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Underneath Her Pantsuit: A Reflection on Hanna Rosin's The End of Men

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**UNDERNEATH HER PANTSUIT: A REFLECTION ON
HANNA ROSIN’S *THE END OF MEN***

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In her book, *The End of Men*,¹ Hanna Rosin argues that women have “surpassed” men. This new reality necessitates a reevaluation of marriage, family, sex, and gender roles.² To further her claim, Rosin dedicates a chapter of her book to the topic of violence committed by women. She argues that women are becoming more violent³:

The new [trope] taps into a fear that as they gain more power, women will use violence and their new specialized skills to get what they want. Singular and exotic though these cases may be, they raise the broader unsettling possibility that, with the turnover in modern gender roles, the escalation from competitiveness to aggression to violence that we are used to in men has started showing up in women as well.⁴

In this Essay I offer two related but distinct reflections on her line of argumentation with regard to women and violence.⁵ First, I argue that Rosin

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¹ HANNA ROSIN, *THE END OF MEN: AND THE RISE OF WOMEN* (2012).

² *Id.* at 4-7.

³ Hannah Rosin spells out her arguments on violence in a chapter entitled “A More Perfect Poison: The New Wave of Female Violence.” *Id.* at 169-91. My response focuses primarily on this chapter of Rosin’s book.

⁴ *Id.* at 173.

⁵ Rosin also asserts that the increased violent tendencies among women may be learned behaviors from men. She writes:

More and more women seem to be cribbing “male” behaviors, and also inventing

offers an account of women's relationship to violence, which can be used as a lens to critique assumptions about women that appear in international law and development. Second, I argue that despite the usefulness of her argument there is a danger in its presentation: she is heavily reliant on race, class, and religion tropes. Rosin's deployment of these tropes does the work of making her claim more believable to an audience that may be sympathetic to such stereotypes. In doing so she further entrenches negative ideas of the groups represented in her book.

I. "INVEST IN WOMEN, IT PAYS"⁶: WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL LAW AND DEVELOPMENT

Rosin's claim that women can be violent helps to dismantle a pervasive idea in international law and development: women are always peaceful and trustworthy. We can see this line of reasoning about women in the U.N. Security Council Resolutions that call for the expansion of the role of women in peacekeeping operations.⁷ For example, Resolution 1325 calls for expanding the "role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations . . . especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel."⁸ Resolution 1325 argues for greater participation of women specifically based on the assumption that women's "full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security."⁹ Security Council Resolution 1888 begins by

recognizing that women and children affected by armed conflict may feel more secure working with and reporting abuse to women in peacekeeping missions, and that the presence of women peacekeepers may encourage local women to participate in the national armed and security forces, thereby helping to build a security sector that is accessible and responsive to all, especially women.¹⁰

entirely new ways of being violent. As best-selling crime writer Patricia Cornwall recently mused to the *New York Times*, "The more women appropriate power, the more their behavior will mimic that of other powerful people."

Id. at 176 (quoting Sam Tanenhaus, *Violence That Art Didn't See Coming*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 28, 2010, at AR1).

⁶ Jill Sheffield, *Invest in Women, It Pays*, CENTER FOR GLOBAL HEALTH & DIPL., <http://www.ghdnews.com/index.php/global-health-partnerships-and-solutions/global-health-and-economy/34-invest-in-women-it-pays> (last visited May 22, 2013).

⁷ See also Security Council Resolution 1829 "(e)mphasizes the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, as recognized in resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008)." S.C. Res. 1829, ¶ 8, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1829 (Aug. 4, 2008).

⁸ S.C. Res. 1325, ¶ 4, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1325 (Oct. 31, 2000).

⁹ S.C. Res. 1325, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1325 (Oct. 31, 2000).

¹⁰ S.C. Res. 1888, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1888 (Sept. 30, 2009) ("[r]ecognizing that the

Resolution 1888 relies upon a woman's ability to carry the torch for peace, even as women are encouraged to be part of the national armed and security forces.¹¹

The website of the U.N. Peacekeepers articulates these assumptions for consumption by the general public. The website states that the presence of women as peacekeepers reduces "conflict and confrontation" and broadens "the skill set available within a peacekeeping mission."¹²

The images on the U.N. Peacekeeping website show female peacekeepers standing proudly in uniform, teaching in classrooms, or assisting civilian women with their daily work. As the slideshow runs automatically across the screen of the U.N. Peacekeeping website, viewers might feel reassured that if men must fight, women will be there to bring communities back together.¹³

The idea that female security troops will transform military institutions into more humanitarian institutions has popular traction. In a feature story about female peacekeepers printed on International Women's Day 2010, a *New York Times* article stated that the women peacekeepers will "seek to mend what war has wrought."¹⁴ The article highlights the work of a scholar who states that women have a civilizing effect on armies.¹⁵ One year later, Nicholas Kristof picked up on the same theme of women as nonviolent, suggesting that investing in women's education will decrease terrorism – not because women

promotion and empowerment of women and that support for women's organizations and networks are essential in the consolidation of peace to promote the equal and full participation of women...").

