VU Research Portal

Not without My Daughter. On Parental Abduction, Orientalism and Maternal Melodrama.

de Hart, B.

published in

European Journal of Women's Studies
2001

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1177/135050680100800104](https://doi.org/10.1177/135050680100800104)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

de Hart, B. (2001). Not without My Daughter. On Parental Abduction, Orientalism and Maternal Melodrama. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 8(1), 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050680100800104>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Not Without My Daughter

On Parental Abduction, Orientalism and Maternal Melodrama

Betty de Hart

UNIVERSITY OF NIJMEGEN

ABSTRACT In 1987 the book *Not Without My Daughter* by Betty Mahmoody became a worldwide best-seller. In the line of Mahmoody's book, similar 'true stories' of western white women with oriental husbands were published. These books concentrate on topics like bad marriages, abuse and international parental abduction. In this article the books are analysed as popular culture products of orientalist discourse on mixed marriages. They are maternal melodramas in which women who are victims of their intermarriage become heroines by sacrificing themselves for the sake of their children. As 'learned foolhardy women' the authors of these stories are cultural reproducers of the West; their function is to warn other women not to enter into a mixed marriage and to warn western society about the dangers of racial and cultural intermixture.

KEY WORDS gender ♦ mixed marriage ♦ motherhood ♦ orientalism ♦ parental abduction ♦ white women

INTRODUCTION

In 1987 *Not Without My Daughter*, a 'true story' by Betty Mahmoody, became an international best-seller. The book tells the story of a white American woman who was forced to stay in Iran by her Iranian husband, together with her four-year-old daughter. Eighteen months later, after a treacherous trip through the Turkish mountains, she and her daughter fled back to the USA. The publication of 13 similar 'true stories' followed between 1987 and 1998. These books tell of bad marriages, abuse and international parental abduction. Most books were written by the mothers themselves, often with the help of a ghost writer.¹

Many books were first published in Great Britain (five) and the USA (four), plus others in Italy, Germany, France, Australia and the Netherlands. They were translated into many languages and movies or

documentaries based on the books were released. It could be stated that the whole western world is familiar with the books. In 1990 Betty Mahmoody was elected 'Woman of the Year' and 'Most Courageous Person of the Year' in Germany. A Dutch newspaper called her 'Mother of All Mothers'. In 1992 *Not Without My Daughter* won the Dutch readers' prize for best book.

The books received positive reviews in the European press, depicting them as the accounts of mothers fighting for their children, and as women fighting for their rights as western women. A Belgian newspaper described the story of Patsy Heymans as 'the fight against a man, a culture'.² The caption to a photograph of Zana Muhsen with her daughter was: 'Zana's daughter has the luck to grow up in a country [i.e. the UK] where women are respected'.³

The German magazine *Der Spiegel* wrote about Mahmoody:

She is the pure West. She is brave, wise at the right time, crying at the humiliation and cold-blooded only when necessary. Her husband is the dark mystery, whose change from American into Iranian resembles the change from Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde.⁴

However, the books also met with criticism. In Europe, public protests came from organizations of binationals. Furthermore, several books and brochures either by Iranian intellectuals or organizations of binationals were published. Their main criticism concerns the prejudices against Iranian culture and binational relationships.⁵

Other comments focus on the gender issue. In a special issue on 'Women and Islam' of the Dutch magazine *Buitenlandersbulletin* (Foreigners' Bulletin) the journalist Sietske de Boer criticized the way the books were represented as 'junk' (de Boer, 1993). According to her the books, although no intellectual fireworks, are informative about the cultural conflicts between East and West and the struggle of women for their identity. The authors know both eastern and western culture and refuse to 'convert' to the eastern culture. The stories tell of their 'literal and figurative return to the West', although not necessarily to a western lifestyle. What the authors look for is a space-in-between, a synthesis between East and West. According to de Boer, the books prove that the negative images of the West about the East are not only fantasy and production, but are based on facts and own experiences. That the books became such a huge success, proves that people in the West do not want to make the West a little bit eastern (de Boer, 1993).

