defining American Values, 1890-2008" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2011); Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana & Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994); R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25-47; Jan Shipps, "Difference and Otherness: Mormonism and the American Religious Mainstream," in *Minority Faiths and*

Similar to some contemporary discussions of Islam, 19th century Nativists marked Catholics and Mormons as bad citizens, recognizable by their devotion to an invalid authority (the Pope or Joseph Smith) and their mistreatment of women by lustful religious leaders outside the bounds of proper familial ties (celibate priests and polygamous husbands).

Nor is military intervention against bad religion limited to anti-Muslim action, in Afghanistan or elsewhere. In 2008, a compound owned by the FLDS in El Dorado, TX was raided by Texas law enforcement officials and Child Protective Services, complete with SWAT teams and helicopters. While 12 men were eventually indicted on charges of sexual assault of a minor, the entire community was subject to punishment, with more than 400 children removed from their families, because of an allegation of a single crime – child marriage – based on a series of phone calls that were later revealed to be a hoax.[19] Government intervention was justified because of the need to protect female children from the possibility of entering into religiously mandated polygamous marriages.

Text: The Political Implications of Language

Government intervention in both Afghanistan and El Dorado was partially justified by the widespread understanding that the women in these communities needed to be protected; Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini argue that the discursive connection between gender and religious deviance is inextricably linked to American foreign

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the American Protestant Mainstream, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

[19] Jacobson and Burton, "Prologue: The Incident"; Stuart A. Wright and James T. Richardson, "Introduction," in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints*, ed. Stuart A. Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 1-6.

policy.[20] The language used to support these raids permeates popular discourse. The press frequently reinforces the notion that bad religions are recognizable through their mistreatment of women. Some coverage of Muslim women by the media has tended towards sensationalism, as epitomized by the *Time* magazine cover from August 9, 2010, featuring an Afghani woman whose nose had been cut off, with the headline "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan."[21] The pictured victim is shown as uniquely brutalized as a result of her Muslim context. Similarly, the press emphasizes the victim-status of polygamous Mormon women. Shortly after the 2008 raid on the FLDS community, the *New York Times* magazine ran a photo essay of FLDS women, describing a woman pictured as "a possible child bride, or a sexual-abuse victim, or a member of an out-of-touch, polygamous religious sect," and showing women in their quaint costumes taking care of copious children.[22] The women's victimization was linked directly to their membership with an "out-of-touch polygamous religious sect," rather than to the fact that following a violent military-style raid on their community, many of their children had been temporarily removed from their custody. Sociologist Sarah Whedon sums up the representation of polygamous Mormons by the media by emphasizing the spectacle of their sexuality and the potential for abuse; in response, the readers "gawk in horror at

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[20] Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, "Bodies-Politics: Christian Secularism and the Gendering of U.S. Policy," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 146-147.

[21] "What Happens if we Leave Afghanistan?," *Time Magazine*, August 9, 2010 http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20100809,00.html. For a discussion of the cover and the justifications for using that particular image, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 27-29.

[22] Sara Corbett, "Children of God," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 27, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/magazine/27mormon-t.html.

their sexual practices and at the way they treat women and children."[23] Even less sensationalized stories reinforce the links between bad religions and the mistreatment of women. In her analysis of articles on veiling printed by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, sociologist Michelle Byng notes that veiling was frequently linked to fears about increasing radicalism and terrorism; conversely, women who unveiled were shown as gaining increased access to freedom and opportunity.[24] The deployment of the veil, as the ubiquitous symbol of Islam's oppression of women, in this case reinforces the links between increased oppression and increased religious extremism.

Not only do post-religious narratives frequently reinforce the connection between oppressed women and bad religion, these texts are seen as especially demonstrative of this connection because of their foundation in personal experience. Dohra Ahmad notes that many contemporary texts by Muslim women are read ethnographically, meaning that readers assume that the stories are both true and representative of a larger sample of

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[23] Sarah Whedon, "Media Representations of Polygamous Fundamentalist Mormon Women" (paper presented at a special conference on Polygamy, Polygyny, and Polyamory: Ethical and Legal Perspectives on Plural Marriage, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, November 8, 2010).
For more on the portrayal of polygamous Mormons by mainstream media outlets, see Janet Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime: Media, Gender, and Politics in Mormon Fundamentalism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 163-194; Ryan T. Cragun and Michael Nielsen, "Social Scientific Perspectives on the FLDS Raid and the Corresponding Media Coverage," in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211-204.

[24] Michelle Byng, "Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West," *Critical Sociology* 36.1 (2010): 113.
For additional analysis on portrayals of Muslim women in popular media and the implications thereof, see: Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*; Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire"; Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 177-207.

religious women.[25] Because of their claims to truth, these narratives offer political coverage for American military intervention both overseas and domestically. Post-religious narratives were cited to justify both the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the FLDS raid in 2008.[26]

Using captivity narratives as justification for military action is not limited to the present, but rather is rooted in the form of the genre itself. The flip side of captivity is the unspoken context: that the captive victims, especially the ones who have not yet escaped and therefore cannot speak, need to be rescued. The texts in question reinforce the link between oppressed women and bad religion through the repetition of certain tropes. Mohja Kahf summarizes the tropes by placing stories about Muslim women into two camps: those portraying the women as victims, and those portraying the women as escapees. She elaborates on these over-determined positions by listing snappily-named components of both positions, such as "Vile Veil," "Rotten Religion," and "Stifled

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[25] Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 111. Ahmad makes this point in speaking about books which describe oppressed Muslim women more broadly and includes both fiction and non-fiction in her analysis; part of her argument is that the actual level of facticity is irrelevant to the manner in which readers respond to these books.

[26] On Afghanistan: Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 17; Roksana Bahramitash, "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism: Case Studies of Two North American Bestsellers," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14.2 (Summer 2005): 221; Juliane Hammer, "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women," in *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, ed. Carl W. Ernst (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 124-125; Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire," 82-83; Stephen Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2011), 109-114.
On the FLDS raid: Martha Sonntag Bradley, "A Repeat of History: A Comparison of the Short Creek and Eldorado Raids on the FLDS," in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21; Gary and Gordon Shepherd, "Learning the Wrong Lessons: A Comparison of FLDS, Family International, and Branch Davidian Child-Protection Interventions," in *Modern Polygamy in the United States: Historical, Cultural, and Legal Issues*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 244; Stuart A. Wright, "Deconstructing the Official Rationales for the Texas State Raid on the FLDS," in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints*, ed. Stuart A. Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 141-142.

Sexuality"; these continue to circumscribe the life of the victim, whereas the escapee has left them behind.[27] Leora Tanenbaum, in offering advance praise for *Beyond Belief*, an anthology of short pieces written by post-religious women, taps into some of the same tropes: the stifled sexuality, causing terror for any woman who had sex outside of marriage; the rotten religion, blocking her access to critical thought.[28]

Furthermore, women's post-religious narratives tap into certain strands of liberal feminist thought. In her analysis of a selection of post-Muslim stories, Dohra Ahmed asserts that narratives only allow women to speak in ways "that are legible and familiar with the language and experience of American feminism."[29] This, in turn, naturalizes the idea that feminism and religion must be inimical. As a result, some feminists draw on post-religious narratives in order to call for intervention in certain religious communities. Saba Mahmood takes the feminist community to task for this, calling on them to recognize the illiberal results of their humanitarian campaigns, particularly as these campaigns are co-opted by neo-conservatives in support of military action.[30]

While any one individual captivity narrative may be insignificant, the genre as a whole powerfully shapes the discourse on religious others in the United States today, and is therefore worthy of attention. I follow Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Tracy Fessenden and Nora Rubel in emphasizing the importance of studying literature as a lens of scholarship

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[27] Mohja Kahf,,"On Being a Muslim Writer in the West," *Islamica Magazine* 17 (2010), http://islamicamagazine.com/?p=561.

[28] Leora Tanenbaum, advance praise for *Beyond Belief: The Secret Lives of Women in Extreme Religions*, edited Susan Tive & Cami Ostman (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2013).

[29] Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 109.

[30] Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire," 101-104. See also Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 29-30.
I discuss the use of feminism within these texts in more detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

on religion. Rajan writes: "I wish to suggest that *literary* texts might provide a different lens than the anthropological for viewing women and their multiple relations, ideological and existential, to religion, and especially for viewing women in an agential frame, and thereby might produce new channels for critique and identification."[31] Fessenden's *Culture and Redemption* (2007) serves as a model of the usefulness of literary analysis in demonstrating cultural realities; Fessenden deploys literature to explore the hegemony of Protestantism in the development of American secularization. Nora Rubel, in *Doubting the Devout* (2008), reads contemporary fiction depicting Orthodox Jews in order to explore their vilification by non-Orthodox Jews; in doing so, she points to broader arguments about the boundaries of Jewish belonging. She notes that "stories and storytelling form a key point of cultural translation and self-interpretation."[32]

My method throughout this project involves close readings which pay attention to both the cultural realities surrounding the texts and the rhetorical flourishes employed by the authors to substantiate their claims. In doing so, I loosely follow the example of Pauline Turner Strong, who argues for the importance of analyzing both the politics and the poetics of early American captivity narratives.[33] Strong argues that most studies of captivity literature focus primarily on one or the other, but not both, of these aspects; analysis of contemporary captivity narratives is frequently similarly one-sided. Scholars

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[31] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "The Brahmin Widow and Female Religious Agency: Anticaste Critique in Two Modern Indian Texts," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 230.

[32] Nora L. Rubel, *Doubting the Devout: The Ultra-Orthodox in the Jewish American Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 15.

[33] Pauline Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

such as Saba Mahmood, Lila Abu-Lughod, Dohra Ahmad, and Janet Bennion have focused on the politics of these texts, noting the ways in which these texts have been strategically deployed; even Ahmad, the only literary scholar of the group, focuses not on the way the books are written, but rather the ways in which they are packaged and read.[34] Ezra Glinter, in his discussion of ex-Orthodox narratives, analyzes the content of several texts in order to argue that they make a unique literary genre, but fails to fully contextualize them in terms of conflicts about the boundaries of Orthodox Jewish life.[35] Mineka Bosch, who, in her analysis of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*, is attentive to both the politics and the poetics of Hirsi Ali's work, limits her analysis to a single text, rather than to a range of textual examples.[36]

Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes: "There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship…. Hence the urgent need to examine the *political* implications of our *analytic* strategies and principles."[37] This is especially the case in studying texts that are explicitly deployed for political ends. The stories told by many authors about their experiences are both violent and based in truth. There are men and women in the world who justify oppressive behavior by pointing to religious doctrine; some Muslims, for example, do appropriate a reified version of Islam to support gender iniquities. In addition, I do not deny that those men and women who seek assistance in extricating

[34] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*,81-112; Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 107-108; Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 189-190; Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire," 83-85.

[35] Glinter, "Ex-Hasidic Writers."

[36] Mineke Bosch, "Telling stories, creating (and saving) her life. An analysis of the autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali," *Women's Studies International Forum* 31 (2008).

[37] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 53-55.

themselves from abusive situations should be supported. Yet at the same time, the fact that certain kinds of stories drown out alternative voices in public conversations means that these particular stories should be questioned and analyzed.

Reflexivity: Locating Myself

In "Notes towards a Politics of Location" (1984), Adrienne Rich writes:

> As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by condemning its government or by saying three times 'As a woman my country is the whole world.' Tribal loyalties aside, and even if nation-states are not just pretexts used by multinational conglomerates to serve their interests, I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create.[38]

She exposes the structural layers that build on each other to define her position: gender, religion, sexuality, political affiliation, nationality. Rich's careful self-positioning epitomizes the reflexive turn which colors my own work. Following Rich, I cannot divest myself of my position as a woman, an American, a feminist, a Protestant at the particular cultural and historical moment of the 21st century. Rich also acknowledges the limits of this awareness: "I need to move outward from the base and center of my feelings, but with a corrective sense that my feelings are not *the* center of feminism."[39] Rich thereby centers her activism within herself, but advances feminist thought in forcing herself to acknowledge that those feelings are not necessarily the model for other feminists to follow.

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[38] Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a Politics of Location (1984)," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), 212.

[39] Ibid., 231.

Audre Lorde also writes from her own experiences; coming from a place of anger at the racism she encountered from other feminists, she challenges them – particularly white women – to recognize not only the oppression they experience, but also the oppression they perpetuate. "By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist."[40] Black women have long worked towards gender justice, but were omitted from the master narrative of feminist struggle, because they did not match the model of the ideal female subject. As a corrective, Lorde calls on white women to actively read the work of women of color, to take it upon themselves to learn about racism, rather than to rely on women of color to educate them, as has traditionally been the case.[41]

I draw on Rich and Lorde as a way of supporting my own reflexive turn. Though I position myself, I also strive towards awareness that my own situation does not define all experience. This is especially important because of the way religious women have been marginalized, especially by feminists. While there are cases of religious women speaking back in popular media – *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*, edited by Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi (2012) and *Love Times Three: Our True Story of a Polygamous Marriage* by the Darger family (2011) to cite two recent examples – captivity narratives overshadow such counter-testimonies. Another potential

[40] Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1984), 116.

[41] Ibid., 114. These themes run throughout Lorde's work. See also, for example, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" (1979), "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979), and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1980), all in *Sister Outsider.*

avenue for denaturalizing the link between mistreatment of women and "bad religion" is to actually engage the women in religious communities; if I meet them on their terms, what would I find? The answer is, not surprisingly, a range of things, as evidenced by ethnographic work done by scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod, Janet Bennion, R. Marie Griffith, Saba Mahmood, Carolyn Moxley Rouse, and Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder.[42] Ethnographic studies, however, are also overpowered by the popularity of first-person accounts which paint religions as oppressive to women.

The work of Rich and Lorde, along with other feminist thinkers such as Minnie Bruce Pratt and Teresa de Lauretis, also encourages an emphasis on intersectionality and complexity as lenses of analysis. This critical edge is predicated on the insistence on messiness, on the disavowal of one universal truth in favor of multiple truths. The emphasis on multiple truths is centrally important to my work. The texts with which I engage tell truths about specific women's lives. However, in doing so, they simultaneously mask other truths, particularly in their portrayals of the women who fail to escape as perpetual victims who need feminists to come and rescue them. I take seriously the idea that though one woman's experiences may reveal a certain reality, these same experiences cannot be taken as the reality on the ground for all women – or even for women in similar circumstances. In challenging the representation of oppressed

[42] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Janet Bennion, *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Janet Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy: Mormon and Mennonite Communities in the Chihuahua Valley* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

women by closely engaging with those very texts that recreate religious women as uniquely and always already oppressed, I develop an alternative way to talk about religious women, which neither demonizes nor romanticizes them.

The combined legacy of feminist theorizing and work on women and religion has made me suspicious of the moves which claim these works as definitively feminist. Being female and being feminist are not the same thing. I add a corollary: that there is not only one way of being feminist. I, too, claim feminism, though my vision of feminist engagement differs from that of Andrea Moore-Emmett or Ayaan Hirsi Ali. My claim to feminist methodology centers on the appreciation of the diversity of the range of women's religious expression – including ways of being in the world that seem counter to some versions of feminism – rather than on supposedly self-evident truths.

In doing this project, I am coming to terms with my own desires to study exotic women and the political and ethical implications of this desire. My ultimate goal in exploring contemporary captivity narratives is to interrogate how I, as a feminist scholar, can talk about women who actively engage in patriarchal religious traditions. How do we valorize the validity of such religious engagement as desirable – when these women seem to be working against their own best interests – while also not ceding "really real" religious engagement to them?

Chapter Outline

The majority of this project is taken up with close readings of four texts: *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* (2010) by Nujood Ali with Delphine Minoui; *God's Brothel: The extortion of sex for salvation in contemporary Mormon and Christian*

fundamentalist polygamy and the stories of 18 women who escaped (2004) by Andrea Moore-Emmett; *Favorite Wife: Escape from Polygamy* (2009) by Susan Ray Schmidt; and *Infidel* (2007) by Ayaan Hirsi-Ali. These texts make up a representative sample of the genre. *I am Nujood* and *God's Brothel* provide examples of mediated stories, as the editorial insertions of the third party authors heavily shape the stories of the captives; *Favorite Wife* and *Infidel* are, in contrast, each marketed as the unmediated truth about one woman's experience in captivity. The authors and subjects write from a range of current religious positions, ranging from atheist hostility against religion to evangelical Christianity to a continued adherence to Islam. With the exception of *I am Nujood*, the texts were first published in the United States for an American audience.

As I engage with these texts, I explore the intersections of feminist theory, secular hegemony and the definition of bad religion, and the particular troubling trope of captivity. I frame my interventions in terms of gender and genre. My focus on gender encompasses the political uses to which these texts have been put, particularly in underscoring the rhetorical stance linking certain religions to the oppression of women. The idea that religion is bad for women frequently ends up reinscribing gender injustice, whether through outside intervention that brings its own problems or through the closing off of paths to activism for religious women. I challenge certain strands of feminist discourse by engaging in gender justice more broadly conceived. Focusing on gender also opens the door for reading women's self-representations, sometimes with and sometimes against the grain, in order to illuminate women's experiences. My focus on genre includes not only attention to the tropes of captivity which pervade contemporary post-religious narratives. Emphasizing genre also allows for a more comparative project; in

reading texts across religious traditions, I hone in on broader discursive strategies which underpin American representations of religious others, thereby denaturalizing the seemingly obvious fact that it must be religion that causes women to be treated badly.

Part I is made up of two chapters, primarily focused on contextualizing the subsequent textual analysis more fully in terms of the scholarly literature and the historical roots of the American ethos of religious othering. Chapter two, directly following this introduction, situates the study in terms of scholarly conversations about feminism, secularism, and the interactions between the two fields. A discussion of the application of feminist theory to the study of religion highlights the tensions that occur when liberal feminism and religious women come into conflict. As "feminism" is claimed by different groups who often work at cross-purposes, this chapter also fleshes out my feminist methodology and the importance thereof in greater detail.

Chapter three provides detailed background information on the history, development, and characteristics of the captivity narrative as a genre linked to religious othering and gender. The chapter draws not only on the extensive scholarly literature on captivity narratives, but also on several narratives which are emblematic of certain moments in the genre's historical development, including the stories of Mary Rowlandson, Hannah Dustan, Maria Monk, and Fanny Stenhouse. The chapter hinges on a detailed discussion of the most common tropes of captivity, and the ways in which these tropes reinforce the connection between bad religion and mistreated women. This information provides context for the deep roots of genre conventions in the American psyche, again providing groundwork for productive readings of the texts themselves.

Part II makes up the bulk of the study. Each chapter in this section consists of a close reading of one particular text. While each chapter offers a different thematic focus, all chapters highlight the way the particular text in question acts as a captivity narrative and demonstrate the ways in which these texts use the tropes of captivity and selective components of feminist thought and/or women's experience to reinforce the binary division of "good" and "bad" religion. The chapters also draw upon the framework laid out in Part I to delineate the ways in which popular fiction draws on feminist and secularist thought to police the boundaries of acceptable religious practice.

In chapters four and five, I address the issues of speaking for others and the overdetermined figures which come to serve as tropes in captivity literature. In "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991), Linda Alcoff concludes that speaking for others is justified if it will enable the empowerment of oppressed people.[43] The authors of both of the texts in this section both present their narratives as ways of enabling formerly oppressed women to speak, thereby arguably empowering former victims. However, their interlocutors are also escapees, whose voices are then taken as more valid than those of other child brides or polygamous wives. In their attempts to give oppressed women a voice, the authors actually silence the women for whom they purport to speak.

Chapter four is a close reading and analysis of *I am Nujood*. In particular, this chapter identifies the strategies that establish authenticity and authority in *I am Nujood,* such as using the first person narrative. It considers the influence of the book's ghostwriter, Delphine Minoui, in shaping the autobiographic retelling of Nujood Ali's experiences. This chapter examines how the genre of "tell-all memoir" marks stories as

[43] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-1992): 29.

"Truth," and yet actually impedes readers' understandings of events. It also includes a discussion of the overdetermined and unhelpful figure of the young innocent girl who we need to rescue.

Chapter five is a close reading and analysis of *God's Brothel*, which focuses more closely on the imbrications of anti-religious polemic and feminism. Contemporary religious captivity narratives, particularly polemical ones like *God's Brothel*, lay claim to feminism in deeply problematic ways. In *God's Brothel*, Andrea Moore-Emmett shares the stories of 18 women who were involved in polygamous Mormon communities to make the point that women's affiliation with these communities is destructive. In retelling the women's stories, Moore-Emmett draws on the authoritative voices of "survivors," while also relying heavily on conventions common to the genre of the captivity narrative. She deploys another overdetermined figure common to the genre: the brave woman who escapes and becomes a voice for retrograde politics. She portrays the women in polygamous communities as physically and mentally trapped in a moral wilderness, where they suffer unspeakable horrors. In paying close attention to the ways that Moore-Emmett strategically deploys the tropes of captivity and escape, this chapter questions the assumptions she makes about the way feminism should be used to "save the women," especially given the fact that not all women wish to be saved.

The issues which appear in chapters six and seven also work synergistically. In these two chapters, I explore more ambivalent first-person narratives to parse more nuanced representations of religious others – and the limits to these representations. In their respective narratives, the subjects of these two chapters demonstrate another tension

inherent in captivity literature, as they negotiate their positions as simultaneous insiders and outsiders to both the deviant group and to mainstream society.

Chapter six explores the way the silenced voices might break through a polemical reading by focusing on the ambivalence of Susan Ray Schmidt's memoir, *Favorite Wife.* In describing her coming of age as a plural wife in a polygamist Mormon community, Schmidt does draw on tropes of captivity in order to ultimately denounce polygamy. However, unlike Moore-Emmett, Schmidt offers a nuanced presentation of a polygamist community which does not simply devolve into accusations of ubiquitous abuse. While she ultimately glosses her life as a plural wife as negative, her insistence on portraying the members of the community as real people, rather than monstrously evil men and their brainwashed victims, underscores her myriad positive experiences coming of age in a polygamous community. Such ambivalence is common within the genre of captivity (to which the extensive scholarly literature which offers readings of captivity stories against the grain can attest). An exploration of ambivalence opens the door for two different strands of analysis. First, ambivalent descriptions of captivity lend power to the genre, underscoring the compelling nature of such narratives. Anyone can write a polemic, but because of her frequently sympathetic portrayal of the community, Schmidt's ultimate denunciation of them is more powerful than Moore-Emmett's. Second, reading Schmidt's ambivalence in conjunction with the alternative analyses of agency articulated by Janet Bennion, R. Marie Griffith, and Saba Mahmood in their respective feminist works on religious women offers new avenues for hearing the voices that Moore-Emmett and others like her silence or dismiss.

The final close reading, in chapter seven, is of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's memoir *Infidel*. This chapter explores the limits of the discursive strategy of captivity in allowing formerly religious women to claim their place as normative Americans. Like Moore-Emmett, Hirsi Ali is primarily a polemicist, clearly staking a claim from the outset that religious adherence to Islam is by definition bad for women. She draws heavily on the language of captivity to support her polemical stance, as well as to lend shape to her personal narrative, in which Islam figures as a mental cage from which she struggled to escape. However, as much as Hirsi Ali wishes to distance herself from her past as an African Muslim woman and become fully European (and later, fully American), she ultimately fails to do so. Like Schmidt, even Hirsi Ali allows some ambivalence to show. In Hirsi Ali's case, these ambivalences highlight the limits of the liberal model of inclusion touted by some feminist thinkers (like Moore-Emmett and Hirsi Ali herself). Hirsi Ali draws on her position as a native informant to bolster her claims about Muslim communities; however, in doing so, she inextricably marks herself as a captive. Her own position as a former Muslim woman is limited to the dual role of victim and escapee; there is no space for her to explore the benefits of veiling or the peace she felt while praying, even though these things were as she tells it also part of her experience as a Muslim woman.

The concluding chapter offers avenues of complication which challenge the stark binary of dominant culture and its Other by pointing towards moments of nuance. Close readings of these texts are useful not only for drawing attention to rhetoric of Othering; these texts also provide avenues for critiquing the norm against which the Other is defined. The final chapter also returns to questions of ambivalence, expanding on the

promises of ambivalent writings hinted at in chapter six, as well as highlighting my ambivalence as a reader of sensational polemics.

PART I

LENSES OF ANALYSIS: GENDER AND GENRE

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING FEMINISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS WOMEN

> What are feminist studies, really? What constitutes a feminist critical framework? Is feminism a mode of production of knowledge – social, aesthetic, and formal knowledge, as well as personal or common knowledge? Is there one feminist discourse, and if so, what characterizes it, and can it too be materially oppressive to some women? Or are there, rather, a variety of discourses, several "feminisms," as many now prefer to say? But if so, the question still remains, What indeed makes them feminist? And finally, how is feminist theory – a term that is used both loosely and narrowly to designate several distinct views and political positions – implicated in institutional discourses, power relations, and ideology?
>
> - Teresa de Lauretis[44]

Feminism is a contested term. The questions raised by Teresa de Lauretis in 1986 direct attention to continuing points of contention among feminist scholars and activists as they (we) demarcate the terms of their (our) interventions. My goal in this chapter is not to offer definitive answers to the question "what makes something feminist?"; rather, I take as given that there are multiple feminisms, which may conflict with each other. Nor is my goal to provide a complete overview of the multifaceted debate on the definition and role of feminism in scholarship. Rather, I point to a few specific fault lines in definitions of feminism, particularly as feminism is theorized in conjunction with religion. Several of de Lauretis' questions are particularly salient to this discussion. To wit: can feminism be materially oppressive to some women? How is feminist theory implicated in power relations and ideology?

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[44] Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies / Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in *Feminist Studies / Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 6-7.

My impetus in writing this chapter lies in the fact that several of the anti-religious books I read are defined as feminist works. How then, do I offer critique of these works, which I find deeply problematic, while also claiming feminism? With these questions in mind, I approach this chapter with dual goals. The first is to provide background on the specific ways in which authors of contemporary captivity narratives claim feminism. The idea that anti-religious advocacy and feminism go hand-in-hand is not unique to these particular texts, but rather is grounded in liberal feminist thought. My critique is predicated on understanding and illuminating the ways in which liberal feminism is imbricated with secularism and can be claimed as a valid position from which to demonize religious others. Doing so lays important groundwork for subsequent chapters, particularly my analysis of the writings of Andrea Moore-Emmett and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, both of whom actively claim feminism, and denounce detractors as non-feminist or non-liberal.

As discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the mistreatment of women has come to signal that a specific religion is "bad" in popular discourse. The distain for religion is partially linked to the secular position from which religion is studied by the majority of liberal academics in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Furthermore, this discourse bleeds out of the academy and shapes popular portrayals of religion, historically and in the present, liberal and conservative. However, this idea is not limited to popular discussions, but has been reinforced by some feminist scholars who correlate specific instances of women's oppression with religious tradition writ large. There is a disdain for religion in some feminist camps. Kathleen Sands links feminist

scorn for religion to the embrace of secularism over against Protestant activism among second-wave feminists in the 1970s:

> The second wave typically cast religion as solidly anti-feminist. This characterization of religion, while largely accurate, became also a self-fulfilling prophecy and rendered invisible the religious feminisms of both centuries. Moreover, mainstream second-wave feminism, in and through its indictment of religion, recast the secular as not only neutral about religion but hostile to it. The success of this altered discourse still can be measured by its continued predominance on both the right and the left.[45]

Because there are feminist scholars and activists who reinforce the false binary between feminism and religion, popular discourse can draw explicitly on feminist work to demonize religion. While I focus here on feminist contributions to this discourse, feminists are certainly not the only people who draw attention to mistreated women, demonizing specific religions in the process. Anti-religious activists of all stripes do not only draw on the zeitgeist of the moment, but employ language that echoes feminist insights. As their claims to feminism are supported by the work of some feminist scholars, exploring the scholarly version of these claims opens new avenues of critique; to return again to de Lauretis: can feminism be materially oppressive to some women? Furthermore, what exactly might this oppression look like?

My second goal is to think about ways in which to articulate a feminist position without relying on imbrications with liberalism and secularism. I particularly draw on the ways in which scholars of religion have offered alternative readings of feminism through their encounters with religious difference. This second goal serves to illuminate my own assumptions about the role of feminist critique, which Joan Scott neatly summarizes in *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011):

[45] Sands, "Feminisms and Secularisms," 317.

> If there is something that can be called feminist methodology, it might be summarized by these axiomatic statements: there is neither a self nor a collective identity without an Other; there is no inclusiveness without exclusion, no universal without a rejected particular, no neutrality that doesn't privilege an interested point of view; and power is always an issue in the articulation of these relationships.[46]

This rubric serves as a marker of my own commitment to bringing awareness to the power dynamics inherent in the discourse surrounding bad religion and oppressed women. The imbrications of feminism and liberalism frequently lead to illiberal results, such as government interventions in Afghanistan or religious communities within the United States, as discussed in the previous chapter. My commitment to feminism is therefore intrinsically linked with my desire to find a way to engage with religious women who may not claim feminism without demonizing or romanticizing them. In analyzing the texts in subsequent chapters, the concerns I bring about hearing the voices of religious women and paying attention to articulations of power in the construction of text allow me to be honest about the complexity of other women's lives and to avoid getting caught up in emotionally laden texts which are used propagandistically often in the name of helping women.

Liberal Feminism

As stated above, the narratives I address are popular, but my argument connects to the way the deployment of feminism in these texts link up to the fault lines that are present even in academic discourse. Part of the power of these texts is precisely the ways in which they tap into strands of feminist thought. Lila Abu-Lughod writes, "all that

[46]Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 73.

needs to be noted here is that Western readers, mostly female, find these sensationalist books gripping enough to buy them in the millions. Their identification with Muslim women victims is a feminist one."[47] Specifically, this identification is predicated on a particular version of liberal feminism. In this section I define liberal feminism as deployed by anti-religious activists. In doing so, I explore the imbrications between Protestantism, secularism, liberalism, feminism, universalism, the idea of progress, and the autonomous self.

A defining characteristic of liberal feminism lies in the idea of women bonding together to fight the common cause of oppression: patriarchy. This idea is predicated on several assumptions. First, that there is a universal female condition, which is both descriptive and prescriptive; all women are portrayed as facing the same problem of patriarchal oppression, and the solution can be found by recognizing this shared universality and embracing the shared sisterhood that it brings. Second, that progress is possible as humans become more enlightened, reasonable, and democratic. Third, that individual freedom, usually understood in terms of choices made by autonomous agents, constitutes an unassailable good. Women should be able to make rational choices which maximize their individual autonomy. These three assumptions similarly undergird liberal secularism. Popular secular formulations, most commonly cited as "the secularization thesis," draw on universalist narratives about the progressive development of humanity as each individual moves from religious engagement to rational choice about the universe.[48]

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[47] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 104.

[48] For a discussion of the imbrications of liberalism and secularism, see Saba Mahmood, "Secular Imperatives?," *Public Culture* 20.3 (2008): 463.

Tracy Fessenden's analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in which Fessenden explores Gilman's reliance on a supercessionary model of both racial and religious progress to undergird her (white, middle-class, vaguely Christian) feminist proscriptions, serves as a useful demonstration of the connections between liberal feminism and secularism. Fessenden links the Protestant underpinnings of the secularization narrative – complete with its emphasis on progress – with the supercessionary model of religion embraced by many feminists and other liberals. She writes:

> The evidence for this special moral standing is frequently given in appeals to the treatment of women: the presumed freedom of women in secularized contexts and the presumed oppression of women in religious contexts is regularly invoked, even by those who care little about or for women's rights (e.g., Muslims veil their women, 'we' do not) to underwrite a hierarchy of progress that places supposedly backward religions at one end of the civilizing scale and democratic freedoms at the other.[49]

It is not incidental that feminists might denigrate certain religions; rather Fessenden suggests that feminism relies on both religious and racial progressivism to continually reconstitute itself as both necessary and effective.[50] Feminists and other liberals continue to rely on the unstated and unquestioned connections between the secular, freedom and democracy, in opposition to the authoritarianism of religion, of which women are the most visible victims. Secularism is the necessary condition to progress and rights – especially for women – are predicated on an embrace of the secular.

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[49] Fessenden, "Disappearances," 139.

[50] "In this way Gilman's racial progressivism… persists undisturbed in the form of a similarly structured religious progressivism by which reformed Christianity trumps all of its more or less tribal antecedents and rivals before blurring benignly into a universal secular. Perhaps the self-righting, self-transcending mechanism that allows racism to disappear from feminist history requires this blurring for its continued demonstration." Ibid., 150.

The narrative Fessenden critiques, of course, occludes liberal religion; first-wave feminism, after all, was largely a religiously rooted endeavor, and many second-wave feminists grounded their activism in their religious convictions, although the dominant narrative of the development of feminism glosses over this point.[51] Fessenden's point, however, is that liberal religion and liberal secularism are frequently identical. Gilman's supercessionary model of religion culminates in a vaguely Christian universalism, a "liberating, dogma-free corrective to all 'androcentric religions'" and their "enslaving doctrines."[52] Precisely because Gilman's vision of religion is generic, it can be claimed as both universal and secular; simultaneously, it is marked as superior to other religions in their particularity. Judaism, Islam, and even less enlightened versions of Christianity are marked as parochial, as outmoded beliefs to be shed in the advancing march of progress. This vision of a universal religion maps onto an essentialized subject. For some second-wave feminist thinkers, who were active when Gilman was rediscovered as a feminist foremother in the 1970s, this essentialized subject looks a lot like Gilman: a white, middle-class, vaguely Protestant woman. While recognizing broad patterns of oppression was a necessary first step in the development of feminist theory, the emphasis on the oppression of women within the nuclear family marginalized important differences among women along lines of race, class, and sexuality. If the descriptive universalized female is predicated on the experiences of white women, then those whose experiences do not match the description are similarly excluded from the solution to the problems she faces. Return to Scott's words that "there is no universal without a rejected particular."

[51] Sands, "Feminisms and Secularisms," 308.

[52] Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 178.

The liberated secular woman can only be marked as universal if conservative religious women are marked as backwards.

The exclusion of liberal religion reinforces the narrative that religion must be jettisoned in order for liberation to be achieved. Joan Wallach Scott contests this framework by tracing the historical development of secularization, pointing specifically to moments of gender inequality, such as the fact that women's suffrage was granted in the United States one hundred and fifty years after the disestablishment of a state religion. In doing so, she argues that secularism does not necessarily equal gender equality; in contrast, secular political models often explicitly reinforce gender inequality by deploying arguments about sexual difference as a natural phenomenon.[53] This analysis of secularism highlights the repercussions of the prevalent discourse about gender and religion. If secularism is seen as by nature liberating for women, then logic dictates that the opposite is also true, and religion must be by nature oppressive. The logic works in a circular fashion to reinforce the held idea that religion is by definition "bad for women." The supercessionary model of religion therefore does not only hide the continued presence of liberal religion, it also hides the inequalities reinforced by secularization, as injustices can be attributed to parochial relics which have simply not yet succumbed to the inevitable progress arriving in secularization's wake.

All of these interconnecting notions are reliant on the liberal autonomous self as the primary actor in the world. The autonomous self is presented as an unencumbered individual who makes rational decisions about what to believe and how to act on said beliefs. This links back to the Protestant secular understanding of religion as a matter for

[53] Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality," 40.

private belief and universalist, progressive narratives about the ability and necessity for each individual to experience and embrace freedom.

> This moralization of history, with its tacit assumptions about what constitutes a modern, progressive person, works in part by aligning this modern, progressive person with the purportedly universal values of individual freedom and agency, thus always and implicitly broadening its scope of inclusion.[54]

While I return later to subsequent feminist challenges to the notion of the autonomous individual with full freedom and autonomy, I do want to emphasize that universal feminism is predicated on the notion that all women share the goal of freedom. Catherine Keller traces this perspective to Simone de Beauvoir, noting that de Beauvoir "pumped her lifeblood into the empowerment of an *independent* self for women."[55] The idea of the essentialized woman is tied up in the idea of the liberal autonomous self; a woman develops agency through her resistance to patriarchy.

Liberal Feminism and the Study of Religion: Reclaiming Religion as Feminist

Although liberal feminism writ large often excludes religion from its narrative, there is space for liberal feminists to reclaim religion as feminist. I highlight several of these contributions because of their foundational importance in the recognition of women's multivalent engagement with religion, against trends that simply reinforce the idea that religions must by definition be oppressive to women. However, these reclamations of religion are ultimately interconnected with the progressive model of

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[54] Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide: Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 15.

[55] Catherine Keller, "Feminism and the Ethic of Inseparability," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 257; emphasis in original.

rational choice which undergirds liberalism. As such, these reclamations of religion, while important, have been deployed to reinforce the binary between good, liberal religion and bad, patriarchal religion.

The work of Mary Daly, a radical feminist theologian, exemplifies both the assumption among feminist scholars that religion has frequently been patriarchal and the quest for reimagining women's religious engagement in radical new ways. Daly notes in her introduction to *Beyond God the Father* (1973) that "the history of antifeminism in the Judeo-Christian tradition has already been exposed."[56] However, while Daly takes as a starting point the patriarchal nature of Christianity, her goal is to move beyond the patriarchal traditions in order to re-imagine God as "Be-ing." Daly draws out the theological implications of feminism: "My purpose is to show that the women's revolution, insofar as it is true to its own essential dynamics, is an ontological, spiritual revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and toward transcendence."[57] This interweaving of religious scholarship and activism marks much of the feminist work on reclaiming religion. Though Daly eventually left Christianity, giving up on the idea of reclaiming that particular religion for women, her work in *Beyond God the Father* continues to serve as an example of the ways in which religious spaces might be reclaimed. Scholars and activists highlighted women's stories not only to share heretofore hidden histories, but also as a way of finding a space for themselves within their own religious traditions.

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[56] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 3.

[57] Ibid., 6.

Daly's influential work is emblematic of a broader trend in feminist engagement with religion which has grown in popularity since the 1970s, when *Beyond God the Father* was first published. As Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ write in their introduction to *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (1989), "feminist theology began with women claiming and naming our own experiences and exploring the ways in which incorporating women's experience might transform traditional religion or lead to the creation of new traditions."[58] Plaskow elsewhere describes her strategy of engaging with women in Jewish history and memory as a way of letting women speak.[59] As Miriam Peskowitz comments on Plaskow's project, "'Letting women speak' was (and still can be) strategically useful in its appeal to a woman's voice that has been denied a hearing in the ears of men and other women. It can demonstrate female agency where this has been denied."[60] This emphasis on speaking women with agency underscores the liberal ethos in which the reclamation of religion is grounded. In focusing on women's voices through rewriting history or creative storytelling, feminist scholars and activists choose which version of their religion to emphasize. They, like Daly, acknowledge the patriarchal backdrop of many religious traditions, but as self-proclaimed autonomous selves, can opt to jettison patriarchal traditions in favor of more egalitarian ones.

Feminist scholars have applied the strategy of hearing women's silenced voices in a range of ways. Some focused on creating new traditions; this most commonly plays out

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[58] Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, "Introduction," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 3.

[59] Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990), 56.

[60] Miriam Peskowitz, "Engendering Jewish Religious History," in *Judaism Since Gender*, ed. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (New York: Routledge, 1997), 29.

as a reclamation of older religious idioms (Native American, African, ancient Greek, pre-Christian European), with emphasis on the centrality of a Goddess figure.[61] Reclamations of various Goddess traditions tend to draw on idealized notions of matriarchal society. For example, Audre Lorde finds the "true nature of old female power" among ancient African civilizations empowering; she lays claim to an older, more real, tradition.[62]

Scholars have also worked to reclaim women's voices – in the historical record, through creative exegesis, through theological inquiry – as a call to remake religious tradition. In what follows, I cite several examples that show the vibrancy and range of this intervention. Phyllis Trible, in *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (1984), reads violent stories of the Hebrew Bible which systematically relegate women to object-status. Ultimately, however, she finds redemption in these stories, and uses them to challenge the misogyny of scripture.[63] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983) writes of the importance of feminist historiography for Christian women; in recognizing the presence of prophetic women in the New Testament, she wishes to "theologically conceptualize [their stories] as an integral part of the proclamation of the gospel."[64] The early Christian women who were silenced and

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[61] The anthology *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (1989) includes a wide range of essays written by women who engage in Goddess religion in different ways. Examples include essays written by Paula Gunn Allen, Charlene Spretnak, Gloria Anzaldúa, Christine Downing, Dhyani Ywahoo, Starhawk, and Carol P. Christ.

[62] Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," 67. See also Lorde, "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving," 50.

[63] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[64] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "In Search of Women's Heritage," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 30.

forgotten are to be remembered in order to remake Christianity into a more equitable religious tradition. Similarly, Rosemary Radford Ruether shows both the shortcomings and the anti-patriarchal possibilities of the Bible, Christian traditions, and post-Christian philosophies; she engages with these sources in the spirit of feminist theology, of which the critical principle "is the promotion of the full humanity of women."[65] She writes that her goal in *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983) is "to glimpse both what has been lost to humanity through the subjugation of women and what new humanity might emerge through the affirmation of the full personhood of women."[66] In rethinking scripture, Christian tradition, and the divine, these scholars push towards a more equitable version of Christianity.

This work is certainly not limited to Christian theologians. Judith Plaskow (1990) and Ellen Umansky (1984) similarly work to remake Judaism in hearing silenced women.[67] Muslim scholars such as Asma Barlas (2002) and Amina Wadud (1999) engage in Qur'anic exegesis in order to emphasize the egalitarian roots of Islam.[68] Buddhist feminist Rita M. Gross (1993) highlights the egalitarian teachings of Buddhism,

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[65] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 18.

[66] Ibid., 45.

[67] Plaskow *Standing Again at Sinai*; Ellen M. Umansky "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989).

[68] Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Amina Wadud *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For a comprehensive analysis of feminist interpretations of the Qur'an, see Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

particularly emphasizing non-dualism as potentially emancipatory for women.[69] Nor is this work limited to the years of the second wave. Reclaiming religion as more egalitarian continues to be an important project for many scholars, and pioneers in this field continue to shape the discourse focused on reframing religion. To cite a very recent example, the summer 2014 issue of *Tikkun* – which is a magazine specifically focused on bringing together progressive religious and secular voices to end oppression – included a special section to which scholars contributed short essays offering ways to rethink God. Rosemary Radford Ruether wrote about God as creative energy; Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ contributed an essay outlining two feminist positions on divinity.[70]

As the example of *Tikkun* can attest, this scholarship has often worked hand-in-hand with activism. In particular, feminist activists who work to claim space as religious practitioners and leaders have drawn on scholarly theological engagement in order to support their claims for inclusion; the successful campaigns for female ordination in many Christian denominations serve as only one example among many of this trend. Women have claimed not only the fringes of some religious practices, but also have reshaped broader religious engagement in order to claim the center of a given tradition as egalitarian.[71] Indeed, many of the scholars who reclaim religion for women have been

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[69] Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[70] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Empty Throne: Reimaging God as Creative Energy," *Tikkun* 29.3 (Summer 2014): 28-29; Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, "Two Feminist Views of Goddess and God," *Tikkun* 29.3 (Summer 2014): 29-34.

[71] Increasingly, women are claiming not only more traditionally "liberal" religions as their own, but also religious traditions marked as conservative. For example, the feminist wing of the LDS Church has gained momentum and recognition in the past few years. A woman led the prayer at the LDS general conference in 2013 and LDS missions have expanded the possibilities for young women to participate. See Joanna Brooks, "Historic Prayer by Woman at LDS General Conference Signals Growing Concern with Gender

actively engaged in practice as well as study, and have tracked the burgeoning feminist engagement with a range of traditions. For example, Qur'anic scholar Amina Wadud writes about her experiences advocating for women's rights as a Muslim in *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006).[72] Maxine Hanks offers a similar perspective on the struggles of feminist Mormons in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (1992).[73]

These moves to recognize the feminine or egalitarian aspects of religious traditions are important, both in terms of opening up paths to religious engagement for women and in terms of inspiring new avenues of critique for feminist scholars of religion. With that said, however, there are shortcomings to a strategy which remakes religion by emphasizing women's voices. In some cases, this strategy erases the historical absence of women; in claiming religion as egalitarian, there is a tension in simultaneously remembering the non-egalitarian uses to which religion has been put.

While hearing silenced women's voices in places like ceremonial Goddess worship or the Hebrew Bible or Medieval mysticism and claiming their words as applicable to the feminist struggle is important and admirable, this emphasis continues to occlude the importance of women's experience as agents when they act in ways that some feminists activists and scholars find deeply troubling. Feminist projects that add women to historical narratives or engage in exegesis mark religious practitioners who do

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Equality," *Religion Dispatches*, April 7, 2013, http://religiondispatches.org/historic-prayer-by-woman-at-lds-general-conference-signals-growing-concern-with-gender-equality/; Jodi Kantor and Laurie Goodstein, "Missions Signal a Growing Role for Mormon Women," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/us/a-growing-role-for-mormon-women.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw.

[72] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

[73] Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1992).

not overtly embrace feminism as engaging in "bad religion." This in turn can be used to reinforce the binary of religion and feminism as diametrically opposed, only now with the exception of a few special good religions. Focusing on the "good" religions which make space for egalitarianism reinforces the progressive understanding about freedom of choice when it comes to religious belief. This too excludes many women who uphold so-called patriarchal institutions; even if they struggle for justice, they may see their religious belief as a given, something which they accept and then work within, rather than work against.

