

smart-grrl-summer-religion-pop-culture

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SPEAKERS

Maz Jobrani, Detox, Megan Goodwin, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping It 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast.



Megan Goodwin 00:22

What's up nerds?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:24

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst a scholar of religion history and Islam, raiser of killjoys, razer of patriarchy, and raiser of goblets of rosé because it's summer.



Megan Goodwin 00:37

Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of gender, sex, sexuality and American religions, public scholarship maven, I'm a fan of a bubbly drink or two: it's smart grrl summer.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:50

We're riffing on the feminist woman-led bands and punk movements of the 70s, 80s, and 90s. We were thinking Bikini Kill heralds of the Riot Grrls of course, but instead where

scholarship and podcasting is a place of resistance and sustenance and politics and community. And good news, nerds, today is no different. We have a final riotous treat of the summer for you! Today's installment? What might popular culture tell us about religion? And how does popular culture influence religion?



Megan Goodwin 01:21

Ooh, tasty. Excited. slather on the sunblock. It's time for the lesson plan.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:35

Slather such a gross word. But today we're talking pop culture not just because it's fun--like we did in the extracurricular RuPaul episode back in season one--but because the so-called lowbrow, popular and consumable media influences religion, has religion in it, and helps us think about religion IRL (that's in real life) and good news nerds. This corner of culture is Megan's forte.



Megan Goodwin 02:02

In the immortal words of that eminent thinker, Oscar the Grouch. I love it because it's trash. It's funny because it's true. What we're doing today is talking about why we care about pop culture and spoilers! This will shock you: but we care a lot. Sometimes pop culture is a barometer for how a community feels, thinks, or acts. Sometimes pop culture moves how communities think, feel, and act and always always about culture reflects the values of the communities it comes from. The media art literature, noise we make and consume tells us a heck of a lot, and makes it remakes a lot of the world we live.



Megan Goodwin 02:39

And popular culture--again, spoilers--is never a political nor is it innocuous. So our thesis today, what we're trying to walk you through in between applications of sunblock--I'm so pale, anyway--is that if we care about religion, we care about how religion is portrayed popularly. What kind of art, what kind of trash do people make when they're trying to think through what religion is and what it does?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:05

Keeping it 101 on today, the segment where we do some Professor work.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:11

Okay, so to get it popular culture and its myriad tangible effects, we're going to look at a specific case study: the book and later film *_Not Without My Daughter_* [NWMD] by Betty Mahmoody. But before we get there, I want to set up some basics. And the reason we're jumping right in folks is because this is really Megan's forte. So if we don't have a tight leash on things, this could be a seven hour episode.



Megan Goodwin 03:37

Challenge accepted.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:39

Okay, so before we get to this really rad case study that is going to--I'm already, like, I have like pre-hives just thinking about it. Megan, how would you define today's keyword popular culture, and then secondarily, I kinda want to know how popular culture is related to like "regular culture?"



Megan Goodwin 04:01

Oh, I know this one.



Detox 04:02

It's our secret word of the day.



Megan Goodwin 04:05

Pop Culture--popular culture--refers to what regular folks might enjoy, as opposed to like snobby professor types. Although you already know this about us, dear nerds, some of us professors also enjoy this nonsense. So opera is high culture in this model, but like TV or certain shows on TV--like reality television, for example, like drag shows, for example--is not high culture. And DUH, as you can probably guess I care about this division specifically because it tells us something about who gets to decide what counts as culture and what is dismissible as pop.



Megan Goodwin 04:40

For real. Do you think opera is defined as culture by, say, lots of poor, queer black women?

Hard no. Wealthy, white, cis, hetero American and European folks called that shit culture and then they did a ton of work to keep it from non-white, non-wealthy, non-hetero non-Americans & Europeans. And then told everybody else they were stupid and uncultured for now liking or understanding opera. And opera is just one obvious example. Pause for confession, I am classically trained first soprano back in the day so this example is close to my heart. Opera is a popular example of what rich, educated, white folks might like. To even get into it you might need a education in Italian. (My Italian sucks.)



Megan Goodwin 05:21

So for me, pop culture is a framework that helps us get into how communities make write, sing, perform paint about their world, and how those worlds are remade by those writings of songs, those performances, those paintings. Do people consume it? Do they take it in? Does it have influence on how we think and feel and perceive the world? Then it's culture and it's worth studying! Pop culture helps me think about things that others--be they fellow scholars or educated elites or just snobs--might dismiss in some way. Like "oh, that's not a real thing to study," or "this is just guilty pleasure," or, memorably, as some troll said on Live Journal during my first year in grad school, that it was "gutter scholarship." True story.



Megan Goodwin 06:04

So please don't miss the race and gender notes here friends. Literally my work starts with "stuff your mom's book club reads," and why we think we can just blow that stuff off--as though it doesn't help shape the way that people think and move in the world. Calling something pop culture is a way to devalue and dismiss it. I'm trying to show how much the stuff we're taught to dismiss matters. And spoilers again, it is a serious lot.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:28

Yeah, and I have to say making that's actually one of the things I've I've really learned from you in our in our long marriage of sharing ideas.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:38

And and that's it I can't underestimate how much TV and books and in the example below this this category of pulp nonfiction has not just, like, rewired my own brain and experience of the world, but rewired American brains, politics, and policy.