¹¹ Carol Cohn, *Mainstreaming Gender in UN Security Policy: A Path to Political Transformation?* 19 (Bos. Consortium on Gend., Sec. and Human Rights, Working Paper No. 204, 2003-2004). Several scholars interrogate the relationship of feminist activism, feminist theory, and the U.N. Security Council Resolutions. *See id.*; *see also* Karen Engle, *From the UN Security Council to Charlize Theron: "Getting Cross" About Sexual Violence in War*, in *WAR IN RETHINKING PEACEKEEPING, GENDER EQUALITY AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY* (Dianne Otto & Gina Heathcote, eds.) (forthcoming 2013); Gina Heathcote, *Force, Feminism and the Security Council*, (SOAS Sch. of Law Legal Studies Research Paper Series, Research Paper No. 6/2010, 2010). Heathcote's paper focuses on the "shifting approaches to participation" as demonstrated in "Security Council Resolutions and the framing of Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 1889 as responses to sexual violence during conflict." *Id.* at 4. Of particular relevance to this Essay is her work considering how Security Resolutions 1325, 1889, 1820, and 1888 represent women as victims and agents. *Id.*

¹² *Women in Peacekeeping*, U.N. PEACEKEEPING, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/womeninpk.shtml> (last visited May 22, 2013).

¹³ "Together they form the thin pink line of a U.N. recruitment campaign for the 21st century. As it marks the 100th International Women's Day on March 8, the United Nations is intensifying efforts to recruit women for peacekeeping missions that seek to mend what war has wrought." Doreen Carvajal, *A Female Approach to Peacekeeping*, N.Y. TIMES, March 23, 2010, at A10.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

are terrorists, but rather because women will stop their husbands, sons, and brothers from committing acts of terror:

Now it is emerging that male domination of society is also a risk factor; the reasons aren't fully understood, but it may be that when women are marginalized the nation takes on the testosterone-laden culture of a military camp or a high-school boys' locker room. . . . Indeed, some scholars say they believe the reason Muslim countries have been disproportionately afflicted by terrorism is not Islamic teachings about infidels or violence but rather the low levels of female education and participation in the labor force.¹⁶

Tropes about women also exist in economic development programs where women are assumed to have a special role in ending poverty and promoting economic growth. As the story goes, women, unlike men, invest in their families and children. Women spend their income on providing health and education, rather than on cigarettes, alcohol, and gambling.¹⁷ In turn, investing in women leads to increased growth and development, not necessarily because women are independently worth investing in, but rather because it yields greater returns.¹⁸ The website of the U.S. Agency for International Development, for example, states that when women and men have the same amount of land, women will produce ten percent more crops.¹⁹ Based on the assumption that women are more likely to repay loans, microfinance institutions often target women.²⁰

¹⁶ Nicholas Kristof & Sheryl WuDunn, *The Women's Crusade*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 17, 2008, at MM28.

¹⁷ *Why Microfinance and Women?*, WOMEN'S WORLD BANKING, <http://www.swwb.org/about/history/why-microfinance-and-women> (last visited May 22, 2013) ("Women are more likely than men to spend their earnings on children's health and education, thereby materially improving the family's wellbeing."). For a general critique of microfinance, see Rashmi Dyal-Chand, *The Pitfalls of Microlending*, BOS. GLOBE, Nov. 13, 2005, at E11.

¹⁸ HER+PROJECT, INVESTING IN WOMEN FOR A BETTER WORLD 2-9 (2010), available at http://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_HERproject_Investing_In_Women.pdf. The HER+ project of Business for Social Responsibility, for example, states that

[t]he benefits of investing in women are evident across the world: Women support their communities, repay their loans faithfully, and provide exemplary leadership on issues from politics to health. It follows that investing in women is good for business, too. And it turns out that workplace women's health-education programs deliver some impressive returns.

Id.

¹⁹ *Why Invest in Women?*, U.S. AGENCY FOR INT'L DEV., <http://50.usaid.gov/infographic-why-invest-in-women/> (last visited May 22, 2013).

²⁰ *Small Change, Big Changes: Women and Microfinance*, INT'L LABOUR OFFICE, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@gender/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_091581.pdf (last visited May 23, 2013).

II. REINFORCING RACE, CLASS, AND RELIGION TROPES

Rosin's argument that women are not always responsible peacemakers may resonate with scholars who critically interrogate women's relationship to violence or find the tropes of women in development simplistic and essentializing.²¹ Unfortunately, Rosin's critical claims, however convincing, are often problematic in their deployment. Several of Rosin's examples of female violence involve poor women, Muslim women, and poor women of color often described in coded language.²² For example, her stories of violent women include a white woman who smashes a McDonald's drive-through because they had no Chicken McNuggets,²³ African American girls who attack a middle-aged man in Washington, D.C. with their "braids flying,"²⁴ a young woman with "Beyonce's eyes" and a "curvy figure" in an alternative criminal justice program,²⁵ and female "suicide bombers" who are able to hide "twelve pounds of explosives" under their "traditional Muslim garb."²⁶ One might question why Rosin chose these examples. Are we already suspicious of these women? Do readers of *The Atlantic* and her book accept her argument more readily when the violent actors are African American girls attacking a gentleman of unnamed race on a street corner?²⁷ Or when we imagine a woman in "Muslim garb" with explosives under her clothing boarding a plane? Rosin's argument that men are ending is strengthened, consciously or not, by her reliance on race, class, and religion tropes.