Others, such as Lutz (1993), Ware (1992) and Robinson (1996) present a different analysis. In a reaction to de Boer, Helma Lutz rejects the view of Mahmoody as a source of information about culture conflicts between East and West. She indicates that Iranian women and women married to Iranian men protested against the stereotyping in Mahmoody's book on

Iran, Iranian culture and mixed relationships. Lutz labels the review of de Boer a 'West is best' approach, which divides women into more, or less oppressed. According to Lutz, the books serve a function for the privileged: contrasting those to the other, who have not reached the higher stage of development yet (Lutz, 1993). The attraction of the Mahmoody story can be explained by the ongoing ancient animosity of Christianity towards Islam. Furthermore, it deals with the construction of western gender relations, of western femininity and masculinity. The Mahmoody story legitimizes western superiority: 'Betty Mahmoody fights for all of us, we are Betty Mahmoody' (Lutz, 1992: 69). According to Robinson (1996) in her analysis of the Australian media coverage of the story of Jacqueline Gillespie, images of women in other societies reinforce norms of subordination in western societies. As Gillespie's story shows, if western women thought they had it bad, it is nothing compared to the situation of women in the East and therefore western women should not complain (Robinson, 1996). According to Naber, the Mahmoody story portrays Arab women as a super-oppressed and inferior group in comparison with white American women, who are represented as the most liberated and superior group of women on earth (Naber, 2000).

Ware writes on the book written by the British journalist Eileen MacDonald about her involvement with the struggle of Zana Muhsen and her mother:

The reader is invited to share her evident distaste for a society in which women appear to be simply bought and sold by their elders, and to view its inhabitants with a rather more derisory sort of scandalised sneer. . . . While the act of comparing social and sexual relations in two different societies may seem like pertinent journalism, the way it is done in this example confirms to a broader ideologically charged survey in which the position of women in a society indicates the level of civilisation it has reached. (Ware, 1992: 14)

Lutz's, Naber's, Robinson's and Ware's analyses of the books as modern products of orientalism, hostility against Islam and gender relations in the West offer important insights. However, it is not the complete picture. The books are being analysed in the West-East dichotomy, which disregards one aspect. Since the white western women crossed the border between West and East by marrying an oriental husband, these books present a mixture of East and West. The discourse on mixed marriages, and white femininity within this discourse, is a specific one. As Ware points out, 'love across the color line' is a theme in itself, independent of political themes (Ware, 1992: 233) – or rather, *other* political themes, since mixed marriages are definitely a political issue. It is this discourse on mixed marriages that I analyse in

this article, taking the 13 books on intermarriage and parental abduction as a starting point.

THE INTERRACIAL FAMILY ROMANCE

In colonial and orientalist discourse miscegenation, mixed marriages and half-breeds are major issues. Interracial or interethnic relationships and marriages cross borders between East and West, and they show what happens in the 'contact zone' of different cultures, ethnic and racial groups. Part of this discourse is the power of the lascivious oriental woman who seduces the white male, but far more common is the threat of the oriental male to white western women. The love of a white woman and oriental man upsets 'natural' gender roles and traditional hierarchies and their transgression is catastrophic (Zantop, 1997). Through the relationship with a black or oriental man, the white woman becomes 'racialized'. This does not mean that she is ascribed the same position as an oriental woman, she is ascribed a particular and qualitatively new position as a white woman and a mother in a mixed marriage (Durrow, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993; Ifekwunigwe, 1999). The discourse is often very negative, but even if a sympathetic attitude towards the interracial romance is taken up, things are bound to go wrong. The interracial romance cannot survive in a racially divided world (Zantop, 1997). The 'interracial family romance' ends with divorce, violence and often death of the child born out of the relationship, or that of one or both of the spouses (see analyses by Hueng, 1997; Marchetti, 1993; Young, 1996).

The interracial family romance (Hueng, 1997) refers to western anxieties about military and masculine prowess and social insecurity about masculinity and paternal legitimacy that in turn mobilized an obsessive revalorization of the patriarchal nuclear family. The interracial family romance is a maternal melodrama (Kaplan, 1992). The maternal melodrama refers to the process through which the female victim of the interracial family romance regains her dignity through her self-sacrificing conduct in helping the child to return to its own, i.e. western, society.

In my analysis I emphasize white femininity within the discourse on mixed marriages, and how the 13 books mentioned earlier reproduce the discourse on mixed marriages, white femininity and motherhood. I start by making some remarks on the perception of oriental men and women.