Illiberal Results of Liberal Feminism

I return here to de Lauretis' question about the possibility of feminism as a source of material oppression; Chandra Talpade Mohanty addresses this dynamic in terms of the exclusionary nature of liberal feminism in engaging with "third world women." While recognizing the strength through difference in building stronger bonds of sisterhood can be positive, it may also lead to non-white women being rhetorically reshaped in order to gain access to these bonds. The prescriptive notion of the universal sisterhood of all women leads to the idea that those other women need "us" to save "them." In her essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1991), Mohanty explores the ways in which western feminists create a monolithic third world woman, who is invariabily viewed as oppressed and completely lacking in any sort of agency:

> I argue that… a homogenous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the images of an 'average third world woman.' This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented,

> victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.[74]

Mohanty particularly emphasizes the fact that formulating third world women as victims of violent and oppressive men repeatedly inscribes their object-status. "Because women are thus constituted as a coherent group, sexual difference becomes coterminous with female subordination, and power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who have it (read: men), and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited."[75] This problematic move is, in turn, predicated on the initial assumption of women as a homogenous group. Western feminists, however, in their ability to write about their oppression – and be heard – can claim subject-status. Third world women, however, remain objects who need to be saved; they need to be "versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism."[76] This allows white women to hide any oppression that they might face and allows them to project this oppression elsewhere.

Another potential illiberal dynamic of liberalism obtains in the insistence on the choice of the autonomous self. Constitutional scholar Michael Sandel's exploration of what it means to choose a religion demonstrates some of the tensions between free choice and religious belief. In analyzing Supreme Court cases after World War II which deal with religion and speech, Sandel examines the ways in which the Court assumes that persons are free and independent agents – "unencumbered selves" who can choose what to believe. A core aspect of his analysis lies in highlighting the illiberal results which

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[74] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 56.

[75] Ibid., 64.

[76] Ibid., 57.

stem from this assumption. In doing so, he argues that for some religious practitioners, "who regard themselves as claimed by religious commitment they have not chosen," choice is not a useful rubric.[77] Rather, religious practitioners are encumbered: a person cannot choose what to believe, but rather, only how to act on the beliefs she already holds.[78] Though Sandel is not a feminist scholar, his work is helpful in succinctly illuminating the tensions inherent in the liberal focus on choice as the greatest good, particularly in conflicts about the correct boundaries of religious practice in the secular sphere.

The intersections of Mohanty's and Sandel's work shed light on the way in which liberal feminism might especially disenfranchise conservative religious women. R. Marie Griffith, in response to liberal feminists who emphasize women's spiritual and material liberation from conservative religions, writes:

> The certain losers in that schema are religious conservative women, those who have retained old religious ties or perhaps forged new ones instead of abandoning them for secular or spiritual feminism. More often than not, such women are perceived as either deluded – that is, brainwashed by the patriarchal structures of traditional religion – or simply repugnant, and at the very least participating outright in their own oppression.[79]

The convergence of the objectified, unspeaking third world woman with the unrealistic understanding that she must rationally chose her religious commitments serve to mark certain religious women as definitively non-feminist. The religious traditions in which they participate are marked as retrograde, as stuck in the past, as not modern. Religious

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[77] Michael Sandel, "Religious Liberty: Freedom of Choice or Freedom of Conscience," in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 85.

[78] Ibid., 85-87.

[79] Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 204

women are framed as backwards, as still subject to "the oldest of all inequalities."[80] From the notion that bad religions mistreat women follows the fact that feminism and religion are often glossed as diametrically opposed by those who claim feminist outlooks.

Disdain for religion appears in mainstream feminist venues. For example, a commenter on Jezebel.com asserted that the group the "Young Mormon Feminists" should be better known as "non-Mormons," implying the feminism and Mormonism are mutually exclusive; this comment was frequently recommended by others discussing the article.[81] This is not an isolated case. An article describing the reaction to an unveiled woman appearing on state-sponsored Saudi television caused a veritable storm of argument in the comments section. One commenter was horrified that there were feminists who could even consider defending Islam, stating: "Someone up thread called Islam a 'beautiful and interesting religion'. On a feminist website. Without a hint of irony."[82] Maureen Dowd, in discussing Anthony Weiner's repeated falls from grace, attributes the fact that Huma Abedin chose to stay with her husband on Abedin's Muslim background – she was trained to be oppressed by her upbringing.[83] Though any of these

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[80] Alexis de Toqueville, *Souvenirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 129, quoted by Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality," 26.

[81] "Bunbury," August 13, 2014 (4:38 PM), comment on Lindy West, "BYU Student Challenges 'No Sex' Policy and Church's Treatment of Women," *Jezebel*, August 13, 2014, , http://jezebel.com/though-she-mentions-being-a-member-of-a-non-sanctioned-1621110053.

[82] "OyVeyThisIsLikeAnotherShoah," August, 4, 2014 (5:36 PM), comment on Isha Aran, "Saudi Anchorwoman Appears Without Veil, Shitsorm Ensues," *Jezebel*, August 4, 2014, http://jezebel.com/youre-wasting-your-breath-here-someone-up-thread-calle-1616003271.

[83] Maureen Dowd, "Time to Hard-Delete Carlos Danger," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/28/opinion/sunday/dowd-time-to-hard-delete-carlos-danger.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss.
For a response to Dowd's op-ed, which particularly emphasizes the double-standard applied to Abedin and her boss Hillary Clinton, who also chose to stay with a philandering husband, see Haroon Moghul,

examples taken on its own may be trivial, together they paint a picture of the continued casual assumption that religion and feminism must be inimical. The examples showing the way religious women are represented to the American public hint at the complicity of some feminist projects with the ongoing wholesale demonization of both Muslims and polygamous Mormons. Such feminist positions rely on the centrality of the liberal autonomous self whose agency is marked through her resistance to patriarchy.

The assumption that feminism and particular religions must be inimical also obtains in academic feminist work. Saba Mahmood comments on this trend among feminists, writing, "I have been fascinated and compelled by the repugnance the mosque movement provokes in feminist-progressive scholars like myself and by our inability to move beyond this visceral reaction."[84] Similarly, Cady and Fessenden specifically note in their introduction to *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* instances of feminist scholars who ignore evidence to the contrary in their claims about the impossibility of liberation through religion, citing Isabel Coleman's work on Muslim women's activism as a particularly marked example.[85]

Rhetorically marking feminism and religion as oppositional is not just problematic in terms of discourse. This rhetorical link bolsters calls to active intervention. Both historically and in the present, liberal feminism may be used as a tool in support of

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"Maureen Dowd's Reductio Ad Islam," *Religion Dispatches* July 29, 2013, http://religiondispatches.org/maureen-dowds-reductio-ad-islam/.

[84] Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, 37

[85] Cady & Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide," 4-5.
The rhetorical opposition between religion and feminism is especially marked in discussions of Islam. See also Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 1; Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own: Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women's Islamic Movements* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 8.
I return to the rhetorical opposition of Islam and feminism in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

colonialism. For example, Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General in Egypt from 1883-1907, appealed for support for the colonial endeavor on the grounds that Muslim women had to be saved from the backwardness of Islam – and the Muslim men who practiced it.[86] As Carl W. Ernst puts it, "a new and surprising weapon in the colonialists' arsenal was the language of European feminism."[87] Their liberation necessitated colonial intervention; to cite a now-common adage coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the white men needed to save the brown women from the brown men in their lives.[88] However, despite his rhetoric, Cromer did little to actually improve women's lives in Egypt, and actively worked against expanding women's rights in England; he served as the president for the National League Opposing Woman Suffrage from 1910-1912. This fact underscores the strategic way the image of the oppressed Muslim woman was used for specifically colonial gains, rather than from a real concern about women's plight in more general terms. Cromer is only one of many colonial administrators and missionaries who called for Western intervention – indeed, claimed it as necessary – in order to combat veiling, suttee, foot binding, or harems.[89]

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[86] Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 31; Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 143-144.

[87] Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, 143.

[88]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 296.

[89] This trend is well documented across a range of colonial encounters. See, for example: Louise Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-21; Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 297-308; Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "The Subject of Sati: Pain and Death in the Contemporary Discourse on Sati," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.2 (Spring 1990): 3-5; Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 175-181; Angela Zito, "Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China: Missionary and Medical Stagings

Nor is the strategic deployment of oppressed women limited to the distant past. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was similarly justified by the Taliban's mistreatment of women, notably by neo-conservatives who simultaneously worked to restrict women's rights (such as access to reproductive healthcare) in the United States.[90] Rhetorically, women's suffering in Afghanistan is linked inextricably to Islam and issues like education and dress, rather than to lack of food or safety due to American military presence or other geo-political factors. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd succinctly summarizes this trend: "State and nonstate projects legitimated through the language of women's rights have intervened, sometimes violently, to 'rescue' allegedly misinformed, manipulated, and oppressed women from illiberal versions of Islam."[91] Hurd's comments also apply to the 2008 raid on the FLDS; allegedly oppressed women must also be saved from illiberal versions of Mormonism.

The way in which liberal feminists have reclaimed religion has done little to combat this trend in writing off non-feminist religious engagement. Miriam Peskowitz, in commenting on the project of "letting women speak" as imagined by Plaskow, notes some of the shortcomings of the liberal feminist project:

> But theorizing feminism primarily as a project that 'lets women speak' risks conflating women's voices with feminism. Not all speaking women speak feminism. 'Letting women speak' brings with it the risks of underestimating the

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of the Universal Body," in *Secularisms* ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 208.

[90] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 6-8; Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire,"81-83.
Similarly Nacira Guénif-Souilamas notes the way feminist rhetoric in support of forced unveiling in France was co-opted by white men for political gain. Nacira Guénif-Souilamas, "On French Religions and Their Renewed Embodiments," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 202-204.

[91] Hurd, "Rescued by Law?," 217.

> problems of feminisms and feminists that conflict with one another. It overlooks a critical problem for feminism at the century's turn: determining which of the women among us can speak 'for women.' [92]

Peskowitz's reminder that "not all speaking women speak feminism" provides a useful jumping-off point for taking seriously the voices of women who uphold, rather than challenge, male-dominated religious institutions.

Reconfigurations: Redefining Feminism through the Study of Religious Women

A potential avenue for denaturalizing the link between mistreatment of women and "bad religion" is to actually engage the women in religious communities. One fruitful source of challenges to liberal feminist thought has been ethnographic study of conservative religious women, particularly in cases where the voices of conservative women were taken seriously. This is important because the narrow definition of liberal feminism may alienate female religious practitioners. As one polygamous woman writes, "From this perspective, Fundamentalist Mormon women have little interest in today's feminist movement, *per se*, and some of its expressions of liberation. To them, such expressions are shallow by comparison. Rather than oppression, plural marriage is

[92] Peskowitz, "Engendering Jewish Religious History," 29.
Peskowitz expands on this critique in a later essay in which she elaborates on the dangers of searching for the "essence" of the feminine, noting in particular the ways in which specific women's voices are erased in the process of having them take on symbolic weight. Miriam Peskowitz, "Unweaving: A Response to Carol P. Christ," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 13.1 (Spring 1997).
Peskowitz is certainly not unique in noting that femaleness and feminism are not synonymous. See, for example: de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies / Critical Studies," 4; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 7.

perceived as a key to true freedom both in this life and in the hereafter."[93] She points to a competing discourse on the meaning of liberation, which is incompatible with liberal models of identity. Ethnographic work by a range of scholars shows that religious women act as agents in a variety of ways, over against liberal feminist perceptions of these same women as brainwashed or in need of rescue. In what follows, I highlight a few examples of this work, particularly those which offer alternative articulations of feminism beyond a liberal rubric.

Leila Ahmed, in *A Quiet Revolution* (2011), challenges the notion that the rise of political Islam and the increased oppression of women go hand in hand. Contrary to her expectations – she acknowledges the biases she held against young women who embraced veiling – she found that it is actually young Islamists who are actively working towards gender justice in the Muslim community. While Ahmed does not explicitly set out to redefine feminist engagement, her work challenges liberal assumptions about the impossibility of overlap between certain political versions of religious adherence and activism towards gender justice.

Ethnographer Janet Bennion, who studies polygamous Mormon communities, also combats common misconceptions about religious women as oppressed. In *Women of Principle* (1998), she argues that women are actually the people who run the polygamous community she studied; the men are frequently absent and the women develop all-female networks which control day-to-day decisions. Women find sources both power and

[93] Batchelor, Mary, Marianne Watson and Anne Wilde, ed., *Voices in Harmony: Contemporary Women Celebrate Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City, UT: Principle Voices, 2000), 74.

autonomy within a patriarchal framework.[94] In *Desert Patriarchy* (2004), a monograph based on continued ethnographic work among other polygamous Mormon groups, Bennion clearly articulates what is at stake in understanding alternate formulations of female power, writing: "This relative autonomy and power of women in rigid patriarchal groups adds new categories of feminism and definitions of gender to our knowledge of human relationships."[95] Bennion later acknowledged that she perhaps overstated the feminist engagement of these women.[96] However, her deployment of the word usefully disrupts standard narratives which dismiss polygamous women as especially and uniquely oppressed due to their religious convictions.

A related strategy involves engaging with religious women on their own terms in order to rethink underlying assumptions, particularly in terms of freedom, choice, and power. For example, Lynn Davidman, in *Tradition in a Rootless World* (1991) and Debra R. Kaufman, in *Rachel's Daughters* (1991), both study secular Jewish women who chose to embrace Orthodox Judaism as adults. The move from secular to Orthodox Judaism seems counter-intuitive, especially for women who would then be constrained into a narrow role within a lifestyle which many mark as authoritarian. However, by engaging with the women who make this choice, Davidman and Kaufman found that these women see their embrace of religion as beneficial, rather than oppressive.[97] Similarly, Tamar El

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[94] Bennion, *Women of Principle*, 6-7.

[95] Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy*, 190.

[96] Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 260.

[97] Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Debra R. Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

Or, in *Educated and Ignorant* (1994), finds that Orthodox Jewish women actively cultivate ignorance in order to maintain social ties within their communities.[98] These findings challenge liberal assumptions about freedom as the greatest good; the women actively chose to give up certain freedoms in exchange for the solace of tradition and rootedness.

R. Marie Griffith also engages directly with religious women. In studying evangelical Christians, Griffith offers an example of engaging with women who are fully entrenched in male-dominated religious communities. In *God's Daughters* (1997), a study of a women's parachurch organization called Aglow, she insists on recognizing the agency of women in religious communities, even when they act in ways that some might see as working against their own interests rather than resisting male-dominated teaching and leadership. Her focus on the ways in which the women in the community describe themselves allows the reader to engage with Aglow members on their own terms and to thereby recognize the limits of liberal models of power and agency in describing the lives of these women. Griffith's work marks an important step in hearing the voices of non-feminist women.

Saba Mahmood, in *Politics of Piety* (2004), an ethnographic study of women participating in the mosque movement in Egypt, expands the theoretical feminist engagement with religious women. In exploring the piety movement among Egyptian women, Mahmood shows the way they assert power in their religious community specifically by submitting to the authority of tradition. Mahmood builds on post-

[98] Tamar El Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and their World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Pub, 1994).

structuralist theories of the self as contingent, particularly Judith Butler's work on agency and Michel Foucault's work on ethical formation, in order re-theorize what it means to be an agent.[99] She notes in her introductory chapter, that commonly, feminist formulations of agency rely on an oppositional tension between "subordination and submission."[100] These theories then often cast as victims of patriarchy women such as those who participate in the piety movement, despite the fact that they are active participants. Mahmood notes that even those scholars who are skeptical of false consciousness claims ask why women would participate in a movement which "seems inimical to their 'own interests and agendas'… [and assume] that there is something intrinsic to women that *should* predispose them to oppose the practices, values, and injunctions that the Islamist movement embodies."[101]

Mahmood critiques this position by arguing that agency is contingent. She writes, "I am not interested in offering *a* theory of agency, but rather I insist that the meaning of agency must be explored within the grammar of concepts within which it operates."[102] She delinks agency from resistance in order to emphasize that her subjects are, in fact, agents. However, it should be noted that she does not see agency as the actions of an autonomous will, but rather the products of a larger authoritative discourse which may go beyond the wills of individual subjects. In doing so, Mahmood resists the urge to focus on hidden feminist leanings of her subjects. Rather, she states that her aim is not "to

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[99] For discussions on her use of Butler and Foucault, respectively, see Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, 18-22 and 28-29.

[100] Ibid., 14.

[101] Ibid., 2.

[102] Ibid., 34.

uncover a 'redeemable element' within the Islamist movement by recuperating its latent liberatory potentials so as to make the movement more palatable to liberal sensibilities. Instead, in this book I seek to analyze the conceptions of self, moral agency, and politics that undergird the practices of this nonliberal movement, in order to come to an understanding of the historical projects that animate it."[103] As such, Mahmood's work offers a challenge to the liberal worldview embraced by most academics; in refusing to rehabilitate Islamist women, she compels the reader to recognize that there are completely other ways of being in the world which do not fall under the universalist rubric of Protestant secular freedom.

While my own work is not ethnographic, the contributions made by feminist anthropologists of religion in studying conservative women are central to the underlying motivations and method behind my project. Through their emphasis on understanding nonliberal religious movements from the viewpoint of the women who embrace them, scholars such as Griffith and Mahmood do not simply focus on women's empowerment through the lens of the desires of a universal woman who wishes to be free from oppression; rather, they take seriously the possibilities offered by post-structrualist feminist methodology as defined by Joan Scott to destabilize liberal rhetoric. Rather than seeing religious women as oppressed or brainwashed, these scholars assert that religious women are active agents who make choices about their lives. I find their ethnographic examples useful in engaging with literary texts because of the reminder they provide me about challenging my own assumptions about religious women, particularly when reading texts which uphold commonly held ideas about the status of religious women.

[103] Ibid., 5.

Breaking Down Binaries

Liberal feminist thought, particularly as relates to religion, rests on a series of binary distinctions. In particular, religion and secularism are placed in opposition, with the corollary that feminism is aligned with the secular position. In recent years, many clashes about the role of religion in the public sphere have played out in the realm of regulating gender and sexuality; the Hobby Lobby case heard by the United States Supreme Court and the French headscarf debate are only two examples of this trend. In their introduction to the anthology *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (2013), Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden write:

> To return, then, to the question of how women come to be included, as though always already there, in a story of secularization founded on their exclusion: the moral narrative of modernity, to which secularism and most articulations of feminism subscribe, implies the commonsense assertion that some societies or communities are more advanced than others and that the treatment of women indexes just who is ahead and who behind on the path that moves religion into the modern secular world.[104]

Cady and Fessenden's remarks highlight the imbrications between feminism, secularism, and the deployment of women as a marker of bad religion. Previous interventions into this interconnected discourse have largely been articulated by scholars of Islam. Ann Braude directly challenges scholars of Western religious women to engage with scholarship on Islam, precisely because they must grapple with questions of modernity; scholars of Christian women can assume modernity, and therefore allow negotiations with modernity to remain invisible.[105] Lila Abu-Lughod and Nilüfer Göle are two such

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[104] Cady and Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide,"15.

[105] Ann Braude, "Religion and Women's Political Mobilization," in *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, edited by Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 73-74.

scholars. In her preface to the anthology *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (1998), Lila Abu-Lughod notes that modernity does not always bring liberation for Muslim women; the essays included in this anthology challenge the common opposition posited between tradition and modernity and the correlated link between modernity and progress.[106] Nilüfer Göle also explores tensions between the false binary of "Islam" and "modernity." In particular, her work on young, educated Turkish women who chose to veil highlight the ways in which those who embrace both Islam and the trappings of modernity are denied access to both camps.[107]

The interventions made by Abu-Lughod and Göle, along with the broader framework to which Braude, Cady, and Fessenden point, inform my assumptions moving forward. My own work is located within this nexus of interventions against dichotomous representations of religion and secular feminism. In reading the texts which make up the bulk of my analysis, my focus lies primarily in tensions and boundaries. The scholarship cited here, which draws attention to the shortcomings in demarcating certain categories as binary oppositions, provides space for exploring the boundary zones of overlap: between religion and feminism, between religion and secularism, between religion and liberation.

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[106] Lila Abu-Lughod, preface to *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), vii.

[107] Nilüfer Göle, "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14.1 (Winter 2002): 178-184; Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

CHAPTER 3

THE TROPES OF CAPTIVITY

A key component of my analysis lies in connecting contemporary post-religious texts to historical captivity narratives. Broadly defined, captivity narratives feature a person who is held against her will by a barbarous group; the suffering of the captive during her imprisonment serves as justification for retaliation against captors or for outside intervention in order to rescue other women similarly held hostage. These emotionally-laden texts were widely disseminated, with several becoming early American bestsellers. By rooting contemporary texts in a recognizable genre, I provide context for a range of alternative readings of anti-Mormon and anti-Muslim texts.

Literary scholars commonly cite captivity narratives as a uniquely American genre.[108] While, as shown by Linda Colley and Lisa Voigt, Europeans wrote captivity narratives in a range of colonial contexts and moments of cross-cultural exchange with ethnic and religious Others, the genre has taken on particular valences in the American imagination.[109] As discussed in the introduction, the American perception of religious otherness is predicated on understanding the United States as a liberal, secular sphere, which, in turn, is based on a Protestant worldview; the United States is the universal space against which all deviance is defined. Captivity literature has shaped this perception by grounding claims of religious deviance in true accounts of confinement

[108] Michelle Burnham, *Captivity & Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 5.

[109] Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); Lisa Voigt, *Writing Captivity in the Early Modern Atlantic: Circulations of Knowledge and Authority in the Iberian and English Imperial Worlds* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

experienced and written about by white women. The genre first rose to popularity in the 17th century, when female English colonists began writing about their encounters with Native American tribes.[110] These early texts were critical in defining the boundaries of captives' home communities – and by extension, "normal" American-ness – as white, Anglo, and Protestant. Though at first glance, Indian captivity literature seems grounded solely in racial difference, religious difference was also a key feature. Women such as Mary Rowlandson drew on normative Protestant teachings of grace in order to make sense of their ordeals among the Heathens, who were frequently portrayed as instruments of Satan.[111] Propagandistic texts were frequently both anti-Catholic and anti-Indian; in some cases, narrators catholicized the Native Americans they encountered, in order to more clearly demarcate the boundaries of the community as Protestant.[112]

My insistence on categorizing contemporary religious texts as captivity narratives considerably expands the scope of the scholarly literature on captivity. The designation of "captivity narrative" is most commonly applied to stories written by Anglo-Americans held captive by Native Americans between the 17th and 19th centuries. However, literary scholars such as Michelle Burnham, Chris Castiglia, Mark Rifkin, and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, and historians of religion such as Tracy Fessenden, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Terryl Givens, have noted the commonalities between Indian captivity

[110] Scholarly literature refers to the texts in question exclusively as "Indian captivity narratives." However, I feel uncomfortable referring to the people as "Indians." I therefore use "Native American" when speaking about the people, and "Indian" when speaking about the texts.

[111] Richard VanDerBeets, *The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 1-3.

[112] Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 30, 53-54; Karen A. Weyler. *Empowering Words: Outsiders & Authorship in Early America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 82.

narratives and other similar forms.[113] The work by these and other scholars defines the genre more broadly, expanding it to include slave narratives, convent tales, anti-polygamy memoirs, and novels (such as *Hope Leslie*, written by Catherine Maria Sedgwick in 1827). Yet this vibrant scholarly literature on captivity narratives generally ignores texts written later than the 19th century. There are a few exceptions among literary scholars; for example, Chris Castiglia includes a discussion of Patty Hearst's memoir in his analysis, and Andrew Panay links Indian captivity narratives to stories of being abducted by UFOs.[114] However, the scholars of religion, such as Terryl Givens, who discuss anti-religious texts as captivity narratives, focus primarily on anti-convent or anti-polygamy tales from the 19th century.[115]

Scholars who do write about contemporary post-religious narratives, in contrast, treat these texts in isolation, rather as part of a larger genre. Saba Mahmood and Roksana Bahramitash, who discuss books by and about Muslim women, treat these texts as a distinctive mode of writing: a new and gendered Orientalism, predicated on the unique neocolonial relationship between the Islam and West, particularly in the present moment

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[113] Burnham, *Captivity & Sentiment*, 2-3; Christopher Castliglia, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4-6; Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 143-180; Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, "*Legacy* Profile: Ann Eliza Webb Young (Denning) (1844-after 1908)," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, 26.1 (2009): 151, 153; Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 125-126; Fluhman, *"A Peculiar People"*, 119; Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 43, 106.

[114] Castliglia, *Bound and Determined*, 87-105; Andrew Panay, "From *Little Big Man* to little green men: the captivity scenario in American culture," *European Journal of American Culture* 23. 3 (2004).

[115] Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 97-152.

as shaped by the War on Terror.[116] Similarly, scholars such as David Bromley and Anson Shupe, who analyze the American anti-cult movement of the late 20th century, refer to texts written by dissidents simply as "apostate tales" or "atrocity tales," failing to ground these texts historically or in terms of genre.[117]

Nora Rubel serves as one exception to this rule. In discussing contemporary fiction about Orthodox Jews, Rubel explicitly connects anti-Orthodox literature to captivity narratives, drawing a genealogy that runs from accounts of captivity among Native Americans, through anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon narratives, to contemporary anti-Muslim and anti-Orthodox accounts.[118] I build on the connection made by Rubel, making more explicit the unspoken valences of the genre of captivity, thereby offering deeper context for contemporary contributions to the canon and expanding the scope of genre analysis to cover 21st century texts.

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[116] "New Orientalism" is the term coined by Saba Mahmood in her attempt to categorize these texts. Roksana Bahramitash defines this discursive category more narrowly as "orientalist feminism." While these categorizations draw on the rich literature on Orientalism and therefore offer avenues for historically rooted analysis, it does not provide space for comparative study which can get at broader questions about demarcating boundaries of normative religious engagement. Bahramitash, "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism,"221; Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire," 83-84. Lila Abu-Lughod and Dohra Ahmad, who have also studied books by Muslim women, refer to them in more general terms as "pulp-memoirs" or part of the "oppressed-Muslim-woman genre." Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 87-91; Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 105-106.

[117] David G. Bromley, "The Social Construction of Contested Exit Roles: Defectors, Whistleblowers, and Apostates," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 42; David G. Bromley, Anson Shupe, and Joseph Ventimiglia, "The Role of Anecdotal Atrocities in the Social Construction of Evil," in *The Brainwashing/DeprogrammingControversy: Sociological, Psychological, Legal and Historical Perspectives*, ed. David G. Bromley and James T. Richardson (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 139-160.
See also John R. Hall, "The Impact of Apostates on the Trajectory of Religious Movements: The Case of Peoples Temple," in *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, ed. David G. Bromley (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1988), 237; Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, & Journalists, 1955-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 89, 129.

[118] Rubel, *Doubting the Devout*, 4-5, 81-82, 94-97.

In this chapter, I focus on the content of captivity literature, identifying the key tropes that distinguish the genre. In doing so, I lay the groundwork for arguing that contemporary texts written by post-religious women follow similar genre conventions to historical captivity narratives. I identify cross-cutting themes that characterize a diverse set of historical texts commonly accepted as captivity narratives; this provides the basis from which to show that the appearance of the same themes in contemporary narratives links them to the broader genre. Because the roots of this genre are so intertwined with the definitional boundaries of American identity, my insistence that contemporary texts also uphold genre conventions allows me to hone in on the ways in which the deployment of captivity allows the demonization of religion to be understood, rather than overt, within the narratives.

In what follows, I discuss four definitive tropes prevalent in the genre: capture, suffering, imprisonment, and redemption. I highlight the appearance of these tropes in a few key historical captivity narratives: Mary Rowlandson's *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682); Hannah Dustan's *A Notable Exploit* (1697, 1697, and 1702); Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures Containing, Also, Many Incidents Never before Published* (1836); and Fanny Stenhouse's *"Tell It All": The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (1874). In doing so, I also explore the development of the genre by noting changes in tropes over time, particularly as captors shifted from ethnic others to religious ones. Because the texts which I analyze are canonical examples of captivity literature, my goal here is not to make a new argument about defining characteristics of captivity narratives. Rather, I succinctly outline the

tropes of captivity in order to provide a clear foundation from which to argue that contemporary texts draw on similar themes.

Overview of Historical Examples

Before discussing genre characteristics, I briefly provide general background information on the texts from which I draw in order to illustrate the defining tropes of captivity literature. These historical texts have already been accepted as canonical examples of captivity narratives by both literary and religious scholars. They were all widely disseminated, frequently by persons with significant cultural capital, such as Cotton Mather and Harriet Beecher Stowe. As such, they serve as my touchstones in navigating the development of this literature.

Mary Rowlandson's recounting of her months with the Wampanoag in 1676, published six years after her return, is widely acknowledged as the first American bestseller, a fact which underscores the special popularity of tales of female captivity; no copy of the first edition of her text survives, as it was passed around so much that all copies were literally read to pieces.[119] *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* is presented not only as entertainment, but as a source of religious edification. In recording her experiences, Rowlandson grapples with her relationship with God. She comes to terms with her captivity by attributing her trials to a test from God; she marks her suffering as God's punishment for her sins, but

[119] Burnham, *Captivity & Sentiment*, 14, 26; Colley, *Captives*, 150; Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, "Introduction," in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), xxxvii; Panay, "From *Little Big Man* to little green men," 203; Siobhan Senier, "The captivity narrative redux," review of *The Blue Tattoo: The Life of Olive Oatman*, by Margot Mifflin, *The Women's Review of Books* 27.1 (January-February 2010):12.

simultaneously understands her redemption as a signal of God's grace. Scholars frequently cite Rowlandson's narrative as the archetypal example of 17th century captivity literature; the majority of scholarly monographs on Indian captivity narratives discuss Rowlandson and her experiences.[120]

Unlike Rowlandson, who wrote down her own story, Hannah Dustan did not leave a written account of her experiences; rather, Cotton Mather recorded Dustan's capture by the Abenaki in 1697 in both sermons and books.[121] His involvement in disseminating her tale underscores the normative power that Puritan ministers gained through the deployment of captivity stories. Dustan's captivity also provides a singular example in her escape: captured because she was unable to flee her home after giving birth to a child, Dustan conspired with her midwife and a young captive boy to kill and scalp their captors. Mather frames this violent action in terms of righteous motherly feeling after the death of Dustan's infant. Like Rowlandson, Dustan understood her captivity as a crucible of the self. During her testimony of conversion years later, Dustan referred to her time in captivity as the most morally strengthening time of her life.[122] Though Dustan's story did not reach the bestseller status that Rowlandson's did, it

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[120] Monographs which especially emphasize the importance of Rowlandson's text include: Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment*; Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*; Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993); Rebecca Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

[121] Cotton Mather first shared Hannah Dustan's experience as part of a fast sermon in 1697. He also included it in two books, published 1699 and 1702. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, "Hannah Dustan," in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, edited by Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Penguin Books), 56; Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 5-6.

[122] Derounian-Stodola, "Hannah Dustan," 56.

continued to carry cultural weight: two statues were made of her late in the 19th century.[123]

Maria Monk tells not of her captivity by Native Americans, but rather by the nuns of the Hotel Dieu Convent in Montreal. Monk's *Awful Disclosures*, in which she describes the suffering she experienced among Catholics, was another American bestseller, selling over 300,000 copies, and only being eclipsed in popularity by Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[124] Her narrative is particularly salacious; it includes reports of priests impregnating the nuns, who subsequently smothered their infants. Monk also claims to have found several pits in which the bodies of murdered infants and disobedient nuns were secretly disposed. Monk's narrative has largely been debunked as fiction, written primarily by Protestant ministers as an anti-Catholic polemic, with Monk acting as a front woman. Indeed, much of the attention which swirled around *Awful Disclosures* stemmed from public arguments about the truth of Monk's story; the revised edition of *Awful Disclosures*, published in 1836, includes a collection of affidavits both confirming and rebutting Monk's claims.[125] Regardless of the truth of Monk's narrative, her story remains a touchstone for scholars of 19th century Nativism.[126]

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[123] Ibid., 57.

[124] Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 154.

[125] Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures Containing, Also, Many Incidents Never before Published* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), 198-204.

[126] See, for example: Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 135-161; Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27-51.

While many anti-polygamy texts had proliferated by the time Fanny Stenhouse's story was published in the 1870s – historian Sarah Barringer Gordon counts nearly a hundred anti-Mormon texts published in the 19th century[127] – Stenhouse's was unique in its claims to truth. Earlier "true" stories of the suffering of Mormon women were almost entirely fictional, usually ending with the tragic death of the heroine. Stenhouse, in contrast, offered an insider's perspective, written by a woman who had escaped from the horrors found in Utah; her narrative therefore not only includes her life story, but extensive background information on Mormonism as it developed from a small and devout community to an overbearing and corrupted theocracy. Stenhouse and her husband, along with Ann Eliza Webb Young, whose book *Wife No.19, or the Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Exposé of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy* was published the following year, spent the subsequent years giving speaking tours about their experiences and campaigning against polygamy. While Young's book attracted more attention, most likely due to her marriage to the infamous Brigham Young himself, Stenhouse's book was also widely read; Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the introduction to Stenhouse's story.

Genre Overview: Politics and Poetics

In the introduction of this dissertation, I discussed the politics of contemporary texts, emphasizing particularly the ways in which popular narratives are deployed in order support the discursive othering of specific religious groups. However, using

[127] Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 29.

captivity narratives in order to support political goals is not a new phenomenon. Rather, as discussed above, captivity narratives were integral to defining the boundaries of American belonging; political and social circumstances influenced the popularity of captivity narratives, which fluctuated over time. Colonial Protestant ministers strategically drew on tales of Indian captivity to reinforce religious normativity as early American communities struggled to establish themselves.[128] Indian captivity narratives also employed anti-French or anti-British imagery as colonists competed with the French for territory or fought British forces for independence.[129]

In the 19th century, the exploding popularity of anti-Catholic accounts of escaped nuns coincided with increased Catholic immigration, lending fuel to Nativist activism. The preface to Maria Monk's lurid tale of her time in a convent frames her story as a preventative measure against the moral and political evils of Catholicism:

> American parents have here a book written for the salvation of their daughters; American patriots, one designed to secure society against one of the most destructive but insidious institutions of popery; American females, an appeal to them of the most solemn kind, to beware of Convents, and all who attempt to inveigle our unsuspecting daughters into them, by the secret apparatus of Jesuit schools.[130]

Anti-Catholic texts would protect society against "institutions of popery" by spreading knowledge about the dangers of Catholicism to those most vulnerable: American daughters. The reaction to *Six Months in a Convent*, a salacious anti-Catholic memoir attributed to Rebecca Reed, demonstrates the efficacy of such texts in raising awareness

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[128] Teresa Toulouse, *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[129] Derounian-Stodola, "Introduction," xiv; VanDerBeets, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, ix.

[130] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 9.

about the threat of Catholic institutions; the publication of Reed's memoir is generally cited as the precipitate cause of riots which resulted in the burning of an Ursuline convent (and girls' boarding school) in 1834.[131]

Mormon captivity narratives held the most cultural currency at the height of the anti-polygamy campaign, lending support to U.S. government intervention in Utah Territory throughout the 19th century.[132] When Ann Eliza Webb Young published *Wife No.19* in 1875, her story of the time she spent as a plural wife of the infamous Brigham Young was a runaway success. However, when Webb Young republished her memoir in 1908, she found that this second publication received significantly less attention – most likely because the Mormon Church had officially renounced the practice of plural marriage at that time and was therefore seen as less troublesome to American ideals of familial and national stability.[133] To expand this micro-history of the political impact of captivity literature, note that in the latter half of the 20th century, anti-cult narratives appeared in conjunction with increased anxiety about the breakdown of traditional family structures, and were used to justify government intervention in Jonestown, Waco, and other alternative religious communities.[134]

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[131] Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 145-147; Nancy Lusigan Schultz, *Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 128-129.

[132] Nancy Bentley, "Marriage as Treason: Polygamy, Nation, and the Novel," in *Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 342-343; Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, 97-120; Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 29-54.

[133] Derounian-Stodola, "*Legacy* Profile: Ann Eliza Webb Young (Denning)," 155.

[134] John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 182; David G. Bromley, "Deprogramming as a Mode of Exit from New Religious Movements: The Case of the Unificationist Movement," in *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, ed. David G. Bromley (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1988), 188-189; Hall, "The Impact of Apostates," 231; John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler, "Apostasy,

The political impact of captivity literature stems from several cross-cutting characteristics that define the genre. A reader may recognize a captivity narrative primarily through the content, rather than the form, that a given narrative takes; stories of captivity span a range of modes and media. Because of the importance of content in defining the genre, identifying the tropes of the genre is central to recognizing a given text as a captivity narrative. The effectiveness of the tropes of capture, suffering, imprisonment, and redemption, however, is heightened by both gender and the emotional impact of dramatic details.

While men have written stories of being held captive, women's stories of captivity took on an early resonance among reading audiences, going back to the prototypical Indian captivities. "Indeed, the Indian captivity narrative is arguably the first American literary form dominated by women's experiences as captives, storytellers, writers, and readers."[135] Linda Colley, in her analysis of the development of the genre within a British colonial paradigm, notes that female captives were more likely to be settlers than soldiers; their texts were therefore more domestic and personal than those of

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Apocalypse, and Religious Violence: An Exploratory Comparison of Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians and the Solar Temple," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 141-170; 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 A. Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 72-76; Shepherd & Shepherd, "Learning the Wrong Lessons," 243-244; Jean Swantko Wiseman, "Strategic Dissolution and the Politics of Opposition: Parallels in the State Raids on the Twelve Trives and the FLDS," in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints*, ed. Stuart A. Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 211; Stuart A. Wright and Jennifer Lara Fagen, "Texas Redux: A Comparative Analysis of the FLDS and Branch Davidian Raids," in *Saints Under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints*, ed. Stuart A. Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 158-163.

[135] Derounian-Stodola, "Introduction," xi.

their male counterparts, and inspired "extreme pathos" in their readers.[136] It bears noting that the "extreme pathos" of the suffering of women frequently serves as a signal of barbarism.[137]

In most examples of the genre, the boundary between fact and fiction is fluid; texts combine autobiography with elements of propaganda, history, and fictionalized elements, such as re-imagined dialogue. Maria Monk's story of life in a convent, which includes both frankly unbelievable details and court documents attesting to their truth, provides a particularly notable example of this phenomenon. The inclusion of detailed scenes depicting torture and murder heightens the emotional impact of *Awful Disclosures* as an indictment of Catholicism.

The truth of a text, or lack thereof, however, does not necessarily impede its political usefulness. Even though Monk's story was shown to have been almost entirely untrue, this did not stop people from reading her story as truth, particularly when it confirmed already existing biases. [138] Saba Mahmood points to a similar dynamic in readings of contemporary narratives. In discussing Norma Khouri's *Honor Lost* (2003), a story of an honor killing in Jordan which was revealed to have been entirely fabricated, she writes: "The factuality of Khouri's account came increasingly to be seen as incidental to the larger reality that the book documents, a reality whose truth the western world

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[136] Colley, *Captives*, 150.
Pauline Turner Strong affirms this dynamic, stating: "Rowlandson's gender adds poignancy to her captivity." Strong, *Captive Selves*, 144.

[137] I discussed this discursive trend in more general terms in Chapter 1, and return to its deployment specifically in terms of captivity later in this chapter.

[138] Grant Wacker describes a similarly lurid ex-nun account given in 1914, which despite its ludicrous details – the subject survived being stoned twice by vengeful priests, for example – was presented as news to its Pentecostal audience. Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univerisyt Press, 2011), 182.

already knows."[139] The parallels between the readings of Monk's and Khouri's accounts indicate that factual truth is of secondary importance to affective impact.

Tropes of Captivity

I now turn my focus to the historical deployment of specific tropes in order to clearly demarcate the content of captivity literature; I discuss capture, suffering, imprisonment, and redemption. I give this background information in order to preemptively frame the work in my subsequent chapters; showing the ways in which these tropes work within canonical examples of the genre provides background for my later references to the same tropes in contemporary narratives.

In the following analysis, I identify the tropes by pointing to their repeated appearance in captivity narratives from the 17th-19th centuries. Some of these tropes, notably the idea of capture, have shifted over time; I acknowledge changes in the way these tropes are deployed, but emphasize continuity of language across the genre. I also discuss the work each trope does to naturalize the idea that the captors represent a group that is outside the boundaries of acceptable American identity. Speaking in general terms, each trope works to indict the community of captors.

Capture

A defining characteristic of early Indian captivity narratives is the forcible and violent removal of the captive from her family. Mary Rowlandson describes the attack of a group of Native Americans on the town of Lancaster in horrifying detail, noting the deaths of her compatriots as buildings are set on fire. "Some in our House were fighting

[139] Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire," 98.

for their Lives, others wallowing in their Blood; the House on fire over our Heads, and the bloody Heathen ready to knock us on the Head if we stirred out."[140] While the majority of Rowlandson's group was taken captive, rather than killed, members of Hannah Dustan's party were summarily executed during their departure: "but e'er they had gone many Steps, they dash'd out the Brains of the *Infant* against a Tree; and several of the other *Captives*, as they began to Tire in their sad *Journey*, were soon set unto their *Long Home*; the *Salvages* would presently Bury their Hatchets into their Brains, and leave their Caracasses on the Ground for Birds and Beasts to Feed upon."[141] Indian narratives, through the description of violent capture, mark the captors as barbarous, and the captives as victims. While a preface to Rowlandson's story contextualizes the attack on Lancaster by noting that the Narragansett had just suffered a military defeat by the colonists, Rowlandson begins her own narrative by stating that the Native Americans came "with great numbers upon *Lancaster.*"[142] This decontextualized attack, combined with the savagery with which the hapless English settlers were met, serves to reinforce the dichotomy between the civilization of the English and the savagery of the "heathen" Native Americans.

This trope, however, has changed considerably as the genre shifted to accommodate other kinds of captivities; with a few exceptions (such as in the cases of

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[140] Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 13. Hannah Dustan's experience was similar: she was forcibly removed from her home, after which the house was looted and set on fire. Cotton Mather, "A Notable Exploit; wherein, *Dux Faemina Facti*," in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 58.

[141] Mather, "A Notable Exploit," 59, emphasis in original.

[142] Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity*, 12, emphasis in original.

Patty Hearst and Elizabeth Smart), very few authors of contemporary narratives can trace the beginning of their captivity to kidnapping. Indeed, contemporary captives are frequently held by family members or other initially trusted individuals, rather than by strangers.

The beginning of this shift is evident in convent captivities, particularly that of Maria Monk. Monk joins a convent voluntarily after a brief and disastrous marriage, after which she feels that she has few options.[143] Combined with her self-described ignorance and conditioning in favor of the Catholic Church, Monk's abortive marriage and generally unhappy home life push her to join the convent in which she was educated as a child. Monk especially highlights her lack of knowledge, noting that if she had learned anything about religion, "I believe I should never have thought of becoming a nun."[144] Monk therefore ascribes her captivity by Catholic nuns and priests not to physical kidnapping, but to mental conditioning. She repeatedly reinforces this theme throughout the text, particularly in order to justify her own complicit actions while in the convent. "Thus we learnt in a good degree to resist our minds and consciences, when we felt the first rising of a question about the duty of doing any thing required of us."[145]

Monk's captors, however, are not above resorting to the occasional physical kidnapping. While Monk's own entrance into the convent was arguably voluntary, she includes several second-hand accounts of young women who were taken in by force. For example, she describes the tale of the daughter of a wealthy citizen, who upon falling

[143] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 28.

[144] Ibid., 21.

[145] Ibid., 86.

down outside the convent, was whisked inside, took the veil immediately, and disappeared completely from public view; even the other nuns were not allowed to see her.[146] Thus, Catholics purportedly expanded their numbers through a combination of duplicity, enforced ignorance, and opportunistic abductions.

The kidnapping of unsuspecting young women was a frequently recurring trope in anti-Mormon fiction, appearing, for example, in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), the first Sherlock Holmes novella written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.[147] Books that purported to be true, however, relied instead upon reports of sinister charisma on the part of Mormon missionaries. Maria Ward's *Female Life Among the Mormons: A Narrative of Many Years Experience among the Mormons* (1855), a mostly fictional account attributed to Elizabeth Cornelia Ferris, claims that Mormonism's success stemmed from Mesmerism and "magnetic influence."[148] Fanny Stenhouse describes the charismatic appeal of one missionary thus: "Elder Shrewsbury was one of those peculiar persons who have a sort of magnetic charm about them, who without our knowing it, or even, in some instances, contrary to our will and reason, enlist all our sympathies and leave behind them an impression that we vainly try to efface."[149] He is able to draw people to his cause "contrary to [their] will and reason" through the force of his personality.

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[146] Ibid., 24-25.

[147] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet," in *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories (Volume I)* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 86-87; Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 44-45.

[148] Quoted in Michael Homer, "Children in New Religious Movements: The Mormon Experience," in *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, ed. Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 225.

[149] Fanny Stenhouse, *"Tell it All": A Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington & Co. Publishers, 1874), 194.