Megan Goodwin 06:56

Oh yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:56

And since I'm going to make you talk about the genre of writing, because, dear nerds, Megan has a book about this coming out just a few days before this podcast will drop. So this case study is ripped from her book. And I think she is the expert, literally, to help us walk through this kind of scholarship. And since I'm going to make you talk about it, I want you to first define some of the things we're working on. So that was pop culture. Can you remind me since *_Not Without My Daughter_* fits into this category of pulp nonfiction, can you can't tell everybody what "pulp" is? Since when I hear that phrase, I'm decidedly thinking royale with cheese.



Megan Goodwin 07:40

Fair enough. Fair enough. And hey, thanks girl, it's nice--it's nice to hear that, yeah. I like help you think about things. I cherish you. Okay, so I have studied pulp nonfiction, and that is a phrase that I'm borrowing [from Dohra Ahmad] who's in Iranian Studies scholar. She works on Iran and Islam in gender and does a lot of work on these kinds of books as they pertain to Iranian ladies. So I've been studying this kind of pulp nonfiction for the better part of the last decade now, as a way to think about white supremacy and gender and sex abuse. We're going to talk about more of that later. Pulp--



Detox 08:14

it's our secret word of the day



Megan Goodwin 08:17

--which can be fiction (royale with cheese) or nonfiction is usually work that folks consider sort of tasteless, garish, over the top poor quality, sensationalist--basically catering to our baser instincts and guilty pleasures, if you will. So unlike other forms of popular media, like film or TV, it's super extra easy to dismiss this kind of media because it has a reputation of being over the top garbage trash. And honestly, it's not **not** over the top and in many cases, racist garbage. It's just that the over the top, often racist garbage is sometimes the only thing people read, say, about American minority religions.



Megan Goodwin 08:58

That's a word that's in the title of my book which is called *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals and American Minority Religions*. And I just want to offer a definition of that as well because I got started in religious studies looking at new religious movements. But I quickly became aware that the way we marginalize, quote-unquote new religions looks an awful lot like the way we marginalize other non-white, non-Christian, non-Protestant-looking-until-the-1980s religions so the way that we make fun of, dismiss code is dangerous, religions like...say Church of Scientology has a lot in common with the way that we marginalize and code as dangerous religions like Islam, for example.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:49

Mmhmm. I was nodding out loud. I didn't mean to interrupt.



Megan Goodwin 09:53

Nod out loud, given that it is an audio medium, and Vicki tells me that I have to listen to things more closely.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:58

That's true. Now that I know what Pope is or have a refresher, let me set up our primary case study today the pulp nonfiction classic, [groan] which like grosses me out so much that this is a classic--



Megan Goodwin 10:12

I hate it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:13

The pulp nonfiction classic not without my daughter and I am--specifically this is addressed to you, Megan, not even you nerds. I'm specifically not letting you set it up because, like, you dive in as if we have all done a decade's worth of work on this book and on the movie, and have like written multiple things about it. So I'm going to take us through the basics and if I eff it up, you just you just interject and tell me. Okay?



Megan Goodwin 10:40

Okay. Yes, fine. Yes. Good. Thank you for being what feels like a lifelong reader and checker of my work and also thank you, thank you for not letting me rage vomit case studies on our pod.



10:52

Always. Always. Ok! So! *_Not Without My Daughter_* is an autobiographical book by Betty Mahmoody, with uh, with, with William Hoffer, about her escape and I'm not sure if I want to say alleged escape or escape?



Megan Goodwin 11:08

Well, like she got out. Sure, like we'll grant her that? Yes, she left Iran under contentious circumstances



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:14

Fair. Okay from Iran, her abusive husband and and like with her daughter in 1986



Megan Goodwin 11:21

Yes, she did not leave without her daughter that's the title of the book.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:25

The book comes out a year later in 1987. And then four years after that in 1991 it's made into a movie starring famously, I think Sally Field. Both the book and the movie were enormous hits, even though the movie took some critical bashing. They were economic and there was some critical success, especially for the book which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Yeah, okay. And so the outline of the story is, dear nerds, if you don't know it, is something like this: Betty lives with her husband who's a doctor. In the US named Syed Bozorg Mahmoody, whose nickname is Moody, and they have a daughter. Moody experiences racism in the first part of this book, because they're living in the US and he's Iranian. And remember, of course, that the early and mid 80s were right around the time of the 1979 revolution in Iran and the hostage crisis of 79 and 80.



Megan Goodwin 12:24

Pause, you have to tell the listeners because lots of them don't know that, because lots of them are Americans who are younger than us. So after the 1979 revolution, slash if you haven't seen *Argo*, a number of Americans who had been working at the embassy were held hostage by Iran, because the US had played a key role in overturning a democratically elected leader of Iran and reinstating the Shah, who propped up British and US oil interests. Basically, we--we fuck the government all up and Iranians will roam out about it and they took some hostages about it and it was on the news every night for over a year.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:59

Yeah, and not just like We didn't just like prop up their scary colonial economic systems, we also enabled and in fact taught the Shah's army, the CIA tactics of torture. So like it, this is not a small deal. And I'm sorry, dear nerds that I did not go into a full thing about it. We can recommend more books and articles about the revolution and the hostage crisis, if you want but right now I'm sticking with the story.