ORIENTAL PRINCE INTO MONSTER

Most of the 13 books deal with Middle Eastern Islamic countries. But even the exceptions can still be placed in orientalist discourse. The author of

one of the books is a Dutch woman with a Spanish Catholic spouse. Even so, she offers an explanation of his behaviour by pointing at his origin and Islamic influences, since he was born and raised in Spanish Morocco (Hoogendam, 1995). Another author is a Belgian woman, married to an Israeli; she states that rather than a European Jew she perceives him as an oriental Jew (Heymans et al., 1995).

At their meeting, the man's oriental background is part of his attraction to her. His coloured skin, dark, piercing eyes and macho behaviour make her heart pound. His oriental background forms both a physical and a psychological attraction. Pamela Green writes: 'That I was attracted and married to an Egyptian may be caused by the anchorage that his strict and patriarchal culture offered me, although a part of me, the Western woman, resisted against this' (Green and McConville, 1995: 82).⁶

And her sister reacts: 'How romantic! Does he wear a turban?' (Green and McConville, 1995: 108). In the books the oriental background of the men shows western traits, like western education, long-term residence in the West, knowledge of various languages and western etiquette, which they combine with eastern courtesy. They are, in short, modern examples of the 'civilized savage', the prince the authors were waiting for. The husband of Jessica Gillespie was in fact a Malaysian prince (Gillespie, 1995).

During marriage, the savage in the oriental prince emerges. As a result, the marriages start to break down. The savage side which formed part of the original attraction, becomes more and more threatening. The oriental prince turns into a monster. These stories show that one can never really get to know an oriental man. However civilized they may seem, they are always hiding something violent and threatening under the thin layer of civilization. His beautiful dark eyes become dangerously sparkling. His strength and decisiveness turn into dominance and authoritarian behaviour. His protectiveness and courtesy become jealousy and possessiveness that obstruct the woman's freedom.

This change from prince to monster is represented as something that happens overnight and is very sudden and unexpected to the women. For instance, the husband of Mahmoody, who in the film version calls himself 'as American as apple pie', is represented as a hard-working physician and a loving father and husband – a real American family man. In Iran, over a period of two weeks, he suddenly transforms into a violent, irrational and unpredictable maniac who beats his wife, rapes her and locks her up. According to Mahmoody, it is the influence of the Iranian, Islamic culture and family that changes him from the prince into a monster. This change for the worse is represented as a backsliding into his own culture and tradition. As Mahmoody writes:

I saw my husband, who had lived in the United States for so many years, backslide more and more into his old Iranian thinking and behaviour. . . . I

had married the American Moody and the Iranian Moody was an unwelcome stranger to me. (Mahmoody and Hoffer, 1989: 248)

As the marriage deteriorates, the countries of origin of the husbands seem to undergo a similar change. Through their husbands the women meet with the attraction of ancient cultures (pyramids), primitive conditions (loam houses) and desolate landscapes (deserts). But now the 'Thousand-and-One-Nights' paradise turns into a hell on earth. No more palm trees and white beaches, but unbearable heat, dirt, filthy toilets, vermin, desert land and backward conditions. The people are described as filthy, or even monstrous, human beings. A familiar figure of orientalism is the recurring description of large crowds of people that threaten the western individual just by being there, because they all look the same, speak foreign languages and smell terrible. Such descriptions emphasize that the individual woman stands alone against the uncontrollable forces of a whole nation or religious world which may turn itself against her at any moment. Or, in the words of Jessica Doyle:

My worst fears of the unknown came true as I walked towards customs. . . . The noise was deafening and I became afraid of the mass of people. I could not hear a word in the buzzing of voices. A thousand Irajs [the name of her husband] swarmed through the thick jumble of women, many of whom were covered from top to toe in the traditional cloth, the chador, and who moved ahead in groups like large black birds. (Doyle and Nicols, 1994: 54)

Now that the descriptions of oriental men and the countries of origin are set out, I turn to the question of how oriental women are represented in the books.

ORIENTAL WOMEN: ENEMY OR VICTIM?

Although one might expect (or maybe hope for) a certain identification of the western women with oriental women because they share problems of subjugation by oriental males, this hardly ever happens. In fact, the negative representation in the books of oriental women is conspicuous. They remain anonymous, veiled figures who move around in groups and are compared to flocks of birds or other animals, as in the quote by Jessica Doyle. Often too, they are described in negative and hostile terms and considered as part of the enemy, supporting oriental men. These women hardly seem human, they are described as witches or as monsters.