Stenhouse's portrays her own conversion as a result of the combination of both duplicity and legitimate religious feeling. She is initially extremely wary about the Mormon community, noting the terrible rumors she had heard prior to her conversion; she worries that her family had converted because of "deception" practiced upon them.[150] This early wariness eventually gives way. After participating in several Mormon meetings, Stenhouse finds herself drawn to the church herself. While this change could be read as a testament to the power of Mormon persuasion, which pulls Stenhouse into the church "contrary to her will and reason," Stenhouse describes her conversion as a result of genuine religious feeling. She writes that "My dreams were of a life of happiness spent in seeking to convert the whole world to the religion of Jesus, which I believed had been restored again to earth by the ministry of holy angels."[151] The missionaries taught sound Christian doctrine and revitalized her community:

> The saving love of Christ, the glory and fullness of the everlasting Gospel, the gifts and graces of the Spirit, together with repentance, baptism, and faith, were the points upon which the Mormon teachers touched; and who can wonder that with such topics as these, and fortifying every statement with powerful and numerous texts of Scripture, they should captivate the minds of religiously inclined people?[152]

Yet even in her rendering of the positive teachings of the early Mormon Church, which she accepted as religious truth, Stenhouse sounds a cautionary note for her presumably Protestant readers. She emphasizes the ways in which Mormon missionaries successfully deployed the Bible in support of their religious claims to "captivate" the minds of their

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[150] Ibid., 43.

[151] Ibid., 61.

[152] Ibid., 48-49.

listeners.[153] Furthermore, Stenhouse casts some doubt into her own state of mind during her conversion: "In the agitated state of my mind at that time, I could not withstand the earnest appeals which were made to my affections and hopes."[154] Even given the heartfelt religiosity she experienced during her first few years within the Mormon community in England, Stenhouse's conversion was not based on rational choice, but rather due to her "agitated state of mind." She compounds this impression by noting the repeated messages she received that doubt equaled sin, a lesson which compounded her mental conditioning in favor of Mormonism.[155]

The narratives of Maria Monk and Fanny Stenhouse serve as an important bridge to contemporary captivity narratives. They are more fluid in their definition of "capture": physical restraint is secondary to the mental captivity experienced by the authors, who then act in concert with their captors to imprison themselves. Authors of contemporary narratives similarly deploy the language of mental captivity, sometimes referring to their conversions as "brainwashing." Even those authors / subjects who were not converts, but rather were born into deviant religious groups, emphasize the conditioning they underwent, for example through selective education.

The presentation of conversion as capture marks these religious groups as deviant. Under the Protestant understanding that came to dominate American thought in the 19th century, religious conversion became marked by rational choice. Notwithstanding the emotionalism of revivals, religions were defined as problematic if those joining them

[153] Stenhouse later asserts that Protestants are especially vulnerable to the teachings of Mormonism; Catholics and infidels are in less danger, because they are less well-versed in the Bible. Ibid., 107.

[154] Ibid., 53.

[155] Ibid., 69, 72, 148.

claimed coercion. The slippage between physical and mental capture connects "Heathen Savages" with Catholics and Mormons, whose religious practice is marked as equally suspect. The language of coercion – no matter how overt or insidious – automatically connects certain religious groups with deviance.

Suffering in Barbaric Wilderness

The suffering of the subject / author of a captivity narrative, as she navigates the barbaric wilderness, often makes up the bulk of any given text. This trope has remained largely consistent throughout the development of the genre, though the examples the author gives serve to reinforce the specificity of a group's deviance. The author confronts not only privation, but also grapples with her moral principles; as such, she depicts her distress as both physical and emotional. The captive's affliction reinforces the deviance of a group, provides titillating details for readers, and also serves as a crucible of the self for the captive. The subject finds meaning or develops the strength to escape precisely through the experience of suffering.

Mary Rowlandson describes the death of her child, who was wounded during the initial attack on the English settlement; sitting in the snow overnight; and extreme hunger.[156] Maria Monk declares that she was treated "brutally" by priests; describes the extreme penances she underwent; and offers to show the readers her scars as proof of the physical torture she endured.[157] Fanny Stenhouse notes the hunger of her family, especially during their travels from England to Utah; describes the disastrous emigration

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[156] Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity*, 16, 18, 21-13.

[157] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 37, 94, 97-99.

scheme in which people walked across the plains only to die of starvation or cold; and depicts the privations suffered by families upon the introduction of a plural wife.[158] While these physical components of suffering are tailored to the specific depravations of a given group – Native Americans sit in snow, Catholics give penances, and Mormons force women into polygamy – there are also continuities in the emphasis on hunger and pain.

Continuity also lies in the language used to describe emotional suffering, which is remarkably consistent across different subsets of captivity narratives. Rowlandson, Monk, and Stenhouse all use dramatic language to illustrate the psychological trauma they faced as captives. Rowlandson writes "It is not my tongue, or pen can express the sorrows of my heart, and the bitterness of my spirit."[159] Monk writes that "My wearisome daily prayers and labours, my pain of body, and depression of mind which were so much increased by penances I had suffered, and those which I constantly feared, and the feelings of shame, remorse, and horror, which sometimes arose, brought me into a state which I cannot describe."[160] Stenhouse declares that "I never was happy, for life had lost its charm to me."[161] These dramatic exclamations, which portray the captive's agony as indescribable, connect different texts together as one recognizable type. The unspeakable pain that Rowlandson, Monk, and Stenhouse all claim to have lived through accentuates the detailed descriptions of physical privation that they include in their respective narratives.

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[158] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 173-178, 206-236, 476, 532.

[159] Rowlandson, *The True History of the Captivity*, 15.

[160] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 75; see also 37.

[161] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 143.

The suffering of the author / subject is not only personal, but can also be generalized to the entire group of captives. Authors convey the universal nature of their pain by describing the milieu of their imprisonment as a wilderness. The wilderness in which the captives find themselves is frequently literal, marked by isolation and primitive conditions, but it may also be figurative – a moral wilderness. This moral wilderness is frequently portrayed in stark religious terms, as non-Christian space.

Rowlandson deploys the trope of wilderness most overtly, describing the woods in which she finds herself as "Wilderness" repeatedly.[162] The fact that she is in the woods, far from English settlements, is compounded by the fact that there is "no Christian Friend" nearby; in fact, her captors impede Rowlandson from reading the Bible.[163] Dustan is similarly blocked from practicing Christianity – her captors prevent her from saying her "English Prayers" whenever possible.[164] Stenhouse also contrasts Christian places with the wilderness in which she finds herself; for example, she notes that the house her family is given in Utah is so primitive that "it was not fit for any civilised Christian to live in."[165] This portrayal of the wilderness specifically exacerbated by lack of Christianity neatly links morality and civilization with Christian (i.e. Protestant) religion. The otherness of the captor is therefore overtly connected to religious belonging.

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[162] Rowlandson, *The True History of the Captivity*, 15, 18, 30.

[163] Ibid., 16, 22, 26, 28.

[164] Mather, "A Notable Exploit," 59.

[165] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 243; see also 547.

The authors' accounts of the depravity they witness reinforce the idea that captivity occurs in a moral wilderness, in addition to a physical one. Rowlandson, Monk, and Stenhouse all include acts of meaningless violence in their narratives. Monk in particular goes to great pains to describe the violence of the convent; as she was sequestered in a city, the wilderness of the convent is largely figurative. In one gruesome scene, Monk depicts the murder of a nun: a group of nuns and priests tie the victim to a bed, put a mattress over her, and proceed to jump on it, thereby simultaneously breaking her bones and smothering her.[166] Monk furthermore repeatedly insists that it was routine for nuns smother the infants to which they regularly gave birth.[167] Notably, the examples of violence perpetuated by captors largely targets women; the abuse of women is a key signifier of barbarism.

More significantly, the depravity with which the victims find themselves surrounded impacts their own ability to act in a moral manner. One could argue that Hannah Dustan's decision to murder and scalp the Native Americans who held her hostage – a group primarily made up of sleeping children – resulted directly from her environs; indeed, her decision to do is influenced by the idea that "she was not forbidden by any *Law* to take away the *Life* of the *Murderers*, by whom her *Child* had been Butchered."[168] Rowlandson, upon finding herself starving, not only eats things which she never would have before and finds them "savoury," but also takes food away from a

[166] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 59-61.

[167] Ibid., 35, 51, 88-89, 108.

[168] Mather, "A Notable Exploit," 60, emphasis in original.

captive English child in order to feed herself.[169] Stenhouse encourages other women to accept polygamy, even though she finds the practice extremely distasteful.[170] Monk in particular admits her complicity in the deviance perpetuated in the convent; indeed, part of her strategic positioning as a truthful author is her willingness to accept censure for actions. "Habit renders us insensible to the sufferings of others, and careless about our own sins. I had become so hardened myself, that I find it difficult to rid myself of many of my former false principles and views of right and wrong."[171]

The image of suffering in the barbaric wilderness continues to be a central trope in captivity literature. Authors contrast the wilderness of captivity to civilization, sometimes literally through images of primitive conditions as distinct from settled communities. By association, the suffering which occurs in the literal or moral wilderness is also placed in contrast to civilization; the implication then, is that such suffering does not occur among the civilized. Rowlandson's repeated focus on food that she eats while in captivity, but would never dream of eating while at home serves as a stark example of this created duality. This logic naturalizes religious difference by allowing the reader to project all deviance elsewhere. Bad things happen with "those people"; if only they could be more like "us" and embrace civilized models of interacting, such suffering would not

[169] Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity*, 21, 23, 27, 36.

[170] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 146.

[171] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 103.

occur.[172] This binary division contrasting wilderness to civilization reinforces the Otherness of captors, as well as marks the opposition to this Otherness as common sense.

Held Against One's Will

Another core component of captivity literature is the captive's inability to escape; she is held against her will by the Other. While this might seem redundant to the trope of suffering in the wilderness, the impact of the suffering is compounded by the desire of the captive to be elsewhere. She is not suffering in the wilderness simply because she is passing through a remote area; she is suffering precisely because she wishes to leave but cannot. This trope therefore reinforces the deviance of the captors, who do not only cause suffering, but cause inescapable suffering. This trope also encourages the intervention of outsiders, who are needed to save the captives when they are unable to save themselves.

As with the suffering, the imprisonment that the subject / authors experience may be physical or mental. Mary Rowlandson, as someone who was taken captive specifically for ransom, is held close to the camp of her captors; the Indians who captured her limit her physical ability to move about. Maria Monk and Fanny Stenhouse, who are held captive by those they count as friends, or even as family, also argue that their captivities included physical restraint. Monk's convent is like a prison, heavily guarded and with high walls. Stenhouse's fullest captivity occurs after she moves to Salt Lake City, which at the time was a remote settlement with few non-Mormon inhabitants. Monk and

[172] Stenhouse, for example, blames all of the suffering experienced during the waves of immigration to Utah on the overreach of the Mormon Church: because they collected funds to subsidize the travels of the immigrants, and then mismanaged them, people suffered. If the newcomers, instead, had been allowed to make their own arrangements – in other words, had not been subject to the intrusion of a religious body into the public sphere – they would not have suffered the same privations. Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 167-178, 191-205, 237-245.

Stenhouse accentuate the physical description of imprisonment by including details about the complicity of others in keeping captive women in their place.[173]

However, because they, unlike Rowlandson or Dustan, were not held for ransom, Monk and Stenhouse compound the impression of being held against their wills through descriptions of mental confusion. Monk wants to escape, but engages in extended internal dialogue with herself about whether she can leave without engaging in irredeemable sin.[174] Stenhouse cannot escape because of the web of family ties in which she finds herself: "Had I then rebelled, I must have renounced all that in life I held dearest – husband, children, all."[175]

This language of mental captivity makes questions about agency and desire much more complicated: if a woman is not sure whether she wishes to escape or not, is she still a captive? If she is complicit in her own imprisonment, is she still a captive? Despite the hints of nuance that these questions raise, captivity narratives ultimately answer in the affirmative: yes, she is still a captive, and therefore in need of rescue. Narratives reinforce the idea of being held against one's will, even in situations where the subject's desires are ambiguous, by deploying language that explicitly connotes captivity: prison, cage, trap. Stenhouse describes her surrender to Mormonism in terms of slavery: "I was then indeed a miserable slave, with no one to stretch forth a kindly hand and strike away the fetters of my mental degradation and lead me forth into light and liberty."[176] In doing

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[173] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 20, 91, 120; Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 47, 312, 365, 509-511.

[174] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 108-109.

[175] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 429.

[176] Ibid., 369; see also 485, 519, 578, 605.

so, she taps into the prevalent linkage between slavery and polygamy among 19th century anti-polygamy advocates, which were frequently described as "twin relics of Barbarism." Similar language continues to appear in contemporary narratives. Even among those, like Stenhouse, who are held by family members, the boundary between captivity and voluntary association is maintained through the strategic deployment of such loaded words.

Redemption: Escapees and the Victims for Whom They Speak

Narratives are primarily written by escapees: the strong, brave, women who made it past their horrifying circumstances and subsequently serve as the voice for captive women as a whole. The captive's ability to tell her story rests on her redemption. In overcoming supposedly impossible odds by escaping, she gains a platform for sharing her experiences. In order to establish her reliability, the author-subject of these narratives emphasizes her personal experiences as indicative of truth. The confessional mode of the author – whose story is true because she lived it – heavily shapes both the form and content of the genre. As Susan Griffin states, "the renegade not only conveys evidence but also *is* evidence."[177] In other words, just the fact that there is a woman who escaped and is now telling her story serves as proof of her experiences; in particular, her existence shows that the group in question must have been terrible. This trope serves to universalize the suffering of a particular captive woman to all similarly situated women, and heightens the importance of outside intervention in order to protect other women.

Coding the captive's escape as redemption further underscores the wilderness / civilization dichotomy. It is not just the case that in escaping she is leaving something

[177] Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism*, 27.

terrible; she is also being saved into something better. Maria Monk describes her hopes for her future, once freed of the immoral influence of the Catholics who imprisoned her: "With time, and Christian instruction, and the sympathy and example of the wise and good, I hope to learn submissively to bear whatever trials are appointed for me, and to improve under them all."[178] Through her redemption, she enters a truly Christian space, where her improvement becomes a possibility.

Telling a narrative from the perspective of the escapee serves dual goals. The first is to show the remarkable character of the captive herself, who is held up as inspiration for others. The statues erected in honor of Hannah Dustan, years after her escape, speak to the staying power of her inspiring actions. A second, arguably more important goal, is to show that escaped captives do not represent isolated incidents of capture, but rather, are called to speak in order to protect other women who remain in captivity. Harriet Beecher Stowe, in her preface to Stenhouse's text, writes: "It is because [Stenhouse's] sorrows and her oppressions are those of thousands, who, suffering like her, cannot or dare not speak for themselves, that she thus gives this history to the public."[179] Though Stenhouse is unique in her ability to share her story due to her escape from the control of the Mormon Church hierarchy, she positions herself as one of thousands who experienced similar suffering.

The inclusion of anecdotes about other captives who failed to escape, and usually meet a grisly end, appear repeatedly in captivity narratives. For example, Rowlandson

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[178] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 145.

[179] Harriet Beecher Stowe, preface to *"Tell it All": A Story of Life's Experience in Mormonism* by Fanny Stenhouse (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington & Co., 1874), vi.

mentions other English captives, especially noting children. She also tells the story of Goodwife Joslin, who rather than being set free, was killed, which event the Native Americans used as an example to keep the captive children in line.[180] Other writers of Indian captivities made frequent and heartfelt reference to young girls who did not return, particularly referencing acculturated daughters.[181]

Stenhouse especially deploys the image of the victimized young girl in need of rescue. Her story is flanked by the stories of several young women whose struggles mirror her own, but whose degradation under polygamy ends in death, rather than escape. Stenhouse's friend, Mary Burton, especially fills this role. Stenhouse interweaves Burton's story throughout *"Tell it All"*, as Burton and Stenhouse together embrace Mormonism, learn about the horrors of polygamy, and finally suffer within polygamous marriages. Stenhouse portrays Burton as youthful and innocent; when the two women first meet, Burton is still a child, and Stenhouse is newly married. Though only about five years separate them in age, Stenhouse contrasts her own worldliness with Burton's innocence; Burton takes on the overdetermined role of the young victim, whereas Stenhouse is shown as a strong, adult woman who takes matters into her own hands. Unlike Stenhouse, Burton is unable to make her way out of the unhappy marriage in which she finds herself, and ultimately takes poison.[182] As such, she makes the perfect

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[180] Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity*, 20.

[181] See for example Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty, Exemplified in the Captivity and Redemption of Elizabeth Hanson," in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 78-79; Bunker Gay, "A Genuine and Correct Account of the Captivity, Sufferings and Deliverance of Mrs. Jemima Howe," in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 102-103.

[182] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 567-574.

victim to call outsiders to arms: Mary Burton and the women like her are in need of rescue. When contrasted with the hopeful future of the escapee, exemplified by Monk's chance to become a better person under the tutelage of real Christians, the plight of the continually victimized women who remain in captivity becomes especially marked.

The Captive's Position: Both/And

Captivity narratives are rich stories which can be profitably read against the grain. Although stories include propaganda and sensational sentimentalism, captives frequently give nuanced presentations of their experiences, which may paint ambivalent pictures of captivity, the meaning of agency, and gender and race in America. Scholars such as Chris Castiglia, Michelle Burnham, Pauline Turner Strong, and Rebecca Blevins Faery made great strides in exploring the critical edge of captivity narratives in the late 1990s, offering a range of readings that explore the ways in which white female captives challenged gender and racial hierarchies in early America.[183] This literature highlights the ambivalence inherent in the genre. As Tara Fitzpatrick notes in her 1991 essay, "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," it is only through her captivity that the subject gains the experience that allows her to offer critique of her own milieu. Captivity changes a person, and while the narratives of captivity can

[183] Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment*; Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*; Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*; Strong, *Captive Selves.*

often be read as straight propaganda demonizing a marginalized group, close attention to the texts allow the reader to see the changes undergone by the author.[184]

Therefore, the contrast that captivity narratives draw between victims and escapees is not entirely one of strict division. The captive is both a victim and an escapee; the power of her escaped voice relies on her previous victimization. A description of Maria Monk, found in the preface to her narrative, highlights this dynamic:

> The author of the book was a small, slender, uneducated, and persecuted young woman, who sought refuge in our country without a protector; but she showed the resolution and boldness of a heroine, in confronting her powerful enemies in their strong hold, and proved, by the simple force of truth, victorious in the violent conflicts which were waged against her by the Romish hierarchy of America and the popular press of the United States.[185]

She is simultaneously portrayed as helpless (small, slender, uneducated, persecuted, and without protector) and strong (resolute, bold, and victorious). In much the same way, she is portrayed as both an insider and an outsider of the group which holds her captive; she was completely immersed in the community, and therefore knowledgeable about its inner workings, but always somewhat separate from it. The dual identities of insider / outsider and victim / escapee are inherent to the logic of the genre.

Negotiating the boundaries between these dual identities frequently provides the central conflict within captivity narratives, as the subject / author grapples with her self-identification. The tensions that emerge provide space for the exploration of more ambivalent portrayals of captors, captives, and the relationship that develops between

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[184] Tara Fitzpatrick,. "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," *American Literary History*. 3.1 (Spring 1991): 1-2. See also Lee Clark Mitchell, introduction to *Riders of the Purple Sage*, by Zane Grey (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxx.

[185] Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 9.

them. Moving forward, the awareness of the tension in the negotiation of dual identities colors my readings of contemporary narratives.

PART II

CLOSE READING OF TEXT

CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTING THE AUTHENTIC VICTIM: *I AM NUJOOD, AGE 10 AND DIVORCED* BY NUJOOD ALI WITH DELPHINE MINOUI

> I'm a simple village girl whose family had to move to the capital, and I have always obeyed the orders of my father and brothers. Since forever, I have learned to say yes to everything.
> Today, I have decided to say no.
> Inside of me I have been soiled, contaminated – it's as if part of myself has been stolen from me. No one has the right to keep me from seeking justice. It's my last chance, so I'm not going to give up easily.
>
> - From *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*[186]

In 2008, a young Yemini girl gained international attention. Numerous media outlets wrote profiles of her. She appeared on talk shows in Europe. Her story was fêted all over the world. *Glamour* magazine named her one of their "Women of the Year," along with such household names as Condoleeza Rice, Nicole Kidman, and Tyra Banks. Hillary Clinton called her a hero. This child, Nujood Ali, received such widespread attention and applause because she successfully divorced her husband.[187] In doing so, Nujood became the first child bride to win a divorce, and was, for a time, the world's youngest divorcee.

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[186] Nujood Ali with Delphine Minoui, *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), 18.

[187] "Divorce" does not fully convey the valences of *khula* , or the legal dissolution of a marriage initiated by a woman under Islamic law. One component of *khula* is that the bride's family frequently returns the bride-price to the groom; Nujood's family was ordered to pay damages to the groom. Some Western commentators found this aspect of Nujood's case particularly repellent. This is not surprising, given that under many Western divorce laws, the one seeking the divorce is usually thought to be the victim, for example of cruelty or abandonment, and is therefore subject to preferential treatment in the division of assets. However, as al-Sharabi et al show in their analysis of the coverage of Nujood's case, "divorce" is consistently used by the media to describe what occurred. While acknowledging the limitations of "divorce" as a legal term, I use it to refer to this case in order to maintain consistency across sources. Abduljalil Al-Sharabi, Noraini Ibrahim, & Nor Fariza Mohd Nor, "Representations of Nujoud's 'Early' Marriage: A CDA of Online English-Language Yemeni Newspapers," *Journal of Language Studies*, 11.1 (2011):108.

As such, Nujood became the face of child marriage – and of the hope that child marriage will be eradicated.[188] She is the poster-girl for "Too Young to Wed," a project of the United Nations Population Fund combating child marriage; a photograph of Nujood serves as the banner for their website.[189] Her example has been cited as inspiration for other child brides in Yemen and Saudi Arabia who were also granted divorces from their respective husbands.[190] Her court case inspired widespread outrage, which included calls for the Yemeni government to pass a law raising the age of consent.[191] She continues to

[188] Though child marriage, particularly in American discourse, is generally taken to be an obvious category, differing definitions of both "child" and "marriage" call into question the universal applicability of the term. To touch only on the category of "child," it must be acknowledged that the boundaries of childhood vary widely by culture. One example of the difficulty in defining childhood appears when comparing analyses of child marriage cases. The United Nations, in compiling data on child marriage in 2005, includes information on those who are married between the ages of 15-19. "Table: Indicators on Marriage," *The World's Women's Reports* (April 22, 2005), http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/ww2005/tab2a.htm. In contrast, al-Sharabi et al argue that Nujood would be read as an adult in Yemeni society because she wore a black hijab, donned by women upon reaching adulthood. Al-Sharabi et al, "Representations of Nujoud's 'Early' Marriage," 113. As with divorce, I refer to Nujood's marriage as "child marriage," using the term to maintain consistency across sources.

[189] "Too Young to Wed," United Nations Population Fund, accessed March 26, 2014, www.tooyoungtowed.org.
See also "Nujood's Story: 'An example for all the other girls,'" *Too Young to Wed Blog*, February 27, 2013, http://tooyoungtowed.org/blog/tag/delphine-minoui/.

[190] Ali and Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 163-164; Borzou Daragahi, "Yemeni bride, 10, says I won't," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2008, http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jun/11/world/fg-childbride11; "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*," *Read it Forward*, accessed March 26 2014, http://www.readitforward.com/delphine-minoui-on-writing-i-am-nujood-age-10-and-divorced/; Joshua Hersh, "A Ten-Year-Old's Divorce Lawyer," *The New Yorker*. March 4, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-ten-year-olds-divorce-lawyer; Nicholas Kristof, "Divorced Before Puberty," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/04/opinion/04kristof.html?_r=1&; "Nujood's Story"; Vivienne Walt, "A 10-Year-Old Divorcée Takes Paris," *Time Magazine*, Feb 3, 2009, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1876652,00.html.

[191] Daragahi, "Yemeni Bride"; "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Anna Louie Sussman, "Minoui Reveals Saga of Yemen Divorce at Age 10," *Women's eNews*, July 18 2010, http://womensenews.org/story/journalist-the-month/100716/minoui-reveals-saga-yemen-divorce-at-age-10#.VHNqQWcZGw8/.

be interviewed for exposés about child marriage in the Western media.[192] Her story is ubiquitous, and Nujood has come to stand in for child brides everywhere.

As demonstrated by the epigraph to this chapter, a frequently quoted passage from *I am Nujood*,[193] Nujood's position as the epitome of both the child bride and the hope that child marriage can be eradicated is predicated on intertwined images of Nujood as simultaneous victim and escapee. As discussed in the previous chapter, the twinned images of the victim and escapee are central in defining captivity literature; a tension obtains within the captive's dual position. She is a victim, subject to the whims of her father and brothers; she is soiled and contaminated. However, she has also freed herself from this captivity: she has "decided to say no."

While Nujood embodies both aspects of this dual figure, a significant portion of her widespread appeal lies in her spunkiness, exhibited primarily through her act of escape. However, Delphine Minoui, the ghostwriter of Nujood's "memoir", relies more heavily on representations of Nujood that reinforce her status as victim. In doing so, Minoui creates an "authentic" literary version of Nujood. Literary scholar Ana Maria Sánchez-Arce argues that claims to authenticity are selectively applied and policed; it is the Other who is authentic.[194] More importantly, only specific versions of an authentic Other – those which match already existing understandings of how the Other is – are given credence. While Sánchez-Arce applies her critique specifically to literary

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[192] See, for example, Fouad Hady, "The Youngest Bride," *Dateline*, September 24, 2013, http://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/story/youngest-bride.

[193] It appears as a teaser on the back flap of the English-language paperback.

[194] Ana María Sánchez-Arce, "'Authenticism,' or the Authority of Authenticity," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 40.3 (Sep 2007): 141.

representations of African Americans, her argument also applies to representations of religious women, especially Muslim women, whose images are given credence if they match what is already expected. Nujood's victimization as a woman under the control of Muslim men determines her own status as Other, which in turn supports claims of Nujood's authenticity. The portrayal of Nujood in the text neatly aligns with the profile of the "authentic" village girl in the Muslim world. Rania Kassab Sweis, in her introduction to an ethnographic study of Egyptian village girls, writes that Nujood's "dramatic story of oppression and, later, emancipation by urban professionals fits neatly within a well-established legacy of discursive production on the sufferings of Muslim women at the hands of family patriarchs, religious authorities, or local political regimes."[195] Dohra Ahmed supports this assertion, noting that readers often see books about Muslim women as truth if they selectively reinforce the vision of the "authentic Muslim woman" as always already victimized.[196] Nujood's story, as retold by Minoui, fits into a larger discourse in which authentic Muslim women are always already victims, epitomized by lack of education, exposure to child marriage, and perpetual poverty.

In this chapter, I read *I am Nujood, Aged 10 and Divorced*, in order to explore the strategies employed by Delphine Minoui in creating Nujood's "voice" through a first-person narrative of Nujood's experiences. This analytical lens allows me to reconstruct the specific ways in which Minoui presents Nujood as an authentic victim. After offering an overview of the content of the text, I discuss my methodology, showing the ways in

[195] Rania Kassab Sweis, "Saving Egypt's Village Girls: Humanity, Rights, and Gendered Vulnerability in a Global Youth Initiative," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 8.2 (Spring 2012):27.

[196] Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 111.

which Minoui's text offers a fruitful case study in pulling apart the seams of production. I then discuss Minoui's use of captivity and "Islam," which reinforce the unquestioned portrayal of Nujood as a victim. I close with the results of this decision, noting both the political uses to which Nujood has been put and the narrative occlusions that occur because of Minoui's authorial decisions.

I am Nujood: An Overview

The publication of Nujood's "memoir", written by French journalist Delphine Minoui, cemented Nujood's popularity in the Western world as the epitome of the child bride.[197] Translated into English in 2010 (along with 20 other languages), *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* was an international bestseller, gaining special prominence in France and the United States.[198] The book details Nujood's experiences in getting married and divorced and purports to bring the reader behind the scenes, in order to give the reader a true glimpse of Nujood's ordeal. Written as a first-person narrative from Nujood's perspective, the text is presented as a more authentic look at Nujood's life than the copious newspaper articles written about her.

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[197] One of the many journalists who covered Nujood's case, Minoui has covered the Middle East and Iran since 1997. Minoui learned about Nujood's case through Hamed Thabet's coverage of it for the *Yemen Times*. After writing a story in the aftermath of Nujood's success for *Le Figaro* in June of 2008, Minoui was approached by publishing house Michel Lafon, which asked her to expand her article into a book. Minoui had previously written two books about Iranian women: *Jeunesse d'Iran: Les voix de changement* (2001) and *Les Pintades a Tehran: Chroniques de la Vie Des Iraniennes* (2007), neither of which has been translated from the French.
"Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Sussman, "Minoui Reveals Saga."

[198] It spent five weeks as the No. 1 best-seller in France in addition to reaching best-seller status in the United States. Kristof, "Divorced Before Puberty."
Though *I am Nujood* was initially written with a French audience in mind, rather than an American one, Minoui uses tropes of captivity familiar to American readers. This suggests that the discourse of captivity to portray women as oppressed by men has broader currency beyond the United States.

The general outline of Nujood's story, as told by Minoui, is as follows. She was born in a small village, where her family kept livestock and bees, and was generally happy. However, when Nujood was a small child, there was an incident involving one of her older sisters (the details of which remain murky), and the family was forced to flee. They settled in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, where they lived in poverty, particularly after the disappearance of one of Nujood's older brothers and her father's subsequent loss of steady work as a result of depression. In February of 2008, when Nujood was nine or ten or maybe twelve, her father arranged for her to be married to Faez Ali Thamer, a 30-year-old man from the same district as Nujood's family. Despite protests from her older sister, Nujood was married off and taken back to the village of her childhood. Although her new husband had originally agreed to wait to consummate the marriage until after Nujood reached puberty, he reneged on his promises and consummated the marriage almost immediately. After spending about a month in the countryside, Nujood and Thamer returned to Sana'a so she could visit her parents.

Rather than remain with her husband, as her parents instructed her, Nujood sought out legal intervention in her case. On April 2, 2008, she went to the courthouse in the center of Sana'a and attracted the attention of a judge, asking him to grant her a divorce. With the help of lawyer Shada Nasser, she was granted a divorce on April 15, 2008; the court proceedings were widely publicized in both local and international media. Although the aftermath of her divorce has been complicated and not altogether positive, both *I am Nujood* and the majority of news coverage of the case conclude with a note of optimism: that Nujood has returned to school and now dreams of being a lawyer. This conclusion

reinforces the narrative arc of the story as one of escape, a journey from captivity and degradation to a moment of triumphant freedom.

I am Nujood is made up of twelve chapters, written in the first person from Nujood's perspective, which alternate between narrating the details of Nujood's divorce case and telling the back story of Nujood's life leading up to her marriage. The structure of alternating chapters causes the story to be told piecemeal, in a series of flashbacks, which sometimes compound, with flashbacks inserted into flashbacks to provide the reader with additional information. The structure of the text, with its recursive retellings of events, creates the feeling that the reader is privy to Nujood's thoughts as they occur, as if one were reading her stream-of-consciousness reflections on her situation. Along with content, tone, and vocabulary, the structure of the narrative reinforces the carefully crafted authenticity of Nujood's narrative voice.

In interviews, Minoui has described the process of writing *I am Nujood*, particularly her attempts to create a believable version of Nujood's voice on the page.[199] Minoui is caught in a difficult position of telling a complex story with only information that a ten-year-old would have access to. She actively worked to see things from Nujood's perspective; notably, when visiting the Sana'a courthouse, Minoui made a point to sit on the floor, in order to physically see what the space looked and felt like from a child's point of view. However, Minoui's work to recreate Nujood's authentic voice in her writing was mediated; Minoui relied on a translater – Eman Mashour, a Yemeni women's rights activist – in order to communicate with her subject. The tension between Nujood and Minoui that bleeds out onto the page raises questions about the authority of

[199] "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Sussman, "Minoui Reveals Saga."

Nujood as a native informant whose voice is mediated by a ghostwriter with her own agenda. Nujood Ali and Delphine Minoui represent an especially problematic pairing: because Nujood is a child, because Minoui does not speak Arabic, and because Nujood's story involved a recent trauma about which she prefers not to speak, this telling is especially fraught.[200]

Constructing Nujood's Voice

While it is not possible to fully tease out the seams of production, there are enough loose threads and visible early steps in the construction of *I am Nujood* to allow the reader to note that this text is constructed, rather than a spontaneous outpouring of Nujood's story. Although the story is "told in Nujood's voice," Minoui's editorial insertions are frequently apparent. Though the voices of the author and the subject are meant to be read as indistinguishable, they are, in fact, jarringly different at times. As such, the text offers a striking example of the way that negotiations surrounding the creation of an adequately authentic subject may play out on the page.

In parsing the seams of production, I rely both on a careful reading of the text of the narrative itself and on the analysis of newspaper sources about Nujood's marriage and divorce, particularly those written by Minoui for *Le Figaro*, which offer glimpses at early drafts of several chapters of the final story. Moving forward, I focus macroscopically on stylistic choices rather than on parsing strange word choices on the sentence level.

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[200] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 160; "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Paula Newton, "Child bride's nightmare after divorce," *CNN*, August 28, 2009, http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/26/yemen.divorce/.
Nujood prefers not speaking about her trauma not only to members of the media, who sometimes appear as exploitative in attempting to glean the salacious details of her marriage, but also refuses to speak to a doctor about her experiences. Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 162-163; Daragahi, "Yemeni bride."

Because I am working from Linda Coverdale's English translation of the text, as presented to an American audience, this adds another level of mediation to and distance from the authenticity of Nujood's voice. Some of the authorial tension, therefore, is a result of translation choices rather than Minoui's stylistic ones. To give one jarring example, in describing an argument Nujood's father has with neighbors, the English version notes "an exceptional breach of protocol," a phrase that significantly breaks from the childish voice of the text.[201] In the original French, however, the phrase used is "fait exceptionnel," which could be simply translated as "unusual action."[202] In most cases, however, the translation is quite close, with adult prose obtaining in both the French and the English-language versions, so while I acknowledge this additional level of mediation, I choose to focus on Minoui's interventions in order to limit the scope of this inquiry. Though Minoui did write *I am Nujood* with a French audience in mind, the general discourse about the oppression of women by religion – particularly by Islam – is fairly consistent throughout the Western world.[203]

Some of the constructed nature of Nujood's voice is apparent even to a casual reader.[204] In fact, the reader is forcibly reminded of the mediation of this text from the

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[201] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 32.

[202] Nojoud Ali with Delphine Minoui, *Moi Nojoud, 10 Ans, Divorcée* (Paris: Michel Lafon Publishing, 2009), 26.

[203] A key difference lies in the dominant religion; France's version of secularism, or *laïcité*, historically stems from state conflicts with the Catholic Church, rather than arguments about the establishment of one denomination of Protestantism. Because of this difference, the regulation of religion by the state plays out in different ways. A headscarf ban, for example, would not likely pass in the United States, despite the stringent Islamophobia apparent in several statehouses, epitomized by bans on "Sharia law."

[204] Leanda de Lisle, "Brave girl's tale deserves better telling," review of *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*, by Nujood Ali with Delphine Minoui, *National Catholic Reporter* 46.14 (April 30, 2010): 3a.

very beginning, as Minoui describes Nujood's inability to read the signs in the courthouse, a scene which occurs in the opening chapter:

> On the white walls, like the ones in a hospital, I can see writing in Arabic, but no matter how I try, I can't manage to read the inscriptions. I was forced to leave school during my second year, right before my life became a nightmare, and aside from my first name, Nujood, I can't write much, which really embarrasses me.[205]

By including this information, Minoui reinforces certain things about her subject: that she is young and uneducated. This does support the presentation of Nujood as an authentic village girl; to return to Sweis's analysis, Nujood's lack of education is a crucial component for marking her as something out of time and over there. However, in doing so, Minoui also undermines the realness of Nujood's voice in the context of someone reading her "autobiography."[206]

Dual voices demarcating the tension between Minoui as author and Nujood as "speaker" within the text appear repeatedly. An early example occurs in a description of the Sana'a courthouse, as Nujood wanders around looking for a judge to grant her a divorce. The scene is set through a mixture of emotion, which is expressed in a childish manner, and explanation, which offers additional details for adult readers.

> What chaos… It must be like Al-Qa Square, the one in the heart of Sana'a where out-of-work laborers go, the place Aba – Papa – often talks about. There it's every man for himself, and they all want to be the first to snag a job for the day at dawn, just after the first *azaan*, the traditional summons to prayer called out five times a day by the muezzins from the minarets of their mosques. Poor people are so hungry they've got stones where their hearts should be, and no time to feel pity

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Many reviews of *I am Nujood* on Goodreads also highlight the awkward construction of Nujood's "voice" by Minoui; http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6818019-i-am-nujood-age-10-and-divorced.

[205] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 17.

[206] Nujood later expressed excitement at the prospect of reading her own autobiography following its translation into Arabic, further calling into question the authenticity of the text. Kristof, "Divorced Before Puberty."

> for the fates of others. Still, I'd like so much for someone here to take my hand, to look at me with kindness. Won't anyone listen to me, for once? It's as if I were invisible. No one sees me: I'm too small for them; I barely come up to their tummies. I'm only ten years old, maybe not even that. Who knows?[207]

Minoui produces what is supposedly Nujood's emotional tone by noting the chaos of the courthouse, culminating in a series of questions which indicate an internal monologue as Nujood struggles to be seen. Minoui brackets Nujood's interaction with the chaos with background information for the reader, giving a glimpse of men struggling to find work as day laborers. Minoui offers further explanation in order to define terms and situate the reader in a Muslim context; even though "papa often talks about" the space where men wait for daily work, it is described in details that only an outsider would need, as Minoui carefully explains exactly what the *azaan* is. Minoui also adds poetic turns of phrase – such as the "stones where their hearts should be" – which contribute to the disjointed narrative voice. The end of the paragraph, with the repeated rhetorical questions and the declaration about the speaker's small size, is especially disconnected from the calm explanations and the rhetorical flourishes.

When *I am Nujood* is read in conjunction with Minoui's newspaper articles and blog posts about Nujood's case, the way in which Nujood's voice was developed becomes noticeable. A comparative analysis of the final chapter of the text, "When I become a lawyer…," and Minoui's Sep 25, 2008 blog post, "Yémen: Après le divorce, l'école pour Nojoud" [After the divorce, school for Nujood], provides an illuminating case study in showing Minoui's additions to the story in order to mark the narrative voice as Nujood's. The final chapter of the book and the blog post in question both describe

[207] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 14.

Nujood's return to school after the hiatus from learning precipitated by her marriage. Many small details are included in both texts: Nujood's green uniform and white scarf; her excitement about studying Arabic, the Qur'an, and math; and the stories of other young girls, inspired by Nujood's example, who had also won divorces from their husbands.[208] However, because the framing of the two texts is so disparate, Minoui presents the information in dramatically different ways.

In some cases, the changes are innocuous. For example, Minoui relates a conversation that she had with Nujood in her blog post: "'Quand j'ai quitté l'école, je savais compter de 1 à 100. Je veux maintenant apprendre à compter jusqu'à un million!', me raconte-t-elle avec un soupire de soulagement." ["When I left school, I knew how to count from one to a hundred. Now I want to learn to count to a million," she told me with a sigh of relief.][209] In *I am Nujood*, Minoui simply presents this information as internalized, part of Nujood's narration as she thinks about the day: "When I had to leave school last February, I knew how to count to a hundred. Now I want to learn to count to a million!"[210]

In order to convey information that Minoui gained through interviews, she artificially places Nujood into situations, and puts facts into Nujood's mouth that Nujood may not have known. To give one example, in her blog post, Minoui describes catching

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[208] Borzou Daragahi, sharing a byline with Delphine Minoui, wrote an almost identical English-language piece for the *Los Angeles Times*. I use Minoui's French-language version in this comparison because of her inclusion of details such as the circumstances under which she gains certain pieces of information; Daragahi omits many of these small details in his write-up. Borzou Daragahi and Delphine Minoui, "After divorce, school," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 2008, A1.

[209] Delphine Minoui, "Yémen: Après le divorce, l'école pour Nojoud," *Le Figaro Blog*, September 25, 2008, http://blog.lefigaro.fr/iran/2008/09/yemen-apres-le-divorce-lecole.html.

[210] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 155.

up with Njala Matri, the principal of Nujood's new school. Matri speaks about the difficulties in educating young girls, especially in a context where child marriage in common. The passage concludes with an anecdote about a student who disappeared from school at age 13; Matri adds that she only later discovered that the girl had married, and now had a child. A moment of almost identical dialogue appears in *I am Nujood*, framed as a story that Nujood overhears when Matri whispers it to another adult: "With the best of intentions, I'm sure, Njala Matri had been careful to whisper this to Shada so that I wouldn't hear her."[211] Minoui's presentation of this anecdote from Nujood's perspective, most likely included to highlight the ubiquity of the problem of child marriage in Yemen, disrupts the flow of the account of Nujood's return to school and, more importantly, once again underscores the artificiality of Minoui's construction of Nujood's narrative voice.

The chapter, blog post, and a video Minoui shot of the day all end with Nujood reciting the Fatiha, the first sura of the Qur'an, in the classroom. In describing this moment in Nujood's voice, Minoui adds significant detail about Nujood's emotional state. She writes:

> With an enthusiasm I haven't dared feel for a very long time, I quickly raise my hand, stretching high so that everyone can see me. It's strange; for once I haven't bothered to think something over before acting. I didn't ask myself what Aba would think, or what people might say behind my back. I, Nujood, ten years old – I have chosen to answer a question. And this choice is mine alone.[212]

The blog post, in contrast, simply relates that the teacher calls on Nujood, who "s'est empressé de lever la main" [was quick to raise her hand]. The video footage also shows no hint of the excitement described in the book; Nujood certainly raises her hand to

[211] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 161.

[212] Ibid., 166.

volunteer, but it is not the exuberant stretch one would expect to see from Minoui's description, and she does so no faster than the other girls in the classroom. This is not to say that it is impossible that Nujood experienced these emotions in this moment, or that if she did, she chose to share them with Minoui. Rather, looking at this moment as retold from multiple angles shows the additions Minoui made in order to create a more realistic internal monologue to relate the details of the story. Minoui's additional gloss on the moment of Nujood's recitation of the Qur'an, which closes the book, allows her to frame Nujood's story in more sweeping terms; in this presentation, Nujood's recitation is a choice that she makes, the culmination of her journey in claiming some level of control over her own destiny.

Parsing out the visibility of Minoui's insertions, either through close reading of *I am Nujood* or through reading the "memoir" in conjunction with Minoui's other writing on Nujood's case, underscores the constructed nature of this text. While all text is, by nature, constructed to some extent, the tension here lies between this text as constructed and the way it is marketed as an authentic outpouring of the emotions felt by a child going through trauma. Furthermore, Minoui's construction lies not only in word choice or the emotions she taps into. The deployment of both captivity and Islam mark Nujood fully as a victim.

Child Marriage as Captivity

In presenting Nujood's story, Minoui relies heavily on tropes common to captivity narratives. As discussed in the previous chapter, the deployment of the captive victim whose presence necessitates outside intervention is a central component of captivity

literature. Describing Nujood's marriage in terms of captivity allows Minoui to reinforce Nujood's position as victim, thereby underscoring the horror of Nujood's situation. This is particularly evident in the emphasis on suffering common to captivity narratives; Minoui's focus on Nujood's entrapment in the barbaric wilderness highlights Nujood's moments of fear and pain.

Although Nujood's home life was marked by poverty and privation before her marriage, the tropes of captivity and escape appear in the text only after Nujood's marriage; these tropes provide order to the arc of Nujood's experience as a child bride. Although Minoui does note that Nujood's home life was difficult, she also describes it as happy. Nujood's captive suffering only occurs at the hands of her husband. Marking a notable shift, from the moment Nujood is married – or captured, as her new husband removes her from her family's home – Minoui draws heavily on the language of captivity to describe Nujood's experiences. The journey from Sana'a to Nujood's new home in the countryside is described in stark terms of traps and escape: "I never said a word that whole trip. Lost in my thoughts, I wanted only one thing: to find a way to go back home, to escape. The farther away from Sana'a the car drove on its way north, however, the more I understood how trapped I was."[213]

This language continues as Minoui describes Nujood's brief sojourn with her husband, particularly when discussing the time they spent in the village. She repeatedly uses the word "trap" when describing Nujood's marriage. For example, she writes: "I've fallen into a trap, and I can't get out… I had to adjust quickly to a new life: I had no right to leave the house, no right to fetch water from the stream, no right to complain, no right

[213] Ibid., 64.

to say no."[214] Minoui intensifies the image of the marriage as trap by asserting that Nujood's husband's home serves as a literal prison, which Nujood has "no right to leave" for any reason whatsoever.

As Minoui narrates Nujood's suffering, particularly as Nujood's distress intensifies under the brutal mistreatment offered by her husband and mother-in-law, the prison expands to encompass not only her marriage and the house, but the entire village. "Escape? I thought about it a few times. But where to? Since I knew no one in the village, it would have been hard for me to seek refuge with a neighbor or beg a traveler on a donkey to save me. Khardji, my native village, had become my prison."[215]

Beyond the overt language of captivity – the repetition of the words "trap" and "prison" – Minoui links Nujood's experience more subtly to genre conventions. Minoui describes the village as part of the barbarous wilderness. "Khardji, my native village, had become foreign to me… No matter how hard I scrubbed the grease-blackened pots, they would never return to their original color. The towels were grey and smelled bad. Flies buzzed around me."[216] Despite the fact that her husband's home is in Nujood's "native village," the village is foreign; furthermore, no matter how hard she works at cleaning, the home remains covered in unmitigated filth. Nujood now finds herself in primitive circumstances, which exacerbate her isolation. The idea that rescue might come in the form of a "traveler on a donkey" highlights the primitive isolation of Nujood's new home. Khardji also comes to represent a moral wilderness, where no one intervenes to

[214] Ibid., 91.