Megan Goodwin 13:23

Stick with the story. But like I also have to name that out loud because I gotta be honest, until I started looking at this book. I didn't know that much about the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Like I knew it happened. Kind of? the end. Americans don't know their history.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:36

I know.



Megan Goodwin 13:36

Exactly. Moving on. And we read these shitty books that teach us the--Anyway, we'll get there.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:42

Okay, I'm sorry.



Megan Goodwin 13:44
It's OK.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:46

Sometimes my Islamic studies where I have to know the whole globe and most of its history gets in the way of understanding what Americans do and do not actually know.



Megan Goodwin 13:54

We don't know so much and we don't even know how much we don't know.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:56

Yeah, okay. Okay, back to Not Without My Daughter. So So there, he's experiencing racism in the US because there's a huge groundswell of anti-Iranian and anti-Muslim sentiment after the 1979 Revolution and hostage crisis. And then the our sympathy in the book shift. So at the beginning of the book, we're like, oh, man, that really sucks. We feel for this guy. They go on what Betty thinks is going to be a vacation to Iran, and immediately everything changes. The second they get there, more or less, Moody, her husband shows his true colors. And those are the he's an abusive, fanatical monster of a man. He bars them from leaving Iran, taking her passport, leaving her without money and transportation in this atmosphere--and there's like all sorts of scary violence in the middle of this too, like, like truly like physical and sexual abuse. Fearing for her daughter's life in her own Betty Mahmoody escapes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:55

I want to say before we get into the rest of it that um Moody, her husband, refuted this story. And so it's a little bit more complicated than what--than what Not Without My Daughter lays out, but in any case, we care about this pulp nonfiction, because well, everything that happens in this story is like a foul, horrific racist depiction if you're of Iranians specifically, and Muslims and Islam, broadly, and everyone's mom's book club, read this book. Megan--



Megan Goodwin 15:27

--they're still reading it. They're still reading it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:29

Oh, boys.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:30

How'd I do? What I miss?



Megan Goodwin 15:31

So good! No, okay. Okay. Okay.



Megan Goodwin 15:34

Without diving into a how easy it is to get nominated for a Pulitzer and all that shit I want--I think the one thing that I want to add is how all of this media builds on itself. Because it's not just that this book comes out right? It's that it becomes a movie. It's building on all of this news coverage. Again, there is--this is a time where there are like three channels and all of them every night are covering the Iranian hostage crisis for over a year. Plus the translation of the book, which confirms many racist Americans absolute worst imaginations of Muslims and Muslim men specifically gets compounded by the fact that Sally Field gets cast in the film.



Megan Goodwin 16:18

Because before Sally Field was like Forrest Gump mom or I think she's in The Help, right? You--if you did not live through the 80s, I don't know that you have a full grasp about how beloved Sally Field was. So she's not any white lady. She's every white lady. She's Gidget. She's the Flying Nun. She is literally America's sweetheart at this point. So to watch her get the shit kicked out of her by this violent Muslim man who is violent, not just in his own marriage, but it's like indicative of how Muslim men really are, even though they try to trick us and make us think that they're just like us. That picturing of Sally Field as every white American lady, and how endangered she is by Muslim men becomes this moment of trying to convince all white American ladies that they are in danger of being abused by Islam and Muslim men. And how dangerous Islam is to America. It's--it's a, it's a big thing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:20

Yeah. So what I hear you saying around, like, how both this particular book and movie's

reception work, but maybe pop culture more broadly, especially when it's like a multimedia pop culture is that these things become mutually reinforcing. And they become juggernauts in their own right. Right like, like the news feeds into why the book was popular. The book gets sold as movie rights, a beloved actress plays the main character. So the book is rereleased with a picture of the movie on the cover. So the book sells more, so there's more interest in the movie. So the movie gets sold on budding and new cable networks at night like HBO--right, like, so all of those things



Megan Goodwin 18:06

The movie gets released that we go into Iraq, right?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:10

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. So like, there's so many things that keep compounding and compounding so it's not just like this book came out in 1987. And then after that, it's like you like hand down a copy from your mom to someone else. It's like on many many reprints with many, many different covers that that virtue signal what's going on in the country at the time?



Megan Goodwin 18:32

Yup. yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:40

Now that we've set that up a little bit, can you, Goodwin, tell me and our nerdy listeners why we should care about this old ass book and it's, like, Razzie-nominated film companion.



Megan Goodwin 18:53

Oh, there are so many reasons that you have to care about this terrible book. I care about it. Now you're going to care about it, and let me tell you why. Okay, we're gonna give you links in the show notes. So I'm going to, I'm really going to try to broad strokes this, but major reasons I want our nerdy listeners to care a lot about the stupid book and it's stupid movie are as follows.