Miriam Ali writes:

The bad smell in the hallway made us sick. It filled our noses and lungs. The house was very dark. We passed a few rooms at a hallway, through a

kitchen, where a woman was cooking eggs in a pan burned with food. While she stirred the eggs the woman hawked up, sniffled her nose, caught the phlegm at the back of her throat and spat it through the room, where it dripped from the wall, next to the signs of her earlier efforts. (Ali and Wain, 1995: 114)

Mahmoody about her sister-in-law: 'Her nose was so large, I could hardly believe it was real. It emerged threatening from beneath her green-brown eyes, that were filled with tears. Her mouth was a collection of friable stained teeth' (Mahmoody and Hoffer, 1989).

On the rare occasion that the oriental women are described in more empathetic terms, it is to show that they are victims of oriental men. They may feel sympathy for the cause of the western woman, they may even share some of their problems like an unhappy marriage, but they are powerless and unable to help or support the women. If they try, they fail in their attempt to help, or choose in favour of their spouses and sons in the end.

There seems to be little female bonding between oriental and western women in these stories. In fact, the oriental women, either the anonymous groups or the hostile or victimized ones, highlight the image of the western individual woman as liberated, and fighting for her rights (Naber, 2000). Where the western woman refuses to stay a victim, she becomes a heroine.

THE FOOLHARDY

The western women start out as victims. First of all they are victims of their husbands who abuse and betray them. They are however victims through their own doing, because, after all, they married this man voluntarily. If they had only known better. But they got no warning and, even if they did, the women were so much in love that they did not pay attention. They were lost in his dark, piercing eyes and could not think.

Ware (1992: 231-2) describes three possible positions for white female characters in colonialist or orientalist discourse: the Good, the Bad and the Foolhardy. The Foolhardy is a western woman who has some feminist inclinations to start with, which is part of her unwillingness to conform. The Orient represents exotic mysteries which both fascinate and repel her. Her fate is to 'dabble' in things she knows nothing about, and to break the taboos of western society both for herself and her community. The conduct of the Foolhardy calls for punishment as it threatens to upset the whole system.

Mahmoody and the other authors are the Foolhardy. They 'dabbled' in marriage with an oriental man, not knowing the consequences. Since western and eastern cultures do not mix, problems are unavoidable.

Hence, women in these marriages had it coming. They were naive, weak and misinformed. The punishment they receive is their struggle to keep their child.

For the writers, a main goal of writing the book, besides working through their experiences, is to warn other women of what might happen if they marry a foreign, especially Islamic, man. And this is exactly how the books were being used: as a warning. The lesson the female authors learned should prevent others from making the same mistake of entering into a mixed marriage. The authors are ascribed the roles of cultural reproducers of the West; they are empowered to decide on what is appropriate behaviour and what not, and to exert control over other women who are constructed as deviants (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 37).⁷

But the Foolhardy are also adventurers, heroines. In 19th century travel stories, western male travellers 'discover' virgin landscapes occupied by savage peoples. The female authors of the books can be seen as modern representatives of these western explorers of oriental countries. The women 'discover' strange cultures in a very personal way, through their marriages and through their adventurous travels to foreign countries in their pursuit of rescuing their children.

Although the stories seem to tell the experiences of women, this is not true altogether. Yegenoglu argues that female travellers fill a gap left by male travellers. Female travellers can enter forbidden zones, the inner world of the Orient. They can go where men cannot. They offer what the male subject lacks, i.e. knowledge of the inside world, which is the core of the 'real Orient'. In other words, male 'explorers' teach us the politics of Iran and public life, but only women can teach us 'real' life facts of women in Iran. Their books remain marginal, however, because they serve as supplements to the books of male travellers which are the main fare (Yegenoglu, 1998). Like the western explorers of the 19th century, the women stand alone against dangerous situations and strange peoples, and become heroines, because they survive all dangers and rescue their children.

THE CHILD AS 'HALF'

During and after the marriage the parents struggle over the identity of the child. A child is either western or oriental, but it cannot be both. The child is regarded as being 'half', it cannot have a bonding with both cultures and countries, with both its father- and its motherland. The countries the children are abducted to are perceived as strange, unknown countries for the child, and not as the countries of their fathers and grandparents.

A choice has to be made. This choice is made by the mothers during the struggle for their child, and it is a choice for a western identity. For

instance, the problems between the American Cathy Mahone and her Jordanian ex-husband started because she wanted to raise the child as a Catholic and did not want her ex-husband to take the child to the mosque on Fridays. While her daughters were held back in Yemen, Miriam Ali tried to change their Yemenite clothes for the jeans she had bought for them (Ali and Wain, 1995: 171).