[215] Ibid., 95.

[216] Ibid., 91.

protect Nujood when she asks for help.[217] The portrayal of the uncaring acceptance of child marriage counterbalances the few elite individuals who do come to Nujood's aid. Minoui thereby underscores the idea that Nujood's case represents a ubiquitous problem, rather than an individual aberration.

The description of Nujood's husband also heightens the impression of Nujood as a captive; Faez Ali Thamer, the man who married Nujood, plays the role of unmitigated villain in the text, a portrayal which reinforces the idea that the interactions between the two were based on an illegitimate relationship, rather than the legal (if problematic) transaction that it was. After describing Nujood's first introduction to Thamer, Minoui never again refers to Thamer by name. Minoui rarely even refers to Thamer as Nujood's husband; when Minoui does use the word "husband," it is modified in order to undermine the validity of the relationship. For example, in narrating Nujood's journey to her new home, Minoui notes a moment when "my unknown husband, [spoke] to me for the first time since we'd left Sana'a."[218] Describing Thamer as Nujood's "unknown husband" reinforces his otherness. Throughout the majority of the narrative, Minoui refers to Thamer neither by name nor by status; rather, he is called simply "*him*" or "the monster." Minoui has stated that this is the language Nujood herself used to speak about Thamer in describing her ordeal.[219] However, Minoui's decision to include this language does not only mirror Nujood's voice. Its inclusion heightens the image of Thamer as captor, as the Other who holds Nujood in the literal and moral wilderness of an illegitimate marriage.

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[217] Ibid., 89-94.

[218] Ibid., 72.

[219] "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*,"

Minoui's portrayal of Nujood's escape strengthens the link between her retelling of Nujood's story and the genre of the captivity narrative. In fact, the bulk of the text does not focus on the trap of Nujood's marriage, but rather on her escape from it. Minoui includes the depiction of Nujood's journey through Sana'a to the courthouse twice, thereby highlighting her escape as the pivotal moment of the narrative.[220] The necessary counterpoint of captivity is escape. Nujood's actions serve to differentiate her story from the experiences of countless girls who continue to be victims by remaining in their marriages. In fact, one chapter of the book describes Nujood's sister Mona, who was also forced into an unwanted marriage at a young age: "Mona, my big sister, the prisoner of a fate even more tragic than mine, trapped in a maze of troubles. Her childhood was stolen from her, as mine was from me, but I now understand that, unlike Mona, I've had the strength to rebel against my fate, and the good fortune to find help."[221] In comparison to Mona, Nujood is certainly less of a victim, due to both personality and luck. Her actions in going to the courthouse without familial support do mark her as brave. However, Nujood cannot fully escape the victim label, as her escape is predicated on educated elites (lawyers, judges, and journalists) intervening in her case.

By depicting child marriage as captivity, Minoui universalizes Nujood's experiences. The implication here is that no child bride can consent, so all child brides must, by definition, be captives, and in need of intervention. My point here is not that Minoui is necessarily wrong in advocating against child marriage. Rather, I emphasize the ways in which Minoui draws upon tropes of captivity in order to mark child marriage

[220] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 15-16, 102-106.

[221] Ibid., 139.

as recognizably evil within specific discursive parameters, which hides the frequently complicated negotiations between families which result in young women leaving one household and joining another.[222]

Foreign Signals: Victims are Over There

In conjunction with the tropes of captivity, Minoui also deploys certain signals which mark Nujood's story as both authentic and foreign. As discussed above, Minoui was not entirely successful at creating a believably authentic voice for Nujood. Despite the visibility of her labor, however, it is important to parse out what exactly Minoui deploys in order to create the expected authentic voice of a Muslim child bride. The exotic details Minoui includes offer insight into the way such texts reinforce normative Western ideals about religious adherence and its relationship to women's rights – specifically the idea that Islam is bad for women.

Throughout the text, Minoui marks Yemen as an exotic location. The preface to *I am Nujood*, titled "Nujood, a Modern-Day Heroine," offers Minoui's introduction to Yemen and works as an especially noteworthy demonstration of Minoui's own biases as a frame for Nujood's story. The opening line establishes the book's setting for the reader: "Once upon a time there was a magical land with legends as astonishing as its houses, which are adorned with such delicate tracery that they look like gingerbread cottages

[222] Journalist Cynthia Gorney's description of a child marriage she witnessed in India provides a powerful counter to Minoui's simplified explanation. "Too Young to Wed: Child Brides," *National Geographic: Live*, accessed March 27, 2014, http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/ng-live/sinclairgorney-lecture-nglive.

trimmed with icing."[223] This fairy tale description marks Yemen as an exceptional place, different from the homelands of the assumed audience. This opening line is followed by a very simplified version of Yemen's history, culminating in the statement that the civil wars Yemen underwent in the 20th century are "too complicated for the pages of children's books."[224] In framing the text in child-like terms, Minoui provides only minimal context to the reader, offering only as much detail about Yemen as a child might know. In doing so, Minoui sets up Yemen as a place out of time; by implication, Nujood's story is something unique to "over there," in a land that time forgot.

Minoui further reinforces the idea that child marriage can only happen "over there" in backward tribal lands by including Nujood's reaction to things taken for granted in the West. For example, Nujood's illiteracy marks her milieu as backwards. In addition, the strategic placement of western consumer goods further highlights the supposed distance between the West and Yemen. Minoui includes two scenes in which Nujood comes across typical Western foods for the first time: "bebsi" ("a black soda from America") and "bizza" ("like a big *khobz* flatbread, with lots of good things to eat on top").[225] In another scene, Nujood sees computers for the first time.[226] While these experiences are likely more linked to class than anything else – for example, the idea that Pepsi is an exotic drink is brought into question by the later revelation that Nujood's

[223] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 7.

[224] Ibid., 9.

[225] Ibid., 51, 141.

[226] Ibid., 124.

family lives down the street from a Coca-Cola factory[227] – the culmination of details about Yemen's exotic buildings, troubled history, and inadequate infrastructure, combined with unexpected encounters with western consumer products, marks Yemen as a backwards place. As Leandra DeLisle notes in her review of the book, this "leaves the impression that her fate is supposedly one that happens only in exotic far-off lands; that if she lived in a Pepsi-consuming country Nujood would never have been raped as she was."[228] Minoui clearly connects Nujood's problems to her locale.

Minoui compounds the representation of Yemen as exotic, and of Nujood as both an authentic representation and victim of this space, by marking Yemen as explicitly Muslim. Unlike the other subjects whose books serve as my case studies for this dissertation, Nujood does not disavow her religion. On the contrary, she remains a devout Muslim throughout her ordeal, which the text points to in a variety of ways. For example, in the first chapter, which describes her initial visit to the courthouse, Minoui shows Nujood calling upon God for support:

> *If God exists*, I say to myself, *then let Him come save me*. I have always recited the five required daily prayers. During Eid al-Fitr, when we celebrate the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, I dutifully help my mother and sisters with all the cooking. I'm basically a very good girl. *Oh, God, have pity on me!*[229]

Minoui not only points towards Nujood's belief in God, but specifically aligns this belief with good Muslim practice: Nujood has always recited the daily prayers and dutifully helped her family prepare feasts to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

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[227] Ibid., 155.

[228] De Lisle, "Brave girl's tale."

[229] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 20, emphasis in original.

However, despite Nujood's religious devotion, Minoui marks Islam as complicit in Nujood's suffering. Minoui thereby reinforces the message that Islam is bad for women. Although Minoui portrays Nujood calling on God several times to save her, both when she first arrives in court and when she experiences the trauma of her marriage, the narrative makes clear that Nujood's resilience and refusal to bow to custom saves her; Nujood's faith provides no assistance whatsoever.[230] After invoking God, Nujood ultimately gets help by taking matters into her own hands and finding a sympathetic judge. More damningly, Minoui links Islam inextricably with backwards local customs. Minoui notes that "Our Islamic traditions stipulate that a woman must not be left alone with a man who is not her *mahram*, her close blood relative."[231] She thereby marks "Islamic traditions" – not defined – as controlling the interactions between men and women in Nujood's context. So when Minoui has Nujood's persona share the "tribal proverb" that says "To guarantee a happy marriage, marry a nine-year-old girl," the reader links this practice to Islam.[232] The connection is heightened by reminders that "when the prophet Mohammad wed Aïsha, she was only nine years old."[233] She thereby discursively links child marriage specifically to the Muslim world, naturalizing the connection between religion and a deviant cultural practice.[234]

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[230] Ibid., 20, 91.

[231] Ibid., 45.

[232] Ibid., 74, 172.

[233] Ibid., 54, 162.

[234] Child marriage actually occurs in communities which follow a range of religious traditions.

Though Minoui draws on generic Muslim symbols and language, such as noting calls to prayer or the Ramadan fast, she also repeatedly uses the headscarf and honor as specific markers of Islamic difference. Both of these ideas carry heavily gendered connotations, especially for a Western audience. Headscarves have come to be symbolic of women's oppression in the Muslim world.[235] Honor, with all of its associations with "honor killings," carries with it a certain dramatic violence, targeted specifically at disobedient women.

Minoui links moments of Nujood's captivity with changes in her veiling practices. Directly after Nujood's marriage, her mother gives her a *niqab* (which covers the face) to wear; up until that point, Nujood had only worn a scarf to cover her hair, which she did in a haphazard manner.[236] She dons a more enveloping veil at the precise moment of her capture. Throughout the text, the heaviness of Nujood's veil correlates with her level of imprisonment. When Nujood first visits the Sana'a courthouse, Minoui includes a selection of what is purported to be Nujood's internal monologue: "I'm exhausted. It's hot under my veil, I have a headache, and I'm so ashamed…. Am I strong enough to keep going? No. Yes. Maybe…. I tell myself it's too late to turn back; the hardest part is over, and I have to go on."[237] This presentation of Nujood's thoughts not only underscores the stress and confusion of the moment, as she finds herself in an unfamiliar place, alone, where she has gone against the wishes of her parents and husband. Her litany of

[235] The symbolic import of headscarves in discussions of the mistreatment of Muslim women is especially weighted in France, where public fights about Islam have played out specifically on the policing of Muslim women's bodies.

[236] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 62-63.

[237] Ibid., 15.

complaints includes the fact that "it's hot under my veil," reinforcing another component of the detrimental impact Islam has on female adherents. Nujood's veil encloses her, serving as a mini-prison that mirrors the prison of her marriage.

Once Nujood is released from her marriage, her veil becomes less heavy and enveloping. Minoui describes Nujood's happiness while playing on swings: "After a few minutes, my scarf blows loose in the wind, and for once, I don't rush to readjust it. My hair tumbles down around my shoulders, rippling in the breeze. I feel free. Free!"[238] Again, Nujood's veil is symbolic; this time, the detail that she is no longer as strictly constrained by her headscarf maps onto her freedom. This loosening implies that in gaining freedom from her marriage, Nujood also loosened the bonds that Islam held over her life.

Minoui's use of the veil as a signal for the backwardness of Islam is reinforced through her description of Shada, Nujood's lawyer and advocate: "Unlike the women in my family, she doesn't cover her face, and that's rare in Yemen, not wearing the *niqab*. Shada wears a long, black, silky coat, with just a colored scarf on her head. Her skin glows, and her lipstick makes her look chic, like ladies in films. And when she wears her sunglasses, she looks like a movie star. What a contrast to all those veiled women out in the streets!"[239] As one of the heroines of the tale, Shada is uniquely unconfined by her religious practice, as evidenced precisely by her relaxed veiling in comparison to other Yemeni women. As Nujood's role model, someone Nujood wishes to emulate not only in terms of career path, but also in terms of sartorial choices, Shada represents the

[238] Ibid., 140.
[239] Ibid., 80.

possibility of "good Islam" in Yemen.[240] Though the reader learns nothing about Shada's religious life, her presentation as a westernized human-rights advocate, who eschews more overt markers of Islamic identity, demarcates a very limited vision of acceptable Islam, which seems largely predicated on Protestant / secular notions of religion's space in the public sphere.[241]

Veiling does not serve as the only marker of Islam's purported connection to oppressed women. Minoui frequently refers to "honor," especially when Nujood's family justifies their lack of intervention in Nujood's marriage. While I hesitate to draw full equivalences between different cultural milieus, Lila Abu-Lughod's analysis of honor among Egyptian Bedouins illuminates components of Minoui's portrayal of honor in Yemen. Abu-Lughod argues that honor plays a significant role in determining one's place with the social hierarchy of Bedouin society, at times trumping other hierarchical determinants such as age or gender.[242] Minoui's repeated citations of honor as a centrally important component of Yemeni life point to a potentially similar dynamic, with honor influencing one's broader social status.[243] As such, honor is presumably a concept with which all of the actors in the story have a complicated relationship.

However, when referencing the word, Minoui portrays Nujood as ignorant of its meaning: "No, I didn't understand, and I couldn't understand. Not only was *he* hurting me, but my family, my own family, was defending him. All that for a question of – what

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[240] Ibid., 162.

[241] I return to this issue in discussing Ayaan Hirsi Ali, chapter 7 of this dissertation.

[242] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 92-97.

[243] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 32, 44, 63, 92, 96, 112, 119, 137.

was it? Honor. But this word everyone kept using, what exactly did it mean? I was dumfounded."[244] When Minoui presents Nujood speaking about her family's honor, Nujood is simply portrayed as "dumfounded" by the concept. The depiction of Nujood as confused about the lack of support from her family allows Minoui to completely bypass a more nuanced discussion of this term. Doing so not only limits the reader's dynamic understanding of the situation that led to Nujood's early marriage, but also reinforces the notion that "honor" is a static thing, only found in such tribal Islamic places as Yemen. Furthermore, Nujood's purported lack of understanding marks honor as something in the realm of adult men, even though both her mother and mother-in-law emphasize Nujood's role in upholding family honor.[245] By hinting at an issue like "honor" – which is strongly coded as a uniquely Muslim issue in broader American discourse – but not exploring the complicated status that honor holds in Yemeni society or its specific impacts on marriage and divorce proceedings, Minoui indicts an entire culture.

Narrative Occlusions: Shortcomings of the Authentic Mask

As evidenced by Minoui's depiction of Nujood as confused by honor, in order to continually mark Nujood as a victim, Minoui presents her as a child, with childlike innocence; Minoui frequently uses confusion as a shortcut in order to remind the reader of Nujood's status. Minoui's insistence on maintaining a superficial resemblance of a

[244] Ibid., 97.

[245] Ibid., 63, 92. Abu-Lughod similarly asserts that honor is not only within the realm of adult men. One's honor is not only reflected by the actions of one's dependents, as is the case with the admonitions Nujood receives from other females. Women may also accrue honor, and therefore respect within their communities, by exerting self-control and voluntarily deferring to those hierarchically above them. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiment*, 105.

childish voice for the sake of authenticity weakens *I am Nujood* as a text. The text lacks clarity around the specific details in the chain of events. Although *I am Nujood* is touted as a "tell-all memoir,"[246] the presentation of the text actually makes it more difficult to understand the events that led to Nujood's marriage and divorce in the first place.

Nujood's father most likely found a husband for Nujood because of the family's poverty. However, other motivations also came into play; both of Nujood's older sisters experienced some sort of difficulty with men, and their father has stated that he feared that Nujood would be similarly victimized.[247] However, because of Minoui's insistence on Nujood's lack of comprehension surrounding the situation faced by her older sisters in particular and her family in general, Minoui can elide the nuances of Nujood's situation. While the details of Nujood's experience are complicated by factors such as urban poverty, familial dislocation, and a complex web of social codes, by taking on Nujood's voice, Minoui can simply declare a situation confusing, thereby curtailing additional details.

Minoui's deployment of Nujood's confusion particularly occludes the facts in the descriptions of the court proceedings. Before discussing Minoui's presentation of the court case, let me be clear that it is extremely likely that Minoui gained a greater

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[246] Newton, "Child bride's nightmare"; KJ Mullins, "Child bride Nujood Ali's life after the divorce," *Digital Journal*, Aug 28, 2009, http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/278338.

[247] The precise details of Nujood's fathers fears for his daughter remain unclear, both for general readers and those who also followed Nujood's case in the news; news reports were inconsistent. See: Daragahi, "Yemeni Bride" (Nujood's older sister had been kidnapped by a rival clan, and another sister went to jail for defending her); "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*" (one of Nujood's sisters had been raped); Hersh, "A Ten-Year-Old's Divorce Lawyer" (Nujood's father wanted to protect her from a kidnapper who had been seen in the neighborhood); Sussman, "Minoui Reveals Saga" (Nujood's father was worried she would be kidnapped); Hamed Thabet, "8-year-old girl's divorce is finalized while a law to prevent early marriage stalls," *Yemen Times*, April 20, 2008 (Nujood's older sisters were also married off young); Walt, "A 10-Year-Old Divorcée Takes Paris" (Nujood's father wanted to protect her from street violence occurring in the neighborhood).

understanding of the case than is represented in the text of the story as written. In interviews about her writing process, Minoui has stated that she met with the judges involved, as well as with Shada Nasser, Nujood's lawyer, in order to confirm the facts of the case. Furthermore, she has stated that she read court transcripts in order to recreate exactly what was said during the trial.[248]

Despite this extensive research, the court proceedings leading to Nujood's divorce is described thus:

> [Thamer's] answers are vague and complicated, and the judge's questions are increasingly incomprehensible. I'm too young to unravel all this nonsense. Words, words, and more words. Quiet at first, then hard, like stones hurled at a wall, and shattering. The rhythm gradually quickens; voices are raised; I hear the accused men defend themselves. The uproar in the room grows louder as my heart pounds faster.[249]

In attempting to show the trial through Nujood's eyes, Minoui defaults to confusion, using words like "complicated" and "incomprehensible" to describe the arguments, which eventually devolve into "words, words, and more words" which the men in the room fling at each other like weapons. The confusion builds, with the description of the trial culminating in Nujood's impassioned internal monologue: "Will everyone just finish up this business and leave me alone, once and for all? I've had enough of these grown-up quarrels that make children suffer. Stop!"[250] This is followed immediately by the judge's verdict: "The divorce is granted."[251]

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[248] "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Sussman, "Minoui Reveals Saga."

[249] Ibid., 116.

[250] Ibid., 117.

[251] Ibid., 117.

In describing the trial in this way, Minoui bypasses the legal nuances of the court proceedings, thereby actually impeding the reader's understanding of how Nujood's marriage was dissolved. In this presentation, it appears that after some argument in a crowded courtroom, the judge simply decided to grant the requested divorce. Although Shada Nasser appears frequently in the text, Minoui includes no discussion of Nasser's strategy for winning Nujood's case: drumming up extensive media coverage and arguing that Thamer committed child rape.[252] In addition, despite having access to court transcripts, Minoui completely neglects to include Nujood's own testimony, in which the judge asked if she would accept a pause in the marriage and agree to return to her husband in three to five years – Nujood refused.[253] This exclusion, along with the exclusion of any language from Nasser during the trial, reinforces the image of Yemen as a distinctly patriarchal space, where Nujood's fate both in getting married and in terminating said marriage are decided entirely by men. By hiding the particulars of Nujood's case, Minoui universalizes it. Nujood's story can then serve as an indictment of foreign (Islamic) cultures, which, based on their adherence to honor and the oppression of women, support child marriage.

Interventions and their Shortcomings: The Draw of Human Rights

The components of the text that present Nujood as a helpless victim – tropes of captivity, the exotic locale, and narrator as confused child – are the same components that

[252] Daragahi, "Yemeni Bride"; "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Mullins, "Child bride Nujood Ali's life"; "Nujood's Story: 'An example for all the other girls.'"

[253] Mullins, "Child bride Nujood Ali's life."

increase the affective impact of Nujood's story. Because tales like Nujood's are deemed "authentic," they are, in a recursive move, taken as authoritative exemplars of the reality on the ground, and specific cases stand in for the whole in a reinforcing loop. The authentic voice is an authoritative voice; in other words, because the authentic voice is "true," it carries with it the authority of experience, which can then be taken as truth more broadly. To take Nujood's case specifically, in response to the release of the English translation of her "memoir" in the United States, Nicholas Kristof penned an op-ed in the *New York Times* linking Nujood's treatment as a child bride with Al Qaeda and terrorism more broadly. Speaking in sweeping and apocalyptic terms, Kristof uses the obvious universality of Nujood's particular case in order to make policy recommendations: the best way to fight terrorism in a hotbed of violence such as Yemen is to educate girls rather than going in with guns.[254] One woman's truth has become a universal Truth, that is then used to determine foreign policy.

Kristof's paternalism, mirrored by a similar common-sense indictment of child marriage penned by Hillary Rodham Clinton for *Glamour* magazine,[255] are certainly well-meaning, and I do not deny that child marriage carries with it a host of problems for the young brides. However, the civilizing discourse employed by Kristof, Clinton, and Minoui relies on a fantasy about how great the West is, and how we – as westerners – can fix things. In Nujood's case, white outsiders re-imagine the narrative of Nujood's life, to

[254] Kristof, "Divorced Before Puberty." While I don't necessarily disagree with his policy recommendations – I like education more than guns too! – I do take issue with his rhetorical deployment of Nujood and her experience, particularly is refusal to engage with the myriad particulars of her situation.

[255] Hillary Rodham Clinton, "The Fight Against Child Marriage," *Glamour*, accessed March 27, 2014, http://www.glamour.com/inspired/women-of-the-year/2011/glamour-exclusive-hillary-clinton-catches-up-with-her-hero-nujood-ali .

make it what it needs to be, in order to reinforce a very specific vision of universal justice.

The way Minoui presents Nujood's story, the reader is left with the impression that now that Nujood is free from her marriage, her struggles are over. Nujood's life after marriage is summed up as a new beginning, with nothing but freedom ahead of her: she is once again "a normal little girl."[256] This, however, is not the case. While Nujood's actions enabled an intervention, allowing her to leave her husband, this intervention cannot be sustained.[257] Her happy ending, unfortunately, is belied by the complications of life, as evidenced by follow-up coverage of her case by the media. Due to Nujood's testimony, Nujood's father was briefly jailed. After leaving her husband, Nujood moved back in with her family, who continued to live in impoverished circumstances.[258] Nujood frequently missed school, had a falling out with her lawyer, suffered under the extensive and intrusive media attention, and, most recently, claimed that her father squandered the royalties from her book and was trying to marry off her younger sister.[259]

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[256] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 167.

[257] Gorney notes that even in cases where child marriage is illegal, government intervention to stop a specific child marriage generally shames the family and does nothing to ameliorate their material circumstances; "Too Young to Wed: Child Brides."
Minoui does elsewhere acknowledge that changes in laws are insufficient to stop child marriage; "Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*."

[258] This was later somewhat ameliorated, as proceeds from the sale of *I am Nujood* went to support the family.
"Delphine Minoui on Writing *I am Nujood*"; Hersh, "A Ten-Year-Old's Divorce Lawyer"; Kristof, "Divorced Before Puberty"; Joe Sheffer, "Yemen's youngest divorcee says father has squandered cash from her book," *The Guardian,* March 12 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/12/child-bride-father-cash-spend; Sussman, "Minoui Reveals Saga."

[259] Hersh, "A Ten-Year-Old's Divorce Lawyer"; Mullins, "Child bride Nujood Ali's life"; Sheffer, "Yemen's youngest divorcee."

Even Minoui shows some hints that Nujood's case is not so cut and dry. Minoui does acknowledge that the one intervention was adequate. For example, Minoui calls the normalcy of Nujood's life post-divorce into question by including details about Nujood's reaction to the media, which was decidedly fraught:

> I chose the school in the nearby neighborhood of Rawdha, so that people would stop staring at me, so that I would be treated like everyone else, like my little sister.
> 'Well, hi there, Nujood! Oh, you are sooooooooo cute!'
> Oops – not this time, I guess! ...
> Shada explains to me that she works for *Glamour*, an important Amercian women's magazine. She has come all the way to Yemen because of me. I'm going to have to tell my story again. Over and over. And once again, my face will freeze when we get to those personal questions I always find so painful to answer. And that anguish I try so hard to stifle will well up deep in my heart.[260]

Nujood clearly feels discomfort in reliving her experiences and telling her story, and appears to resent journalists' incursion into all areas of her life, making it impossible for her to be treated like everyone else. What makes the inclusion of this passage so fascinating is that Minoui – a journalist – not only was present at Nujood's first day returning to school, but filmed it as part of her scoop for *Le Figaro*.[261] Precisely due to continued engagement with her story, Nujood attracts unwanted attention and cannot return to normalcy. On the other hand, however, Nujood was only able to escape from her marriage because of the widespread attention she garnered. Nujood's relationship with the media was therefore necessary to a positive outcome of her story, but also simultaneously impeded it.

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[260] Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood*, 160.

[261] Minoui, "Yémen: Après le divorce."
This extra journalist from *Glamour* does not appear in video footage or in Minoui's original description of Nujood's return to school, so it is unclear whether she was also present, or whether this moment occurred at another time and was included her to reinforce the chapter's theme of Nujood's desire to return to normal.

The Fraught Question of Giving Women a Voice

My reading of *I am Nujood* serves as a reminder to be aware of the baggage of the first-person narrative. While first-person narratives can ostensibly claim truth in a way that third-person accounts cannot, the use of the first-person to "give voice" to an individual can simultaneously elide realities that do not fit a predetermined narrative. The way Delphine Minoui retells Nujood's story shapes it so that it stands in for the universal tale of child marriage; rather than coming to terms with the fact that Nujood's story is not necessarily redemptive, Minoui reproduces the story that her European and American readers expect to encounter.

Ultimately, Nujood is a child whose story is retold in a manipulative way for a Euro-American audience. Despite rhetorical flourishes that insist that *I am Nujood* tells the real and complete story, the reality of the situation on the ground remains opaque, precisely because of the insistence on the part of western journalists to use Nujood as representative of all child brides. The use of captivity lends credence not only to calls for intervention, but also to this universalizing discourse. By portraying Nujood as a captive of child marriage who escaped, Minoui can argue that all child brides are captives; Nujood embodies the most real version of child marriage precisely because she can speak about it in retrospect, as simultaneous insider and outsider to the institution.

The advance praise offered by Marina Nemat, author of *Prisoner of Tehran*,[262] underscores the manner in which one woman's story becomes the universal story. She writes, "Nujood and all other girls like her who are traded like objects deserve to be heard. This important book gives them a voice." This comment points to another layer of

[262] A memoir about the author's incarceration in an Iranian prison in the 1980s.

mediation. I focused on the way in which an outsider – Minoui – gave voice to one specific individual. Yet this version of Nujood's voice is used to speak for "all other girls."

Carolyn Jessop, an author of captivity narratives about her experiences with the Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints (*Escape* and *Triumph*), also offers advance praise for *I am Nujood*. The use of these two authors of captivity literature in order to sell Nujood's story hints at the way the genre transcends religious boundaries. Jessop and Nemat, in linking their texts to Nujood's, point to a larger trend of demonizing religious groups that mistreat young women, particularly in terms of sexuality and marriage patterns. Jessop's inclusion is particularly important in terms of recognizing the connections made between different deviantly exotic groups; in this case, a Mormon woman writes about the experiences of a Muslim woman, and identifies with her circumstances.

I now turn to *God's Brothel* by Andrea Moore-Emmett to build on these cross-cultural connections. Reading Minoui and Moore-Emmett next to each other, I make more explicit how individual tales are overtly crafted into collective tales. Here too outsiders and escapees "give voice" – to use Nemat's language – to the myriad women who continue to be victimized.

CHAPTER 5

FEMINIST HEROINES: THE ESCAPEES OF ANDREA MOORE-EMMETT'S *GOD'S BROTHEL*

> I have wondered what it is that enables certain individuals to break free of the totalitarian beliefs while others remain clinging to a blind authoritarian faith… From my own observations, the protean self, as manifested in women escaping polygamy, also has the ability to make great leaps across unknown chasms. Not a leap 'of faith,' but rather a leap 'from faith' – to freedom of conscience and reason.
>
> - From *God's Brothel*[263]

Like Delphine Minoui, Andrea Moore-Emmett begins with an escaped child. In 1998, Mary Ann Kingston, then sixteen years old, was severely beaten by her father as punishment for running away from her polygamous husband.[264] However, rather than retelling Mary Ann's story, as Minoui did with Nujood, Moore-Emmett chose to articulate Mary Ann's suffering through the accumulated experiences of other women. Because Mary Ann was a minor at the time of her highly publicized court case, the media turned to a newly formed network of former polygamous wives, called Tapestry Against Polygamy, in order glean information about polygamous communities and, more importantly, to "give Mary Ann a voice."[265]

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[263] Andrea Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel: The extortion of sex for salvation in contemporary Mormon and Christian fundamentalist polygamy and the stories of 18 women who escaped* (San Francisco: Pince-Nez Press, 2004),17-18.

[264] Ros Davidson, "Polygamy case reveals Utah's 'dirty secret'," *Scotland on Sunday*, April 18, 1999, 23; Michael Ellison, "Public virtue, private sins," *The Guardian*, April 21, 1999, The Guardian Features Page, 12; Tom Rhodes, "Incest trial to spotlight powerful polygamy clan," *Calgary Herald*, April 4, 1999, D2.

[265] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 16.

The stories Moore-Emmett collected through her interactions with former polygamous wives can be found in *God's Brothel: The extortion of sex for salvation in contemporary Mormon and Christian fundamentalist polygamy and the stories of 18 women who escaped*, published in 2004. Each short narrative in *God's Brothel* relates the horrific experiences of one woman in a polygamous community. Moore-Emmett writes that "each story is one more thread in the tapestry that is constantly being woven, revealing abuses endemic in the religiously-coerced polygamous lifestyle."[266] An unabashed anti-polygamy activist, Moore-Emmett champions Tapestry, which not only serves as a support network for former polygamous women, but also advocates for stricter enforcement of anti-polygamy laws and offers resources to women who are trying to leave polygamous communities; Moore-Emmett also, through her activism and journalism, positions herself as an expert on polygamy, writing articles for outlets such as *The Huffington Post* and *Ms. Magazine*, providing commentary for newscasts, and serving as a witness in relevant court cases. She was later involved in pushing for the 2008 raid on the FLDS compound in El Dorado, TX, making dire warnings as early as 2006 that Warren Jeffs and his followers in the FLDS "expect to have a shoot-out, a bloodbath" and "would like to be a martyr," predictions of violence that did not come to fruition.[267]

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[266] Ibid., 16.

[267] Quoted in Wright and Fagen, "Texas Redux," 156.
Moore-Emmett also hints at the dangers of the El Dorado branch of the FLDS in *God's Brothel*, published several years before the raid: "When local officials turn on the heat, the polygamist groups move to areas where they believe they can convince locals that they are quiet, law-abiding people, as the FLDS has attempted to do in Eldorado, Texas, only to have their cover blown by former polygamists who recognized their presence and tactics and alerted officials." While this assertion is not as dramatic as the idea that Jeffs

In "Engendering Jewish Religious History," feminist scholar Miriam Peskowitz discusses the practice of exposing the seams of a supposedly seamless narrative.[268] The metaphor that Moore-Emmett invokes – a tapestry made of many threads – posits a final product that is woven together from many voices. But the way Moore-Emmett invokes this implies that there is no "weaver," that the different voices weave together spontaneously, thereby effacing her construction of the story of polygamy. The collected narratives in *God's Brothel* especially emphasize abuse, lending credence to Moore-Emmett's position that the mistreatment of women is ubiquitous in polygamous communities. However, the purportedly true picture of polygamy that Moore-Emmett presents is not unmediated. In fact, when the group was formed, it was first called "Tapestry of Polygamy," but changed its name to "Tapestry Against Polygamy" after many happy polygamous women contacted them to include their voices as threads in the picture being woven.[269] Because of the overt anti-polygamy position of both Tapestry and Moore-Emmett, only certain threads of the story are deemed acceptable; themes which highlight anti-feminist or anti-liberal aspects of polygamy appear repeatedly throughout Moore-Emmett's work.

In reading *God's Brothel*, I pay close attention to the seams of production in order to highlight Moore-Emmett's construction of the ideal subject: the escaped polygamous woman who now speaks out against the evils of polygamy. Rather than portraying her subjects as helpless victims, Moore-Emmett accentuates their strength in escaping, their

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"would like to be a martyr," it shows another avenue of her advocacy against polygamist groups. Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 219.

[268] Peskowitz, "Engendering Jewish Religious History," 23.

[269] Batchelor, Watson, and Wilde, *Voices in Harmony*, 42.

reclamations of their "protean selves" as they leap "from faith" towards "freedom of conscience and reason." She offers *God's Brothel* as a primer for women who remain in polygamous marriages; through reading her text, current victims are to find inspiration and support for their own escapes. Moore-Emmett particularly draws on a narrow liberal feminist understanding of polygamy predicated on a vision of female agency developed through a resistance to male-dominated institutions.

I highlight Moore-Emmett's presentation of a series of feminist escapees in order to get at several intertwined modes of discourse. I explore the complicity of certain strands of feminist polemics in demonizing women who participate in "deviant" religions. Moore-Emmett connects her version of feminism to a disavowal of Mormonism (or religious authoritarianism), particularly through her deployment of captivity in telling women's stories. She wants to give voice to women whom she sees as oppressed, but cannot hear stories that conflict with her version of female empowerment. Moore-Emmett's focus on the fact that the women in her collection speak for all polygamous Mormon women effaces the complexity and diversity of polygamous women's lives, leaving her portrayal blind to a range of women's experiences. I argue that in making her strongest case about the dangers of polygamous unions, Moore-Emmett disregards the actual voices of the women she wants to help. Furthermore, Moore-Emmett not only completely discounts women with whom she disagrees; she also smoothes over the voices of her subjects by molding them into strong escapees who have come to disavow religious belonging. All of her interlocutors tell the same story, showing the limitations of Moore-Emmett's feminist vision of agency.

Textual Overview

The central portion of *God's Brothel* is made up of stories told by 18 women about their experiences within polygamous communities, either as wives or daughters (or both) to polygamous men.[270] Like Minoui, Moore-Emmett does not tell her own story, but rather retells the stories of others. Unlike Minoui, however, Moore-Emmett does not take on an artificial narrative voice, but rather narrates the experiences of others in the third person, interspersed with occasional quotations from the women themselves. The stories presented are not transcribed interviews, but retellings of events by Moore-Emmett. Rather than going into every detail of a woman's life, each narrative provides a snapshot into the worst of a woman's experiences.

Moore-Emmett shapes the narratives of women's experiences in several ways. The narratives themselves were carefully curated by Moore-Emmett; after conducting interviews with "many" women, Moore-Emmett selected and retold the women's stories as they appear in *God's Brothel*.[271] In addition, Moore-Emmett molds all of the selected stories to fit a standard narrative arc.[272] The women whose stories are included show some diversity of experience with polygamy, in terms of their relationships to polygamous men or their participation in different established polygamous groups,

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[270] See Appendix A for a more detailed list of the experiences undergone by each of the 18 women.

[271] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 16.

[272] Biddy Martin, in noting the ways in which lesbian autobiographies of the 1970s-1980s frequently equated coming out with a particular kind of political consciousness, points to a similar kind of erasure of experiences. She critiques the singular lesbian narrative through the writing of women of color. I find Martin's work helpful because of the attention she draws to the hegemonic power of a singular narrative within a subgenre. In this chapter, I draw attention to some of the negative implications of Moore-Emmett's insistence on a unique version of the polygamy story; I offer one potential for critique of the singular polygamy story in the following chapter. Biddy Martin, "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]," in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Anne C. Herrmann and Abigail J. Stewart (Boulder & San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994), 320-325.

thereby providing a cross-section of the polygamous community. However, the diversity of experience is constrained by the imposed plotline; the focus of each narrative, with its arc of capture, imprisonment, and redemption through escape, is on the suffering each woman experienced due to her affiliation with a polygamous family. Reading Moore-Emmett's book is difficult. Most of the narratives include straightforward accounts of horrific violence, physical, emotional, and sexual. I do not in any way wish to diminish the suffering of these women, which is particularly graphic in many of the included stories. However, one result of the repeated cataloguing of abuses and the way they are presented is that these particular experiences come to stand in for the whole of the community.

Moore-Emmett further shapes the presentation of the personal accounts of life in polygamy through the framework surrounding the narratives. She includes a detailed introductory overview of polygamy in the United States, which includes a brief history of Mormon polygamy and information about current polygamous groups. In addition, each personal narrative opens with an epigraph. The epigraphs, drawn from a range of sources from Emily Dickinson to Thomas Hobbes to Patty Hearst, reflect Moore-Emmett's position as an adversarial advocate.[273]

Finally, Moore-Emmett presents the stories in such a way as to stress their truth. She only includes the narratives of women who were willing to contribute without the protection of anonymity; she carefully notes, at the end of each narrative, exactly which names have been changed. The women's allegations are therefore presented as a matter of public record, rather than unverifiable accusations. Moreover, Moore-Emmett

[273] See Appendix A for a complete list of epigraphs.

positions herself as uniquely able to parse the truth of the stories about polygamy due to her own upbringing. While she was never part of a polygamous community, in the introduction to the book she tells the reader about her own Mormon background and minor indoctrination into polygamy. She even attended a Mormon college, but eventually left the faith. The implication here is that because Moore-Emmett lived in Mormonism, she is a reliable mediator for these women's stories – she knows what's real.

The framework Moore-Emmett provides inflects the way the narratives are meant to be read. As such, I read not only the personal accounts, but also analyze the ways in which the accounts and the framework mutually reinforce one another, providing the reader in the end with a cohesive, if narrow, view into the world of polygamous Mormons. The central take-home from this picture is that women in polygamous families are completely lacking in powers of self-determination. This cohesive view, while shaped by feminist concerns with helping women escape from patriarchal practices, ultimately serves to mark an entire religious tradition as unacceptable in the contemporary United States.

Starting Assumptions: The Dangers of Polygamy

God's Brothel is an overtly polemical text. In both collecting and framing the personal narratives, Moore-Emmett explicitly sets out to make the case that polygamy is an inherently destructive institution, particularly when practiced in conjunction with what she deems religious authoritarianism. As such, Moore-Emmett repeatedly emphasizes various facets of both the dangers of polygamy and the illegitimacy of religious proclamations in support thereof. The introductory overview, in which Moore-Emmett

lays out the history and dangers of polygamy, primes the readers for the subsequent stories of misery. In what follows, I note some of Moore-Emmett's choices in order to make clear her rhetorical stance: that polygamy is dangerous and must be stamped out, for the good of the women who are trapped in polygamous marriages.

Moore-Emmett opens her overview by providing a brief history of polygamy as practiced by members of the Mormon Church following the 1843 revelation of the doctrine of polygamy to a few select followers by the "self-proclaimed prophet Joseph Smith."[274] While her account is generally a factually accurate portrayal of the chain of events after Smith's pronouncement, her reference to Smith as a "self-proclaimed prophet" is emblematic of the subtle ways she shapes the presentation of the historical narrative.[275] In declaring Smith a "self-proclaimed prophet," Moore-Emmett shows her skepticism of Smith's prophetic power. This is not necessarily a historical untruth, as many of Smith's contemporaries were equally skeptical, and it is unlikely that there can be a definitive answer on the veracity of Smith's prophetic claims. However, in marking Smith as "self-proclaimed," Moore-Emmett from the outset of her history of Mormon polygamy indicates that Smith and Mormonism are less than real – a self-proclaimed prophet is not a real prophet and he cannot found a real religion. This in turn colors the rest of her narrative, marking every subsequent religious innovation as equally illegitimate.

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[274] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 21.

[275] In doing so, Moore-Emmett taps in to a long-standing debate on the founder of Mormonism, perhaps best epitomized by two seminal biographies of Smith: Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), which paints Smith as a charlatan, and Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), which portrays Smith as someone who genuinely felt that he was called by God.

Moore-Emmett compounds the deviance of polygamous groups through alarmist flourishes which emphasize the ubiquity and insidiousness of polygamous Mormon communities. For example, Moore-Emmett notes that between 30,000 and 100,000 polygamists live in the western US, Canada, and Mexico.[276] However, she explicitly supports the larger figure as more accurate, contrary to academic sources which estimate the population to be one-third to one-half that number.[277] She heightens the sense of threat posed by such a large number of religious polygamists in North America in her description of the Utah state government:

> As what could be described as a theocracy, Utah has precious little separation of church and state. Utah citizens, with their heavily Mormon majority, have voted into office Mormon governors for most of the state's history. The state legislature remains consistently near 90 percent Mormon, and the congressional delegation has been 100 percent Mormon for decades. Further, several polygamist men serve in local government positions including as mayors, Utah State Housing Development Advisory Councilmen and city councilmen.[278]

Several of her scare techniques are readily on view here. The first sentence argues that the entire state of Utah is deviant from the rest of American society, as it lacks separation of church and state and is therefore a "theocracy." This deviance is directly linked to the mainstream Mormon Church – the "heavily Mormon majority" who consistently elects Mormon governors, state legislators, and congressmen. The final sentence notes the presence of polygamist men in roles in local governments. The lack of transition between

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[276] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 26.

[277] The range most commonly used in scholarly monographs is between 30,000 and 60,000. Janet Bennion, *Evaluating the Effects of Polygamy on Women and Children in Four North American Mormon Fundamentalist Groups: An Anthropological Study* (Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2008), 13. Quinn asserts that a more accurate count is even lower than the 30,000 most commonly cited; he counts 21,000 fundamentalist Mormons in his 1998 study. Quinn, "Plural Marriage," 6.
Even other journalists generally cite a lower number than Moore-Emmett does. See, for example, Rhodes, "Incest trial."

[278] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 31.

the Mormon congressional delegation and the polygamist men in local government hints to the reader that these communities are one and the same, and that, furthermore, the presence of deviant religious practitioners is more insidious than commonly thought.

One of polygamy's dangers is its threat to democracy. Moore-Emmett paraphrases Naomi Schaefer, a Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, stating "polygamy seems to corrupt society as a whole, destroying education, individual rights and the rule of law – in other words the foundations of democratic governance."[279] The claim that polygamy challenges "the foundations of democratic governance" is supported by asserting that it is analogous to slavery; only one instance, of either slavery or polygamy, can "fundamentally alter a society."[280] This analogy hearkens back to 19th century anti-polygamy activism, which frequently drew the link between polygamy and slavery as "twin relics of barbarism." Moore-Emmett continues to hammer home the point that polygamy harms democracy by drawing on her own insider knowledge of polygamists, asserting that (all) "polygamists live proudly outside the law, feeling themselves above man's law and justifying their acts, including illegal and devious acts, as being dictated by a higher authority."[281] This ties back to her earlier description of Utah as a theocracy; polygamists are dangerous because of their refusal to live by the laws of man. Religion here is shown as too much a part of these people's lives – so much so that they move outside the bounds of democratic governance, and by implication, the protections of American citizenship.

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[279] Ibid., 44. The Ethics and Public Policy Center is an organization dedicated to applying Judeo-Christian morals to critical issues of public policy.

[280] Ibid., 44. In making this claim, she paraphrases conservative political scientist Tom Flanagan.

[281] Ibid., 45.

Because Moore-Emmett repeatedly emphasizes the dangers that polygamous communities pose to democratic institutions, she portrays welfare fraud and failure to pay taxes as endemic to these communities. In this instance, however, her overt framing overshadows the information actually given by the narratives, which fail to support Moore-Emmett's claims. While several narratives do note the anti-American rhetoric of some polygamous leaders, only one woman, Connie, provides a specific, first-hand account of tax fraud. Welfare fraud appears more frequently in the narratives, but is still only mentioned by four out of 18 women.[282] Because of the framework Moore-Emmett provides, however, the reader is left with the impression that many of the women must have spoken about defrauding the U.S. government, even if the evidence is not actually provided by the text.

The largest danger that polygamy presents is the threat of abuse of both women and children. Moore-Emmett asserts not only that abuse is endemic in polygamous communities, but that abuse is inherent to the practice of polygamy. Moore-Emmett repeats this assertion not only throughout the overview of polygamy that frames the text; as stated above, suffering and abuse ground each of the individual narratives as well. The first paragraph of the chapter in which Moore-Emmett narrates Laura's story exemplifies the ways in which the introductory framework to *God's Brothel* bleeds into the personal narratives:

> Perhaps no one else has seen or lived through more of the inner workings and daily lives of as many varied Mormon fundamentalist polygamist groups as Laura

[282] The reliance of polygamous women on welfare is supported by Janet Bennion's ethnographic work. Bennion, however, interprets the fact of polygamous women collecting welfare checks as single mothers as "creative financing" rather than as fraudulent – after all, they have to support their families somehow, and their husbands frequently do not have the means to do so. Bennion, *Women of Principle*, 77-79.

> Chapman. Based on her firsthand experiences and observations, there is one message above all others that she wants to convey about living in polygamy: incest, statutory rape, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, deprivation of education and forced marriages of young girls are endemic to all of the polygamist communities and not, as some have proclaimed, no worse than in the general monogamous population or isolated to only a few polygamous groups.[283]

Using an appeal to her knowledge as an insider to "many varied Mormon fundamentalist polygamist groups," Moore-Emmett asserts that Laura Chapman knows about Mormon polygamy, and through those "firsthand experiences and observations" has decided that it is inseparable from the abuses that she describes.[284] Moore-Emmett's introduction to Laura's story, which emphasizes the specific negative experiences soon to be shared in Laura's narrative, mirrors the litany of abuses Moore-Emmett includes in summarizing the introduction to the text. The repeated listing of things that women suffer – sexual and physical violence, lack of consequences for violent men, poverty, lack of education, and forced marriage – further reinforces the repetition of the narratives themselves, which center on the purportedly endemic abuse within these communities. Reading narrative after narrative of emotional manipulation, severe beatings of children, and sexual assault builds a picture of inevitable abuses within these Mormon communities, and closes off the possibility of alternative points of view.