Megan Goodwin 19:14

So one, this book isn't happening in a vacuum, right? America loves to tell itself stories about what happens if we don't protect white women in the right way and the kind of danger that they're immediately in. So this isn't just a story about Islam and Muslim men as a specific threat to white ladies in America. It's a broader way of telling ourselves stories about why we have to be really scared of people who are different from us, and particularly be really scared of religions and religious people who are different from us. And then when we get to Not Without My Daughter specifically, it's a really compelling story about like, one woman's experience of surviving domestic violence against all the odds. And it draws us in as feminists, as freedom-loving Americans--that that that shit is really consumable, right, like, there's a reason that people love stories like this so much. It reaffirms this narrative of like resistance in the face of tyranny. But that's that's the surface--right?--lurking beneath this book and like not very far beneath this book in this movie are some violent, scary, long lasting American biases against Muslims in Islam. Betty Mahmoody portrayed her husband and his family all Iranians and basically all Muslims as dirty, dangerous, animalistic, violent and especially abusive of quote "their" unquote women. Mahmoody literally says her husband is abusive and violent because he's Muslim, because he's Iranian. So all Muslims and Iranians are --must be-- fundamentally unAmerican and violent, especially toward women. That really matters.



Megan Goodwin 20:52

It also matters because like this pulp nonfiction is still in print. It's cheap. Its cover has been updated to highlight our current image of "Scary Muslims." So like it of course has a woman in like full niqab. It's popular, it's everywhere, and for a lot of folks it is the only thing--I can't stress this enough--it is the only thing they will ever read about Islam or about Iran. Like this is what your mom knows about Islam for real sorry about it, but it's not your mom, Ilyse, because she knows you. But like everybody else's Mom, this is what this is all my mom knows about Islam.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:30

Groans.



Megan Goodwin 21:30

Yeah, I hate it. I hate it. Okay. Hmm. So like, one of the side points in the book in the movie is that before Moody steals Betty away to Iran under false pretenses, he acts like a regular secular Iran-hating American, but then he isn't. He like--she uses the language of

reversion and like backsliding a lot. So the message of this book is like, even supposedly good Muslims, even supposedly good Iranians, even supposedly good immigrants can't really be trusted, because their true natures will eventually betray them. And more importantly will be trade attack violate white American women, comma America.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:14

Blech. That's so gross.



Megan Goodwin 22:18

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:18

I hate it so much



Megan Goodwin 22:19

You should you should hate it. It's disgusting. I hate it. Let's all hate it together. Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 22:26

So there are many reasons I want you to care about this book and its movie. Like how Oprah's OWN network plays it all the time still in the year 2020. How it shows up as a feminist book on actual bookshelves. It's actually in an encyclopedia of feminist literature. How people have used it as evidence in actual courts to prove Muslims and Iranian men are inherently violent and should not be trusted with their own children. But I know you're waiting for me to tell the story about Betty Mahmoody and how she became a little politician. As an advisor, I am not shitting you to the United States government.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:05

It's true. I really I know. I know dear nerds, I write these scripts and I am I'm like literally waiting on bated breath for Megan to tell the part of the story that I've already myself written. Because is like, I--hold on to your butts! It's Bananas.



Megan Goodwin 23:22

Grasp your butts firmly!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:23

Okay, keep going. Seriously keep going.



Megan Goodwin 23:25

Okay, guys, look, I think this is the part where you were reading my draft and you're like, Wait, what? Wait, what? What? Like there's no way--like it broke you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:31

You broke my brain.



Megan Goodwin 23:34

Okay, okay, so this trash book this garbage fire book, li--and the movie obviously because we can't just count Sally Field Gidget flying Nun. The story--



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:45

Norma Ray?



Megan Goodwin 23:46

Yeah. Oh, God. Yeah, yeah. Woof. So American. This story--this garbage fire of a story--literally helped shape US federal law and policy. In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act which makes the international abduction of a child by a parent a federal felony offense. I am not exaggerating when I say that Mahmoody and Not Without My Daughter made this law happen. She was the only person to be named in the Senate hearings for the House Resolution, that's 3378 for you law nerds, the bill which eventually became the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act. Senators mentioned the book in deliberations. And if that's not enough, later, the whole ass US State Department appointed Mahmoody as an advisor, quote, "on the plight of American women and children held against their will in foreign countries" end quote.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:40

Okay, okay, okay,



Megan Goodwin 24:42

this garbage garbage matters.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:45

I know this because I've read your article which which about this and now and you're now-out book like, countless times, but I need to say this because--because like, quite honestly, nerds and this is not just like, I'm not play acting here. Every fucking time I revisit your work on this, I am floored that this pulp nonfiction, this auto biographical memoir, literally reshaped policy in the US. And like, at the same time like Not Without My Daughter with contested, there are challenges to the veracity of this book and her story. And even Roger Ebert In his review of the movie for realsies was like, "uh guys, this is this is real racist."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:34

So, in its moment, this was not wholesale by every reader everywhere accepted as immutable truth. And yet, this book's and the movie's pulp popularity, made it possible for Mahmoody it like frankly a random lady and survivor, it made her a lawmaker and advisor to the US State Department. Her book is the literal basis of international policy.