Protecting the child from abduction seems to be the same as protecting the child from non-western influences. The backwardness and cruelty of oriental culture justifies this choice. Although the books appear to be centred on the child, they present stories of the mother's struggle for the child from the perspective of the mother. The child does not play an independent part in the books.⁸ The mother-child relationship is being idealized as a natural, biological bond. Hence, the child naturally belongs to the mother. The interests of the child and of the mother seem to coincide. A symbiosis takes place between the mother and the child; they become one.

This symbiosis of mother and child is very clear in Mahmoody's story. From the day they arrive in Iran, Mahmoody hates the country and dislikes her family-in-law. Her daughter, Mahtob, is four years old when they go to Iran. Mahmoody is not yet aware of the fact that her husband is planning to stay in Iran. From the very first day, she stays with her daughter in her room in the family house, leaving it only when asked to do so. She writes about the first day in Iran: 'Mahtob and I exchanged meaningful looks and read each others minds. . . . I knew that Mahtob fell asleep with the same thoughts as I. Please God, let these two weeks be over soon' (Mahmoody and Hoffer, 1989: 18).

It is not just the children who have no independent part in the books. The mothers, in the same symbiosis of mother and child, cannot exist without their children. Their life fulfilment is in their children. This is where the interracial family romance turns into the maternal melodrama.

MATERNAL MELODRAMA

The maternal melodrama is a patriarchal construct. It coincides with persisting images of motherhood in which women go all the way in sacrificing themselves for their children (Kaplan, 1992). They will do anything to save their children, even if it means death.

Mahmoody could very well have died during her harsh trip in the middle of winter through the mountains between Iran and Turkey; Pamela Green nearly died of stab-wounds inflicted by her family-in-law in Egypt. But since the interracial family romance needs death, it is the (ex-)husband that dies, not literally but socially. Because of the huge press

coverage the husbands' names and faces are known all over the world. That is what constitutes their punishment.

For women in intermarriage the maternal melodrama gains additional importance. By their self-sacrificing behaviour as mothers, they prove their willingness not only to bring their children back to western society, but also to return to western society themselves. They do so by rejecting the Islamic (ex-)husband and his culture. They regain their dignity as western women, and become 'de-racialized' through the battle for the child. They need the child for this; the women exist only through the child, not outside the child. And since the child is a lifelong remembrance of their crossing the colour line, they have to do it. The women have no independent identity; during the marriage her identity was determined through her husband, now it is established through the child.

It is only after the marriage, but mostly during, or after the successful battle for the child (for if she did not succeed, she just did not fight hard enough), that she gets the support she needs from western society through press coverage, fund raising, and so on. Mahmoody tried to find help before she went to Iran, but received none. After she fled Iran, the US Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped her to write her book. Finally, she deserved support. Now the victim of the Islamic male has turned into a western heroine who stood alone against the Islamic world, and won.

WHITE MALE SAVIOUR?

It is remarkable, however, that white male saviours are virtually absent in the struggle of the women. Although many women remarry a western husband, the roles of these husbands seem to be limited and mainly emotional. They offer her a new chance in a 'decent' marriage. They help her rebuild her destroyed self-confidence. They put their arms around her at appropriate moments when she needs their strong shoulders. But the struggle for the child is *her* struggle, not his. The child is hers, not his. He supports her, but apart from that she mainly stands alone in her struggle.

Lawyers cannot play the role of western male saviours, because of their limited knowledge and limited legal possibilities in Islamic countries. The only white male heroes are the members of ULC. This is a group of ex-Vietnam veterans who make a living by rescuing American children from Islamic countries. Their adventures were the basis of the book written by the journalist Neil Livingstone (1993) and the movie of the story of Cathy Mahone. In the second book by Zana Muhsen (Muhsen and Crofts, 1999), however, they are described as frauds, asking for a lot of money and doing nothing in return. Therefore their heroism is dubious. The modern, liberated foolhardy heroine struggles alone, without support, not even from western law.

CHILD ABDUCTION AND THE LAW

In the West–East dichotomy the West is implicitly put forward as modern, civilized and rational. The stories are represented as struggles of western women for liberation and emancipation, which is the normal state of affairs in western society but that still must be achieved in eastern countries. Domestic violence and rape, recurring themes in the books, are represented as a cultural problem.