The ways in which Moore-Emmett's biases impact her presentation becomes particularly evident when comparing the description of dress among the Kingston community (one of several polygamous Mormon communities in the Western US), as

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[283] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 90.

[284] In contrast, Bennion has come up with a rubric for identifying situations with higher likelihood of abuse, which includes isolation, father absence, lack of a female network, overcrowding, and male supremacy; Bennion, *Evaluating the Effects of Polygamy*, 8. She further refutes Moore-Emmett's position with the argument that polygamous women may be able to combat abusive relationships because of the support of their co-wives, an avenue unavailable to monogamous women. Bennion, *Women of Principle*, 109 & 139.

told by Moore-Emmett, to a similar description written by ethnographer Janet Bennion. Moore-Emmett writes:

> In the early years of the Kingston group, the male members wore only blue coveralls with a string tied around the waist. Women wore plain, long blue dresses with no pockets. They later abandoned this way of dressing to wear clothing that would not identify them as polygamists. Most members' attire now appears about 20 years behind contemporary fashion and is often noticeably dirty.[285]

Compare this to Bennion's description:

> In the early days of the church, the Kingston men wore blue coverall-type suits tied with strings and the women and girls wore plain blue dresses. Blue was seen as symbolic of the Kingston renunciation of worldly goods. The outer clothing contained no pockets for possessions, and many members wore no hats or shoes. Since those times they've adopted a rather 1950s style of dress. Men wear white business attire with skinny ties or bolo ties, and women wear modest home-made long-sleeved dresses with hemlines at the ankle.[286]

Both describe earlier fashions in a very similar manner, noting the blue coveralls, the string ties, and the plain blue dresses. However, Moore-Emmett asserts that a change in clothing came about so the Kingston group would no longer be identified as polygamists due to their dress; Bennion does not comment on the cause of the sartorial shift. Furthermore, Moore-Emmett asserts that the clothing worn by members of the Kingston group now is both "behind contemporary fashion" and "noticeably dirty," as opposed to Bennion's continued dispassionate description of business suits and modest homemade dresses in a "1950s style." Rather than pronouncing judgment on the clothing choices of the Kingston group, Bennion offers a possible explanation for these choices: "the renunciation of worldly goods." The value judgment implicit in Moore-Emmett's

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[285] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 84.

[286] Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime*, 41.

description of clothing encourages the reader to think of the people described as backwards and unable to properly take care of themselves. From this description of clothing, emphasized by Moore-Emmett's presentation, a stereotype of the whole group develops. Moore-Emmett is not wrong in her description – the two accounts do convey the same information – but she presents the information in such as way that it supports her larger point about the negative lifestyle found in polygamous communities.

Claiming Feminism

Moore-Emmett writes that "polygamy is patriarchy spun off into its furthest possible extreme."[287] In portraying polygamy – and by extension, religious communities in which polygamy is practiced – as the most patriarchal possibility of human interaction, Moore-Emmett thereby positions opposition to polygamy as by definition feminist. She reinforces this connection throughout her writing about polygamy. An article she wrote for *Ms. Magazine* opens with "While it comes as no surprise that the Utah Supreme Court has overturned the convictions against polygamist Warren Jeffs today, the outrage is no less palpable for feminists watching around the world."[288] In an interview with Karla Mantilla for *Off Our Backs*, a feminist magazine, Moore-Emmett defends her assertion that the fight against polygamy is a feminist issue, stating

> Because this is a lifestyle that depends on women to make it work. Women are a form of currency. If there ever was a feminist issue, I think this is it. Polygamy is a system that abuses women here in our country, where women's basic civil rights

[287] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 17.

[288] Andrea Moore-Emmett, "Polygamist Warren Jeffs Can Now Marry Off Underaged Girls with Impunity," *Ms. Magazine Blog*, July 27, 2010, http://msmagazine.com/blog/2010/07/27/polygamist-warren-jeffs-can-now-marry-off-underaged-girls-with-impunity/.

> and basic human rights are violated every day. I don't know what could be more of a feminist issue than this.[289]

Her assertions that fighting polygamy is feminist appear not only in outlets such as *Ms. Magazine* and *Off Our Backs*; Moore-Emmett also claims feminism throughout *God's Brothel*. Indeed, she claims her self-definition as a feminist is central to her engagement in anti-polygamy activism.[290] In describing Moore-Emmett's claims to feminism, I keep in mind that her version of feminism is only one of many, as discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. More specifically, Moore-Emmett taps into liberal, secular, feminist discourse, which emphasizes the importance of women as individual agents who make free and unencumbered choices about their lives. Return to her discussion of "protean selves" in the passage which opens this chapter. She contrasts the "freedom of conscience and reason" of the autonomous individual with the "blind authoritarian faith" of religious belonging. I discussed some of the shortcomings of such a feminist stance in my overview of feminist scholarship on religion; in reading *God's Brothel*, I sharpen this critique by noting the specific negative repercussions of Moore-Emmett's deployment of liberal feminist rhetoric in describing religious women.

Before critiquing Moore-Emmett, however, I highlight the ways in which she claims feminism. Moore-Emmett bolsters her position not only through her choice of words, but also by citing other feminists and feminist icons. In her overview of polygamy, Moore-Emmett draws on the work of Andrea Dworkin, Gerda Lerner, and

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[289] Karla Mantilla and Andrea Moore-Emmett, "Mormon Polygamy: An Interview With the Author of *God's Brothel*," *Off Our Backs*, 36.3 (2006): 29.

[290] For example, Moore-Emmett mentions her affiliation with the National Organization for Women (NOW), a widely recognizable feminist organization; she served for a time, beginning in 2003, as president of the Utah chapter, using her position as a platform in her fight against polygamy. Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 38.

Marilyn French. The books she cites by these authors – Dworkin's *Woman Hating* (1974), Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), and French's *The War Against Women* (1992) – are all easily identifiable as feminist texts through their titles alone. Notably, all three of these women have made passionate interventions in favor of women's rights and the recognition of women's history, but are also critiqued for their generalization, overstatement, and lack of attention to cross-cultural nuances. Much like Moore-Emmett, Dworkin, Lerner, and French lay claim to feminism through a specific liberal lens.

Moore-Emmett's position as a liberal feminist is clear especially in her discussion of same-sex marriage. She carefully maintains her liberal bona fides by clarifying that her fight against polygamy does not extend to hostility towards other alternative partnerships, specifically citing same-sex marriage; she is not bigoted against alternative lifestyles, she is protecting women from patriarchal power imbalances.[291] Her explanation of the distinction she makes between same-sex marriage and polygamy is revealing; she asserts that "polygamy is about one powerful man collecting a submissive harem of women as property and a herd of children with no individual identity. Homosexuality is about the sexual orientation of two committed equal partners asking for the same rights and recognition given to equal partnered heterosexual couples."[292] In marking polygamy as intrinsically bad because of unequal power dynamics inherent in the relationship, Moore-Emmett draws on imagery aligned with liberal feminism. The "women as property" and

[291] This was a salient argument at the time of the text's publication, when opponents of same-sex marriage argued that same-sex marriage represented a slippery slope that would lead to the legalization of polygamy.

[292] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 38.

the lack of "individual identity" among children are placed in contrast with the "rights and recognition" due to equal partners. The language of individual rights undergirds liberalism; Moore-Emmett's emphasis on rights from a liberal framework illuminates her insistence that polygamy threatens the very nature of democracy, as discussed above. Her assertion that polygamous women are part of a "submissive harem" is especially loaded. The word harem marks polygamy as a foreign institution – specifically a Muslim one, far outside the civilizing influence of liberal feminism. Furthermore, harems are understood as uniquely feminine cages; Moore-Emmett's use of the image of the harem to describe polygamy underscores her assertion that intervention in polygamy is a feminist duty, as polygamy is described as especially harmful for women.

Because of Moore-Emmett's framing of her project as feminist, she portrays polygamy as an institution that introduces dangers that especially effect women. Although Moore-Emmett acknowledges that the majority of past or present societies have allowed polygamy, she quickly invalidates the use of this piece of information as support for its continuance. "In all of these communities [that allow polygamy], women are already otherwise discriminated against."[293] Even if polygamy is accepted in a variety of cultures, Moore-Emmett's assertion is that these cultures all, by definition, treat women badly. In doing so she reinforces one of her central claims: that polygamy is inherently patriarchal and bad for women – and that it is therefore a feminist mandate to fight to eradicate it.

Moore-Emmett especially emphasizes the sexual assault suffered by the women in polygamous communities: 15 of the 18 women whose stories Moore-Emmett narrates

[293] Ibid., 39.

include discussions of sexual violation. Eight women report being raped as either adults or teenagers by family members, husbands, or strangers. Even the women who were raped by strangers, outside of polygamous communities, link their rapes to their plural marriages. Allison was raped by a stranger when she was 11, to which she attributes her later unhealthy relationship with her family and her desire to enter a plural marriage.[294] Wendy was raped by a stranger after having left her plural marriage; she attributes her "risky behavior," which led to her attack, to a way of dealing with the painful repercussions of living polygamy.[295] In addition to unwanted sexual attention, several women also reported frustration due to inadequate sexual attention from their husbands. This is framed as another form of manipulation. Five women report that their husbands withheld sex, generally as a form of control or punishment. Sometimes this was initiated by the husbands, who rewarded good wives with additional "nights"; sometimes this was initiated by another wife, to assert control over a newcomer into the family.

Moore-Emmett's focus on sexual violation marks the violence in these communities as particularly feminized. Jewish literary scholar Sarah Horowitz, in her essay "Mengele, the Gynecologist, and Other Stories of Women's Survival," writes of the "woman victim as erotic object" in representations of the Holocaust; the female victim's repeated sexual violation draw a mix of concern and titillated fascination among listeners.[296] So too, in Moore-Emmett's retelling of polygamous experiences, has the sexualized female victim become a trope in representations of polygamy. While Horowitz

[294] Ibid., 109

[295] Ibid., 190.

[296] Sarah Horowitz, "Mengele, the Gynecologist, and Other Stories of Women's Survival," in *Judaism Since Gender*, ed. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (New York: Routledge, 1997), 207.

argues that "the retelling of stories of rape and sexual violation may serve to eroticize victims, thereby reenacting, to some measure, the initial atrocity,"[297] for Moore-Emmett, the titillating repetition of abuses is enacted precisely to heighten feelings of concern in her readers. Her call for intervention is predicated on the continued revictimization of polygamous women, and the emotion such revictimization draws forth in readers.

Her emphasis on sexual violence serves primarily to mark women as victims and men as perpetrators. In Moore-Emmett's presentation, it is the men who pull women into polygamous communities and who are primarily held responsible for abuse. She reinforces this emphasis on polygamous men as villains whom women must resist in her interview with *Off Our Backs*, stating "Every time I talked to one of these women, I was surprised at the level and depth of cruelty that these men, in the name of God, can reap on women and children."[298] Under such a rubric, men have all the power, and therefore perpetuate all of the evils in the system.

However, Moore-Emmett does not just portray her interlocutors as victims, though she does emphasize the suffering which they endured. Because her book is centered on the stories of women who left polygamous communities, she accentuates their strength as escapees. In speaking to *Off Our Backs*, Moore-Emmett notes the importance of getting information to polygamous women, so that they have the tools at their disposal to develop "critical thinking skills"; she especially underscores the importance of providing polygamous women with images of "women in strong roles… women as having abilities where they don't have to depend on men, that show they are

[297] Ibid., 210.

[298] Mantilla and Moore-Emmett, "Mormon Polygamy: An Interview," 26.

capable, they are strong and they are smart."[299] Moore-Emmett sees *God's Brothel* as an educational tool not only for outsiders, so that they can learn about the dangers of polygamy, but also as an educational tool for polygamous women, so that they can recognize their situations as oppressive and learn to break free. It is therefore not surprising that Moore-Emmett shows her subjects as strong women willing to "make great leaps across unknown chasms."[300]

Literary scholar Dohra Amhad writes that "the late-twentieth-century strain of gendered Orientalism produced a series of plucky individualists: introspective, outspoken, strong willed. Far from exotic, in this iteration they are pleasingly familiar, a kind of shadowy sister-self to the American female, if not feminist, reader."[301] While Ahmad is describing books written by former Muslim women, her analysis applies easily to Moore-Emmett's subjects, who, while they may have undergone terrible experiences under the patriarchy of polygamy, embrace their plucky individualism. Six of the women Moore-Emmett interviewed categorize themselves as always sassy, even from childhood, describing, for example their rejection of church teachings from a young age.[302] Connie especially epitomizes this position, repeatedly noting her independence and rebellion against other members of the polygamous community she joined as an adult; she was "too independent to have another wife in charge of her life."[303] Moore-Emmett even

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[299] Ibid., 30.

[300] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 17.

[301] Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 108.

[302] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 84, 91, 185.

[303] Ibid., 153.

positions herself this way, thereby both reinforcing the portrayal of her own feminist consciousness and her connection to her subjects. In a short anecdote in the introduction, Moore-Emmett describes a night spent with college friends, during which the other young Mormon women resigned themselves to the thought of polygamy in the hereafter; Moore-Emmett, in contrast, declared, "I'll go to hell first."[304]

Other women are shown learning to be outspoken and strong-willed. After years of subservient behavior, Carmen notes that "her children closely observed her speaking out and standing up for herself" and began to emulate her actions.[305] The closing quotes in several chapters similarly offer encouragement. Vicky states, "I think for myself now";[306] Stacy echoes Vicky's sentiment, declaring that polygamous wives "need to know that a choice exists."[307] Rowenna best exemplifies the outspoken and sassy persona that Moore-Emmett celebrates. Rowenna's story closes with the following quote: "You can tell a man dreamed all this up. Polygamy is one big eternal fuck."[308] This quotation not only demonstrates Rowenna's blunt opinion on polygamy, but reinforces Moore-Emmett's argument about polygamy as a patriarchal institution, in terms of being a way of life made up by men in order to oppress women.

Moore-Emmett's feminist presentation, which encompasses both the suffering inflicted by men and the ability of feminists to identify with the strong women who

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[304] Ibid., 14.

[305] Ibid., 108.

[306] Ibid., 64.

[307] Ibid., 89.

[308] Ibid., 73.

escaped this suffering, creates a monolithic category of "polygamous women," who must by definition all be victims rather than active agents. This monolithic category of polygamous women victims points to the limits of Moore-Emmett's feminist definition. The only valid choice for women to make is to work against polygamy; in her understanding, it is impossible for a woman to choose to remain in a polygamous relationship.

> Much is said about many women in polygamy being consenting adults who willingly choose to live as plural wives and who are very happy. There can be no consent when girls are born into polygamy and, through isolation and limited education, do not know of any other choices. There can be no consent when women are recruited and go through the conversion process without understanding how mind-control takes place physically and mentally… Polygamy can be seen as one of the many ways women historically have been persuaded by patriarchy to participate in their own oppression and collusion against themselves and one another. Such complicity, however, does not equate to a reasoned choice any more than it did for that certain segment of African slaves in American who fought against their own emancipation.[309]

Even if women are "complicit," for example, because they marry polygamous men, they did not make a "reasoned choice" to do so. This logic applies even to women who enter polygamous families as adults, since they have no "understanding how mind-control takes place." No woman who "participates in her own oppression" can choose to do so. Moore-Emmett describes happiness as a duty of polygamous women, using data from interviews with those who left to show that anyone inside who professes be content must be lying: "while they were claiming happiness during their time inside of polygamy they

[309] Ibid., 40-41.

were, in fact, miserable."[310] Women who might disagree with Moore-Emmett are dismissed as brainwashed liars from the outset.

The specific feminist position that Moore-Emmett takes, predicated as it is on a narrow vision of agency through rational choice, effectively silences any woman who might disagree with her. Moore-Emmett's dismissal of Elizabeth Joseph as an apologist who "nostalgically romanticize[s] that Mormon women were happy polygamist wives" or that polygamy was "an early feminist movement" is demonstrative of this tendency.[311] Moore-Emmett cites a speech Joseph gave to the Utah NOW chapter in 1997, in which Joseph, speaking as a plural wife, argued that polygamy offered flexibility for career-minded women, and as such, represented the "ultimate feminist lifestyle."[312] While Joseph does refer to Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, a plural wife and the first female legislator in the United States, as one of her heroes, she primarily speaks from her own experiences in offering an alternative interpretation of polygamous families. Moore-Emmett cannot include Joseph's voice precisely because Joseph also claims feminism, but in support of diametrically opposed goals.[313] Rather, Moore-Emmett dismissively asserts that this is simply nostalgic romanticizing, thereby showing the limits of her version of liberal feminism by policing its boundaries. The silencing of voices like

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[310] Ibid., 42.

[311] Ibid., 24.

[312] Elizabeth Joseph, "Polygamy – the Ultimate Feminist Lifestyle" (speech given at "Creating a Dialogue: Women Talking to Women," Utah NOW state conference, May 1997), http://www.patriarchywebsite.com/resources/polygamy-lifestyle.htm.

[313] This is not to say that Joseph's claims to feminism are not problematic. In asserting that polygamy allows her to have it all, Joseph notes that her ability to work was based on the knowledge that there were other women at home to care for her children, make dinner, and iron her husband's shirts – not the knowledge that her husband was an equal partner in managing the care of their home.

Elizabeth Joseph's – by feminists, who frequently act out of a desire to help oppressed women – perpetuates a different kind of violence; in refusing to recognize the agency of women with whose life choices feminists may not agree, these women are repeatedly marginalized. The models of liberal inclusion that are predicated on certain feminist visions of individual rights are not capacious enough to include radically different visions of being human in the world.

Only a woman who resists can be an agent: this is the crux of Moore-Emmett's perception of polygamous marriages, and informs her rhetorical stance and her emphasis on outside intervention. She does not hear assertions to the contrary; a woman who is not interested in a feminist version of liberation, who rather finds freedom precisely through an institution Moore-Emmett finds uniquely oppressive, cannot be in her right mind. The polygamous women are captives and need to be rescued, not just from the men who hold them captive, but also from themselves. Because of Moore-Emmett's perception of polygamous unions as by definition without consent and therefore in need of intervention, she deploys captivity to explain women's participation in polygamous groups. For Moore-Emmett, the tropes of captivity act as a pivotal rhetorical tool, which Moore-Emmett uses to support her argument that polygamous women need to be rescued, as demonstrated by Moore-Emmett's presentation of the narratives of the women who "escaped."

Tropes of Captivity

Like Delphine Minoui, Moore-Emmett relies heavily on tropes common to captivity literature in order to emphasize the suffering of her interlocutors. However,

Moore-Emmett accentuates captivity much more heavily in order to overtly call on outsiders to intervene in the communities she describes. Because the victims Moore-Emmett wants feminists to help are adult women who have chosen to remain in polygamous communities, she insists that the victims are captives not only because of their physical detention, but because they are subject to mental control.

As discussed above, each individual narrative follows a common arc; the plotline of capture, suffering during imprisonment, and redemption defines captivity literature. Other characteristics of the genre, such as the wilderness of captivity being placed in opposition to "civilization," also appear in Moore-Emmett's stories. Some women describe the physical isolation of their homes, emphasizing dirt roads or lack of running water. Other women, who lived in urban centers such as Salt Lake City or Las Vegas, reinforce their isolation by emphasizing the closed nature of the communities in which they found themselves. Commonly recurring themes that run through the narratives include a lack of education, communal property, poverty, and a lack of access to medical care.[314] These issues are framed as human rights issues, and reinforce the fact that these women are in the "wilderness," without access to the markers of "civilization."As is common in captivity literature, the image of the physical wilderness is reinforced by the moral wilderness in which the captives find themselves. In this case, the focus on sexual and physical violence of both adults and children highlights the moral wilderness in which these polygamous women find themselves. Statements such as the lack of

[314] This list is mirrored by an article Moore-Emmett wrote in response to the FLDS raid in 2008, in which she lists the conditions characterizing children's live in the El Dorado community, culminating in the horrifying fact that FLDS children had never seen a crayon before CPS's intervention. Andrea Moore-Emmett, "Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch," *Huffington Post*, October 9, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrea-mooreemmett/meanwhile-back-at-the-ran_b_133403.html.

polygamous respect for the "laws of man" further mark polygamous communities as outside the bounds of American civilization. The captors, right at home in the moral and physical wilderness of polygamous communities, are similarly characterized as outside the bounds of civilization. Even if the men involved are not ethnically Other – they are frequently members of the captive woman's family – they are marked as Other through their actions.

Moore-Emmett particularly stresses a lack of agency on the part of the captives she describes; that is, until they free themselves by asserting their capacity for individual reason. Moore-Emmett repeatedly hammers home the idea that polygamous women lack agency; no free choice is possible in her presentation of polygamous communities. Speaking to Karla Mantilla, she says:

> But this is coercion and manipulation, using God to coerce these women into these arrangements… Since they really don't know of any other choices, they don't have any choices… But mostly they think that this is the only path that there is to God and that this earth life doesn't mean very much, that it's very temporary… Mormonism seems to be kind of a preparation course in fundamentalism. Sometimes Christian women will decide that this is the way to live – it's usually because they've been manipulated by a man, or there's always some outside pressure from men, or a man, trying to persuade them into this lifestyle.[315]

In discussing her work on polygamy for a feminist audience, Moore-Emmett calls attention to the lack of agency that the women joining polygamous marriages have. She begins by discussing women born into polygamous communities – the ones who "don't know of any other choices, [so] they don't have any choices" – but quickly expands her analysis to women who choose to enter polygamous marriages as adults. She writes off Mormon women as unable to make rational decisions because Mormonism is a

[315] Mantilla and Moore-Emmett, "Mormon Polygamy: An Interview," 26-27.

"preparation course in fundamentalism." Even women who join polygamous communities who have no background in Mormonism are "manipulated" or "always [under] some outside pressure from men." The narratives Moore-Emmett shares reinforce her claims about lack of choice in joining polygamous communities. Each story opens with a brief explanation of how the particular subject of that narrative came to be involved in polygamy: the woman's capture. Reasons offered include birth, brainwashing, mainstream Mormon doctrine, or a history of abuse and addiction. While it may seem strange to think of women born into polygamous families as "captured," doing so emphasizes Moore-Emmett's presentation on the lack of choice offered to women in polygamous families.

Even women such as Vicky, who joined a polygamous community with her husband as an adult after study of scriptures, eventually glosses her experience as non-consensual, as all the reading she chose to do was "brainwashing."[316] Seven of the 18 stories include intimations of brainwashing or mind-control. Moore-Emmett quotes five women as using the words "brainwashing" to explain their indoctrination.[317] Lillian recaps her experiences by saying that she was in a "cult" where people were "conditioned" to say that they were happy.[318] Connie is quoted as going further, indicting all participants in fundamentalist Mormon communities as mentally ill: "'Someone who's mentally healthy wouldn't live this lifestyle,' she says. 'You have to be sick to fall into

[316] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 58.

[317] Ibid., 58, 72, 131, 139, and 182.

[318] Ibid., 82.

this to begin with. These people come together because of their mental illnesses.'"[319] The mental entrapment does not only provide an explanation for women joining polygamous groups, but also for remaining in them. Moore-Emmett draws out the connection between polygamy and brainwashed victims by invoking cults. The epigraph for Cora's story is a quote from Patty Hearst, the poster-girl for brainwashed captives: "I suppose I could have walked out of the apartment and away from it all, but I didn't. It simply never occurred to me."[320] Moore-Emmett also cites "cult expert" Margaret Singer, declaring that "Anyone is susceptible to thought reform and cults, and often converts are some of the very brightest of individuals…. Once converted, mind control takes hold."[321]

The flip side of this is that once women begin to think for themselves, they are able to escape. This portrayal follows the standard captivity narrative arc, in which a woman develops control over her own life both in order to escape and also through the act of escaping. Moore-Emmett glosses the women's experience in her remarks thus:

> Once they began to exercise critical thinking skills, they were able to sort through the dogma, releasing the hold their religion once had on them to allow them to leave. During interviews, more than one woman stopped in the middle of a theological narrative to say, "I can't believe I ever fell for that shit."[322]

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[319] Ibid., 150.

[320]This quote comes from Hearst's 1982 memoir. However, Moore-Emmett does not entirely contextualize what Hearst said. Hearst continues: "My fear of the police outweighed my hatred for the SLA," a statement which complicates Hearst's position as brainwashed, particularly since she makes this comment after learning that the police killed most of the SLA. Patricia Campbell Hearst, *Every Secret Thing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 241.

[321] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel,* 47. Singer is hardly an unbiased party in the study of religious affiliation. She was an avid supporter of the deprogramming movement and frequently served as an expert witness in court cases to show that brainwashing was a real danger; in her mind, any person who joined a "cult" was a brainwashed victim, rather than an active participant who may have actually wanted to join a specific group. Her work on the taskforce on Deceptive and Indirect Persuasion and Control was ultimately rejected by the APA Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility due to lack of scientific rigor and clear bias.

[322] Ibid., 48.

The development of "critical thinking skills" – in other words, thinking for themselves in a way that centered their individual needs over all else – is coded shorthand for breaking the "mental control" once exerted over the women who left. Moore-Emmett's presentation of the response women had to recollecting their former captivity is particularly notable. "I can't believe I ever fell for that shit" provides multiple levels of information. First, that the women see their former captivity as predicated on garbage, and that this garbage was something they believed on some level. However, this belief was not true belief; the language that "I fell for it" implies that the beliefs embraced were presented in a dishonest manner. Furthermore, Moore-Emmett's use of a direct quotation that she attributes generally to the women she interviewed demonstrates the ways in which her subjects bleed together. Moore-Emmett's presentation of a swath of women, held captive not only by their physical isolation, but also through the influence of mind control, makes her calls for intervention seem like a necessary solution to the problem of endemic abuse.

The Opposition of Feminism and Religion

In portraying polygamous communities as spaces of captivity where women undergo brainwashing, Moore-Emmett marks the mind control she describes as explicitly religious. She paints religion as a negative and controlling force in these women's lives. For example, Moore-Emmett quotes Silvia speaking about the ways in which her community integrated religion into all corners of everyday life:

> In the [Apostolic United Brethren], as in all Mormon fundamentalist polygamist groups, religion dominates the lives of members. "The rhetoric was constant with

> many long meetings that included firesides, Sunday worship, women's meetings, teen meetings and children's meetings, consisting of Boy Scouts, family and personal scripture reading and religion classes in school,' says Sylvia. "Everyone had pictures of those in the line of priesthood authority in their homes, starting with Joseph Smith and going to Owen Allred."[323]

While Sylvia's description seems fairly innocuous, Moore-Emmett implies that this continuous encroachment of religion on people's lives allows for a level of indoctrination that is not healthy. Moore-Emmett reinforces this point in Sarah's narrative, writing: "Like so many other cult leaders, Fred required nothing less than the ultimate price from his followers. And followers will pay that price gladly when it is cloaked in religion."[324] Religion here is presented as a tool used by cults to control people. No positive spiritual benefits of religious affiliation are mentioned here; rather, Moore-Emmett repeatedly emphasizes the power of religious rhetoric. In doing so, Moore-Emmett reinforces the notion that affiliation with such a religious group cannot be the result of a person's agency, but rather must have been coerced in some way. Moore-Emmett's version of feminism is not only anti-polygamy but also anti-religion.

While the women Moore-Emmett interviewed focus only on the control exerted over them in polygamous communities, Moore-Emmett expands her portrayal of brainwashing to include any "cult" or "fundamentalist group."[325] She writes, "there are millions of fundamentalist extremists in thousands of cults and religious movements throughout the world from Muslims to Operation Rescue (an extremist anti-abortion

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[323] Ibid., 161.

[324] Ibid., 211.

[325] While Moore-Emmett's use of "fundamentalism" is not particularly nuanced, it should be noted that many polygamous Mormons refer to themselves as "Mormon fundamentalists," thereby highlighting the fact that they remained true to the fundamentals of Joseph Smith's teachings rather than later innovations. Wilde, "Fundamentalist Mormonism," 258-264.

group that block's women's access to abortion clinics)."[326] Her use of the words "fundamentalist," "cults," and "religious movements" as equivalent allows her to neatly mark a huge range of people as brainwashed. She reinforces the idea that a wide range of religious engagement is negative through her definition of "fundamentalism," for which she insists that there is a single profile: all fundamentalists are patriarchal, anti-feminist, anti-pluralist, anti-liberal, believe in a male God, see men as the head of the family structure, and disavow freedom.[327] This list of features is largely already familiar to readers of this text – they are ones that Moore-Emmett has repeatedly linked to plural marriage in a Mormon context.

As a liberal feminist who emphasizes freedom as a human right, Moore-Emmett sees the list of characteristics applied to "fundamentalism" as inimical to a just world. As such, she insists on a secular framework that posits religion as inherently irrational, even dangerous. Her description of women's escape as "a leap from faith" or "the development of critical thinking skills" underpins the view that liberation and secular reason are intimately connected. Moore-Emmett further bolsters this claim through her use of epigraphs touting the dangers of religious belief. For example, she quotes Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, a 19th century British Freethinker: "Less power to religion, the greater power to knowledge."

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[326] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 47.

[327] Ibid., 47. This profile of "fundamentalist groups" comes from the work of the Fundamentalism Project, run by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. The one piece of their work that she cites – the definition of fundamentalism – is the part of the project that was the most heavily criticized within the scholarly community. For a nuanced overview of academic studies of and debates around fundamentalism, see Simon A. Wood and David Harrington Watt, editors, *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 1-17.

In framing her work as secular, Moore-Emmett expands her list of fundamentalist abuses to apply not just to polygamous communities, but to all religion. Religion is presented as a form of captivity, because of the brainwashing inherent in embracing beliefs with which she disagrees. The synergy Moore-Emmett sees between polygamous Mormons and Muslims underscores this point. Moore-Emmett repeatedly points the reader towards Muslims – particularly the Taliban – in order to illuminate the dangers of polygamous Mormon groups. She writes, "little difference exists between Afghanistan's once powerful Taliban's extreme religious beliefs with its oppressive and dangerous effects on women and those of the Mormon fundamentalist polygamist and Christian polygamists, other than the fact that the latter live in America." [328] Moore-Emmett takes for granted the deviance of Muslims; her language describing the obvious zealousness of the Taliban compounds her use of "Muslims" as one of only two examples of fundamentalist movements – the other is Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group. For Moore-Emmett, Muslims serve as a good starting point from which to prove the similar deviance of homegrown groups. The starting point for comparison is the mistreatment of women, precisely because of "extreme religious beliefs" which have "oppressive and dangerous effects."

Moore-Emmett expands her definition of religious deviance to also encompass non-fundamentalist Mormons; she argues that the mainstream LDS Church supports polygamous communities. It is certainly true that the mainstream Mormon Church has a fraught history and relationship with both the practice of polygamy and the communities that continue to embrace this practice as religious doctrine; polygamous groups are

[328] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 37; see also 49.

inextricably bound to the mainstream church. Commonalities between polygamous and mainstream Mormons include shared history and doctrine; in addition, many polygamous Mormons hold the mainstream LDS Church in high regard.[329] However, most mainstream Mormons and church leaders disavow their connection to polygamous communities. Known polygamists are excommunicated by the LDS Church,[330] and church leaders warn members to stay away from polygamous cults.[331]

Moore-Emmett does briefly acknowledge that the Mormon Church no longer supports polygamous unions. However, she undermines this position with her repeated emphasis on the complicity of the Mormon Church in supporting polygamy, both directly and indirectly.

> While the Mormon Church itself no longer condones polygamy and continues to excommunicate members who are discovered to be living the practice, the attitude between Mormons and Mormon fundamentalist polygamists is that of kissing cousins with more similarities than differences… With the commandment to live polygamy canonized as scripture to all believing Mormons, it is impossible for them to outright repudiate it.[332]

She cements the idea that polygamy is central to Mormonism by asserting that polygamy was described by Smith as "the only way to attain the 'fullness of exaltation' in the

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[329] Bennion, *Evaluating the Effects*, 29-30; Sarah Posner, "Polygamy still very much alive in Mormon theology," *Religion Dispatches*, November 18 2014, http://religiondispatches.org/polygamy-still-very-much-alive-in-mormon-theology/; Quinn, "Plural Marriage," 26-28.

[330]This is even the case in countries where polygamy is a legal marital arrangement, despite the fact that the 1890 Manifesto renounces polygamy only as long as it is against the laws of the land. Quinn discusses this dynamic in terms of polygamous African communities converting to the LDS Church; Quinn, "Plural Marriage," 61-68.

[331] For example, Janet Bennion notes that Bruce R. McConkie, a high-ranking leader of the Mormon Church, cautioned good Mormons to avoid the LeBaron "cult," employing the metaphor of a "rabid dog" that seeks to destroy members of the church. Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy*, 123.

[332] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 30.

afterlife" and as the "most important doctrine ever revealed to man on earth."[333] She thereby reinforces her view of polygamy as central to early Mormonism, laying the groundwork for her more overt accusations of Mormon collusion when it comes to contemporary polygamous communities. An important point for Moore-Emmett is that polygamy is "scripture" for Mormons, as it is part of the Doctrine and Covenants.[334]

Nine women's stories mention the complicity of the mainstream Mormon Church. Vicky, Carmen, and Allison specifically note interactions with Mormon bishops who refused to help them leave their marriages, told them to go back to their husbands, or actively encouraged them to join a plural marriage.[335] Other narratives note the continued theological support for plural marriage within the Mormon Church; multiple women report ultimately leaving the LDS church because the church continues to preach polygamy as something that will be perfected in the future or afterlife. Cora, for example, is direct in her repudiation of the Mormon Church because of the leadership's support of the principle – if not the practice – of polygamy:

> But Cora's affiliation with the mainstream church soured when she asked the bishop about polygamy. "He said, 'We'll all have to live polygamy someday,' and then I thought, 'I'm going to have to go through Hell again?' That finished it for

[333] Ibid., 21.

[334]The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) is an open-scriptural canon used by both mainstream and polygamous Mormons. It was first published in1835, and originally contained both lectures on doctrine and revelations of Joseph Smith. It has gone through several editions, with the lectures of doctrine eventually removed, and additional revelations appended to the text, though it remains primarily made up of Joseph Smith's revelations. Section 132, revealed by Joseph Smith in 1843, calls for the institution of plural or celestial marriage to be instituted by the Mormon community. In the title page of Part I, Moore-Emmett quotes several verses from the D&C which are commonly used as justification for the doctrine of plural marriage. Verses 61-63 assert that a man has the right to marry multiple women, but women do not have the right to take more than one husband. Verse 54 calls upon Emma Smith, Joseph's wife, to obey and cleave to her husband lest she be "destroyed"; it is commonly cited as the proof used by polygamous men that Emma Smith (and by extension all Mormon women) faced damnation if they refused plural marriage.

[335] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 62, 105-106, 110.

> me," says Cora. "The Mormon leaders get upset when people live polygamy now; but then they say, 'We'll live it later. It will be different then.' It can never be different. It's a farce."[336]

Moore-Emmett includes her own similar reaction to the mainstream Mormon Church and its preaching of polygamy in her introductory remarks. Her words, when read in conjunction with Cora's, reinforce the slippage between mainstream and polygamous Mormons, encouraging readers to see all Mormons as ultimately interchangeable in terms of their treatment of women.

> And, although I didn't grow up in Utah where polygamists are commonplace, polygamy was always a part of my life as a young Mormon girl. Polygamy loomed over my eternal future as a reverse 'happily ever after.' Even though I didn't embrace it any more than my maternal great-great-grandfather did, I knew it was just a matter of time before I would be expected to share my husband; if not in this life, then in the hereafter.[337]

In doing so, she links polygamy – which she establishes as violent religious deviance – to the larger Mormon community. The few come to stand in for the many; and in this case, the many does not just refer to the entire polygamist community, but also to the Mormon Church and any religion Moore-Emmett sees as anti-feminist.

Creating a Unified Image

In pushing the stories of her interlocutors to fit within the rubric of feminist escapees of the captivity of religious belonging, Moore-Emmett does not only undermine the voices of women with whom she disagrees. She also overpowers the voices of the women whose stories she tells, even as she purports to give these former polygamous

[336] Ibid., 132-133.

[337] Ibid.,14.

women a platform for sharing their experiences. A close analysis of Janice's narrative, in which Moore-Emmett's role in shaping the text is particularly evident, demonstrates the ways in which the diversity of polygamous women is flattened, so that each woman fits into the prescribed box. The basic outlines of Janice's story do fit the captivity arc. Due to an unhappy home life as a child, she was vulnerable to outside influences, and joined the Mormon Church as a teenager. Later, as a young single mother, she was even more vulnerable; Moore-Emmett quotes Janice as referring to herself as "naïve and enamored." During this time, a young polygamist couple who were members of the LeBaron group befriended Janice, and then began to court her.[338] Her capture was completed when she moved to Mexico to join them. In the wilderness of Mexico, Janice met Floren LeBaron, marrying him three days later. She suffered through her marriage, experiencing conflict with her sister-wife, isolation, filthy living conditions, and untreated disease. She left Floren after a year, but remained in the colony and married another polygamous man. This too ended quickly, after Janice was pushed into an unwanted threesome with her husband and another wife. She left the community soon after and spent the next decades distancing herself from the LeBaron community.

However, Janice differs significantly from Moore-Emmett's other interlocutors in that she has not denounced polygamy as a lifestyle. Moore-Emmett closes Janice's narrative with the following statement: "She has returned to the Mormon Church, believing that polygamy will be lived correctly someday. 'Polygamy was – is – a part of

[338] Ibid., 116.

my life,' she says."[339] The information that Janice continues to be a Mormon who embraces the idea of polygamy implies that perhaps she was not captured after all, but made a reasoned decision based on the choices available to her. Moore-Emmett therefore frames Janices's story in a way that undermines the validity of Janice's continued religious affiliation. Moore-Emmett opens Janice story by explaining that Janice came from a long line of women with self-destructive addictions to abusive relationships; "Janice's personal choices in life were different in that her addictions were religious."[340] In presenting Janice's story in this way, Moore-Emmett removes Janice as an active agent in her religious choices. She faced "addiction," a disease that caused her to affiliate with unsavory religious characters. Moore-Emmett's introduction of Janice cuts off the possibility of Janice being anything other than a victim due to her hereditary addictive tendencies; Moore-Emmett thereby ensures that Janice's story fits her model of captivity to religious dogma, rather than reasoned religious belief.

Moore-Emmett heightens the salaciousness of Janice's narrative by including extensive information on the LeBaron group, which gained widespread notoriety for violence in the late 1970s.[341] For example, Moore-Emmett provides background on mental illness in the LeBaron family as well as their claims to priesthood; these two

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[339] Ibid., 123.

[340] Ibid., 114.

[341] Janice's story is eight pages long. Three of those eight pages are given over entirely to providing background information on the LeBarons.
For information on the LeBaron schism and violence, see Scott Anderson, *The Four O'Clock Murders: The True Story of a Mormon Family's Vengeance* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Ben Bradlee Jr. and Dale Van Atta, *Prophet of Blood: The Untold Story of Ervil LeBaron and the Lambs of God* (New York: Putnam, 1981); Rena Chynoweth with Dean M. Shapiro, *The Blood Covenant: The True Story of the Ervil LeBaron Family and its Rampage of Terror and Murder* (Austin, TX: Diamond Books, 1990); Irene Spencer, *Cult Insanity: A Memoir of Polygamy, Prophets, and Blood Atonement* (New York: Center Street, 2009).

factors are, by implication, linked. Even though Janice never discusses any mistreatment by her husband during her marriage to Floren LeBaron, emphasizing only that she never loved him, lived in primitive conditions, and didn't get along particularly well with his other wives, the fact that Floren's older brother was institutionalized implies that their marriage was perhaps less calm than reported. In addition, Moore-Emmett discusses the fracturing of the group and the increasing violence of the group against both members and outsiders, in great detail, even though none of these anecdotes are important to the arc of Janice's personal narrative. Janice left the LeBaron group in 1965, more than five years before the schism between the LeBaron brothers developed into a blood feud.[342] The inclusion of this violence increases the sense that Janice was in danger, even though she is one of the few women who does not claim to have experienced abuse.

Janice is not the only woman whose difference Moore-Emmett flattens. Moore-Emmett also presents 19th century polygamy as monolithically bad, citing letters and diaries of polygamist women which suggest unhappiness, noting "poverty, self-martyrdom and unfulfilling marital unions."[343] While the discussion of historical polygamy makes up only a very small portion of Moore-Emmett's text, her deployment of Zina D. H. Young parallels her telling of Janice's story. Moore-Emmett uses Young's words in an epigraph, quoting her as saying "[A] successful polygamous wife must regard her husband with indifference, and with no other feeling than that of reverence, for love we regard as a false sentiment; a feeling which should have no existence in

[342] The peak of the killings occurred in the late 1970s, culminating in the murder of Rulon Allred in 1977, though murders associated with the group continued until the late 1980s, when several former members were executed.

[343] Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 24.

polygamy."[344] Young's remark is meant to be read as yet another data-point proving that polygamy is a lesser form of marriage, as it is not to be based on romantic love. However, Young's words, which emphasize reverence over love, highlight an alternative understanding of marriage based on religious goals. Indeed, rather than an anti-polygamy advocate or even a sad plural wife, Young, along with Eliza R. Snow, was a high-profile female defender of polygamy.[345] Moore-Emmett's strategic use of Young, which largely consists of decontextualizing Young's words and history, further demonstrates the ways in which Moore-Emmett overrides the voices of her interlocutors in order to reinforce her pre-existing idea of what plural marriage must be.

Furthermore, Moore-Emmett's repetitions, her telling of one story after another, blinds the reader to any individual woman, which ultimately undermines Moore-Emmett's emphasis on her project as a way to give individual women a voice. The work of Rey Chow, a postcolonial feminist scholar, on contemporary China as media spectacle, illuminates this trend in Moore-Emmett's work. Chow argues that in continually representing violence – in China, in this case – the media feminizes an entire group of people as victims; the actual Chinese women, however, become eclipsed.[346] While Moore-Emmett tells the stories of specific women, the way the stories of these women are re-created for broader consumption creates a spectacle of violence that transcends the

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[344] Ibid., 101.

[345] Jill Mulvay Derr, "'Strength in Our Union': The Making of Mormon Sisterhood," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 164. See also: Fluhman, *"A Peculiar People"*, 117; *The Life and Labors of Eliza R. Snow Smith; with a Full Account of her Funeral Services* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instruction Office, 1888); Stenhouse, *"Tell It All"*, 252.

[346] Rey Chow, "Violence in the Other Country: China as Crisis, Spectacle, and Woman," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 87.

stories of particular women. The reader becomes complicit in this violence, as the telling and retelling of stories gains power, and the individual experiences get lost in the shuffle. The repetitive deployment on the same arc of captivity reinforces this blindness to individuals, and underscores the mediated spectacle of such stories. In recreating the image of the polygamous woman as eroticized victim, Moore-Emmett taps into the widespread trope that maintains that the mistreatment of women is endemic in alternative religious communities.

Perpetuating Violence against Women

The manner in which Moore-Emmett deploys feminism pushes both polygamous wives and escapees into monolithic categories, thereby reinforcing the dichotomous rubric of victim and escapee. There is no wiggle room in the way she presents the stories of her interlocutors; rather, the narratives present atrocity after atrocity after atrocity, portraying a series of women who are not individuals, but all versions of the same. My analysis of *God's Brothel* expands on the discussion of individual tales become representative of a larger whole by exploring what is at stake in explicitly feminist versions of this move.

The voices of actual polygamous women are repeatedly marginalized. Because of Moore-Emmett's one-dimensional representations of polygamous women as brainwashed victims of repetitive abuse, the reader learns more about Moore-Emmett's vision of polygamy than about the actual women who serve as her subjects. The reader learns that Moore-Emmett sees herself as an advocate for justice, a feminist fighting the good fight on behalf of other women. The reader learns that polygamy must be predicated on

devaluing women. The reader does not learn what life is actually like for the thousands of women who choose to join and remain in plural marriages, despite Moore-Emmett's repeated assertions to the contrary.

Though Moore-Emmett shares narratives of the suffering she sees as inherent to polygamy in order to liberate women from the inherently dangerous institution of plural marriage, her work instead perpetuates violence against the same women she wishes to save. Liberal feminist iterations of the story of oppressed women overtly call for intervention; repeatedly drawing on harrowing anecdotes of cruel domination marks this intervention as obviously necessary precisely through the emotional response such suffering elicits in readers. The repetition of story after story which emphasizes physical and sexual violence against women creates an affective response as readers struggle to process the gruesome details – an affective response which can drown out analysis of Moore-Emmett's overstatements. Righteous indignation on behalf of the suffering of both Nujood and Moore-Emmett's polygamous wives and daughters leads some liberal feminists to embrace distinctly illiberal policies. The impetus to forcibly remove women from their families, regardless of any inequalities inherent in their marriages, completely undermines the possibility that these adult women have already made choices about the way to live their lives.