Megan Goodwin 26:04

Yeah. Is this a good time to tell you that memoirs aren't fact checked?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:08

So, I mean, I knew that but yes, that's a good time to tell our audience. Yeah,



Megan Goodwin 26:12

they're not--



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:12

It might explain the theme coming out of my headphones,



Megan Goodwin 26:15

not fact checked, absolutely contested. Scholars, policy--like no one who consumed this media with a critical eye thought it was a gospel. (Joke? Question mark.) Like, if--this was this was never like something that just got released. And everybody went, Oh, yeah, yeah. Okay. It was always contested. And yet, as you point out, Ilyse, President William Jefferson Clinton helped turn her book into international law. It is correct. Do you need a minute?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:55

And so fast to like your listeners. I want you to hear the timeline. She gets out of Iran in 86. The book comes out in 87. The film is released in 91. The law is 93. So like this is a phenomena.



Megan Goodwin 27:13

Yep.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:13

Yeah, it's I'm broken--



Megan Goodwin 27:14

Yes! It's a juggernaat.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:15

It's not--I wanna I know this stuff and I want to like, I'm sweating. I'm sweating with rage.



Megan Goodwin 27:21

Yeah, you should be you should be rage-sweaty. Do you need a minute you're having a very violent reaction to facts.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:27

I mean, that's kind of our blunt brand is like violent reaction to facts. But I do need a minute. So can you bring us back while I like, you know, get a handkerchief or something.



Megan Goodwin 27:36

Shake it off, girl, shake it off.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:38

OK, I am stuck on trashy pulp nonfiction author makes more of a difference than I ever will in the world, while she's also in an adjacent field to my own expertise, like I'm stuck in that. so can you help me bring it back to the thesis though, that was in theory my job? How does Not Without My Daughter help us see pop culture and religion as intertwined or working on each other or doing work in the world.



Megan Goodwin 28:02

I am so glad that you asked me that because I think it's really important. Super big story is that man, you can never discount the political power of a good story. Omid It actually our previous guest star talks about this all the time: where good stories changed the world. This this pulp garbage trash fire of a story: It has legs. And I want to pause and acknowledge that this story is important to a lot of people, and particularly a lot of survivors of domestic and sexual assault. Because she survived: she gets out right and too many people do not survive domestic assault or domestic violence, too many people do not survive sexual assault. So her story matters as an example of violence, of intimate partner violence being survivable. And I get that. That's one of the things that's complicated here, and about all my case studies honestly.



Megan Goodwin 29:06

At the same time, though, it is unfortunate but also true that her inspiring story of surviving domestic violence is also racist as fuck. It gets accepted into a cultural mainstream--white American culture--in part because it reflects what Americans already assumed about Iran and Muslims and especially Muslim men in 1987. Muslim men according to this story, and stories like it were irredeemably violent, utterly backward and barbaric. Because they beat women, that's how you know right? And fundamentally unable to be otherwise even when Moody is good at the beginning of the book, we later learned that it was all an act or like maybe he had even convinced himself but she, Betty,

clearly knew, knew or should have known better because this is what Muslim men are. So that's her story right? But like, also this book and this movie tell a story that America already believes. It bolsters racialization of Iranian Muslims. It becomes the catalyst for laws and also civil suits against Muslim men, particularly around custody.



30:24

Betty Mahmoody becomes an honored spokesperson for domestic violence. Her story of escape contributes to the idea that all women and especially potentially including Muslim women, need saving from Muslim men. And we need to shout out obviously Abu Lughod's very famous article and then Book Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Stories like the one Betty mahabodhi told him helped justify sustained aggression toward Muslims, American or otherwise by portraying Islam as inherently foreign and essentially violent towards women.



Megan Goodwin 30:58

Not Without My Daughter is both a popular reflection of American norms and it further solidifies and even codifies those norms. So here pop culture is influence on our ideas about religion, specifically Islam here, and religious people, Muslims and good white Christian women alike--it's it's so obvious once you go looking for it, but if you dismiss pop culture as unimportant, then you don't have to ask if it's also contributing to like racialization of Muslims, white supremacy, militarization, imperialism and military incursion against say Muslim majority countries.



Megan Goodwin 31:37

Like fucking Oprah man, Oprah, who is in a lot of ways the voice of American women supported this work at the height of her Oprah-ness. Her network is still airing this garbage movie on the reg! And I think Not Without My Daughter really helps us think harder about how whiteness works. Why was this book so popular? Why was it so readily accepted? Why didn't even frickin Oprah who is famously--very famously--not a white lady, fall victim to this troubling story of a woman who was lured or tricked into an abusive relationship?



Megan Goodwin 32:16

So I've argued that Not Without My Daughter does all of this work precisely because Betty Mahmoody is portrays herself and then as portrayed by Sally Field as an unwitting,

trusting, loving white woman, a symbol of purity and a white supremacist system. We're used to these stories, they're not new, they always always do damage. And white women have a long, long history of deploying this very narrative for their own benefit, as we recently saw, say, in a video about a white lady who couldn't just let a Black man look at some damn birds in Central Park.



Megan Goodwin 32:54

The story of white women under attack also being the story of America and Americanness being attacked is a really really old one. It is arguably just about as old as American cinema itself. This is all very Birth of the Nation. Pause to shout out Judith Weisenfeld and her thinking on that horrible, tenacious film. So, so yeah. Now Without My Daughter is a late 80s, early 90s phenomenon that draws on notions of white women being victims and captives of hostile, militaristic, nationalized, masculinized, religious fanaticism, and specifically Islam as like Islamic religious fanaticism. We need to think about these popular stories, because they're popular, because they're influential, because they're accepted. It's just common sense. And they do real violence in the world beyond just helping us see how notions of religion and religious people play out in supposedly secular trashy places. Like these truly, truly terrible books you buy in airports.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:57

Yeah, thanks, Megan. I think that case study really--I just think it like nails it. I really do.