These sexual crimes, so common in the West, are disclaimed and projected onto the East and the violent Islamic males. Here, familiar fantasies resound about the Orient as a sensual place of harems, polygamy, heated passion and oriental men raping white women. It is represented as the clash of cultures, rather than of gender relations, which makes it impossible to uphold the marriage.

Law is an important theme in all the books. The child abduction often results in, or was preceded by, fierce legal battles between mother and father on divorce and child custody. The road to recovering the child is long and harsh.

The difficulties in recovering the child are mainly represented as the result of oriental, and especially Islamic, law. Islamic law is represented as ancient and backward, justice and legal security are not considered to be traits of Islamic law. Judges are unpredictable, legal procedures take many years and there is no telling when it will end. Lawyers in Islamic countries are more interested in their own bank account than in their clients. They are prejudiced against western people and against women. Islamic law is said to support its own subjects, i.e. men, and to be prejudiced against western women and mixed marriages. Women and children are simply the property of Islamic men. It is clear that women who are abused by their husbands and whose children are abducted find that they stand no chance at all in Islamic law.

Therefore it is justified to turn to alternative, illegal means. Quite often the mothers act the same way the fathers did; they abduct their children. Sometimes women are the ones that abduct first. Patsy Heymans fled with her children from Israel to Belgium with the help of her father. Then it was her husband who abducted the children, back from Belgium. The group of American ex-Vietnam veterans described by Livingstone (1993) breaks every rule of national and international law when operating to rescue children. The film of the story of Cathy Mahone tells us what this 'rescue' means: two veterans force a bus full of schoolchildren to stop and storm inside to snatch the child from the arms of the female teacher.

One would expect that in the East–West dichotomy western law would be described as righteous, modern and directed at the protection of women. But this is not the case. Women who tried to find help in their home country found that no one could inform them or help them, or were

even willing to do so. Their warning that the husband would probably abduct the children was often ignored in legal proceedings. Neither did lawyers provide any solution. Western law and visiting rights accommodated the opportunity for the abduction, which often took place during the father's visiting hours. National borders prove to be no barrier at all for parents who want to flee the country with the child. Western law is as incapable as Islamic law of protecting women and children. The women reproach western authorities for a total lack of support.

The difference between the two systems is that western law seems to have the intention of protecting women and children, but that Islamic law is aimed at the protection of the authoritarian father. It is Islamic law and not western law that is solely represented as a patriarchal system. Islamic law will never change, while western law can change through information and amendments of laws.

FINAL REMARKS

In this article I have analysed the books of Mahmoody and others as products of a specific orientalist discourse on mixed marriages. The white female writers are Ware's 'foolhardy heroines', who dabbled in marriage with an oriental husband. Now that they have learned and know better, they are ascribed a role as cultural reproducers of the West. Their failure and maternal melodramas reinforce the borders between West and East and hence meet the western need for self-sustaining identity.

It is important to ask why books on the interracial family romance and its dramatic ending are so popular. Is it a discourse about the impossibility of love between a man and woman from different cultures (Ware, 1992: 233)? Is it because women are still fantasizing about harems and capture (Schade and de Hart, 1989)? The stories resemble Rudolf Valentino's *The Sheikh*: they share themes like capture, polygamy, heated passion and rape (see Hull, 1990). But other explanations are possible.

The obsession is focused on mixed marriages of western *women*. These are the marriages that do not only endanger western women themselves and their children, but also western society as a whole. In current discussions on migration and multiculturalism mixed marriages of western women are represented as threats (Kamminga, 1993). Western women are the gateway to western society through their sexuality; their marriages with migrant men are a threat to restrictive immigration policies.⁹ Western women that cross the colour line of love endanger western nation-states (de Hart, 1999). As such, the learned foolhardy are a warning to all of us.

NOTES

An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Critical Legal Studies Conference 'Loose Ends, Old Beginnings and Fractured Overtures' in Lancaster, September 1998. I am very much indebted to everyone who commented on earlier drafts, especially Anita Böcker, Manon Pluymen, Thomas Spijkerboer, Sarah van Walsum and the women of LAWINE, the organization of Dutch women with a migrant spouse.