Reading *God's Brothel* in terms of captivity brings into sharp focus the manner in which Moore-Emmett speaks over the women to whom she wishes to give voice. Moore-Emmett uses tropes of captivity to provide order to the narratives she shares; she standardizes each woman's story by fitting it into a common rubric for maximum affective impact. Describing adherence to polygamous Mormonism as captivity is central

to Moore-Emmett's calls for intervention; without the understanding that women cannot participate voluntarily in polygamous communities, there can be little justification for their forced removal. By drawing awareness to Moore-Emmett's explicit use of captivity, I show the potential violence that the deployment of captivity can perpetuate against already marginalized women.

In the following two chapters, I focus in on narratives written by the escapees themselves. These subsequent memoirs, while still shaped in order to make a point about the dangers of certain religious groups, also offer more nuanced presentations of deviant religious groups. Part of this nuance stems from another tension inherent in the captive's position: her simultaneous role as both insider and outsider. I read the next post-religious narratives against the grain, in order to highlight moments of ambiguity. Captivity literature does not just mark women as brainwashed victims; it may also offer a way of seeing the allure of these communities.

CHAPTER 6

ALTERNATIVE ARTICULATIONS OF FEMALE POWER: THE AMBIVALENT CAPTIVITY OF SUSAN RAY SCHMIDT IN *FAVORITE WIFE*

> The reality was, I had married Verlan and we had five wonderful children. He'd saved me from marriage to Ervil and becoming part of Ervil's madness. The other reality was, Verlan lived with a certain madness of his own, one that I could no longer agree with. As of now, that part of my life was over.
>
> - From *Favorite Wife*[347]

On October 27 of 1968, Susan Ray, barely fifteen years old, married Verlan LeBaron in a quiet ceremony in Mexico. She was his sixth wife. Nine years and five children later, she just as quietly left him, driving with her father out of Mexico and to Utah, where she stayed with her older brother while adjusting to life as a single mother. Eventually, Susan remarried, this time to the monogamous Dennis Schmidt, and became a self-described born-again Christian in a Nazarene Church. However, despite the joys of her new life and monogamous marriage, Susan Ray Schmidt continued to feel haunted by her earlier relationship.[348] Thirty years after leaving Verlan LeBaron, she self-published her memoir, *Favorite Wife: Trapped in Polygamy, a True Story of Violent Fanaticism* (2006); three years later it was re-released by Lyons Press as *Favorite Wife: Escape From Polygamy* (2009).[349]

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[347] Susan Ray Schmidt, *Favorite Wife: Escape From Polygamy* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2009), 392.

[348] In the Epilogue to *Favorite Wife*, Schmidt writes that after leaving Mexico, she had recurring nightmares about members of the community, which finally ceased after her completion of her memoir. Ibid., 401-402.

[349] Unless otherwise noted, all citations of the text refer to the 2009 version, which is almost identical to the 2006 publication.

Favorite Wife: Escape from Polygamy details Schmidt's adolescence and early adulthood, as she comes of age in the LeBaron polygamous group, formally known as the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times. The main arc of the story follows her courtship, marriage, and divorce, as she is captured by and escapes from Verlan LeBaron, a religious leader of the community. Both the content and the presentation of the text encourage the reader to engage with *Favorite Wife* as a captivity narrative. The cover of *Favorite Wife* features a black and white photograph of a man and seven women: Verlan and his first seven wives, taken in 1973. Schmidt is prominently highlighted, the peppy blonde in the center of the group, encircled and trapped by the members of her family. When juxtaposed with the subtitle of the text, the image highlights the twinned ideas of captivity and escape. The marketing of the text underscores this initial impression; the tagline on the back cover of the 2009 version of Schmidt's memoir is: "A riveting memoir of life inside one of North America's most notorious polygamous cults." Because of the popular rhetoric around "cults," a reader comes to the book with certain expectations: there will be violence, deviant sex, and brainwashing.

Reading *Favorite Wife* as a captivity narrative provides a way in to engaging with Schmidt's ambivalence about her experience. Christopher Castiglia, in *Bound and Determined* (1996), notes that Indian captivity narratives were frequently used to support racial hierarchies; he argues, however, that close attention to the narratives themselves shows that the white women captives sometimes subvert these same hierarchies. He writes that "there is often a gap between what the narratives purport to say and what the

anecdotes relate."[350] I loosely follow Castiglia in my reading of Schmidt's narrative, showing the ways in which she both reinforces and subverts the discourse about the religious deviance of polygamous Mormons. While the text purports to show powerless women and the dangers of polygamy, Schmidt shares stories which highlight moments of female power, as well as feelings of genuine love between a man and his multiple wives. The summation of her experience, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, highlights this dual tension; she portrays her husband Verlan as both her savior and her captor, a man who rescued her from one version of madness, but who pulled her into an alternative madness with which she could no longer agree.

The ambiguity of a captive's experience is inherent in the genre of captivity narratives. Recognizing *Favorite Wife* as a captivity narrative allows for multiple interpretations. Specifically, attention to the nuances of the way in which Schmidt speaks about her captivity does not only reinforce the discourse about the deviance of religious others; such a reading also allows the reader to see some of the positive aspects of Schmidt's community. As with the narratives collected by Moore-Emmett, Schmidt's story follows a standard arc of capture, suffering, and escape. However, in contrast to the simplified narratives retold by Moore-Emmett, Schmidt's retelling of suffering includes her accommodation to her captive life. The power of a captivity narrative lies precisely in the tension of the captive's position, as both part of and not part of the Other. The captive's story is interesting not just for the pathos of her suffering, but in her liminal standing. While the two previous chapters have highlighted the ways in which captives separate themselves from their captors, both physically and emotionally, this chapter will

[350] Castiglia *Bound and Determined*, 27.

note the ways in which Schmidt, as captive, continues to affiliate with her captors, particularly on an emotional level. Because captives are simultaneous insiders and outsiders, their narratives may also offer insight into alternative ways of organizing relationships or of seeing the self by providing insight into the lives of Others.[351] For example, Mary Rowlandson does not just note moments of privation; she also acknowledges the moments of generosity she experienced among the Native Americans who held her for ransom, offering a slightly more nuanced vision of Indians as something beyond bloodthirsty savages.[352] This dynamic is even more marked in captivity narratives in which the boundaries between captor and captives are increasingly blurred. Fanny Stenhouse, in writing about her captivity among the Mormons, goes to great pains to show the positives of the early Mormon community whose members consisted of her close friends and family members.[353] In some cases, the insights women gained among the captives offered them a way to turn critique back on their own communities; Castiglia argues that white women frequently equated their captivity by Native Americans with the treatment at home by white men.[354]

In what follows, I perform a dual reading of *Favorite Wife*. I recap Schmidt's narrative as she tells it, dividing the narrative into four sections which cover different points in the arc of her story as one of captivity. In highlighting Schmidt's deployment of

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[351] Lisa Voigt argues, in her study of both Spanish and English-language captivity narratives, that the experiences of captives were central tools of empire-building, as captives were seen as important sources of knowledge about alien communities. Voigt, *Writing Captivity in the Early Modern Atlantic*, 1.

[352] Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity*, 27.

[353] Stenhouse, *"Tell it All"*, 44-49.

[354] Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 9-12.

tropes of captivity, I note the ways in which this deployment serves to mark the polygamous Mormon community of her childhood as religiously deviant. I simultaneously note the ways that portraying her story as captivity gives Schmidt the space to explore the positive components of her life without fully endorsing them. Reading Schmidt's text can therefore serve as a window into the lives of polygamous women in a way that moves beyond the image of them as brainwashed victims, as she articulates alternative visions of what it means to live a full life.

Overview of Text

Susan Ray Schmidt was born into a Mormon family that joined the Church of the Firstborn of the Fullness of Times in 1959, when Schmidt was six years old. The Church of the Firstborn is a polygamous Mormon group, incorporated as a church in 1955 and led and founded by Joel LeBaron until his death in 1972. The Ray family moved to the fledgling church community in Chihuahua, Mexico, where Schmidt spent her childhood. Schmidt's story opens in April of 1968, when she was 14 years old, and covers approximately nine years of her life. The years in which Schmidt was a member of the Church of the Firstborn comprise its peak years in terms of vibrancy and membership. By the time Schmidt was excommunicated in 1977, Joel LeBaron had been murdered and the group had splintered, with a rival faction led by Ervil LeBaron, another brother in the LeBaron family. While the Church of the Firstborn still exists, it is small and continually fractured by internal fights over leadership.[355]

[355] Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy,* 59; Quinn, "Plural Marriage," 18; Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel*, 27; Schmidt, *Favorite Wife*, 402.

Schmidt, like Andrea Moore-Emmett, is an adversarial advocate; unlike Moore-Emmett, Schmidt's activism is of a decidedly religious nature. Schmidt works with Living Hope Ministries to spread Christianity to Mormons, both polygamous and non-polygamous, as well as with Shield and Refuge Ministries, a Christ-centric group offering support for those seeking to leave polygamous marriages. She frames her interventions against both polygamy and Mormonism as her Christian duty; on her personal website, she writes, "Out of a profound love for Jesus and obedience unto Him, we are committed and compelled to equip believers to share the truth in love with the LDS people."[356] As part of her ministry, she travelled to El Dorado, TX in April of 2008, where she explained polygamy to local churches, to get them involved in "helping" the members of the FLDS, and gave anti-polygamy tracts to members of the FLDS.[357]

Schmidt's religious concerns infuse her narrative, though she does not actively proselytize in the text. The importance of Protestant religious engagement appears as a means to escape from captivity. Summarizing her book for her personal website, Schmidt writes that "it tells of her harrowing experiences in this violent, fundamentalist Mormon sect, and of her ultimate search for salvation through Jesus Christ."[358] In several interviews given after the publication of *Favorite Wife*, Schmidt has stated that one of her goals in writing a memoir was to offer support to other women who wish to leave

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[356]Susan Ray Schmidt, "From Polygamy to Christianity," accessed July 9, 2013, http://susanrayschmidt.com/.

[357] "Doris Hanson interviews Susan Ray Schmidt," *Polygamy: What Love is This?* 1:20 (October 23, 2008),, http://www.whatloveisthis.tv/episodes/2008/ep120.htm.

[358] Schmidt, "From Polygamy to Christianity."

polygamous families; her book can serve as a model that others may follow.[359] According to Schmidt, in order to escape, women should get an education, think for themselves, and actively read scripture. Schmidt also asserts that those who practice polygamy are victims of a false theology; this inherently bad system allows for brainwashing and abuse.[360] Schmidt's emphasis on education and individual choice mirror Moore-Emmett's recommendations; however, in Schmidt's case, her proscriptions take on an especially Protestant bent with her call to read scripture and her focus on false theology as the core danger of polygamy.

Schmidt's stated goals support reading *Favorite Wife* as a captivity narrative. Her portrayal of her marriage as captivity underscores the idea of polygamous marriage as an inherent evil perpetuated by false belief. In this way, *Favorite Wife* continues the work done by Andrea Moore-Emmett in *God's Brothel*.

Schmidt's narrative is a shaped text; even if it is not mediated to the same degree as *I am Nujood* or *God's Brothel*, the story is still presented in such a way to further specific goals. Reading Schmidt's memoir in conjunction with the two memoirs of her former sister-wife, Irene Spencer, highlights some interesting discrepancies between events and Schmidt's retelling of them. Spencer asserts, for example, that before her marriage to Verlan, "Susan came from Chihuahua to visit. At least she got to see what

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[359] "Susan Ray Schmidt responds to your questions," *Mormon Mentality*, June 5, 2007, http://www.mormonmentality.org/2007/06/05/susan-rays-schmidt-responds-to-your-questions.htm; "Interviewing Susan Ray Schmidt," *B.A.D. Girls Book Club*, November 1, 2007, http://badgirlsbc.blogspot.com/2007/11/interviewing-susan-ray-schmidt.html; "Life After… Being a Sister Wife," *The Rachel Ray Show*, January 4, 2011, http://www.rachaelrayshow.com/show/segments/view/life-after-being-sister-wife/.

[360] "Doris Hanson interviews Susan Ray Schmidt"; "Doris Hanson interviews Susan Ray Schmidt as a proxy for Rena Chynoweth," *Polygamy: What Love is This?* 2.16 (April 23, 2009), http://www.whatloveisthis.tv/episodes/2009/ep216.htm; "Susan Ray Schmidt responds."

she was getting herself into."[361] This directly contradicts Schmidt's presentation of her meeting Verlan's family, a process that Schmidt draws out over multiple chapters. These chapters are marked by her abrupt realization of the true status of her new family and her position in it, and are central in Schmidt's marking her text as one of captivity. It is at this point that Schmidt first experiences the wilderness. An awareness of the situation ahead of time, regardless of whether the anecdote is true, would undermine the rhetorical power of Schmidt's capture.

Another notable discrepancy is Spencer's assertion that she, Schmidt, and a third sister-wife spent several months in Dallas, TX, where they sold jewelry.[362] Schmidt never mentions that this happened, but Spencer presents it as her sister-wife's final impetus to leave the marriage: "Meanwhile, just as Verlan feared, Susan's time in Dallas convinced her she could make it on her own."[363] Again, Schmidt's failure to include any mention of time spent in the states allows her to present her escape in theological, rather than practical, terms.

My point is not about the "truth" of one narrative over the other (there are a few inconsistencies between them in terms of timeline, particularly as regards where a given wife was living at a particular point in time), but rather to point out that while Schmidt's narrative is less obviously mediated than Moore-Emmett's retellings are, her narrative is clearly shaped by the story she wants to present. In shaping her story, Schmidt taps into existing genre conventions in order to make her story recognizable as one of captivity to

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[361] Irene Spencer, *Shattered Dreams: My Life as a Polygamist's Wife* (New York: Center Street, 2007), 281.

[362] Ibid., 339-342.

[363] Ibid., 343.

the reader. Marking her turning point in theological rather than practical terms further allows Schmidt to develop her understanding of relationship as paralleled between man and God as a cohesive thread that runs through the text.

Schmidt's emphasis on captivity seems to be called into question by a final goal she has shared in interviews after the publication of her book: she declares that she wants to show that people who practice polygamy are not crazy, but are rather normal human beings just like anyone else.[364] This claim is manifestly apparent in her narrative; the vast majority of characters she describes are deeply sympathetic, even the ones with whom Schmidt does not see eye to eye. Polygamous Mormons are not divided into victims and monsters, but rather act according to their belief that they are truly serving God through their lifestyle. I argue, however, that this nuanced portrayal is completely in line with genre conventions.

Alternative Articulations of Female Power

In reading Schmidt's ambivalence, I particularly note the ways in which her narrative shows a wider range of possibilities for religious women's engagement in their communities. The marketing of *Favorite Wife* suggests that women in the Church of the Firstborn are victims who need to be rescued. If I briefly summarize the arc of Schmidt's story – marriage at a young age, unhappiness and poverty as a polygamous wife, and divorce precipitated by self-education – there seems to be little discrepancy between the marketing of the text and the text itself. However, close attention to Schmidt's narrative reveals several avenues for women to gain power within the community; there are several

[364] "Interviewing Susan Ray Schmidt."

women who appear throughout the narrative who demonstrate that embracing a liberal ideal of the atomized self is not the only way to reach self-fulfillment.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I discussed several scholars whose ethnographic work on religious women pushed the boundaries of feminist scholarship beyond the liberal rubric. I return to three of these scholars – Janet Bennion, R. Marie Griffith, and Saba Mahmood – in order to illuminate the alternative visions of female engagement which appear in *Favorite Wife*. All three of these scholars offer alternative readings of female engagement in conservative religious communities which have been castigated as anti-feminist, or even anti-woman; they insist on recognizing the agency of women in religious communities, even when they act in ways that some might see as working against their own interests rather than resisting male-dominated teaching and leadership. Because power outside of a liberal schema is not always readily apparent, their work helps me highlight the appearance of various forms of female power as presented by Schmidt among the women in the Church of the Firstborn. This section therefore briefly lays the groundwork for understanding the ways in which Schmidt's portrayal of women in the LeBaron group may show them to be more than victims.

In *Women of Principle*, an ethnographic study of the Apostolic United Brethren, a Mormon polygamous group based in Utah, Janet Bennion argues that even though this community is very patriarchal, it actually runs on female networks. The female communities of mutual support which deal with the day-to-day life in the community in reality run the show, meaning that women, rather than men, are actually the key players in maintaining the group's welfare. Because of the centrality of female networks in the AUB, women who join the group integrate more easily than men do; in addition, women

are able to deploy these female networks to gain a sense of power over their lives. Bennion cites autonomy and female solidarity as articulations of this power.[365]

R. Marie Griffith studies Aglow, a parachurch organization of evangelical women. In *God's Daughters*, Griffith discusses the power of submission in terms of bodily discipline and marital relationships. She notes how stories that Aglow women tell emphasize the control they gained through submission to God and sometimes, by association, to their husbands. Griffith speaks of stories which "show how personal power may be encoded in the doctrine of submission, as the women center their narratives on their own capacity to initiate personal healing and cultivate domestic harmony."[366] To speak more concretely: women who submit themselves to God and their husband find themselves happier. Through this submission, women gain mastery, not only over themselves, but also over their situations writ large; this mastery, in turn, is marked as liberatory.

Saba Mahmood, in *Politics of Piety*, studies women participating in the mosque movement in Egypt. In exploring the piety movement among Egyptian women, Mahmood shows the way they assert power in their religious community specifically by submitting to the authority of tradition. Mahmood's articulation of submission differs from Griffith's in that Mahmood emphasizes techniques of self-mastery, particularly modesty, as tools women use to develop community standing. By cultivating modesty, women are able to move in religious and political arenas that would otherwise be closed to them.

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[365]Bennion, *Women of Principle*, 7. See also Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy*, 171-180.

[366] Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 175.

These arguments – that women may gain standing in a male-dominated religious space through networking, submission, or self-cultivation – offer a framework through which to read Schmidt's portrayal of women in the Church of the Firstborn against the grain. The theories developed by scholars who worked with women in conservative religious spaces help to demonstrate ways in which female members of the Church of the Firstborn might interpret the events Schmidt describes; this allows me to move beyond the simple rubric of captivity that liberal outsiders are encouraged to see in Schmidt's presentation.

In what follows, I analyze Schmidt's text on multiple levels. I note the ways in which Schmidt taps into tropes of captivity in order to build to her ultimate assertion that polygamous marriage is a trap which perpetuates the victimization of women. I simultaneously highlight alternate readings of certain key passages which call into question the facile equation of deviant religious belonging with victimization. I do not argue that these alternative readings represent a more truthful version of events. As such, I make no claims as to whether the months leading up to Schmidt's marriage should be read as courtship or capture, to give just one example. Rather, placing multiple interpretations of events in conversation with one another allows Schmidt's ambivalence about her experiences to shine through. In order to draw the reader's attention to the arc of captivity that shapes Schmidt's narrative, each of the following sections hones in on a single trope of captivity narratives, beginning with Schmidt's capture.

Capture / Courtship

The first quarter of the book details Schmidt's courtship, primarily by Verlan LeBaron, her future husband, but also includes descriptions of Schmidt's flirtations with Ervil LeBaron (Verlan's older brother) and another man in the community, Lane Stubbs. Because Schmidt's captivity is linked to her marriage, rather than her pre-marital family life, this opening section of her text Schmidt establishes two things. First, in order to show that her marriage is captivity, she portrays the community in which she grows up as civilization, in order to heighten the contrast between life with her parents and the wilderness she eventually experiences after her marriage. Second, she details her entrance into a plural marriage, showing the way in which she was captured. Both of these components are not only central in establishing *Favorite Wife* as a captivity narrative; they also serve to illuminate Schmidt's deep ambivalence in her portrayal of her experiences.

Interspersed with scenes of courtship, Schmidt includes vignettes of family life with her parents and in the community, and portrays her childhood and Colonia LeBaron as positively idyllic. By noting small details, the reader learns that life is not easy: Schmidt describes wearing second-hand clothes, having holes in her shoes, and working long hours with the family to care for their garden .[367] However, Schmidt does not emphasize these details, balancing them by also sharing stories about buying ice cream, groups of teenagers driving to the city to catch a movie, community dances, and piano

[367] Schmidt, *Favorite Wife,* 2, 93, 30-32.

lessons.[368] She portrays her parents as kind and supportive, and their family life as serene; the only problem her father's second wife seems to cause is that Schmidt gets stuck with baby-sitting duty more frequently than she would like.[369] Because she describes Colonia LeBaron in such a positive manner, Schmidt is later able to reinforce the negative aspects of her life with Verlan by contrasting it with her childhood.

The idyllic portrayal of her childhood means that Schmidt's baseline for civilization is not a law-abiding Christian community within the United States, but rather the same polygamous sect which she later repudiates.[370] The polygamous community of Colonia LeBaron is the safe, civilized place against which all else in her life is compared. Schmidt's book is unique in presenting her childhood and pre-marital home life as happy, which noticeably contrasts with the narratives retold by Moore-Emmett as well as with other anti-polygamy memoirs.[371]

Schmidt's courtship / capture offers even greater opportunities for highlighting the ambivalence inherent in Schmidt's portrayal of captivity. Schmidt's decision to marry can be simultaneously read in two competing ways: as religious coercion or as an

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[368] Ibid., 12-14, 20, 49-52, 27-28.

[369] Ibid., 4.

[370] Irene Spencer, another former wife of Verlan's who has written memoirs about her experiences with the Church of the Firstborn, gives a far different impression of Colonia LeBaron. When she first arrived, in 1953, she was horrified by the conditions she found. Schmidt depicts Colonia LeBaron as a civilized safe haven; for Spencer, Colonia LeBaron is the wilderness in which she is held captive. Spencer, *Shattered Dreams*, 110-113.

[371] See Mary Mackert, *The Sixth of Seven Wives: Escape from Modern Day Polygamy* (Self-published, 2000); Dorothy Allred Solomon, *Daughter of the Saints: Growing up in Polygamy* (New York: W.W. Norton & C., 2003); Dorothy Allred Solomon, *In My Father's House: A Memoir of Polygamy* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2009); Spencer, *Shattered Dreams*; Elissa Wall with Lisa Pulitzer, *Stolen Innocence: My Story of Growing Up in a Polygamous Sect, Becoming a Teenage Bride, and Breaking Free of Warren Jeffs* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

example of female power within the community. After providing an overview of Schmidt's courtship, I highlight in particular two scenes which exemplify this tension. The first scene depicts a dream Schmidt has, which she collectively interprets with several women in the community as about her future husband. The second scene portrays a reunion Schmidt has with Verlan after several months of distance, during which she firmly decides that he is, in fact, the man for her.

The blurb on the back of the 2009 version of Schmidt's text states that "she had no choice in the matter." Indeed, Schmidt's isolation and age at the time of her marriage support this understanding. After all, she grew up in a small polygamous community in Chihuahua, Mexico; as described in the text, Schmidt interacts almost exclusively with other members of the Church of the Firstborn. Verlan's courtship consists of a dance, a single one-on-one conversation, a few letters, and some encouragement from another of his wives before he proposes.[372] Before telling her parents the good news, Verlan asks Schmidt to tell him she loves him, she manages to squeak out the words, sounding "like a scared chicken."[373] While Verlan repeatedly declares his love for Schmidt during their whirlwind courtship, they frequently come at times when she challenges him; for example, he uses his love for her to override her objections about getting married almost immediately after his proposal, a declaration which comes across as extremely manipulative.[374] They marry eight days after Schmidt's 15th birthday, two days after his

[372] Schmidt, *Favorite Wife*, 52, 58-61, 63, 89-92.

[373] Ibid., 102.

[374] Ibid., 101.

proposal.[375] Summarizing Schmidt's courtship in this manner underscores the idea that courtship was a perfunctory mechanism through which to coerce a romantic teenager into precipitously entering the marriage.

However, even within this portrayal of her courtship as capture, Schmidt insists that her marriage was her decision. Early in the text, she informs the reader that "as a young woman of the church I had the privilege of selecting my husband."[376] She assumes that desire, rooted in love, will guide her choosing her future husband; she writes, "Of course, I knew of other girls in the colony who had married men without being in love. The brethren had assured them that the proper feelings would come, if they married a righteous man of the priesthood. But I would never do such a thing."[377] She develops a crush on Verlan during his visit to Colonia LeBaron for a biannual meeting of church members. When the reader first meets Verlan, he is described as masculine and desirable. Schmidt watches him covertly, thinking "Of the five LeBaron brothers, I had always thought he was the best looking. Wide shoulders and a slim waist complemented his long legs. Brown hair feathered from a receding hairline, the slight graying at his temples adding to his appeal. Dreamy lashes rested against his cheeks as he looked at his book."[378] Schmidt admires Verlan because of his looks and personal charisma; she cares little for his spiritual capital, which stems from his leadership position within the church. Nor does she convince herself of his worthiness because of her lack of other options.

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[375] Ibid., 101, 103.

[376] Ibid., 7.

[377] Ibid., 17.

[378] Ibid., 8.

While his leadership may certainly have been a factor in her ultimate decision to marry Verlan, Schmidt shows that she had other options by discussing other men who courted her before her marriage.[379] She also notes that both of her parents felt that she should wait a few years to get married, which points to a lack of coercion on the part of her family.[380] These factors point to the tension in her portrayal of her courtship as her movement towards captivity.

The tension between religious coercion and female choice is particularly evident in chapter three, in which Schmidt has a prophetic dream which becomes central to her decision to wed. While it occurs after she initially notices Verlan as a handsome man, her dream predates any conversation with him. In narrating her dream and various interpretations thereof by other women in the community, Schmidt negotiates issues of female community and submission to God's will.

Chapter 3 opens with Schmidt having a terrible dream, with snakes and ghosts pulling her towards hell. However, she is saved by a man who pulls her up and away from the grasping creatures; the man kisses her, and she recognizes him as Verlan LeBaron – a man who she hardly knows, but had recently noticed as handsome. When she tells her mother the vague details, her mother notes: "As a woman of the church, you have the right to personal revelation about whom you should marry… But, then again, what you had could just be a plain old bad dream. You're so young, honey. Sometimes, I

[379] Spencer affirms this, noting that "Susan was pretty and smart. Every other man in the group would have given his eyeteeth to have her." Spencer, *Shattered Dreams*, 283.

[380] Schmidt, *Favorite Wife*, 25 & 53.

think you're trying to grow up too fast."[381] Schmidt reinforces this idea of females receiving personal revelation by almost immediately following this with a flashback to her discussion with her sister.

> A few months ago [Rose Ann]'d told me in one of her big-sister talks about the revelation she'd had about Harvard. She had cried in remembrance of it, and told me if I prayed, God would give me a revelation of my own. "It's your right," she'd insisted. "It's such a blessing to know that you've married the man God has picked out to be your husband through eternity. It carries you though the hard times. Believe me, I know. Susan, you need to get on your knees and ask the Lord."[382]

Both Schmidt's mother and older sister state repeatedly that a woman has the right to choose her own husband. However, this choice will most likely be mediated by God, who will show the woman's choice to her through a personal revelation. The women understand this revelation as a great gift from God ("a blessing"), but one that carries with it responsibilities.

Schmidt also turns to Grandma LeBaron, Verlan's mother and the matriarch of the community, for help in interpreting her dream. Grandma tells Schmidt:

> "Why, honey, there's no doubt in my mind what it means. Our Heavenly Father knows that you're almost of marriageable age, and He loves you and recognizes you as a Daughter of the True Church. I've known there was something special about you since you were a small child, and He knows it, too. He's guiding your life even though you're not aware of it, and He has your spiritual welfare in mind. However, if you fail to follow His guidance, you are an open target for Satan's trap."[383]

Grandma reinforces the religious connotations of Schmidt's dream, urging Schmidt to follow God's directive and marry Verlan. In reflecting on the advice she receives,

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[381] Ibid., 25.

[382] Ibid., 25.

[383] Ibid., 29-30.

Schmidt frets that she is wrong about the dream, that she will spend the rest of her life never having a boyfriend because she is worried about being untrue to her future husband – who might not even be the one for her. Once God shows a woman her path, it would not be right for her to not submit to the sign sent to her.

These conversations highlight the tensions between coercion and choice in describing religious captivity. The exhortations to follow the will of God, particularly on the part of Grandma, demonstrate some level of religious coercion. One could argue that this dream, brought on by daydreams about a handsome but unreachable older man, pushed Schmidt into her impulsive marriage to Verlan. Older married women within the community draw on the idea of God as an actor in people's lives in order to influence the actions of a younger, vulnerable woman.

Yet the dream and its aftermath also show possibilities for female power in the community. First, Schmidt only goes to women for advice, underscoring Bennion's assertions about the importance of female networks in mediating day-to-day life in male-dominated communities. Within the Church of the Firstborn, men receive messages from God; only men take on the mantle of prophecy. Yet Schmidt and the women around her interpret her dream as a special, female version of hearing God's voice. The women of the community encourage Schmidt to act on her own interpretation.

In offering explanations about prophetic dreams, Rose Ann, Schmidt's mother, and Grandma LeBaron all encourage Schmidt to submit to God in choosing a spouse, but not necessarily to submit to men. Falling back on this interpretation allows Schmidt some leeway in negotiating her courtship by Ervil LeBaron, Verlan's brother. Ervil begins to court Schmidt by telling her he had his own revelation that she should be his wife. While

Schmidt initially paints him as a godly man, she eventually comes to distrust him, and draws on her own revelatory dream as proof of his manipulative tendencies. Through her submission to what she and other women in the community see as God's will, Schmidt asserts some control over her circumstances. Throughout the text, Schmidt continues to return to the dream and interpret it as a positive force in guiding her life, as a sign that God was saving her from Ervil and for Verlan; this becomes significant later in the text, when there is a split in the church as Ervil, with the help of his wives and children, instigates a blood feud against other members.

The tension between religious coercion and full agency reappears at the culmination of Verlan's courtship of Schmidt. After several months of separation, Schmidt and Verlan dramatically reunite:

> Suddenly he glanced over at me. Stopping abruptly, he stared at me across the plowed field. Even though a good distance separated us, our eyes locked. I searched his features, looking for a sign of feeling or emotion. As I recognized my own fear of rejection mirrored in his face, all the doubts, the confusion, and the strain bottled inside for the past six weeks sprang to the surface. I wept with relief. Raw, unrestrained emotion hit me with such force that I could scarcely stand, and I grasped at the fence for support.
> The brilliant colors of autumn swayed through my tears, the morning air soft and sweetly scented by the Windmars' fresh cut alfalfa behind me. Somewhere close by a chicken clucked. The world around me shone brilliant, a bounteous gift from God, faultlessly framing the most intense, overpowering revelation of my life. I loved Verlan LeBaron.[384]

Schmidt emphasizes the romance of the situation. Her eyes meet Verlan's across a distance, and they communicate their emotions to each other without speaking a word. Their love is mutual, with both of them fearing rejection. The perfumey romance of the moment underscores Schmidt's assertion that she was not pushed or manipulated into her

[384] Ibid., 95-96.

attraction. Read in conjunction with his earlier portrayal as potentially manipulative, this description of Verlan as truly loving presents him as a rounded human being. He is Schmidt's captor, but also the man of her dreams. Schmidt's desire for him may entrap her, but it also allows her to be introduced to a more powerful love than was previously available to her.

Schmidt paints her reunion with Verlan as a religious moment and her recognition of his love as a "bounteous gift from God." The discovery that she truly loves Verlan is "the most intense, overpowering revelation of my life." The calling from God she hears when she is reunited with Verlan mirrors her earlier revelatory experience. Both her dream and her experience with Verlan in the field reinforce Schmidt's belief that her subsequent marriage to Verlan is the correct thing to do in a cosmic sense. In doing so, she begins to elucidate a theology of relationship, wherein intense interpersonal love with her husband also represents her love for God.

Schmidt shows her courtship to be the result of the intersection of religious influence and romantic desire. She uses the idea of courtship as captivity to heighten the religious deviance of the group by showing the ways in which religion singularly influenced her decision to get married at a young age to a much older man with five other wives, a man who, by many standards, would be an undesirable husband for a teenage girl. However, her insistence that she and Verlan not only loved each other, but shared a love intertwined with religious imperatives, shows a way in which such a marriage might offer something better than liberal ideas about freedom.

Suffering I / Early Marriage: Into the Wilderness

In the second quarter of *Favorite Wife*, Schmidt details her first four months of marriage: meeting the many members of her new family, adjusting to loneliness and more pronounced poverty, and realizing how little say she will have in the way her life will be organized. Schmidt establishes Verlan's household as the wilderness, in contrast to the happy family home she described in the first section of her story. The trials that Schmidt undergoes in adjusting to her new life are not meaningless, however; during this time, Schmidt develops as a person, going from being a child to being a wife. In fact, her suffering leads directly to her character development. Her captivity forces her to become an adult, changing her irrevocably.

Once Schmidt marries Verlan, life is no longer idyllic. After their marriage, Verlan immediately takes Schmidt out of her parents' house in Colonia LeBaron and brings her to Ensenada, a journey of several days. After being abruptly moved to Ensenada, she lives in a trailer behind the house shared by two of Verlan's other wives, Charlotte and Lucy. While there, she repeatedly emphasizes missing her family, especially her mother. She notes the hardship of her life with Verlan, particularly the poverty inherent in her new situation. On her first morning with her family-by-marriage, she remarks on the food, which she gags down with difficulty: wheat mush and a slice of bread, which she compares (unfavorably) her mother's pancakes and bacon. "As I swallowed a dry piece of bread, a new thought occurred. Verlan can't afford better food than this! With so many wives and children, he has to provide inexpensive foods!"[385] She has moved from the civilization of a small and tight-knit community to a land in which

[385] Ibid., 134.

she is an unwelcome interloper. The lack of community and family ties during the early years of her marriage mark her new home as a wilderness as much as hardship does.

During this period of her marriage, Schmidt responds negatively to setbacks. In one particularly telling scene, Schmidt depicts her newly married self playing marbles with the children of the family. Charlotte, Verlan's first wife, sees this, and expresses disdain at Schmidt's actions. Schmidt's response, however, cements her fifteen-year-old self in the role of the petulant teenager. She takes a bath (in the main house where the other wives live, not in her trailer), soaking in the tub as she listens to her sister-wives prepare dinner for the family. She writes: "Having a real bathtub to bathe in instead of a tin washtub was a definite step up in the world. Of course, this really wasn't my house – it was my husband's house. But wasn't what was his also mine? I relaxed as I leisurely soaked, and felt like a rich woman."[386] Schmidt's moment of feeling "like a rich woman" is short-lived; her impoverished suffering quickly resumes, as she struggles with loneliness and her inability to properly sort laundry. Yet this moment is also important in establishing Schmidt's character arc, as she moves away from such responses precisely through the crucible of her captivity.

Schmidt depicts her development through the negotiations of her relationships with her sister-wives. At the beginning of her marriage, Schmidt declares optimistically: "I wanted no tension with my new sister-wives. It was expected of us to love one another and to maintain harmony in our husband's home."[387] Even though Schmidt frames this assertion in distinctly patriarchal language, emphasizing the importance of maintaining

[386] Ibid., 140.

[387] Ibid., 130.

harmony for her husband, Schmidt's statement demonstrates her understanding that a woman cut off from the female network – a woman who has tension with her sister-wives – will not have an easy time of it. Of course, she does experience tension with her sister-wives, particularly in scenes like the one above when she acts like a teenager, rather than an adult. Yet the importance of a female network becomes increasingly apparent as Schmidt realizes how little time Verlan actually spends with his wives and children. Schmidt begins her marriage thinking only of her husband, focusing on their special loving relationship and the importance of harmony for his benefit; as she experiences the reality of her situation, she relies more and more on the other women in the community. Schmidt and her sister-wives live together, shop together, and support each other financially. Schmidt puts it bluntly, stating, "It seemed that all Verlan's wives could rely on was each other."[388]

This shift in Schmidt's perception of the relationship between wives can be read two ways. First, Schmidt's reliance on her fellow wives, rather than her husband, for material and emotional support can be seen as another sign of her suffering; Schmidt and the other women are forced to go outside the bonds of conventional hetero-normative relationships in order to get by, yet another signal of the moral wilderness in which they find themselves. On the other hand, this realization could be read as support for Bennion's argument about the importance of female networks as a source of strength for women in patriarchal communities.

In her struggles to adjust to her new family, Schmidt looks to her sister-wives and other women in the community for inspiration. She specifically notes submissive wives

[388] Ibid., 178.

who, through their submission, seem to gain happiness and some measure of power in their marital relationships, naming her co-wife Lucy and her cousin Lorna (who is married to Schmidt's brother-in-law Ervil) as inspiration. When Schmidt first meets Lucy, she describes her generosity of spirit: "The gentle, giving ways of a selfless spirit shone from her eyes. It was obvious that she deeply loved Verlan and wanted his happiness."[389] Schmidt later adds that "Lucy seemed content with our way of life. She acted cheerful and selfless, even though she had spent little time with Verlan since our arrival."[390] When visiting Lorna, whose poverty exceeds Schmidt's, Schmidt emphasizes similar characteristics in her description:

> I marveled at her cheerfulness. She acted as though she enjoyed living in squalor, in a town where she knew practically no one, with two kids and pregnant…. Lorna could teach me a few things about keeping a positive attitude regardless of the circumstances. She obviously adored Ervil and was willing to overlook his shortcomings.[391]

Schmidt notes the cheerfulness and selflessness of these two women, as well as the "obvious" love that they must feel for their husbands in order to accept the harsh realities of their lives. Through their submission, to both God and their husbands, they make the best of their circumstances.

As with Schmidt's increased reliance on her co-wives, the descriptions of Lucy and Lorna can be read in multiple ways. The way these women suppress the suffering they must be experiencing – after all, Lorna lives in squalor and Lucy does all of the housework without the benefit of Verlan's attention – heightens the idea of polygamous

[389] Ibid., 132.

[390] Ibid., 138.

[391] Ibid., 156.

marriage as captivity with implications of brainwashing. However, Schmidt's comment that Lorna could teach her a few things, which echoes a similar statement she makes about Lucy, again shows the cultural capital that certain women hold in the community. Griffith's insights seem particularly apt, as Schmidt portrays these women as showing power over their lives precisely through cheerfully submitting to whatever life throws at them. Schmidt contrasts their acceptance with her own situation; she continually links her own unhappiness with her inability to fully submit to her circumstances.

Despite the hardships Schmidt experiences as a plural wife, she insists on her own agency in joining Verlan's family. In describing her choice, Schmidt makes a curious statement: "It was God's will, and I had voluntarily given myself to plural marriage."[392] The possible contradiction between her voluntary action and God's will underscores the tension throughout the narrative. As Schmidt's marriage continues, and she submits more fully to what she understands to be God's will, this tension increases, raising questions about religious belonging, and how much choice there is in such a matter.

Suffering II / Submissive Marriage: Acclimation or Brainwashing?

About halfway through the book, Schmidt returns to her hometown of Colonia LeBaron and pays a reluctant visit to her mother-in-law, Grandma LeBaron. The resulting conversation with the two women marks a shift within the text. At this point, Schmidt is deeply unhappy in her marriage. Before she can ask for advice, however, Grandma exhorts:

[392] Ibid., 146.

> "Susan, dear, I realize being married to a man like Verlan is a challenge to a young girl like yourself. In the days ahead he is going to need you like never before. Trust his judgment! Stand firmly behind him and let him know that you're his and that he can count on your support. You must forget your own needs, put those of your husband high above your own. Be a prayer-warrior on his behalf. Prayer is a woman's mission if she's married to a leader in the Church of God."[393]

The matriarch of the community tells Schmidt, at this time still a teenage girl, to submit herself fully to her husband – but also to become a "prayer-warrior," implying a more active role as well as the submissive one. Schmidt takes Grandma's advice to heart and works to become a more supportive wife. After this interaction, she begins to show the reader moments of her swallowing her hurt and anger and making the best of whatever bad situation in which she finds herself, rather than scenes of her crying or otherwise avoiding her situation, as she did during the first few months of her marriage. Her relationship with her husband and her relationship with God are inextricably linked; through mastering herself for her husband's benefit, she does what is best in the eyes of God. Schmidt actively works to cultivate herself in order to become a more successful polygamous wife.

This does not mean that Schmidt's material circumstances improve. Rather, Schmidt repeatedly shows the poverty she faced as a member of Verlan's family in this third section of the book. She tells stories of the women struggling to feed their many children on Verlan's inadequate salary; at one point, two years into her marriage, Schmidt sells her prized possession – a guitar – in order to get her young daughter something to eat besides beans, carrots and beets.[394] She notes on multiple occasions that

[393] Ibid., 191.
[394] Ibid., 263.

she does not even have the spending money to buy a Coke.[395] The descriptions of poverty are not only relegated to discussions of food. Just as important are Schmidt's descriptions of general living conditions. She lives in shacks and trailers without plumbing. There are several scenes of visitors being horrified at living conditions. In one such scene, her cousin Mark, who is also a member of the church, is disgusted by the dumpy trailer which was her first home in Los Molinos.[396] Schmidt shows her life to be frustrating because of the lack of creature comforts which she feels she should receive.

Time and again, Schmidt makes the best of things in response to her lack of control over her circumstances. When Verlan goes on a mission, leaving his young wife alone for months on end, Schmidt resolves to support his work.[397] When Verlan moves her into a dirty, broken-down trailer, Schmidt borrows some cleaning supplies from the neighbors.[398] After giving birth to her fourth child and finding herself without support, she does have a good cry, but pulls herself together enough to calm her children and bury her placenta in the backyard.[399] The discipline Schmidt exerts in learning to be a good submissive wife hearkens back to the insights provided by both Griffith and Mahmood about alternative ways in which the actions of religious women might be interpreted. While Schmidt may appear to be acting in ways that "seem inimical to [her] 'own

[395] Ibid., 152, 155, 255.

[396] Ibid., 252.

[397] Ibid, 227-228.

[398] Ibid., 248-249.

[399] Ibid., 361-363.

interests and agendas,'"[400] one could argue that her actions allow her to become more integrated into the community, and therefore more successful at navigating the hardship she faces.

These self-mastery techniques allow Schmidt to build a relationship with her sister-wives; when she no longer acts like a child, they no longer treat her like one. She eventually comes to "cherish" her sister-wives and "adore" Verlan's children.[401] She also develops a stronger relationship with Verlan, developing her self-mastery specifically so that he is proud of her.[402] Their relationship grows less strained, and includes moments when Verlan indulges his young wife. The intense love Schmidt expresses for both her husband and her sister-wives not only shows her accommodation to her situation. It is also the most evident manifestation of her ambivalence about the community she eventually chose to leave.

Because of her willingness to submit to him, Verlan rewards Schmidt. To cite one example, he lets her have her way in naming their first child; Verlan gives way to her in the moment directly after she publicly gives way to him. Her response to this magnanimity is to tell her friend, "That man spoils me so, Franny… Anything I want, he gives me."[403] The statement that Verlan gives Schmidt anything she wants is striking when read in conjunction with the many things she desires that he does not provide: running water, adequate food, and Coca-Cola. In the moment, Schmidt is happier because

[400] Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, 2.

[401] Schmidt, *Favorite Wife*, 372.

[402] Ibid., 213.

[403] Ibid., 244.

of her submission, and can be read as yet another instance of the gains Schmidt makes in accepting God's will. Yet this scene is also troubling, encouraging the reader to see the manipulation within their relationship, even if Schmidt refuses to accept such a verdict.

Verlan's controlling tendencies could lead the reader to conclude that Schmidt was manipulated into stoically embracing her lot in life. Indeed, her passive acceptance of a terrible situation paired with her repeated declarations of love for the man who placed her in said situation could be read as a result of brainwashing, rather than techniques of accommodation that allow her to improve her relationships. Reading her acceptance as brainwashing is supported by the way Schmidt underscores her feelings of being trapped. While she may not be physically restrained, she does not have the wherewithal to leave her community; because she is not a wage-earner, her access to finances goes beyond impoverishment, as she is completely dependent on others for help. On the few occasions when she does travel between LeBaron community outposts, her actions are circumscribed by the presence of other members of the Church of the Firstborn. The one time she does travel alone, she befriends a young American sailor who helps her when she has trouble crossing the border from California to Mexico. Verlan and his first wife severely reprimand Schmidt for this interaction. Any communication with a "man of Babylon" is strictly prohibited.[404]

This portion of Schmidt's memoir shows the height of her captivity. Her emphasis on physical entrapment and on her own submission illustrates both the suffering she underwent as a captive and the potential that her captivity included a mental component as well. Yet this captivity shaped her life in irrevocable ways, leading directly to

[404] Ibid., 203 & 208.

Schmidt's ambivalence, as demonstrated by the strong relationships she develops with the women in her captor's family. Unlike the other women portrayed by Minoui and Moore-Emmett, who are controlling villains complicit in the captivity of the heroine, the other women portrayed by Schmidt are not evil women who harm her, but rather her compatriots. Their shared captivity marks them as friends precisely due to their joint experiences of suffering.

Escape

The final quarter of the book details Schmidt's escape, which occurs on multiple levels. As the story progressive, Schmidt shows the ways in which she distances herself from her husband and from her religious beliefs. Eventually, the culmination of her questioning of both her relationship with her husband and her belief in God leads her to leave the Church of the Firstborn completely. Schmidt comes to level critique against her own community because of her experiences as a captive within her marriage to Verlan. While she never goes as far as to label her childhood captivity, as, for example, many of Moore-Emmett's interlocutors do, Schmidt's experiences allow her to see her childhood in a different light. Colonia LeBaron, where Schmidt grew up and which stood as the civilization against which the wilderness of life was Verlan was compared, eventually also comes to be marked as lacking civilization because of the ubiquity of polygamy within the community.