Megan Goodwin 34:04

You're welcome. Happy summer everybody.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:08

Yeah, you sound sad and tired. So since we've heard from Megan and her super rad book, let's hear about us. Its primary sources.



Megan Goodwin 34:19

PRIMARY SOURCES.



34:22

Okay, my primary source from today comes from being a wee graduate student at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. And standing in the hallway being introduced to the department's major donor. Now it's unusual honestly for departments particularly for state school departments to have donors but UNC did. Does? question mark? I don't know I don't go there anymore. And I met this very nice, very well intentioned white lady who likes me--actually invited me to her wedding. True story.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:55

Wait, what? Oh, no, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. flag on the field. What way?



M

Megan Goodwin 34:58

Yeah, yeah, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:00

Your life is so weird. Okay, I'm sorry,



M

Megan Goodwin 35:03

it's too late. But this is like that. That's where we're at, right? I mean, it was a big wedding, but still. So I'm being introduced to her. And we're chatting and she's asking me about my research. And I have just started kind of noodling through this. And because I was in the middle of writing the chapter about Not Without My Daughter, I said, "Okay, well, the thing that I'm writing now, is about how these stories about Muslim men attacking and hurting and controlling white American women get so popular."



M

Megan Goodwin 35:36

And her response, and I will quote it word for word for you listeners was, quote, "Well, isn't that true?" So like, A, that's a great question; B, ew; C, if you have spent any time with me in person, you know that I have no poker face at all. And so I know



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:01

WHAT?!



Megan Goodwin 36:02

It's true! Sometimes, I do a bad job of keeping how I'm thinking and feeling off my face, which turns bright red when I'm angry. So I have been introduced to this major donor by my advisor slash the dude who gets to decide whether I get a PhD or not. And who is also obviously, trying to get this lady to continue to give us more money. And I'm watching him, watch me try not to explode. So in possibly the greatest act of self restraint I have ever exhibited in my entire life, I managed to say only I think it's really interesting that you think that



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:44

Oh no!



Megan Goodwin 36:45

And then for some reason, this major donor was spirited away very quickly from my presence. The end!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:52

I could not imagine why were you guys just like in the hall?



Megan Goodwin 36:56

No, we were in front of the main office.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:58

Oh, no, I know exactly where that happened. That is awkward city. "Isn't that true?"



Megan Goodwin 37:05

"Well, isn't that true?"



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:06

I want to like retroactively unleash, you're Crackin on that lady.



Megan Goodwin 37:11

Like and the thing was is it's not--she didn't ask it in a mean or like a bitchy way you just don't like, oh, we're having a chill conversation, "Isn't that true?"



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:20

Right, right. Well, like that's the perniciousness of white ladies and their white supremacy.



Megan Goodwin 37:26

accurate. Anyway, so primary sources Well, your turn. Uh,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:34

I guess I'll make mine about Not Without My Daughter too because why not dear nerds, but like as a scholar of Islam, let me say out loud: I have never read this trash book. I have never watched this trash movie. I only know about it through Megan.



Megan Goodwin 37:51

Remember when Foody refused to watch this movie for me? I was like, I need to know things about Iran. She's like, No, no, fucking read something. I'm not watching this.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:57

Well like Kathleen M Foody is a serious scholar of Iran. Like, this is not our thing. Anyway. Anyway, so I do a lot of public lectures about Islam like, honestly so many and I could talk more about why I do those lectures but frankly, as a white woman, I find it is actually part of my job as a PhD holder in Islamic studies to talk to hostile and semi-hostile audiences about Islam, so that quite honestly Muslims do not have to do that work. Um, anyway, even in the lovely so-called liberal state of Vermont, there's never-- literally never--been a talk where someone usually a woman of a certain age doesn't come and either asked me about Not Without My Daughter or tells me how much she loved that story or wants me to disprove its core narrative. Right like similarly to the "isn't that true?" Or asks me how I could possibly talk about domestic violence--how I could leave out domestic violence from my like, intro 101 What are Muslims? talk when clearly domestic violence plagues Muslim communities because of this, this book? So as you so frequently said, and I've like straight up lifted this from you, Megan, my go to line is like, yeah, of course domestic

violence happens because sexual and domestic abuse happens. But it doesn't happen because of Islam or because of Iran regardless of you reading this trash book, comma, white ladies of a certain age. But I can't escape this dumb ass book and this dumb ass movie, even in a so called liberal place like Vermont, which I think shows me and it should show y'all how pervasive it's influenced. And it's like, like deep resonance with a frankly a liberal white feminist white supremacy. It is however many years later--30 something years later--so for a terrible book and like a pretty shitty movie, that's something.