1. The complete list of the books is as follows:
 First published in Britain: Miriam Ali and Jana Wain, *Without Mercy* (1995; on Yemen); Pamela Green and Brigid McConville, *Dear Children* (1994; on Egypt); Zana Muhsen and Andrew Crofts, *Sold: A Story of Modern-Day Slavery* (1991; on Yemen); Eileen MacDonald, *Brides for Sale? Human Trade in North Yemen* (1988; on Yemen); Zana Muhsen and Andrew Crofts, *A Promise to Nadia* (1999; on Yemen). All the books on Yemen were on the same story of Zana and Nadia Muhsen.
 First published in the USA: Jessica Doyle and Carolyn Nichols, *Rescued* (1994; on Iran); Neil C. Livingstone, *Rescue My Child: The Story of the Ex-Delta Commandos Who Bring Home Children Abducted Overseas* (1992; several countries); Betty Mahmoody and Arnold D. Dunchock, *For the Love of a Child* (1992; several countries); Betty Mahmoody and William Hoffer, *Not Without My daughter* (1987; on Iran).
 First published in Germany: Ilse Achilles, Anya Butt and Miriam Butt, *6000 Kilometer sehnsucht* (1992; on Pakistan).
 First published in France: Patsy Heymans, William and Marilyn Hoffer, *Kidnappe* (1995; on Israel);
 First published in the Netherlands: Jannie Hoogendam, *Littekens in mijn hart. Ik verloor mijn kinderen* (1995; on Spain).
 First published in Australia: Jacqueline Gillespie, *Once I Was a Princess* (1995; on Malaysia)
 First published in Italy: Sandra Fei, *Perdute* (1993; on Colombia).
 Not included was the most recent book by the Swiss Christine Hoffmann on her marriage with a Masai from Kenya. Although Hoffmann's story has a lot in common with the books analysed in this article, it is about a white Swiss-black African marriage and therefore does not fit within an orientalist discourse, since the discourse on black Africans is specific (Young, 1996). The Masai husband is not represented as threatening, like the Islamic husbands, but as an eroticized black body, a child of nature, lazy, etc.
2. See the article by Desire de Poot in *Accent* (13 October 1995: 20).
3. The photograph was published in *Dag allemaal* (22 August 1995: 116–18).
4. *Der Spiegel*, cited in Lutz (1992).
5. See Arki (1991), IAF (1991), LAWINE (1991), Motadel (1992) and Schade and de Hart (1989).
6. Quotations are translated from Dutch editions.
7. Women with a migrant spouse throughout Europe complained of getting tired of receiving one or more of the books as gifts, as wedding presents for instance (IAF, 1991; Lutz, 1992).
8. An exception is *6000 Kilometer sehnsucht* (Achilles et al., 1992), which was written by the mother and her two daughters.
9. Discourse on so-called 'bogus marriages' is mainly about female citizens and migrant men (de Hart, 1999).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achilles, Ilse, Anya Butt and Miriam Butt (1992) *6000 kilometer heimwee*. Weert: M & P. (Originally published: *6000 Kilometer Sehnsucht*, Munich: Piper, 1992.)
- Ahmed, Leila (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots for a Modern Debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ali, Miriam and Jana Wain (1995) *Without Mercy*. London: Little, Brown. (Originally published: *Zonder genade*, Baarn: De Kern, 1995.)
- Arki, Mustafa (1991) *Dass Andere sein lassen. Bi-kulturelle Partnerschaft; kritische Anmerkungen zu Betty Mahmoody's Buch*. Hildesheim: Intern Kulturwerk.
- De Boer, Sietske (1993) 'Ruimte voor vrouwen', *Buitenlandersbulletin* (7): 13–18.
- De Hart, Betty (1999) 'Maria Toet en andere verhalen. De nationaliteit van de gehuwde vrouw en de constructie van de natiestaat', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 25: 183–206.
- Doyle, Jessica and Carolyn Nicols (1994) *Gered!: het aangrijpende verhaal van een moeder die haar ontvoerde kinderen terughaalde uit Iran*. Antwerpen: Standaard. (Originally published: *Rescued*, New York: HarperCollins, 1994.)
- Durrow, Heidi (1995) 'Mothering across the Color Line: White Women, "Black" Babies', *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 7: 227–41.
- Fei, Sandra (1993) *Ontvoerd!* Weert: M & P. (Originally published: *Perdute*, Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1993.)
- Frankenberg, Rose (1993) *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gillespie, Jacqueline (1995) *Once I Was a Princess*. Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1995.
- Green, Pamela and Brigid McConville (1995) *Lieve kinderen: een moeder zoekt in Egypte naar haar drie ontvoerde kinderen*. Amsterdam: Forum. (Originally published: *Dear Children*, London: Pan Macmillan, 1994.)
- Heymans, Patsy, William Hoffer and Marilyn Hoffer (1995) *Ontvoerd!* Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Antwerpe: Kritak. (Originally published: *Kidnappe*, Paris: Fixot, 1995.)
- Hoogendam, Jannie (1995) *Littekens in mijn hart. Ik verloor mijn kinderen*. Amsterdam: Luitingh-Sijthoff.
- Hueng, Marina (1997) 'The Family Romance of Orientalism: From Madame Butterfly to Indochine', pp. 158–83, in M. Bernstein and G. Studlar (eds) *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. London: Tauris.
- Hull, Edith M. (1990) *De sjeik*. Helmond: Westfriesland. (Originally published: *The Sheikh*, London: Nash, 1919.)
- IAF (Verband Binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften) (1991) *Hätte Betty uns gefragt. . . .* Frankfurt am Main: IAF.
- Ifekwunigwe, Jayne O. (1999) *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of 'Race', Nation and Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Kamminga, Marleen (1993) *Grensoverschrijders. De beeldvorming van bi-culturele relaties in Nederlandse dagbladen*. Amsterdam: Wetenschapswinkel Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Kaplan, E. Ann (1992) *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*. London: Routledge.
- LAWINE, Stichting (1991) *Not Without My Daughter: LAWINE-kritiek op het boek en de film*. Amsterdam: LAWINE.
- Livingstone, Neil C. (1993) *Red mijn kind*. Weert: M & P. (Originally published: *Rescue My Child: The Story of the Ex-Delta Commandos Who Bring Home Children Abducted Overseas*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.)