Approximately three-quarters into the book, the prophet of the group, Joel LeBaron, is murdered. During the funeral services, one man gives testimony which encourages Schmidt to explore her faith more fully; this questioning, in turn, leads

directly to Schmidt's increasing rebellion. The breakdown of Schmidt's marriage mirrors her burgeoning lack of faith in the strictures taught by the Church of the Firstborn.

As Schmidt tells her story, her turning point comes at a meeting of the whole church community shortly after the death of their prophet and her brother-in-law. A new member of the church, Timothy Neil, stands up and announces that he is leaving, due to the failure of Joel's mission because of his death. Furthermore, he exhorts the rest of the community to follow his example, saying:

> "I highly recommend that the rest of you get on your knees and ask God for personal guidance. That means you women, too! Stop looking to your husbands to carry you into heaven – stop leaning on the arm of the flesh. You'll stand naked and alone before the judgment seat of God! Don't cling to something that is disintegrating before your eyes. Don't be blind. Think for yourselves. Read! Pray! Don't stop searching until you find the truth. That's what I intend to do. May God bless you all."[405]

This exhortation is explicitly Protestant in language, encouraging the listeners to think for themselves, develop a personal relationship with God through reading and prayer, and separate themselves from fleshly concerns. Neil places emphasis on the importance of the autonomous self over and above the good of the community. There are also feminist undertones to the language, which specifically targets women to actively engage in their faith. In the language of Timothy Neil, it is activeness – agency – that can bring someone closer to God.

Schmidt marks this speech as centrally significant to her escape from her polygamous – and religiously misguided – lifestyle. She writes:

> I'd begun to study the Scriptures in an effort to find for myself what I believed in. Ervil's writings were what triggered my interest – as had the provoking words of Brother Tim Neil during the last conference meeting in Colonia LeBaron, when

[405] Ibid., 332.

> he'd challenged the church's women to read and study, and stop leaning on the arm of the flesh. Tim Neil's accusation had made me realize how well I fit into that category. I was no longer a child, I needed to know for myself that our church doctrine was true, especially now that Joel was gone.[406]

While Schmidt shows her development from child to adult throughout her story, at this point she fully embraces adulthood, which she links explicitly to a new kind of religious understanding. She focuses her study on the teachings in various scriptures around polygamy and comes away from her reading confused and angry: confused at the contradictory language around polygamy and angry that God seemed to value men more than women.[407] In placing a large emphasis on her reading the Bible as a source of liberation from her material circumstances, Schmidt frames her story as a search for salvation, both material and spiritual. Her marketing of her text as a story of her "search for salvation through Jesus Christ" supports this reading.

At the end of the chapter wherein Schmidt details her study and her internal conflict, she includes an argument she has with her husband about his management of the family; she closes the chapter with the following statement: "If Verlan wanted to see me, he could just come to Colonia LeBaron. With or without Verlan's permission, I was going home."[408] In organizing her chapter divisions in this manner, Schmidt links her reading of the Bible directly to her assertion of her right to control her life. For the first time, she travels without her husband's permission and moves back to the place she grew

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[406] Ibid., 340.

[407] Ibid., 343.

[408] Ibid., 347.

up. At this point, she swears off Verlan, deciding that she can live happily without him.[409] With the exception of occasional moments of intimacy, for the next several years, Verlan and Schmidt rarely see one another. Schmidt writes that she yearns for a man's gentle touch and that she misses Verlan's kisses when he's not around.[410] She desires attention that is not possible for her to receive from her husband due to their familial circumstances.

Yet she is unable to continue to find peace or happiness in submitting to her husband. She does not resort to pouting, but rather rebels against her husband and, eventually, God. In her study of scripture, she comes to the conclusion that God must love his sons more than his daughters, something which Schmidt cannot bring herself to accept.[411] In dealing with this confusion, she "continued [her] habit of talking to the Lord," asking Him to "help [her] accept [her] lot in life, and not be bitter."[412] However, her disenchantment with God's plan as taught by the Church of the Firstborn eventually trumps her habits. Submission to God – or at least this particular iteration of God – becomes intolerable, rather than a source of strength. She finds that she cannot make the sacrifices that others do, because she does not believe in the church any more, cannot see how living in misery is way to serve God.[413]

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[409] Ibid., 350 & 365.

[410] Ibid., 365 & 372.

[411] Ibid., 342-343.

[412] Ibid., 344.

[413] Ibid., 396 & 398.

After this point in the narrative, Schmidt portrays herself more consistently as rebellious: she argues with her husband, drinks coffee against his orders, and overtly begins a campaign of resistance, which spreads to some of her sister wives. After moving back to Colonia LeBaron, she develops a support network of other women, which allows her to exert more control over her day-to-day circumstances. While the men may be the ones who determine doctrine, and often have the power to move their families on a moment's notice, the women make the day-to-day decisions about food, living conditions, and child-rearing. In one scene, in which Schmidt blatantly drinks coffee in front of her husband, against his express wishes, these two groups – male-dominated doctrine and female-dominated reality – clash. Schmidt's response to Verlan's bellowing about her not being allowed to drink coffee is, "This is my house, not yours. I arranged for it, I moved myself here, and I'll drink coffee under my own roof if I feel like it."[414] While Schmidt does not attribute her abilities to fend for herself to the female network she had built, Verlan does; he blames her rebellion on her living in Colonia LeBaron where she is closer to her family.

While Schmidt does portray herself as disenchanted with her marriage to Verlan, she does not initially give up on polygamy. Until the very end of her narrative, she shows little desire to leave her community. Instead, when she first plans to leave Verlan, she explores other options within the church, including marriage to another man as a plural wife.[415]

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[414] Ibid., 366.

[415] Ibid., 367-368.

However, Schmidt eventually resolves that it is polygamy that is the root of her problems, after being confronted with the poverty of other women in Colonia LeBaron. In one particularly telling scene, she and her friend Debbie get into a fight about their mutual mistreatment. Schmidt castigates Debbie's (absent) husband for treating Debbie poorly; Debbie lives in squalor, but her husband is courting another woman. Debbie responds to this criticism by noting that Verlan treats Schmidt no better.[416] Schmidt uses this scene not to demonstrate the reality of Debbie's situation, but to show that Schmidt's own circumstances are not unique. Verlan is not the only man who cannot support his families; rather, this is a common characteristic shared by many men in the community. Failure to support one's family is an inherent problem in the patriarchal polygamy preached and practiced by the leaders of the community. Schmidt writes: "I'd been so blind! Why had it taken Debbie's appalling living circumstances to open my eyes wide to what our men were doing! Verlan's wives lived no better!"[417] Through this scene, Schmidt uses her experiences of captivity to give her space to critique the community as a whole, thereby distancing herself from her earlier, optimistic portrayals of polygamous marriage, such as that found between her parents. She shows the breakdown of other polygamous marriages as well, thereby bolstering her argument that her unhappiness in marriage can stand in for the whole; the separation of her parents, who earlier served as a model for happy polygamous marriage, is especially notable.[418]

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[416] Ibid., 387-388.

[417] Ibid., 389.

[418] Ibid., 359-360; 402.

The argument Schmidt has with Debbie allows Schmidt to pull free not only of her husband, but from the Church of the Firstborn. She leaves Mexico and is subsequently excommunicated from the group. In the Epilogue to the text, Schmidt brings the reader up to date on her life. While she continued to face hardship, it is downplayed; rather, she emphasizes the growth and joy she felt in the aftermath of her ordeal. She provides basic information on her children, as well as friends, family, and sister-wives: who still practices polygamy, and who have become "Christian" and lead "normal fulfilling lives."[419]

The Allure of Captivity

Because Schmidt shows the good parts of her experience, she builds trust with the reader, thereby making her narrative more compelling. Her captor is not an evil man with hypnotic powers of persuasion, but a human man to whom Schmidt is deeply drawn. Ambivalence about one's captors or experiences is a common feature to captivity literature. Castiglia notes that "notwithstanding all the pain and suffering captivity brought into their lives, [captive women] also discovered a strength and daring, a sense of adventure, that their prior lives had rarely allowed."[420] Participation in a deviant group allows women to escape from the narrow strictures of identity enforced by Protestant / secular norms.

Schmidt never fully denounces her experiences. In the Epilogue to *Favorite Wife*, she writes, "As for myself, I've come to an understanding with God…. I also thank Him

[419] Ibid., 402.

[420] Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 30.

for the experience I had being in Mexico. It's made me into the happy, grateful person I am today, who recognizes her blessings and who doesn't take them for granted."[421] Schmidt's words echo the ways in which Puritan women spoke of captivity among Native Americans. For example, Hannah Dustan testified that she was "Thankful for my Captivity, twas the Comfortablest time that ever I had; In my Affliction God made His Word Comfortable to me."[422] Captivity is a crucible of the self which leads to personal development.

In some ways, *Favorite Wife* is distinctly different from the other narratives studied in this dissertation; Schmidt's story is less overtly polemical than either *I am Nujood* or *God's Brothel* because the ambivalences of her narrative break through the dominant discourse. As such, her memoir can be read as a corrective to Moore-Emmett's presentation of all polygamous women as inherently oppressed. However, my analysis showed that despite Schmidt's ambivalence, she draws upon tropes of captivity in order to make sense of her encounter with Mormonism. When reading the text with the grain, especially considering the marketing of *Favorite Wife*, the audience experiences Schmidt's narrative not as a corrective to Moore-Emmett, but rather, as an extended case study which supports Moore-Emmett's argument about the evils of religious polygamy. Instead of embracing feminism, as Moore-Emmett does, Schmidt ends her narrative by embracing a more correct version of Christianity. In both cases, the discourse of saving women from dangerous belief systems shapes the accounts of suffering and eventual

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[421] Schmidt, *Favorite Wife*, 401.

[422] H.D. Kilgore, *The Story of Hannah Duston* (Haverhill, MA: Duston-Dustin Family Association, 1984), 13-14. Deroundian-Stodola notes that in this usage, "comfortable" means morally strengthening. Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, 56.

redemption. In highlighting the ambivalences within Schmidt's retelling of her story, I demonstrate the possibilities of hearing alterative stories subsumed within contemporary captivity narratives.

Yet Schmidt's story ultimately offers an indictment of religious polygamy. To return to the quotation that opened this chapter, her final portrayal of membership in the Church of the Firstborn as "madness" powerfully reinforces the message that this particular brand of religious deviance is beyond the pale. Schmidt's message bolsters Moore-Emmett's polemic about the dangers of religious polygamy. In fact, Schmidt's ambivalence makes her narrative more powerful than Moore-Emmett's, which strengthens her voice as a critic of polygamous Mormon communities.

Schmidt's aside about the "normal, fulfilling lives" of those family members who have embraced Christianity points to the limitations of captivity literature in depicting alternative modes of religious belonging. Despite any benefits gleaned from the experience of being a captive, or even ambivalence about one's experience, the possibilities of alternative ways of being religious are still limited within the logic of the genre. My final close reading, of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's memoir *Infidel*, delves more deeply into the tension inherent in captivity literature as authors negotiate their polemical goals and the inconsistencies of everyday life.

CHAPTER 7

THE LIMITS OF LIBERAL INCLUSION: *INFIDEL* BY AYAAN HIRSI ALI

> I also don't want my reasoning to be dismissed as the bizarre ranting of someone who has been somehow damaged by her experiences and who is lashing out. People often imply that I am angry because I was excised, or because my father married me off. They never fail to add that such things are rare in the modern Muslim world. The fact is that hundreds of millions of women around the world live in forced marriages, and six thousand small girls are excised every day. My excision in no way damaged my mental capacities; and I would like to be judged on the validity of my arguments, not as a victim.
>
> - From *Infidel*[423]

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali refugee turned Dutch politician turned researcher at the American Enterprise Institute, is a controversial figure. Her second book, *Infidel*, which is both a memoir and a polemic, caused a firestorm of debate among a cadre of liberal public intellectuals writing for publications such as *Slate* and *The New Yorker*.[424] White feminists have praised her work in raising public awareness around domestic violence

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[423] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 348.

[424] See: Paul Berman, "Who's Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?" *New Republic*. June 4, 2007, http://www.newrepublic.com/node/60961; Ian Buruma, "Against Submission," review of *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *New York Times*, March 4, 2007, Sunday Book Review, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/04/books/review/04buruma.html?_r=1&; Peter Collier, "Backbone, Berman, and Buruma: A Debate that Actually Matters," *World Affairs* (Winter 2008): 48-58; Timothy Garton Ash, "Islam in Europe," review of *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* by Ian Buruma and of *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *New York Review of Books*, Oct 5, 2006, 32-35; Pankaj Mishra, "Islamism: How should Western intellectuals respond to Muslim scholars?" *The New Yorker*, June 7, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/06/07/islamismism; Ron Rosenbaum, "Berman on Buruma on Ayaan Hirsi Ali," *Ron Rosenbaum, Writer*, June 6, 2007, http://ronrosenbaumwriter.wordpress.com/2007/06/06/berman_on_buruma_on_ayaan_hirs/; Ron Rosenbaum, "Bonfire of the Intellectuals: Paul Berman's outraged attack on Ayaan Hhirsi Ali's attackers," *Slate,* March 15, 2010, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_spectator/2010/03/bonfire_of_the_intellectuals.html; Malise Ruthven, "Righteous and Wrong," review of *The Flight of the Intellectuals* by Paul Berman and *Nomad: From Islam to America* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *New York Review of Books*, August 19, 2010, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/aug/19/righteous-wrong/?pagination=false.

and female genital mutilation.[425] Right-wing politicians and pundits embrace her virulently anti-Islamic discourse. Academics and some public opinion leaders castigate her for this same anti-Islamic rhetoric, for her willingness to abrogate civil liberties in order to liberate Muslims from themselves, and for the willful blindness she employs in discussing the political "realities" of the Middle East and East Africa, which are then conflated with the Muslim world writ large. Feminist scholars critique Hirsi Ali's desire to speak for Muslim women while simultaneously ignoring the voices of these same women. She faced death threats, and lived with security provided by the Dutch government for several years. She is undoubtedly intelligent, attractive, and charismatic; she inspires strong feelings in detractors and adherents alike.[426]

A large part of Hirsi Ali's appeal lies in her claims to authority as a "native informant" in writing about Islam; these same claims to authority vested in personal experience also contribute to the frustration some feel with her incendiary rhetoric. Hirsi Ali positions herself as uniquely knowledgeable because of her intimate familiarity of Islam as a former practitioner. The deployment of her voice by outsiders reinforces her self-positioning as an expert of Islam and women; Islamic scholar Meena Sharify-Funk

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[425] For example, Jolande Withuit, a columnist for *Opzij*, an influential Dutch feminist magazine, stated: "Finally, a Muslim woman saying what I have all these years thought." Quoted in Deborah Scroggins, *Wanted Women: Faith, Lies & the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali & Aafia Siddiqui* (New York: Harper, 2012), 191.
While a key component of Hirsi Ali's authority as a female victim of Islam lies in the fact that she was excised – a practice which she erroneously attributes to Islamic teachings – it does not play a major role in the text of *Infidel*, serving as only one example of pain in the midst of a litany of accusations against her family. I therefore elect not to delve into the debates about the meaning of female circumcision for different communities, and the questions about cultural relativism in the face of violence that these debates raise.

[426] Her divisiveness was most recently exemplified in the spring of 2014, when Brandeis University rescinded its offer of an honorary degree. Richard Pérez-Peña and Tanzina Vega, "Brandeis Cancels Plan to Give Honorary Degree to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Critic of Islam," *New York Times*, April 8, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/us/brandeis-cancels-plan-to-give-honorary-degree-to-ayaan-hirsi-ali-a-critic-of-islam.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw.

notes that Hirsi Ali is frequently cited as an (or the) authoritative voice on the reality of women's position in Islam.[427] Hirsi Ali asserts her position as a knowledgeable voice on "true" Islam across her body of work, using her experiences as proof for her arguments. However, she does not use her platform as a native speaker of things Islamic to speak to other Muslims; rather, she self-consciously packages herself as an informant about Islam for Western readers. Though she has declared herself the "Voltaire of Islam,"[428] the voice bringing the Enlightenment to the Muslim world through reason, her audience does not consist of Muslims. As such, she tells "a reality whose truth the western world already knows," reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes rather than engaging with potential Muslim interlocutors who challenge the validity of her claims.[429] Hirsi Ali's authority is not contingent on the truth of her narrative. Her critics have pointed to her misreading of the Qur'an and her universalizing of her own particular experience to apply to all Muslim adherents, but have been dismissed by both Hirsi Ali and her supporters.

Like Andrea Moore-Emmett, Hirsi Ali is primarily a polemicist, clearly staking a claim from the outset that religious adherence to Islam is by definition bad for women. She strategically deploys tropes of captivity in order to support her claims about the evils of Islam. Hirsi Ali's text, however, is also a deeply compelling narrative in which moments of ambivalence about her relationship with Islam and her family appear; in

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[427] Meena Sharify-Funk, "Pervasive Anxiety about Islam: A Critical Reading of Contemporary 'Clash' Literature," *Religions* 4 (2013): 460-461. See also Sarah Bracke, "From 'saving women' to 'saving gays': Rescue narratives and their dis/continuities," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19.2 (2012): 242-244; Sheehi, *Islamophobia*, 95-109.

[428] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 27-34; Mishra, "Islamism."

[429] Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire," 98.

retelling her life story, Hirsi Ali, like Susan Ray Schmidt, shows contradictory moments within her experiences. Unlike Schmidt, however, Hirsi Ali does not embrace these moments of ambivalence as indicative of the potential for multiple truths, but rather actively works to negate the value of these experiences in determining the truth she wishes to convey.

Hirsi Ali simultaneously disavows her Muslim heritage and maintains a link to it in order to establish herself as an authentic native voice. Despite her protestations to the contrary, epitomized by the selection from *Infidel* which opens this chapter, her authenticity is predicated on her experiences as a victim rather than on her arguments.[430] She is a useful interlocutor precisely because of her position as a captive.[431]

Hirsi Ali argues that liberal society is open and accepting of difference – especially when compared to the Muslim world. She, like Moore-Emmett and some other feminist thinkers, touts the free choice of autonomous individuals inherent to liberalism as the solution to the violence of deviant religion; if women embraced free choice, they would not longer participate in deviant groups which abrogate women's best interests. Women can then participate fully in a liberal society. I have pointed to some limits of liberalism in previous chapters, noting especially the ways in which "feminism" can be used to silence dissenting women's voices. My reading of Hirsi Ali sharpens this critique; *Infidel* brings into sharp relief the limits of liberal inclusion, as Hirsi Ali's acceptance

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[430] See also Buruma, "Against Submission"; Iveta Jusová, "Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's *Submission*: Reinforcing the Islam vs. women binary," *Women's Studies International Forum* 31 (2008): 150.

[431] This claim is borne out by the ways reviewers have responded to her text; they frequently emphasize the fact that her position is based on real life experience. See, for example: Berman, "Who's Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?"; Susan Campbell, "A crusader for the rights of Muslim women," review of *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Record* [Bergen County, NJ] April 8, 2007, E03; Peter Ross Range, "Fierce feminist," *Blueprint* 2007.1 (2007): 43-45.

into liberal society is predicated on her disavowal of religious belonging. At the same time, Hirsi Ali's voice can only be heard through her position as a captive victim, demonstrating a more insidious way that liberal inclusion is ultimately limited.

Textual Overview

Published in the United States in 2007[432], *Infidel* was an immediate success, garnering copious reviews and gaining a spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list.[433] She had previously published a collection of essays focusing on women and Islam called *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (2004); her subsequent book, *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* (2010), revisits some of the material from *Infidel*, expanding on several stories about her childhood and her family. In *Nomad*, Hirsi Ali also tells of her adjustment to life in the United States. Both *The Caged Virgin* and *Nomad* are more strongly polemical and less autobiographically focused than *Infidel*. While I focus this chapter specifically on *Infidel*, my reading of her work is colored not only by Hirsi Ali's public persona, but also by her other books, and the internal inconsistencies of her stories from one text to the next.

The text of *Infidel* is divided into two sections. The first, called "My Childhood," covers Hirsi Ali's life until the age of 22, at which point she moves to Europe. This section reads as a fairly straightforward autobiographical account. It opens with

[432] Though the Dutch version of her memoir, titled *Mijn Vrijheid* (*My Freedom*) was released in 2006, it was actually an authorized translation of the American version of the text. I therefore ground my argument in an understanding of Hirsi Ali's writing within an American context.

[433] It appeared on the NYT non-fiction bestseller list sporadically in 2008-2009 for a total of 17 weeks.

background information on her parents and grandmother and recounts the events of her childhood in chronological order. Chapter divisions mark geographical shifts – the family moved frequently due to her father's political activities as an opposition leader to the Siad Barré regime. She includes details about her excision, her difficult home life with her mother and grandmother, her education, and her boyfriends. Hirsi Ali's relationship with Islam acts as a central theme weaving through her narration. She describes her mother's religious adherence, linking it to some of the strife her parents underwent, particularly after the family moved to Nairobi. She describes her own burgeoning fascination and engagement with Islam, due mainly to the influence of one of her teachers. Hirsi Ali's religious adherence causes some internal conflict as she begins to date; she frequently describes the guilt she experiences for feeling desire, though neither the guilt nor any of the supposedly ubiquitous pressure to save family honor stop her from acting on it. An unwanted arranged marriage to a Somali-Canadian man abruptly ends her childhood; her new husband arranges for her to travel to Germany to await a visa to Canada, which ultimately allows her to escape not just Africa, but also her family.[434]

The second half of the book, called "My Freedom," opens with Hirsi Ali's arrival at Frankfurt International Airport. In this section, Hirsi Ali tells of her move to Holland, her acclimation to Dutch society, and her entrance into Dutch politics. Simultaneous to her increased involvement in Dutch life, she cuts herself off from her family, the greater Somali community, and, eventually, her religion. She describes the development of her

[434] The fact of her "forced marriage" is one of the most contested points in Hirsi Ali's narrative. Her husband and her family members deny that she was an unwilling party to the marriage, and assert that, in fact, the marriage was her idea. See Scroggins, *Wanted Women*, 52-55. Hirsi Ali mentions her family's claim at the end of *Infidel*, but immediately denies its validity, noting "Who *would* admit to marrying a girl who didn't want to be married to him?" Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 340.

ideas – particularly her increasing disenchantment with Islam – during this time period, and goes to considerable length to expound on her views on the dangers of Islam to Western civilization.

The text is bookended by an introduction and an epilogue, both of which are framed around the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, with whom Hirsi Ali made the short (and controversial) film *Submission: Part I*.[435] Hirsi Ali uses both the introduction and the epilogue as a platform for clarifying her position on Islam and women; in the introduction she writes "Each abuse is justified by the perpetrators in the name of God, citing the Quran verses now written on the bodies of the women. These women stand for hundreds of thousands of Muslim women around the world."[436]

Monolithic Categories: Islam and the West

Because my way in to Hirsi Ali's story is through her claims that Islam allows for the abuse of women, I open my analysis of *Infidel* with a brief overview of her polemical position, particularly as relates to her portrayal of the relationships between Islam and women. In doing so, I draw on her language in *Infidel*, though the reader should note that this language is consistent across Hirsi Ali's writing and speeches. The brunt of the criticism leveled against Hirsi Ali targets her presentation of Islam.[437] While I agree that

[435] Van Gogh's murder was the catalyzing event that led Hirsi Ali to go into hiding for nearly a year, as van Gogh's killer left a note on the body stating that Hirsi Ali was next. Though she was not close with van Gogh, his death heavily impacted her life, and the two are often linked together in discussions of Muslim intolerance.

[436] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, xi.

[437] See for example: Mustapha Marrouchi, "(Im)possible Narratives: Islams Re/Deconstructed," *Philosophia Africana* 13.1 (Fall 2010): 43-47; Mishra, "Islamism"; David Morgan, review of *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali,

Hirsi Ali's deployment of Islam as an anti-woman monolith is deeply flawed, I also acknowledge that given Hirsi Ali's starting assumptions, her conclusions are rational.

Hirsi Ali takes as her starting point the "fact" that Islam is monolithic; furthermore, this monolithic "Islam" can only be represented as a specific brand of militant Islam epitomized by Saudi Arabia and the Muslim brotherhood. In the Epilogue to *Infidel*, she writes:

> I first encountered the full strength of Islam as a young child in Saudi Arabia. It was very different from the diluted religion of my grandmother, which was mixed with magical practices and pre-Islamic beliefs. Saudi Arabia is the source of Islam and its quintessence. It is the place where the Muslim religion is practiced in its purest form, and it is the origin of much of the fundamentalist vision that has, in my lifetime, spread far beyond its borders. In Saudi Arabia, every breath, every step we took, was infused with concepts of purity or sinning, and with fear. Wishful thinking about the peaceful tolerance of Islam cannot interpret away this reality: hands are still cut off, women still stoned and enslaved, just as the Prophet Muhammad decided centuries ago.[438]

While Hirsi Ali opens this passage by to pointing her own experience – encountering the way Islam was practiced in Saudi Arabia as a child – she quickly universalizes this experience, noting that this was Islam in its "purest form" where "every breath… was infused with concepts of purity or sinning." Hirsi Ali further expands the relevance of her singular experience to all Muslims by noting that her negative encounter was consistent with what "the Prophet Muhammad decided centuries ago," and cannot be aligned with "wishful thinking about the peaceful tolerance of Islam." She draws the reader's attention to punishments commonly associated with Islam by the American public: hands cut off and women stoned. Lila Abu-Lughod calls this construct "IslamLand," pointing not only

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The Times Literary Supplement [London, England], April 6, 2007, 33; Scroggins, *Wanted Women*, 200; Sheehi, *Islamophobia*, 95-109.

[438] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 347.

to the monolithic and imagined nature of Hirsi Ali's version of Islam, but also the subtext that Islam is a place from which one can escape.[439]

Hirsi Ali's view of the reality of a monolithic Islam allows her to state, regarding 9/11, "But it *is* about Islam. This is based in belief. This is Islam."[440] She elaborates on this position by declaring that "Every devout Muslim who aspired to practice genuine Islam – the Muslim brotherhood Islam, the Islam of the Medina Quran schools – even if they didn't actively support the attacks, they must at least have approved of them."[441] In her view, all real – "devout," "genuine" – Muslims can be defined by their support of terrorism against the West.

The West, too, is defined monolithically, though in contrast to Islam, which is all that is bad, the West is all that is good. Hirsi Ali sets Islam and the West into binary opposition with each other, condemning Islam while valorizing the West. She starts hinting at this binary opposition when discussing her education in Saudi Arabia and Nairobi, stating that "We were taught that, as Muslims, we should oppose the West."[442] However, the bulk of her discussion of the Islam / West clash is woven through her description of moving into Dutch society. As she describes her acclimation, Hirsi Ali uses the story as a platform for contrasting Dutch society with a generic but undefined Islamic one. She makes statements such as: "I was beginning to see that the Dutch value system was more consistent, more honest, and gave more people more happiness than the

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[439] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 68-73. She notes, for example, the curious subtitle that Hirsi Ali gives *Nomad*, her third book: "From Islam to America."

[440] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 268.

[441] Ibid., 270.

[442] Ibid., 109.

one with which we had been brought up. Unfortunately, many of these Dutch ideas seemed not to be congruent with Islam."[443] Even a visit to Amsterdam's famous red-light district does not shake Hirsi Ali's firm belief that in Holland, everything is perfect – the red-light district is an extraordinary case, and "ordinary Dutch people were not depraved in this way."[444] Ian Buruma, in reviewing *Infidel*, writes that Hirsi Ali's description of the goodness of Holland "warms the cockles of my Dutch heart, of course, but it offers up the West as a caricature of sweetness and light, which is then contrasted not to specific places, like Somalia, Kenya or Saudi Arabia, but to the whole Muslim world."[445]

Hirsi Ali's presentation of the Muslim world as monolithic and dangerous is not new or unique. Writing in conjunction with the Iranian hostage crisis (1979-1981), Edward Said noted a similar trend among the media and academic representations of Islam. He writes: "The result has been a gross simplification of 'Islam,' so that numerous manipulative aims can be realized, from the stirring up of a new cold war, to the instigation of racial antipathy, to mobilization for a possible invasion, to the continued denigration of Muslims and Arabs."[446] Said argues that this simplified version of Islam does not only exacerbate hostility towards the Muslim world, but also obscures the realities of the day-to-day lives of actual Muslims. Just as Said's work serves as a reminder that Hirsi Ali's portrayal of a monolithic Islam is not new, the recent explosion of academic work on Islamophobia, which is predicated on an understanding of Islam as

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[443] Ibid., 217.

[444] Ibid., 215.

[445] Buruma, "Against Submission."

[446] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How we See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xviii.

monolithically malevolent towards the West, demonstrates the pervasiveness of the stereotype of Islam Hirsi Ali perpetuates.[447]

Hirsi Ali repeatedly cites the treatment of women as a key factor distinguishing Islam from the West. The prostitutes in Amsterdam notwithstanding, Hirsi Ali shows Dutch people treating women well and Muslims treating them badly. After moving to Holland, Hirsi Ali worked for a time as a Somali-Dutch translator; she would be called in to help Dutch social workers communicate with her Somali compatriots. In describing her experiences as a translator, Hirsi Ali's discussion of her work in women's shelters is particularly striking. She accounts for the disproportionally large presence of immigrant women in the Dutch shelters by linking the mistreatment of women directly to Islam and the Qur'an, explaining to the reader: "You must obey your husband if you are a Muslim. If you refuse your husband and he rapes you, that is your fault. Allah says husbands should beat their wives if they misbehave; it's in the Quran."[448] Because "it's in the Qur'an," domestic abuse must therefore be condoned by all practitioners of Islam. She reinforces this notion not only through drawing on examples of specific Muslim women facing violence, but also by deploying a commonsense approach that shows reading Islam as oppressive for women as an instinctive response: "Even as a child, I could never comprehend the downright unfairness of the rules, especially for women. How could a

[447] See for example: Carl W. Ernst, ed., *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Peter Gottshalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Sheehi, *Islamophobia.*

[448] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 244.

just God – a God so just that almost every page of the Quran praises His fairness – desire that women be treated so unfairly?"[449]

Hirsi Ali is not unique in attributing the mistreatment of women by Muslims to their religious affiliation, rather than, for example, geopolitical, economic, or social factors. She draws upon the common trope of the Muslim woman as oppressed, which I discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. This is perhaps the aspect of Hirsi Ali's work for which she has been most heavily critiqued, particularly because of her refusal to hear the voices of Muslim women who disagree with her, or might even find comfort in religious adherence.[450] Because she has established Islam as a monolithic entity, there can be no space for a Muslim tradition that is not irreparably misogynistic. As literary scholar Iveta Jusová notes in her analysis of Hirsi Ali's short film *Submission: Part I*, "While representing herself as a voice for Muslim women's emancipation, she has shown little patience with those Muslim women whose points of view do not coincide with hers, and her attitude towards them has been dismissive and patronizing."[451] This dismissive attitude does not only apply to uneducated Muslim women whom she might meet in domestic violence shelters; it is also extended to feminist Muslim scholars and activists who show a range of possibility of nuanced engagement with Islam while

[449] Ibid., 94.

[450] Hirsi Ali is not alone in this. Joan Scott notes a similar trend among feminists campaigning for a headscarf ban in France. "Since they take the sign to have only one meaning, the critics see no need to ask women why they wear head coverings; moreover, any answer that disputes their interpretation is dismissed as false consciousness. There's a kind of reverse fundamentalism at play here, with secularists insisting on their perception of it as *the* truth of the veil." Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality," 37.

[451] Jusová, "Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's *Submission*." 153. See also: Mishra, "Islamism"; Garton Ash, "Islam in Europe," 34; Marrouchi, "(Im)possible Narratives," 46.

simultaneously fighting for women's rights.[452] Like Moore-Emmett, Hirsi Ali completely silences the voices of the women for whom she purports to speak, all in service of giving voice to these same women. Hirsi Ali argues that their voices can be dismissed because Islam blinds women to reality:

> I wanted Muslim women to become more aware of just how bad, and how unacceptable, their suffering was. I wanted to help them develop the vocabulary of resistance. I was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft, the pioneering feminist thinker who told women they had the same ability to reason as men did and deserved the same rights. Even after she published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, it took more than a century before the suffragettes marched for the vote. I knew that freeing Muslim women from their mental cage would take time, too. I didn't expect immediate waves of organized support among Muslim women. People who are conditioned to meekness, almost to the point where they have no mind of their own, sadly have no ability to organize, or will to express their opinion.[453]

Hirsi Ali declares that she must act as the voice of these women, because "they have no mind of their own." She takes as evidence for this claim the fact that there would be no "waves of organized support among Muslim women" for her recommendations. In doing so, she demonstrates that she views agency as inextricably linked to resistance to both patriarchy and Islam; both agency and resistance are understood in terms of the enlightened atomistic individual.

Through this dismissal of the agency of women who do not actively resist "their suffering," Hirsi Ali reinforces the Islam / West binary distinction, expanding it specifically to women's identity: Muslim women, by definition, cannot be feminists, or even active agents in determining their own life choices. Historian Afsaneh Najmabadi

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[452] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Free Press, 2010), xxiii; Sheehi, *Islamophobia*, 100-101.

[453] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 295.

writes that "thinking of Islam as the antithesis of modernity and secularism… continues to reproduce Islam as exclusive of secularism, democracy, and feminism, as, in fact, a pollutant of these projects."[454] The discursive position which reinforces feminism and Islam as binary opposites, which Hirsi Ali is certainly not alone in embracing, is both problematic and powerful. Westerners draw on this language in order to justify outside intervention into Muslim communities. Simultaneously, conservative Muslims may also appropriate Hirsi Ali's reified versions of both feminism and Islam to support gender inequities. Indeed, much of the power of Hirsi Ali's argument lies in the fact that there are salient and high-profile examples of the mistreatment of women by Muslims, who may, in fact, draw on Islamic teaching for justification; while I acknowledge this fact, the practice of blaming all violence against women perpetuated by Muslims on religion, rather than on the nexus of religious, socio-political, and economic factors is disingenuous. Jusová notes that Western women are never seen as victims solely of their religion; rather, feminists analyze their struggles as resulting from a complex cultural web of patriarchal institutions.[455] The binary opposition of Islam and feminism, as formulated by either liberal Westerners or conservative Muslims, disenfranchises Muslim feminists and undermines their work towards gender justice in Muslim majority

[454] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "(Un)Veiling Feminism," in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 53. See also: Cady and Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide," 4-5; Göle, "Islam in Public," 178-183; Hafez, *An Islam of her Own*, 5-8.

[455] Jusová, "Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's Submission," 153. I would slightly amend this statement, as even Western women who participate in specific deviant religions are portrayed as uniquely oppressed by religion, rather than economic or socio-political factors.

countries.[456] In her analysis of women's activism in Iran that is both Islamic and feminist, Najmabadi notes that both conservative Islamists and secular feminists perceive such activists as threatening, and ask the activists to clearly demarcate their position as either feminist or Islamic. However, it is precisely through the messiness of their current position as both Islamic and feminist that activists create space for working toward gender justice within the Islamic republic.[457] Najambadi's work demonstrates one potential illiberal result of holding Islam and feminism as diametrically opposed.

The Importance of Captivity

Hirsi Ali grounds her argument that feminism and Islam are incompatible in an understanding of religious belief as captivity. She draws repeatedly on the image of Islam as a "mental cage," which women don't leave because they have "internalized [their] imprisonment."[458] She reinforces this language throughout her writing; she refers to the relationship a Muslim has with Allah as a "master-slave relationship" and titled her first book *The Caged Virgin*.[459] Hirsi Ali's overt insistence on captivity as a framework for her experiences undergirds her polemic. If Islam is a mental cage, which provides support for more physical captivities such as forced marriage and veiling, Westerners must

[456] Similarly, Asma Barlas conjectures that in writing as a "believing woman" who draws upon feminist tools to read the Qur'an, she will be doubly disenfranchised by both conservative Muslims and Western feminists. Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 1-30.
[457] Najmabadi, "(Un)Veiling Feminism," 42-44.

[458] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 285. See also 130, 295, 309.

[459] Ibid., 272, 281, 314.

intervene to help free Muslims from the shackles of religious belonging. She closes her book with the following exhortation:

> It is possible to free oneself – to adapt one's faith, to examine it critically, and to think about the degree to which that faith is itself at the root of oppression. I am told that *Submission* is too aggressive a film. Its criticism of Islam is apparently too painful for Muslims to bear. Tell me, how much more painful is it to be these women, trapped in that cage?[460]

Westerners must not only intervene so that Muslims can discover that "faith is itself at the root of oppression," but must not be afraid of criticizing Islam. Equating Islam with captivity allows Hirsi Ali to dismiss her critics out of hand. Westerners don't know, because they haven't lived it and therefore lack her authority; Muslim women are victims of false consciousness, trapped in a mental cage which does not allow them to speak the truth of their experiences.

I differ from other critics of Hirsi Ali's oevre in that I focus my analysis on Hirsi Ali's explicit deployment of the tropes of captivity in *Infidel*. Exploring the ways in which *Infidel* acts as a captivity narrative allows me to highlight the rhetorical flourishes which allow Hirsi Ali to support her polemical position through personal experience. Her use of captivity to describe her childhood emphasizes her status as a victim of Islam.

The tropes of captivity provide order to the narrative arc of *Infidel*. She portrays her life in Africa as captivity, placing it in opposition to the freedom she discovered upon moving to Europe and distancing herself from Africa, from her clan, and from Islam. Her childhood becomes her captivity, her family become her depraved captors from whom she must escape. She uses the language of confinement to describe her life with her family, as well as repeated allusions to the primitive environment in which she grew up.

[460] Ibid., 350.

She writes, for example, that "in a sense, my grandmother was living in the Iron Age," underscoring the distance she feels not just intellectually, but temporally, from her grandmother.[461] The fact that the woman who is largely responsible for raising her is portrayed as not just from another place, but another, very distant, time, underscores from the beginning that Hirsi Ali's childhood was spent in the wilderness.

In additional to drawing on the opposition of wilderness and civilization, Hirsi Ali emphasizes the suffering she underwent as a child. This augments her insistence that her childhood should be understood as captivity. She describes herself as bearing the brunt of her mother's misery, forced to do chores around the house in addition to her schoolwork.[462] Though she does not argue with her mother, she asserts that "I wanted more than anything to be with other children, out of the house."[463] Hirsi Ali marks her home as a place of captivity through her desire and inability to escape.

The portrayal of her family as her captors, however, offers inadequate support for Hirsi Ali's assertion that her case should be read as representative of the Muslim world writ large. She therefore amplifies the power of her message by insisting that adherence to Islam constitutes a captivity of the mind. Drawing on tropes of the captivity narrative in her own story allows Hirsi Ali establish Islam as a mental cage in which young, impressionable girls are imprisoned but from which she managed to escape due to her ability to learn to be an autonomous individual. In what follows, I summarize *Infidel* through the lens of Hirsi Ali's deployment of captivity in describing her adherence to

[461] Ibid., 8.

[462] Ibid., 69-70.

[463] Ibid., 63.

Islam. I draw the reader's attention to Hirsi Ali's use of captivity in order to show the way she organizes her narrative to provide meaning to her life in a way that supports her polemic. There is an excess in her insistence that Islam is a cage. Yet this insistence is central to her understanding of liberal inclusion; if liberalism is predicated on choice and Islam is incompatible with choice, then religious affiliation with Islam marks an individual as suspect within a liberal rubric.

In order to explain her initial adherence to Islam, Hirsi Ali shows religious education as indoctrination. Each time the family moves to a new city, Hirsi Ali is enrolled in a new Qur'an school. She goes to great pains to describe the education she receives in these schools, emphasizing especially rote memorization over the discussion of meaning. In describing her Qur'an school in Saudi Arabia, Hirsi Ali goes as far to say that "Apparently, understanding wasn't the point."[464] At home, Hirsi Ali's mother reinforces the rote lessons the children learn at school by enforcing specific ritual practices in the home.[465] The culmination of Hirsi Ali's religious education occurs in high school under the tutelage of Sister Aziza, who encourages her students to directly engage with their religion. Hirsi Ali is especially struck by Sister Aziza's description of a pair of angels who hover over each person's shoulders:

> On the left and on the right, they recorded our thoughts, intentions, and ideas – bad and good. Even if we did cover ourselves and pray, that was not sufficiently meaningful for God. What counted was the *intention*. If your mind strayed – if you were doing it for the wrong reasons – God and the angels could look into your heart and *know*.[466]

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[464] Ibid., 42.

[465] Ibid., 42.

[466] Ibid., 80.

When Hirsi Ali first introduces the angels, she simply notes that they could watch one's intention by looking into a person's heart; however, she quickly shows the ubiquitous Islam symbolized by these watchful figures to be oppressive. When Hirsi Ali begins to date, despite the pleasure she feels with her first boyfriend, she is tortured by guilt. "But I also knew that it was evil. I was living on several levels in my brain. There was kissing Kennedy; there was clan honor; and there was Sister Aziza and God."[467] She later links this guilt over her actions and emotions explicitly with the angels: "Then he kissed me. And again, it was as if a switch had clicked shut in my mind. I knew the angels were watching me, but I kissed him back."[468]

The angels introduced to Hirsi Ali by Sister Aziza end up symbolizing a cage more constricting than her physical presence in her family's house ever was. By using the symbols of the ever-present angels as a stand-in for her religious belief, Hirsi Ali demonstrates the ways in which she thinks Islam circumscribed not just her actions – for example, the fact that she veiled in order to be properly modest – but also her thoughts and emotions. She continues to mention these watchful angels throughout the rest of her text, particularly after she moves to Europe.

Once Hirsi Ali shows her full embrace of Islam, she then shows the readers the ways in which she slowly extricated herself from it. This shift away is marked by several abrupt ruptures, the first of which occurs when she is still in Nairobi. She attends a protest against Salman Rushdie in the wake of the fatwa against him, in response to his book *The Satanic Verses*, which was seen as blasphemous and mocking by some

[467] Ibid., 83.

[468] Ibid., 96.

Muslims. During her attendance, she feels alienated from the crowd, and declares that this was the last time she attended the debate center.[469] She uses this well-known political moment – frequently discussed in popular media as the prime example of Muslim intolerance – to signal her break from the Muslim Brotherhood.[470] At this point, she still self-identifies as a believing Muslims, but is less involved in one of its more "fringe" permutations. In Hirsi Ali's telling, this moment of severe intolerance shakes her loose of the most constricting mental cage that she had entered.

However, this first crack in her belief is nowhere near adequate to free her from the cage of Islam. Even after separating herself from East Africa, her family, and her unwanted husband, she remains haunted by Islam; she writes, "The book of misdeeds written by the angel on my left shoulder would surely weigh far more than the slim volume of my good works. My father had cursed me, and now I was damned."[471] Even when no longer in a Muslim context, she asserts that she continues to feel constricted in her thoughts in actions by Islam, particularly the watchful angels who see her sins against her family.

In Hirsi Ali's retelling of events, what finally provides the full impetus for her to free herself from her cage is full acclimation into Dutch society, particularly her engagement with various Enlightenment philosophers, while attending university.

> Sometimes I could almost sense a little shutter clicking shut in my brain, so that I could keep reading my textbooks without struggling to align their content with my

[469] Ibid., 119.

[470] This juxtaposition is especially interesting given the frequency with which she is now compared to Rushdie. See, for example, Berman, "Who's Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?" See also Scroggins, *Wanted Women*, 202.

[471] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 211.

> belief in Islam. Sometimes it seemed as if almost every page I read challenged me as a Muslim. Drinking wine and wearing trousers were nothing compared to reading the history of ideas.[472]

She links learning the history of ideas with the sinful acts of drinking alcohol and wearing immodest clothing, but portrays this learning as challenging the deepest core of her religious belief. This is fully consistent with her polemical portrayal of the West and Islam as inimically opposed. She demonstrates her intellectual distancing from Islam, but still finds herself emotionally and personally connected to the religion.[473]

In recounting her own story with the cage of Islam as a guiding metaphor, Hirsi Ali uses the dramatic moment of 9/11 as the final impetus for her movement out of Islam, taking this moment of violence to expand on the extended metaphor of Islam as captivity. She writes that while she found it "spiritually appealing to believe in a Hereafter" and she found her life "enriched by the Quranic injunctions to be compassionate and show charity," she had come to the conclusion that Islam was more negative than positive.[474] She continues, describing the negative components of Islam as she sees them in stark terms:

> I could no longer avoid seeing the totalitarianism, the pure moral framework that is Islam. It regulates every detail of life and subjugates free will. True Islam, as a rigid belief system and an amoral framework, leads to cruelty. The inhuman act of those nineteen hijackers was the logical outcome of this detailed system for regulating human behavior.[475]

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[472] Ibid., 239.

[473] Ibid., 263.

[474] Ibid., 272.

[475] Ibid., 272.

In describing Islam as a moral framework that "regulates every detail of life and subjugates free will," Hirsi Ali reinforces once again the image of Islam as a cage. It is telling that Hirsi Ali links her final movement out of Islam to such a fraught historical moment, and not only for the rhetorical power she draws upon to connect Islam with violent totalitarianism. Even Hirsi Ali, an independent woman who had removed herself intellectually and emotionally from Islam, needed the kick of a large-scale terrorist attack for her to fully escape from the mental cage. By her logic then, it is perfectly consistent for her to call upon the West to forcibly remove other Muslims from their own mental shackles, just as she was forcibly removed from hers.