Megan Goodwin 40:10

Yeah, it's funny. And by it's funny. I mean, it's not it's sad and makes me yell uh how much white ladies love stories about how great and strong white ladies are in the face of Islam and Muslim men, but like also just in general, like American white lady "fuck yeah" is a really tenacious narrative.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:38

All right, do better fellow white ladies because that was primary sources.



Megan Goodwin 40:52

Story story story time.



Megan Goodwin 40:55

It's like Will Smith except that it's not because of my being extremely white.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:59

All right. nerds. I've been alluding to this all episode but we're drawing here on Megan's research from her literally just released book *Abusing Religion*. I want to be very clear that I am the author of this script today. So even the bits that Megan said, I wrote out with some edits, I made this episode happen. It's my turn to pick the storytime primary text and I am picking an excerpt from Megan's brand new book *Abusing Religion*! Because I think y'all should read it and also because I think truly the work she's doing in it, uh around abuse, sexual abuse, in specific, race, racialization, and nationalism and gender is crucial.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:45

I'm going to keep the quote really short and I'm going to skip over a lot of the key theoretical contributions since, like, we have the author right here to tell us a little something about what she means. So, ahem, Goodwin writes: "Abusing Religion demonstrates that the stories we tell ourselves about American religious outsiders matter. These stories do real work in the world, creating and limiting conditions of possibility for religious and sexual difference in the contemporary United States, and shaping presumably secular institutions." [137] end quote.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:20

Alright lady, brand new book out in the flesh. Tell me, what should we take from this quote in particular, but then also how does Not Without My Daughter play into the whole of what you're arguing?



Megan Goodwin 42:34

Okay, I'm not allowed to use any new keywords here. So we'll try to keep it super 101 with y'all.



Megan Goodwin 42:41

I am showing you all that popular culture that we might be tempted to push aside, shapes the world that we live in in ways that we might not even pay attention to you because here's the thing. Betty Mahmoody? Not a religious studies scholar. Now Without My Daughter offers a theory of religion, and her theory of religion--which is the theory of religion shared by a lot of white ladies and a lot of other folks in the United States--is that America equals not Islam and Islam equals not America. There's an assumption that a religion in the United States looks a certain way it looks like Betty Mahmoody, it does not look like her husband. And there's an assumption that religious freedom can and should only go so far. Right? So it is not a book that explicitly says, um, Muslims shouldn't be allowed in the United States. But it says it implicitly pretty clearly and it has helped reinforce generations now of readers thinking that American religion excludes Islam, excludes religious difference, that folks who do religion in ways that are different than mainstream Christianity are not just weirdos. They're dangerous. And we are right to try to control them or to exclude them.



Megan Goodwin 44:10

Not because we hate religious freedom, obviously not. We're Americans. We love freedom. America plus freedom equals BFF. But because if we let them get to free, they take advantage of us. And we know that because look what happens. So we tell ourselves these stories about American religious outsiders being sexual predators, and we blame sex abuse, domestic violence here too, on religion, instead of looking at a bigger picture and saying, Wow, people are really shitty to each other and sexual abuse happens everywhere. It's a way for us to blame the way that humans abuse other humans on religion and by doing that, both say that abuse is not our problem to fix, and that we're right to exclude people who do religion differently than we think it should be done.



Megan Goodwin 45:09

Plus, yeah, those definitions don't just happen in places that are explicitly religious, right. Like Betty Mahmoody mentions the fact that she's Methodist like one time--she's not speaking on behalf of Christians. She's speaking on behalf of Americans. This is a secular book that gets sold in secular bookstores that got technically secular laws passed in the technically secular fucking US Senate. Right. So it brings us back to that "even spaces you think are not shaped by religion? Surprise, they are shaped by religion."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:42

Yeah, so thank you. I think what I want to add having read like every version of this book from dissertation to book is that--and why I pulled this quote, honestly--is that you're doing this really interesting work of saying that definitions of religion and religion is defined in places that we want to ignore. That we want to say are like beneath us as a scholarly community and then also our beneath us as like people who just live in the world. Right? Like to give a Mahmoody the power to define Islam it hurts my ears to have you say that. And yet--



Megan Goodwin 46:36

Sorry, girl.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:36

--it's hard not to at least assent to the fact that she has had more power in delineating what Islam is in like legal contexts then then like any imam I can think of so like not a theologian nor a scholar and yet. I think the other thing that you're doing so beautifully in

Abusing Religion (available now dear nerds!) is that you really are taking to task the ways in which white Protestantism gets labeled neutral and therefore any abuse, any sexual abuse in particular, but any abuse that happens in those communities is like nobody's fault. Whereas in any other community, it is a collective punishment: All Muslims are violent all LDS church members are like liciduous in a very particular way and all pagans, witches are demonic and possessed and doing sex wrong in ways that are abusive to children. Right like, like you're doing a really great job of showing how when an American mainstream portrays religious others as inherently wrong, religiously that they are also doing sex wrong. And it makes Protestants like free to do whatever they want and who never look in the mirror around, say cultures of sex abuse that are coded in Protestant way. So yeah, I think I think everyone should read this. I learned a lot and I don't I don't care at all about America. I whispered that into the mic as if it's not just like coming in at level but, um, anyway, thank you for sharing that.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 48:29

You are welcome. I want to yes. Um, couple things when LDS is Mormon fundamentalists, not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but yes, but also Yeah, just kind of bring us back to our thesis. This pop culture matters because it It truly and materially shapes the way that--I don't think an exaggeration to say millions of Americans think about Islam now--but it also does it in a way that's so sneaky because--because these kinds of books aren't supposed to matter, because we're told that we shouldn't take them seriously--that it gets, it keeps getting to do this really gross, religiously intolerant anti-Muslim work (or anti Mormon fundamentalist or anti any sort of religious difference work). And that's, that's why we want you--we need--you to pay attention to where we tell ourselves stories about religion and then tell ourselves that it doesn't matter if they're a little racist, or they're a little sexist or whatever, because you know, it's just it's just for funsies.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:35

Right! Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 49:40

Summer!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:41

Well, I guess that's that.