- Lutz, Helma (1992) 'Rassismus und Sexismus, Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten', pp. 57–80 in Andreas Foitzik (ed.) *Ein Herrenvolk von Untertanen. Rassismus-Nationalismus-Sexismus*. Duisburg: DISS.
- Lutz, Helma (1993) 'Oost West thuis best', *Buitenlandersbulletin* 8: 25–6.
- MacDonald, Eileen (1988) *Brides for Sale? Human Trade in North Yemen*. Edinburgh: Mainstream.
- Mahmoody, Betty and Arnold D. Dunchock (1992) *Uit liefde voor een kind*. Weert: M & P. (Originally published: *For the Love of a Child*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1992.)
- Mahmoody, Betty and William Hoffer (1989) *In een sluier gevangen*. Weert: M & P. (Originally published: *Not Without My Daughter*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1987.)
- Marchetti, Gina (1993) *Romance and the 'Yellow Peril': Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Motadel, Iradj (1992) *Wahrheit oder Lüge. Eine Amerikanerin im Orient. Der Fall Betty Mahmoody 'Nicht ohne meine Tochter'*. Detmold: Orient-Verlag.
- Muhsen, Zana and Andrew Crofts (1992) *Nog eenmaal mijn moeder zien*. Baarn: De Kern. (Originally published: *Sold: A Story of Modern-Day Slavery*, London: Futura, 1991.)
- Muhsen, Zana and Andrew Crofts (1999) *Vechten voor Nadia*. Baarn: Bosch & Keuning. (Originally published: *A Promise to Nadia*, London: Futura, 1999.)
- Naber, Nadine (2000) 'Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23: 37–61.
- Robinson, Kathryn (1996) '"Own" Tales: Representation of Asian-Australian Marriages', *Feminist Review* 52: 53–68.
- Said, E. (1979) *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Schade, Inez and Betty de Hart (1989) 'Vijftienduizend waarschuwingen tegen bi-culturele relaties', *Buitenlandersbulletin* 10: 18–19.
- Ware, Vron (1992) *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*. London: Verso.
- Yegenoglu, Meyda (1998) *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Young, Lola (1996) *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (1997) *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage.
- Zantop, Susanne (1997) *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Pre-Colonial Germany (1770–1870)*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Betty de Hart is writing her PhD on Dutch women with a migrant spouse within Dutch nationality law and immigration law and the role of gender, ethnicity and class. She is affiliated to the Institute for Sociology of Law, University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Address: Institute for Sociology of Law, University of Nijmegen, PO Box 9049, 6500 KK Nijmegen, The Netherlands. [email: B.deHart@jur.kun.nl]