Symbols of Captivity: The Power of the Veil

Like Minoui, Hirsi Ali uses veiling as an over-determined marker of Muslim women's oppression. Her descent into compliance with Islam under the influence of Sister Aziza and her emergence into the reason of atheist Dutch society are demarcated by her veiling practices.[476] Yet close attention to Hirsi Ali's description of both veiling and unveiling show her ambivalence regarding her encounter with Islamic practice which call into question her rubric of a monolithic and always detrimental version of the religion. As I showed through my reading of Schmidt's memoir, captivity narratives frequently feature ambivalent portrayals of the captor, and Hirsi Ali is no exception. There are moments in which she describes the emotional benefits that she experienced as

[476] Hirsi Ali deploys the veil similarly in *Nomad*, when she describes her younger half-sister as by definition an oppressed Muslim women based solely on the second-hand information that she veils. Hirsi Ali, *Nomad*, 15-17.

a Muslim; these positive moments apply to both internal and external markers of religious belief.

Hirsi Ali describes her entrance into Islam in terms of indoctrination, rather than reasoned choice. However, she also shows her own active participation in becoming religiously engaged. Hirsi Ali describes herself as quite taken by Sister Aziza's admonition embrace religious practice; she determines that she will be a better Muslim. As such, she begins to veil. She writes of the experience:

> It had a thrill to it, a sensuous feeling. It made me feel powerful: underneath this screen lay a previously unsuspected, but potentially lethal, femininity. I was unique: very few people walked about like that in those days in Nairobi. Weirdly, it made me feel like an individual. It sent out a message of superiority: I was the one true Muslim. All those other girls with their little white headscarves were children, hypocrites. I was a star of God. When I spread out my hands I felt like I could fly.[477]

In this powerful description, Hirsi Ali shows some of the allure that a young woman might feel when choosing to veil, especially in a non-Muslim environment, though she is later unsympathetic to the possibility of this viewpoint being shared by other young women, particularly Muslim women in Europe. Her experience with veiling therefore offers a dual message of captivity and power. She may have been brainwashed into veiling due to her upbringing, but within the moment she feels powerful, like an individual, "a star of God." She finds strength in dressing more conservatively than her peers.

Despite the power Hirsi Ali feels as a veiled woman, when Hirsi Ali completely unveils, the moment symbolically underscores her freedom from Islam. She writes that

[477] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 85.

she felt taller "walking about with my hair in the air" for the first time since puberty.[478] This occurs soon after her arrival in the Netherlands, and provides Hirsi Ali with an early impetus for reconsidering her religious beliefs, though she justifies her actions to God by declaring herself still modest.

Despite the weight Hirsi Ali gives this final unveiling, in fact, Hirsi Ali had already strategically modified her veiling practices several times. She unveils not because of lack of belief, but because it makes life easier for her within specific contexts. In Nairobi, she begins to veil less strictly; she still covers her hair, but relaxes the rest of her outfit as she goes through secretarial college. This particular change is shown as more pragmatic than out of a change of faith, as "it was dawning on me that I wouldn't be able to keep wearing it for long if I was planning to work in an office in Nairobi."[479] In Mogadishu, she briefly adopts a more enveloping veil to please a boyfriend. Once they break up, she goes back to the black robe she wore in Nairobi, but quickly abandons it because "nobody in Somalia wears *black*."[480] While exploring Dusseldorf during her first evening in Europe, "after a while I took my coat off; I thought I might stick out less. I still had on a headscarf and a long skirt, but it was the most uncovered I had been in public for many years."[481] Later, at the Dutch asylum center, she slowly unveils at the urging of her Ethiopian roommates. The clincher, however, is her "experiment," wherein she walks around unveiled to see if she brings about sexual fits in any of the men;

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[478] Ibid., 195.

[479] Ibid., 120.

[480] Ibid., 134, emphasis in original.

[481] Ibid., 185.

instead, "I attracted less attention than when I was covering my head."[482] In these scenarios, Hirsi Ali follows an increasingly less strict version of hijab in order to get a job or to better blend in. Notably, with the exception of her time wandering around Dusseldorf, each of these moments of partial unveiling occur while she still finds herself surrounded by other practitioners of Islam. The ease with which she unveils calls into question her rubric of Islam as cage; she easily cast off this most public assertion of her Muslim identity. The multiple ways in which Hirsi Ali engages with a veil, in both donning and removing it, demonstrates the ambivalence that runs through her narrative.

Ambivalence and its Erasure

Unlike Schmidt, however, Hirsi Ali does not embrace her ambivalence, making a statement that she is grateful for her captivity because of what it taught her; rather, she actively undermines the value of these experiences in determining her vision of the truth. As Mineke Bosch notes, "The more we read of the book, the more frequently we hear how something is or works "here," the more difficult it becomes to recall how complex and multi-layered her life in Africa was, and how full of ambivalences and contradictions."[483] In noting Hirsi Ali's ambivalence, I simultaneously focus on her self-policing; Hirsi Ali pushes back against the moments of ambivalence that she shows in order to downplay their importance. These acts of erasure highlight the underlying

[482] Ibid., 195.

[483] Bosch, "Telling stories," 143.
Bosch is not alone in noting Hirsi Ali's ambivalence, particularly the ways in which moments of her life do not match her rhetoric about Islam being the cause of all suffering. See also: Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 108-110; Review of *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Economist* 382.8515 (February 10, 2007): 87-88.

tension of Hirsi Ali's narrative as she works to reconcile her rhetoric with her family history.

Hirsi Ali's description of the Grand Mosque in Mecca exemplifies her portrayal of potentially positive aspects of Islam. She broadly describes the appeal of the mosque, but closes by undermining its value in determining the truth of Islam:

> My mother found comfort in the vastness and beauty of the Grand Mosque, and it seemed to give her hope and a sense of peace. We all liked going there; we even got ice cream afterward. Gradually, the rituals and stories centered on this place began to mean something to me. People were patient with each other in the Grant Mosque, and communal – everyone washing his or her feet in the same fountain, with no shoving or prejudice. We were all Muslims in God's house, and it was beautiful. It had a quality of timelessness. I think this is one reason Muslims believe that Islam means peace: because in a large, cool place full of kindness you do feel peaceful.[484]

In describing the Grand Mosque as a "large, cool place full of kindness," Hirsi Ali puts her finger directly on some of the beauty of Islam. However, even in this passage, she actively works to undercut her own description, by noting that "this is one reason Muslims *believe* that Islam means peace" – implying that Islam is precisely the opposite. She further challenges the idea of a peaceful Islam, despite her direct experience of a positive Muslim environment, by following the above passage directly with a contrasting paragraph describing Saudi Arabia more generally – as hot, dirty, and cruel, placing particular emphasis on strict punishments and a society "fixed in the Middle Ages."[485]

A comparable dynamic obtains in Hirsi Ali's description of her participation in group prayer. For example, she writes about the feeling of being at the mosque during Ramadan, declaring that "there was a feeling of oneness and union, a huge sense of

[484] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 43.

[485] Ibid., 43.

community from everyone involved in a small space doing just one thing, and doing it voluntarily."[486] However, she quickly negates the power of this moment by immediately distancing herself from any oneness or union experienced in the mosque:

> When you pray, you are supposed to feel the force of God and know that you are in His presence. But though I tried hard to open my mind to that force, I never seemed to feel it. To be honest, I prayed because I knew I should, but I never felt very much during prayer, only the discomfort of the grass mat pressing against my feet and the unpleasant odors of some of the bodies around me as the imam droned, monotonously, for hours.[487]

She includes a similar description of her engagement with prayer when describing family prayers at home. When her father returns home after ten years of separation, the subsequent group prayers are "beautiful… everyone felt it." However, Hirsi Ali later declares that when her father led prayers, she went through the motions, but was focused on her chores.[488] Both of these descriptions of prayer point to moments of transcendence available to Muslims precisely through religious practice within a community of faith. Yet by adding the caveat that she did not experience the anything meaningful during prayers, Hirsi Ali strategically locates herself as never-quite inside the community of Muslims who act as the captors in her narrative. Positioning herself in this manner allows Hirsi Ali to have it both ways. She can be both a former "real Muslim," who heard sermons and prayed and participated in the Muslim Brotherhood, and an objective outsider, who always resisted the mind control posited as inherent in the religion. Yet because she was not a really real Muslim who actually "felt" the prayers, Hirsi Ali can separate herself from the community and therefore be included in a liberal polity.

[486] Ibid., 129-130.

[487] Ibid., 130.

[488] Ibid., 164-167.

Hirsi Ali's ambivalence frequently serves to highlight the tension between the "true" public version of Islam, which she denigrates, and the personal Islam of her family life, from which she finds it more difficult to separate herself. Her discussion of her father's religious views encapsulates this tension:

> This was my father's Islam: a mostly nonviolent religion that was his own interpretation of the Prophet's words. It relied on one's own sense of right and wrong, at least to some degree. It was more intelligent than the Islam I had learned from the *ma'alim*, and it was also far more humane….
> My father's Islam was also clearly an *interpretation* of what the Prophet said. As such, it was not legitimate. You may not interpret the will of Allah and the words of the Quran: it says so, right there in the book. There is a read-only lock. It is forbidden to pick and choose: you may only obey. The Prophet said, *"I have left you clear guidance; no one deviates from it after me, except that he should be destroyed."* A fundamentalist would tell my father, "The sentence 'Only the Prophet can call a Holy War' is not in the Quran. You're putting it in there. That is blasphemy."[489]

She argues that because his "more humane" version of Islam is "clearly an interpretation," it cannot be the "true" version of Islam. True Islam does not allow for interpretation, but must rather be a literal reading of the Qur'an. This is a hugely problematic position, not least because in doing so, she refuses to acknowledge that any reading of the Qur'an – even a so-called fundamentalist reading – is an interpretation. Her version of true Islam is narrow, and serves to cede "Islam" to a small cadre of believers who hold the most patriarchal and violent of positions. Despite the fact that she notes cultural differences between Muslims, she ultimately rejects the idea that alternative ways to engage in Islam – such as that espoused by her father – are actually Islamic. Cultural differences only serve to mask an underlying core of "real Islam."

[489] Ibid., 179, emphasis in original.

In her analysis of *Infidel*, Lila Abu-Lughod comments on this tension, phrasing it in terms of a conflict between the particularity of experience and a universal vision of what Islam must be:

> Two visions are at war in *Infidel*. One is a closely observed and keenly felt rendering of the uncertain and contradictory experiences of a particular girl in a particular Somali family with its unique circumstances, tensions, tragedies, vulnerabilities, and precarious struggles to maintain life and dignity in trying times. The second is a compulsive repetition of a formula that overlays these poignant struggles. The formula generalizes about what Islam means and does to people.[490]

Her argument that Islam is monolithic serves as the "formula" which she asserts that her story follows; the ways in which her story can be read to follow the formula are precisely what make her narrative useful. Yet Hirsi Ali's contradictory portrayals of her engagement with Islam show the limits of this formulaic, pure version of Islam in describing Muslim life on the ground.

Negotiating Boundaries: Somali and Western, Apostate and Citizen

As stated above, Hirsi Ali's usefulness as an anti-Muslim interlocutor lies precisely in her claims to authenticity as someone who was once a Muslim. However, the role of native informant is not an easy one to inhabit. Part of Hirsi Ali's challenge lies in simultaneously marking herself as fully Western as well as Somali; she must show herself to be Somali enough to be able to comment on the "reality" of life for Muslim Somali women, but also show herself to be reliably westernized in order to be accepted as a trustworthy interlocutor. In order to claim her place within the West, she not only declares that her previous religious belonging was "captivity" rather than real religious

[490] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 109-110.

adherence. She also explicitly distances herself from the Somali community in terms of her actions and her rhetoric and shows that she held an innately Western spark of individualism.

Hirsi Ali marks herself as separate from the Somali community from the beginning of *Infidel*. She portrays herself as knowledgeable about, but not quite a part of, the people of her homeland.

> If you are a Somali woman you must learn to tell yourself that God is just and all-knowing and will reward you in the Hereafter. Meanwhile, everyone who knows about your patience and endurance will applaud your father and mother on the excellence of your upbringing. Your brothers will be grateful to you for preserving their honor. They will boast to other families about your heroic submission. And perhaps, eventually, your husband's family will appreciate your obedience, and your husband may one day treat you as a fellow human being.[491]

Hirsi Ali describes the "typical" life of a Somali woman, portraying it as completely dependent on obedience to men for any measure of happiness. The content of this prescription is at odds with her self-portrayal from the beginning of her introduction, where she comes across as an opinionated and independent woman; clearly, then, Hirsi Ali cannot still be part of the Somali community. Instead of saying "we Somali women learned" or "my mother learned," she states that "you must learn," thereby not applying this description of the ideal Somali woman to herself.

This dissociation becomes more pronounced once Hirsi Ali moves to Holland. While slowly embracing Dutch society and morals, Hirsi Ali moves away from interacting with fellow Somalis. Comparing two passages describing the plight of Somalis in Holland is instructive of the way she dissociates herself from her fellow countrymen:

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[491] Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 12.

> We were all facing the same confusion. We had always been sure that we, as Muslims and Somalis, were superior to unbelievers, and here we were, not superior at all. In day-to-day life, we didn't know how the cash machines worked or that you had to push a button to order the bus to stop.[492]

This second passage appears two pages later in the text:

> I felt embarrassed and even let down by the way so many Somalis accepted welfare money and then turned on the society that gave it to them. There was still a lot of clan feeling in me; I felt somehow responsible for their actions. I didn't like how they denied misdeeds, even if they were caught red-handed. I didn't like how they boasted, or the myths and transparently false conspiracy theories they propagated. I didn't like the endless gossiping or the constant complaints and they were victims of external factors. Somalis never said "Sorry" or "I made a mistake" or "I don't know": they invented excuses. All these group strategies to avoid confronting reality depressed me. Reality is not easy, but all this make-believe doesn't make it easier.[493]

Hirsi Ali shifts from speaking of "we Somalis and Muslims" to "they" Somalis who act in ways she finds embarrassing or otherwise reprehensible. Even though she states that she still has "a lot of clan feeling," and therefore feels connected to the community through ties of responsibility (which is not mutual, as she does not at all care what they think of her), she disavows this connection by referring to her countrymen in the third rather than the first person.

Hirsi Ali does not only separate herself from her Somali heritage, she portrays herself as always already Westernized. She declares that "something inside me always resisted the moral values behind Sister Aziza's lectures: a small spark of independence."[494] Even at the height of her adherence to Islamic precepts, she cannot

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[492] Ibid., 223.

[493] Ibid., 225.

[494] Ibid., 93.

fully submit because of her intrinsic embrace of Western individualism. She asserts, "Inwardly, I resisted the teachings, and secretly I transgressed them."[495]

She reinforces her innate connection to Western ideas by returning repeatedly to her love of reading, particularly novels, which "were fun, they seemed real, and they spoke to me as the old legends never had."[496] Through these texts, she discovers better ways of thinking: "All these books, even the trashy ones, carried with them ideas – races were equal, women were equal to men – and concepts of freedom, struggle, and adventure that were new to me."[497] She credits these novels with introducing a range of concepts that she comes to hold as central to healthy identity formation: independence, equality, and individualism.

> But the spark of will inside me grew even as I studied and practiced to submit. It was fanned by the free-spirited novels, the absence of my father, and the frustration of watching my mother's helplessness living in a non-Muslim country. Most of all, I think it was the novels that saved me from submission. I was young, but the first tiny, meek beginnings of my rebellion had already clicked into place.[498]

This independent spirit comes in handy as soon as Hirsi Ali reaches Europe. She first arrives in Germany, and despite her inability to speak German and the strangeness of the new place, she is able to navigate her new surroundings fairly well. A cousin who meets her there calls her a "prodigy," contrasting her with other Somali family members who

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[495] Ibid., 94.

[496] Ibid., 64.

[497] Ibid., 69.

[498] Ibid., 94.

are incapable of managing in this new space.[499] In sharing this information, Hirsi Ali strengthens the idea that she truly belongs in the civilized space of Europe, rather than in her homeland; she intuitively understands how to do things like take a taxi, unlike her compatriots. Her description of her hostess, Amina, further highlights Hirsi Ali's difference; Amina is still completely Somali, and feels uncomfortable leaving the house alone, whereas Hirsi Ali understands the subway system after a brief tour. She declares: "It wasn't that difficult."[500]

This dual dynamic of distance from the home community and intuitive affiliation with Western civilization is a common characteristic of contemporary religious captivity narratives. Because contemporary stories frequent feature women who were born into their captivities, rather than being physically kidnapped, like their Puritan predecessors, this strategic distance is important in making it easier to read these women as captives and their friends and family members as captors.

In Hirsi Ali's case, the tension that arises from this self-positioning, in conjunction with the tension that obtains in her ambivalence about her experiences with Islam, illuminates the troubled nature of popular discourse about Islam as a religion. Under a Protestant / secular rubric, religious affiliation is predicated on correct belief and performance of ritual. Such a definition of Islam is apparent in Hirsi Ali's emphasis on things like veiling and prayer as markers of her participation in the community of believers. However, if Islam is only a religion marked by prayer and veiling, there is nothing that marks it as necessarily incompatible with modernity. Hirsi Ali's efforts to

[499] Ibid., 184.

[500] Ibid., 186.

clearly demarcate the boundaries between Muslims and Europeans point to alternative understandings of Islam as linked to neither orthopraxy nor orthodoxy, but rather to ethnicity or familial obligations.

Once in Holland, Hirsi Ali racializes the binary opposition between Islam and the West. In describing her work as a Somali-Dutch translator, she writes:

> When I went to the awful places – the police stations, the prisons, the abortion clinics and penal courts, the unemployment offices and the shelters for battered women – I began to notice how many dark faces looked back at me. It was not something you could avoid noticing, coming straight in from creamy-blond Leiden. I began to wonder why so many immigrants – so many Muslims – were there.[501]

In this description, Hirsi Ali conflates "dark faces," "immigrants," and "Muslims" as equivalent and in opposition to the "creamy blond" Dutch Christians and atheists with whom she attends university. This slippage not only reinforces the idea that all of the problems faced by Muslims must be related to their religion, rather than class or the difficulty of life as a refugee; it also indicates Hirsi Ali's understanding of Islam as something more than a religion in the Protestant / secular sense of the word. Hirsi Ali's linkage of Islam with a non-European cultural and ethnic milieu is apparent in her work to actively demarcate Bosnian refugees as non-Muslim, as they trouble the strict binary division she invokes. She notes that the Dutch workers call them "the Muslims," but is fascinated by their whiteness and their lack of adherence to what she recognizes as Islam.[502] The women wear tiny t-shirts and shorts and don't pray. If Islam and the West *must* be different, how then can she wrap her head around the existence of white,

[501] Ibid., 243.

[502] Ibid., 197.

European Muslims? Her inclusion of a few interactions with the Bosnian Muslims demonstrate both some of the problems with the Islam / West binary and her method of ultimately reinforcing this same binary. In the end, Hirsi Ali concludes that they aren't "real" Muslims because they think of and practice Islam in a completely different manner from the "correct" one; once Hirsi Ali leaves the refugee center, the Bosnian Muslims (and other European Muslims) completely disappear from the text. The other Muslims whom Hirsi Ali describes meeting in the Netherlands are Somali, Turkish, or Moroccan; the white Muslims are not the ones in the "awful places," and are therefore further separated from the stigma of being Muslim at all. In depicting Bosnian Muslims in this way, Hirsi Ali reinforces the idea that Islam is by definition exotic.

Hirsi Ali's definition of Islam as exotic challenges her portrayal of escape from Islam as a result of her increased critical thinking skills. If Islam is ethnically determined, then her apostasy is not just about leaving her faith, but about leaving her family and the Somali community. This is borne out in the text, as she describes her separation from her compatriots as well as her increasingly fraught interactions with her family members.[503] Hirsi Ali's apostasy is no small issue; her prescription for all Muslim women to leave their faith belies the difficulty in completely cutting family and community ties, and is therefore about more than a simplistic rubric of brainwashing by an evil religion.

[503] Such as, for example, her father cursing her when she leaves her husband, discussed above. Ibid., 211. This is even more apparent in *Nomad*, wherein Hirsi Ali describes resuming contact with her parents after years of distance. For example, she includes a lengthy description of reconnecting with her mother, who castigates Hirsi Ali for abandoning both the family and Islam. Hirsi Ali, *Nomad*, 31-35.

The Limits of Liberal Inclusion

In order to protect liberal society, Hirsi Ali argues, Islam must be curtailed. In doing so, Hirsi Ali follows Susan Moller Okin's argument in "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" to its logical extremes.[504] Okin argues that minority groups that limit women's freedom should not be afforded group rights within a liberal society.[505] Both as a politician and as a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Hirsi Ali has called for abrogating the civil liberties of Muslims in order to protect women and protect society. She blatantly supports the political right in Holland and the United States, all in the name of feminism. In her essay, Okin concludes that it might be better for certain minority groups to become extinct as separate entities, rather than to continue to allow them to oppress female members; Hirsi Ali not only supports Okin's conclusions, but uses the authority of her own experiences in order to make such recommendations inevitable.

In order to make this argument, however, Hirsi Ali indelibly marks herself as a captive. She tries to get around this, by implying in her conclusion that her experiences are not of central importance in providing truth to her story. She urges the reader to fall back on the facts that transcend her experience. She claims that her own story is not the only authority; reason, logic, and scientific facts which conveniently reinforce the rightness of her own story are the more profound markers of the truth of her experiences. However, no matter how hard Hirsi Ali works to project Islam onto the other – to eschew

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[504] Jusova and Scroggins note the influence Okin's work has had on Hirsi Ali. Okin's influence is most obvious in Hirsi Ali's discussion of multiculturalism in her essay "What Went Wrong? A Modern Clash of Cultures." Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*, 52-55; Jusová, "Hirsi Ali and Van Gogh's *Submission*, 152-154; Scroggins, *Wanted Women*, 195.

[505] Susan Moller Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women*, ed. Susan Moller Okin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11.

her cultural markers – she cannot erase the fact that she is an African woman who was once a Muslim. Despite her desire to "be judged on the validity of my arguments, not as a victim," Hirsi Ali's voice carries the furthest precisely in the moments when she shares her life story, when she lays claim to the authority of authentic experience. Her argument demands that she was a victim of Islam.

Like Nujood, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is taken as emblematic of the greater population of Muslim women. In telling her story, she stridently insists on the evils of Islam despite the tensions in her own relationship with religion which appear on the edges of her narrative. My analysis of *Favorite Wife*, which hones in on overt moments of ambivalence, helps make apparent Hirsi Ali's more oblique references to ambivalence. Her deployment of captivity allows her to undermine the importance of moments when Islam appears in a positive light; in Hirsi Ali's rubric, to be a Muslim is to be a captive and religion must therefore be complicit in the subjugation of adherents. Her story, like Schmidt's, is meant to be read as yet another example of the dominant narrative. Yet in negotiating the tensions inherent in her position – both African and European, both captive and escapee, both insider and outsider – Hirsi Ali demonstrates the complexity of liberal inclusion, a complexity which directly contradicts her aggressively liberal stance.

This tension in Hirsi Ali's text highlights the broader discursive trends inherent in current liberal claims to inclusion. Religious others – especially those who mistreat women – are excluded; furthermore, their rights can be abrogated in the name of protecting these abject women. In Hirsi Ali's vision, liberal society cannot include public iterations of Islam, which Hirsi Ali presents as intimately imbricated with more private

versions; the only Muslims that a liberal society can accommodate are those who, like Hirsi Ali, are no longer Muslim by praxis or through cultural ties.

The limits Hirsi Ali places on her own experiences are indicative of the way the current liberal framework limits the ways to talk about the experience of women, particularly religious women; her version of a liberal society cannot include a complex and multi-layered vision of life in Africa, particularly for Muslim women. *Infidel* and other texts like it reinforce exclusion of religious others in liberal terms. These alluring texts remind us how right "we" are and how wrong "they" are. These texts help us justify actions against religious others; religious others are excluded precisely because they do not fit a narrow vision of the good, the ethical, or the universal, no matter how inclusive that vision claims to be. Reading Hirsi Ali and others in terms of captivity highlights this charged rhetoric precisely because of the centrality of tropes of captivity in marking religious belonging as antithetical to choice.

CHAPTER 8

AMBIVALENT READINGS: AVOIDING STARK DICHOTOMIES

In criticizing attacks on "Bad Religion" as a monolith, I may have inadvertently created another monolith, the dominant, normative "Bad Liberalism." The norm I have presented consists of both the dominant Protestant middle-class culture and its commitments and practices, and, related to this, a group I have defined as liberal feminists. Though my project primarily focuses on the discourses which create and reinforce the boundaries which demarcate religious Others, thereby marking them as monolithic, the norm is also more complex than my analysis of these texts and this particular contemporary discourse makes it seem. Protestantism and liberal feminism are multifaceted positions, which have more to offer than the idealized accounts of themselves perpetuated by captivity literature.

In this conclusion, I want to complicate facile portrayals of the dominant culture. I do this in order to resist flattening the norm against which the Other is defined. One challenge I face is how, in the context of my efforts to complicate the understanding of what gets constituted as "bad religion" (and why, and how), to avoid setting up its diametrical opposite, an uncomplicated dominant culture. In addition, I revisit the promise of those moments in the texts I have read that signal a more nuanced engagement with so-called deviant religions. The danger of dealing with tainted texts is that in arguing against certain tropes within these narratives and the ways in which they have been deployed towards specific political ends, critical readers lose track of the qualities that draw people to reading them in the first place. I therefore use this conclusion as a

way to insert a note of caution into my reading, to push back against dichotomous black and white portrayals of both the dominant culture and its Others.

I argue for complexity in engaging with this material along several distinct but related avenues. First, after briefly reviewing my arguments from this dissertation, highlighting particularly the imperialist functions which contemporary captivity narratives often serve, I underline how my readings of these pulpy 21st century texts provide space for critiquing the norm in unexpected ways. Specifically, I discuss the ways in which the books replicate the limitations against which they argue and the ironies of this replication. I then turn to a multi-pronged discussion of ambivalence, starting with my own. I do not wish to say that there is no value to be found in such narratives; caricatures of either side are unhelpful. I therefore draw the reader's attention to the manner in which texts may be not only compelling, but politically useful, rather than just terrible polemics (as Saba Mahmood and other scholars have argued). I close the conclusion by returning to the space for ambivalence that can be found within the genre of the captivity narrative itself, offering some thoughts on the rich opportunities these texts offer for exploring intersections of religion, gender, and agency, precisely because of the ambivalence that marks so many of these narratives.

Uncanny Imitations

I read these books critically precisely because of the useful function they serve in legitimizing interventionist policies. I am troubled by the ubiquity and cultural power of contemporary narratives describing the suffering of formerly religious women, particularly regarding the manner in which such texts dismiss dissenting voices. I

therefore frequently find myself attacking these books in order to counter the pervasive praise heaped upon them by opinion leaders such as Nicholas Kristof in popular American culture. I argue so strongly against the arguments put forth by Andrea Moore-Emmett and Ayaan Hirsi Ali because voices like theirs drown out alternative descriptions of women's life within certain religious groups and prevent their dissemination in popular media. In reading these texts carefully, I resist the ways in which they create charged reading experiences in support of the political discourse which calls for intervention to "save the women."

I call attention to these texts as captivity narratives specifically, rather than, for example, conversion narratives or political tracts, though they do share characteristics with both of these genres. The emphasis on captivity allows me to hone in on the rhetorical deployment of religious affiliation as an involuntary phenomenon; this argument, that a woman cannot chose to participate in a patriarchal religion, but must rather be a victim of false consciousness or of brainwashing by religious leaders or of intimidation by her male relatives, is central in supporting outside intervention in order to save these same women (from their religions, their families, and themselves). Readers bring certain expectations to narratives marketed as stories of captivity; these popular texts promise sex and violence, abject female victims, and religious redemption as escape to freedom.

In addition, my use of captivity narratives, which have come to be read as a quintessentially American genre, hints at the imperialist work that such texts do in spreading normative American values, especially in terms of the Protestant version of secularism which shapes the acceptable boundaries of the role of religion in the American

public sphere. Under this value system, in broad rhetorical terms, defining religious Others relies on the tension between coercion and choice. Women are coerced into joining bad religions, which then demand that women act against their best interests by, for example, forcing them into undesirable marriages. In contrast, women choose to participate in good religions; this participation allows them to live "normal" lives (to use the language of both Minoui and Schmidt). The multifaceted ways in which post-religious narrators deploy the trope of captivity in order to support their claims about religious deviance highlights this dynamic. My analysis shows how these books, when read at face value, offer full-throated support of a certain kind of American hegemony.

However, my analysis also shows that careful reading of these texts can hint at fissures within the monolithic portrayal of the dominant culture as both good and rational. These narratives are produced to prove the superiority of autonomous choice as a rational system, but in doing so uncannily replicate a power structure that stifles people's desires and emotions. Specifically, these texts provided limited avenues for women's expression, religious or otherwise. This uncanny imitation is most obvious in the paternalism that authors show towards religious women. Variations on this paternalism and its limitations are especially notable in the work of Delphine Minoui, Andrea Moore-Emmett, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Moore-Emmett imitates the paternalistic machine she argues against by so strictly shaping the voices of her interlocutors; just as she argues that polygamy cuts off women's choices, by framing women's stories in order to fit her very specific criteria of what it means to live a good life, she also cuts off women's choices. I particularly emphasize this dynamic in my discussion of Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*. Hirsi Ali, in addition to dismissing the voices of dissenting women, as Moore-Emmett does, also self-edits her

own experiences, in order to minimize, or even negate, any positive components in her portrayal of her relationship with Islam.

The replication of supposedly deviant modes is not limited to authors' reliance on paternalism; the overt emotional appeals made within these texts similarly mirrors that which the subject / authors purport to overcome in leaving behind deviant religious idioms. These narratives use affect in service of the rational, an ironic tension which subverts the notion of a smooth dominant culture.

Literary scholar Michelle Burnham opens her 1997 monograph, *Captivity and Sentiment*, by noting that emotional responses, especially on the part of readers, are integral to the success of captivity narratives. She writes:

> From the biblical image of the captive Israelites weeping on the banks of a river in Babylon to the sentimental media coverage of Americans held hostage in the Middle East, the representation of captivity has invariably, it seems, been accompanied by tears – and perhaps more by the tears of spectators than by those of the captives themselves.[506]

Indeed, reviews of many of the texts that make up my study highlight the emotional responses felt by readers. Recall, for example, Nicholas Kristof's righteous paternalism in response to Nujood's story; her precocious escape inspired Kristof's indignation and subsequent call for intervention in Yemen. Similarly, Carolyn Jessop wrote that Nujood's story "broke my heart but put it back together again with a renewed hope in the staggering power of the human spirit."[507] In offering advance praise for *God's Brothel*, Frank Silverstein notes his horror and disgust, writing that "I feel like a curious spectator

[506] Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment*, 1.

[507] Carolyn Jessop, advance praise for Ali with Minoui, *I am Nujood.*

to a gruesome accident" when reading the escaped women's stories.[508] In reviewing Ayaan Hirsi Ali's work, Timothy Garton Ash highlights the sexualized response she incites: "In fact, she is irresistible copy for journalists, being a tall, strikingly beautiful, exotic, brave, outspoken woman with a remarkable life story, now living under permanent threat of being slaughtered like van Gogh. It's no disrespect to Ms. Ali to suggest that if she had been short, squat, and squinting, her story and views might not be so closely attended to."[509] Her story is titillating not only because of the details of her history, but also because of her striking persona. After first meeting Hirsi Ali, Theo van Gogh reportedly declared, "She's incredibly hot. I wish I could fuck her. Can a circumcised woman come?"[510]

The deployment of the mistreatment of women as a signal of religious deviance relies on emotional exhortations, as demonstrated by the affective responses of righteousness, disgust, and titillation evoked by these and other contemporary captivity narratives. The repetition of captivity across these narratives, which as Burnham points out, is indelibly linked to emotional responses, is central to the resonance of the genre. My close readings, with particular attention to the tropes of captivity, allow me to highlight the emotionally-laden components which shape the narratives. Though the dominant rhetoric of normative American values emphasizes logical choice which undergirds liberal thought, analysis of these narratives frequently reveals powerful

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[508] Frank Silverstein, advance praise for Moore-Emmett, *God's Brothel.*

[509] Garton Ash, "Islam in Europe," 34. Garton Ash was subsequently criticized for misogyny for precisely this line; while I agree about the misogyny, I also think that Garton Ash points to an important dynamic of Hirsi Ali's work and persona.

[510] Quoted in Scroggins, *Wanted Women*, 230. I find this example completely gross, but also clearly indicative of the superficial arousal her narrative incites.

emotions behind the supposedly rational decision to move away from "deviant" religious affiliation. Furthermore, though authors present their arguments condemning certain religions as logical, they rely heavily on emotional appeals in order to sway readers. Recall, for instance, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's repeated insistence that her claims about the deviance of Islam are based on logical thought, rather than her experiences, though she simultaneously draws on affective moments from her life story in order to engage readers.

Noting the strategic use of emotion in order to support supposedly rational claims is helpful in complicating the portrayal of the dominant culture from which these captivity narratives stem, particularly by calling into question the sharp binary frequently drawn between coercion as deviant and choice as liberal. The political discourse which connects liberalism to rational choice is rooted in the affective turns which these texts tap into so effectively. My readings of contemporary captivity narratives make it clear that logic, rather than opposing affect, is actually rooted in affect; emotion cannot be separated from choice. The autonomous self who acts completely rationally is a myth of liberal discourse. It is therefore ironic that captivity, and the affect inherent in the genre, is deployed to support a liberal rubric in order to disenfranchise religious Others precisely because of their use of non-rational coercion.

Slave Narratives and the Question of Political Efficacy

Though the narratives I analyze may seem quite straightforward as polemics to be written off as inconsequential, they actually offer rich opportunities for engagement with the intersections of religion, gender, and agency. I am sympathetic to the fact that many

women who write such narratives do so as a way of dealing with past trauma, or of critiquing a system that they truly believe to be evil and insidious.

In order to accentuate the positive potentials of the transformative politics of captivity literature, I admit to an omission. In offering the historical framework for reading contemporary captivity narratives, I neglect 19th century slave stories.[511] Like other forms of captivity literature, slave narratives highlight the traumatic suffering of individuals in order to denounce an entire political, economic, and ethical system. While some texts, such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself* (1862), were written by escaped slaves, many others were loosely factual propaganda pieces written by abolitionist outsiders. Like Indian, Catholic, and Mormon captivities, slave narratives were raunchy, exploitative, and extremely popular. Maria Monk's story of life as a captive nun was first outsold by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[512]

Many people who read and produced slave narratives were also involved in the production and dissemination of both anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon narratives; to mention only one prominent abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe had connections to both anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon activists.[513] Nativists and abolitionists frequently drew parallels between the evils of slavery and the evils of false religious belief. Lyman Beecher asserted that "the Catholic system is adverse to liberty."[514] The 1856 platform of

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[511] I thank Rebecca Alpert for pushing me to acknowledge the challenge presented by slave narratives to an easy genealogy of captivity narratives as purely illiberal documents.

[512] Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous text, though not generally studied as a captivity narrative, does draw on many of the same tropes as texts more commonly classified as slave captivities.

[513] Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 111-136; Stowe, preface to *"Tell it All"*.

[514] Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West* (2nd edition) (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1835), 61.

the Republican Party denounced slavery and polygamy as "twin relics of barbarism." In recounting the decision to include a denunciation of polygamy in the nascent party's platform, John A. Wills wrote that although his task was originally to draft only a resolution against slavery in the territories, he felt justified in including polygamy in his condemnation "as polygamy was already odious in the public mind and a growing evil, and as both those social institutions rested precisely on the same constitutional basis."[515]

Given the overlap in activism and rhetoric between anti-Catholic, anti-Mormon, and anti-slavery advocates, it is not surprising that all three groups found sensational narratives of captivity and escape to be useful tools in their respective campaigns. Writers of anti-slavery texts strategically deployed the suffering of individual slaves in order to denounce the practice wholesale and to call for government intervention in abolishing the practice, just as anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon activists told and retold individual stories to stand in for entire populations as they advocated for government action to convert Catholics or limit the political power of the Mormon Church. Though slave narratives are sometimes problematic, for example in their portrayal of helpless African-Americans in need of white liberators, despite the similarities in style, tone, and goals between escaped slave accounts and the stories of escaped nuns and polygamous wives, I cannot bring myself to write off abolitionist narratives as salacious nonsense in the same manner in which Maria Monk is frequently dismissed. Abolition is a good cause, without the

[515] John A. Wills, "The Twin Relics of Barbarism," *Historical Society of Southern California, Los Angeles (1890)*, 1.5 (1890), 41. Wills later notes that some members of the sub-committee which drafted the resolution argued that the famous phrase specifying slavery and polygamy as barbaric should be removed; "it was unnecessary to specify 'polygamy' as it was already virtually included in the term 'slavery.'" Ibid., 41.

undercurrent of bigotry inherent in 19th century anti-Catholicism or 21st century Islamophobia.

I bring up slave narratives and their connection to captivity literature in order to highlight the fact that salacious polemics are not all so easily dismissed; the addition of abolitionists to the mix of anti-Indian, anti-Catholic, and anti-Mormon agitators serves as a sharp reminder that sensational texts can serve important purposes. A glib dismissal of contemporary texts as simply Islamophobic or close-minded does a disservice to the multifaceted politics of the genre. Texts frequently cross politics, as evidenced by the writing of both anti-Catholic abolitionists and anti-Muslim feminists. In this dissertation, I primarily focused on the anti-Muslim component of their writing, but I am simultaneously sympathetic to the arguments inflected by feminist concerns.

The Promise of Ambivalence

My own feelings about these texts provide only one avenue for exploring ambivalence. In reading captivity narratives, I found that the strongest narratives do allow for ambivalent feelings on the part of the captive. There is an allure to deviance. There may be space within deviant communities for acting in ways that are otherwise closed. Even polemical texts offer hints of complex realities. In reading Jean Sasson's *Princess* books, Dohra Ahmad notes that, despite its overemphasis on Islam as the root of all of the subject's problems and its selective omissions about the complicity of the United States in supporting the repressive Saudi regime, the reader can glean a kernel of truth about class differences in Saudi Arabia, and especially the restrictions placed on upper-class

women.[516] As mentioned above, though Hirsi Ali actively negates her positive experiences as a Muslim woman, she does include them, thereby offering readers oblique hints as to the power a woman might feel due to her veiling practices, to cite only one example. Delphine Minoui does include some details which point to the fact that Nujood's father contracted her marriage due not to malicious disregard for his daughter, but because of a combination of abject poverty, lack of education, and fear for Nujood's welfare. Careful reading of even *God's Brothel* can show glimpses of a more nuanced reality for some Mormon women. Though Andrea Moore-Emmett heavily editorializes Janice's story in order to undermine Janice's continued affiliation with Mormonism, Janice's assertion that polygamy is a part of her life despite her suffering signals that there is more to her story than the straightforward account of captivity and escape.

To conclude, with not only all of the texts I read for this project but also the compelling and complicating slave narratives in mind, I return to my initial reading of Susan Ray Schmidt's *Favorite Wife*, and my strong visceral response to Schmidt's narrative. I felt her story in my gut. Since that time, I have repeatedly read and reread *Favorite Wife*. Each time, I have been struck by the multifaceted emotions the text evokes. This is especially true in those instances where Schmidt describes her long struggle to disengage from her family. I am fascinated by her descriptions of poverty and the negotiations necessary to live in a polygamous family. I feel horror and disgust as Schmidt describes the manipulative tendencies of her husband and brother-in-law; my horror compounds as the internecine violence within the Church of the Firstborn increases. Despite the drama and the horror, however, the most powerful moments of

[516] Ahmad, "Not Yet Beyond the Veil," 111-116.

Schmidt's narrative occur through her juxtaposition of violence and affection. My reading of *Favorite Wife*, which highlights such moments of ambivalence that she shares about her experiences, demonstrates that close readings of stories of captivity may unexpectedly show beneficial aspects of life among the captors.

The multiple positions which captives fill in retelling their stories allows for space within the genre that may otherwise be unavailable for subjects / authors to explore feelings of ambivalence. Even though Schmidt's narrative presents the most ambivalent portrayal of the experience of captivity of any of the texts that make up this study, in other venues she has been considerably more vocal in straightforwardly critiquing polygamy as an illegitimate lifestyle. Schmidt has been particularly blunt in conversations with Doris Hanson, another former polygamous wife with an anti-polygamy public-access television show, stating outright that there is no benefit to polygamous marriage and vehemently disagreeing with those who offer alternative viewpoints.[517] Yet her polemical stance during her moments of public advocacy are considerably less compelling than her memoir.

When I first read *Favorite Wife*, I thought Schmidt's glowing descriptions of her husband and co-wives were weird. After all, these people were her captors and competitors. Based on the stories that Schmidt tells, anger or revenge would be justified. She suffered through poverty and an emotionally unfulfilling marriage for years. Yet her ability to show these same people as her support network as well as her captors and, more importantly, her family, marks her defection as a difficult decision. In fact, it is the

[517] "Doris Hanson interviews Susan Ray Schmidt"; "Doris Hanson interviews Susan Ray Schmidt as a proxy for Rena Chynoweth."

shocking juxtaposition of ambivalence within captivity that makes her ultimate defection so powerful.

I return to this point in order to highlight my call for others to carefully read contemporary captivity narratives, rather than simply dismiss them because of the problematic work that they perform. This conclusion hints at the myriad ways in which this genre might enable less dichotomous thinking not just about religious Others, but also about ourselves.

APPENDIX A

THE WOMEN OF *GOD'S BROTHEL*

	Polygamous Marriage	Child Bride	Marriage a love match	Polygamous parents	Involved with Tapestry
Vickie	1		1		1
Rowenna	1				1
Lillian			1	1	1
Stacy			1	1	1
Laura				1	1
Carmen	1				1
Allison	1	1			
Janice	1				
Cora	1	1			
Brenda	1			1	
Connie			1	1	
Cindy	1				1
Silvia	1		1	1	
Sherrie					
Leona		1		1	
Wendy	1				
Tammy	1				1
Sarah				1	1

	Sexual assault of women	Sexual assault of children	Husband withholds sex	Physical abuse of women	Physical abuse of children
Vickie			1		1
Rowenna					
Lillian	1	1			1
Stacy					
Laura	1	1			1
Carmen		1		1	1
Allison	1	1			
Janice	1				
Cora		1	1		1
Brenda		1			1
Connie					1
Cindy		1			1
Silvia		1	1		1
Sherrie		1			1
Leona	1	1			1
Wendy	1		1		
Tammy	1	1	1	1	1
Sarah	1			1	

	Emotional abuse	Poverty	Lack of education	Lack of medical care	Communal resources
Vickie	1				1
Rowenna		1			1
Lillian		1	1		1
Stacy			1		1
Laura		1	1	1	
Carmen		1			
Allison					
Janice		1		1	
Cora	1	1		1	1
Brenda	1			1	
Connie		1	1	1	
Cindy					1
Silvia			1	1	1
Sherrie		1	1		
Leona			1	1	1
Wendy					
Tammy	1				1
Sarah			1	1	1

	Welfare fraud	Tax evasion	Mormon Church complicit	Brainwashing	Always Sassy
Vickie			1	1	
Rowenna				1	
Lillian				1	1
Stacy					1
Laura			1		1
Carmen			1		
Allison	1		1		
Janice					
Cora			1		1
Brenda			1	1	
Connie	1	1		1	
Cindy					1
Silvia					
Sherrie	1		1		
Leona			1	1	
Wendy					1
Tammy	1		1		
Sarah					

	Epigraph
Vickie	Where there is doubt, there is freedom - Latin proverb
Rowenna	SATORI - The Buddhist concept of letting go of illusion and mistaken belief
Lillian	There are no righteous socieites; there are simply different degrees of depravity. - Howard Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle*
Stacy	I dwell in possibility - Emily Dickinson
Laura	I cannot live without my life. - Emily Bronte
Carmen	[A] successful polygamous wife must regard her husband with indifference, and with no other feeling than that of reverence, for love we regard as a false sentiment; a feeling which should have no existence in polygamy. - Zina D. Jacobs Smith Young, 1869
Allison	Never can polygamy cease to be anything but a series of cruel stings. - Eliza Ann Young, 19th wife of Brigham Young, 1887
Janice	Women kiss the chains that bind them. - Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Cora	I suppose I could have walked out of the apartment and away from it all, but I didn't. It simply never occurred to me. - Patty Hearst
Brenda	Fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which every one in himself calleth religion. - Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan," 1651
Connie	Evils which are patiently endured when they seem inevitable become intolerable once the idea of escape from them is suggested. - Alexis de Tocqueville
Cindy	Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. - George Santyana [*sic*]
Silvia	Less power to religion, the greater power to knowledge. - Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, *Testament*, 1942
Sherrie	Heresy makes for progress. - Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, Reformer, 1897
Leona	I dim / I dim / I have no doubt / If someone blew / I would go out. / I did not. / I must be brighter than I thought. - Carol Lynn Pearson, from *Picture Window*
Wendy	[poem written by Wendy]
Tammy	Just ten days ago Hyrum brought home A new wife. My heart is rather heavy. - Ellen Clawson, Letter to Ellen Pratt McCary, 1856
Sarah	Hope is the thing with feathers in my soul / That sings the song without words / And never stops at all. - Emily Dickinson

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