Megan Goodwin 49:45

Yeah, my my book's a stone cold bummer, but I feel like you should read it anyway.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:49

It is but it's super smart. Hey, shall we move on?



Megan Goodwin 49:52

Let's before we head outside, don't forget nerds. You still got homework.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 50:04

We know we know it's summer, but there's so much good work on religion and pop culture. And we've barely scratched the surface. Here is some stuff to keep you occupied. And as always, don't forget that everything we list just now. And everything we listed before will be in the show notes plus more. Megan, since this is your actual literal field of expertise, I want to know what you recommend but also remind you that you needn't suggest the whole 80 pages of bibliography I know you have. So with that caveat, what do you recommend



Megan Goodwin 50:35

How dare, oh, very dare! Me cite things. What? Okay, fine. So I did an kind of overview of the case studies in the book for The Revealer, which is NYU's religion and media center's religion magazine. So those are available online, you can check those out and see if you want to read the rest of the book. I think you should I think it's good. Also if we're thinking about Islam and Muslims and American Islam and domestic violence I want to direct you to Juliane Hammer's work. She has really shaped my thinking about abuse and religious difference but particularly the ways that our assumptions about Islam and Muslims and Muslim men harm Muslim women, even while we are trying to quote unquote save them. And then since it's summer, I want you to go read or watch or take in literally any creative work made by a Muslim woman who didn't escape from anything. Or if you want pop culture works specifically about Iranianness and gender, you can check out A Girl Walks

Home Alone at Night, which is an Iranian Western vampire film I have also written about!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:41

Rad!



Megan Goodwin 51:42

thanks,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:43

I'm gonna I'm gonna stick to pop culture and Islam and quite honestly a lot of the academic books that I was going to recommend we've recommended above this, so I'll put those in the show notes and skip them here. But let's talk pop culture and Islam since that's kind of the theme of this episode, and it's definitely what I know best. I think friend of the pod Michael Muhammad Knight will definitely eye roll it at us. No matter though he please do not Body Slam--what's a wrestling move--don't do a body slam at me.



Megan Goodwin 52:13

Pile drive? I don't actually think about wrestling.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:15

Me neither. But his book and it's film adaptation Taqwacore is another pop culture moment and movement. The book literally inspired movement of punk Islam and punk Muslims. So it's a little bit pulp, too. I think I'd suggest, I think he'd say the same. But please, oh, he's our friend. And he's so much more than this movement in his life. So go read his other books. Megan in particular always recommends Blue Eyed Devil. I really like Why I'm a Five Percenter. Yeah. And he's got a brand new book out with UNC



Megan Goodwin 52:48

Yeah, a scholarly monograph,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:50

a scholarly monograph coming at you real soon. I'll put all of those things in the show notes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:57

If you want something to like, on Netflix and chill with you've got Ramy on Hulu. It's it's not a perfect show, but I do think it's doing some real work to be honest about his own experience and I'll post up some critique about it too, largely from Muslim women.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:15

We wrote a thing about RuPaul's Drag Race and Persian princess Jackie Cox that's pop culture and racialisation and Salaam Khanoom Jackie Cox joon.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:25

And of course the major homework of this episode is Megan's brand new like out three days ago book *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* with Rutgers University Press. That is officially all we've got for today. But wait a minute. That's actually all we've got for Smart Grrl summer. We hope that these four thematic episodes have been a break from COVID isolation, a reminder to be anti racist in the midst of national protests, protests. And frankly like state sanctioned Extra judicial murder. Yeah, a splash of something bubbly while you take a walk to take a break from all of that stuff. Season Two is next and we're going to get your syllabus up online in short order. Until then nerds--



Megan Goodwin 54:14

you can find Megan that's me on Twitter at @mpgPhD and Ilyse at @ProfIRMF, or the show at @keepingit_101. Find the website at keepingit101.com.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 54:28

Peace out nerds!



Megan Goodwin 54:29

do your homework! It's on the syllabus! And make your beach read about something other

than white ladies who need rescuing. I see you Karen's, I see you!



Maz Jobrani 54:36

You would think as a American Iranian American actor I should be able to play any part good, bad, what have you but a lot of times in Hollywood when casting directors find out you're of Middle Eastern descent. They go, Oh, you're Iranian great. Can you say I will kill you in the name of Allah? I could say that but what if I were to say hello, I'm your doctor. They go great, and then you hijacked the hospital.



Maz Jobrani 55:21

Like I think you're missing the point here.