Rosin's reliance on these tropes is a distraction from a focus on the women that enable violence, death, poverty, and torture on a larger scale. Madeline Albright,²⁸ then the U.N. Ambassador, justified the death of approximately

²¹ See generally Chandra T. Mohanty, *US Empire and the Project of Women's Studies: Stories of Citizenship, Complicity and Dissent*, 13 GENDER, PLACE & CULTURE 7 (2006) (discussing women's studies and feminism in the context of U.S. imperialism); Brenda Smith, *Uncomfortable Places, Close Spaces: Female Correctional Workers' Sexual Interactions with Men and Boys in Custody*, 59 UCLA L. REV. 1690 (2012) (examining "female-perpetrated sexual abuse in custodial settings and its place at the intersection of race, class, and gender in order to disentangle complex and overlapping narratives of abuse, sex, desire, and transgression").

²² Not all of Rosin's examples are of poor women, Muslim women, or poor women of color. Her chapter begins with a few examples of women with "advanced professional" degrees and "impressive" jobs. After these initial examples, however, Rosin begins to focus in on the groups I describe here. ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 169-72.

²³ *Id.* at 179.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.* at 180-81.

²⁶ *Id.* at 185.

²⁷ Rosin leaves out the race of the man attacked. *Id.* at 179.

²⁸ Female political leaders do make an appearance in Rosin's book in passing: "As always, Pinker's broad sweeping truths are hard to argue with, except by thinking of counterexamples. (Was Margaret Thatcher a pacifist? Did Condoleezza Rice oppose the Iraq war? Did wars end after women got the vote? Is there anyone fiercer than an anonymous

500,000 children in her 1996 defense of sanctions in Iraq.²⁹ There is nothing more unwomanly than killing children. Former First Lady Laura Bush's alleged devotion to women's rights became a war cry in Afghanistan resulting in death and injury for thousands of the very women she sought to rescue.³⁰ As a candidate for president, Hillary Clinton threatened to "obliterate Iran"³¹ – an act that would certainly kill women. These female leaders might not wear "Muslim garb," but their pantsuits³² (or skirtsuits in some cases) seem to provide enough coverage for the violence they are willing to unleash.

mommy blogger ranting about women who don't want to breast-feed?)" *Id.* at 175.

²⁹ *tj1776, Madeleine Albright Says 500,000 Dead Iraqi Children Was "Worth It" Wins Medal of Freedom*, YOUTUBE (May 2, 2012), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omnskeu-puE>. Albright later said she regretted the statement. See *Democracy Now! Confronts Madeline Albright on the Iraq Sanctions: Was It Worth the Price?*, DEMOCRACY NOW (July 30, 2004), http://www.democracynow.org/2004/7/30/democracy_now_confronts_madeline_albright_on.

³⁰ In November 2001 Laura Bush stated the following during a presidential Weekly Radio Address:

I am delivering this week's radio address to kick off a worldwide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the Al Qaida terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban. That regime is now in retreat across much of the country, and the people of Afghanistan, especially women, are rejoicing. Afghan women know through hard experience what the rest of the world is discovering: The brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists. Long before the current war began, the Taliban and its terrorist allies were making the lives of children and women in Afghanistan miserable. Seventy percent of the Afghan people are malnourished. One in every four children won't live past the age of five because health care is not available. Women have been denied access to doctors when they're sick. Life under the Taliban is so hard and repressive, even small displays of joy are outlawed. Children aren't allowed to fly kites. Their mothers face beatings for laughing out loud. Women cannot work outside the home or even leave their homes by themselves.

Text: Laura Bush on Taliban Oppression of Women, WASH. POST, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html (last visited May 23, 2013).

³¹ David Morgan, *Clinton Says U.S. Could "Totally Obliterate" Iran*, REUTERS (Apr. 22, 2008, 1:43 PM), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/04/22/us-usa-politics-iran-idUSN2224332720080422>.

³² Pantsuits and skirtsuits have been the subject of much discussion (and parody) for female politicians. See, e.g., Suzy Menkes, *For Margaret Thatcher, a Wardrobe Was Armor*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 11, 2013, at E5; Jillian Berman, *Angela Merkel's Pantsuits Spark Media Madness*, HUFFINGTON POST (Oct. 9, 2012, 1:56 PM), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/09/angela-merkels-pantsuits-_n_1951627.html; Robin Givhan, *Wearing the Pants*, WASH. POST (Dec. 9, 2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/08/AR2007120801502.html>.

III. WHOSE CLOTHES WILL WE LOOK UNDER?

If we take Rosin's critique that women can be violent seriously we would need to interrogate our assumptions about women, girls, war, and development. It would reveal an incoherence we already live with: women leaders deploy armies of poor women³³ to kill or save other poor women. They do so with the support of international law and development institutions that characterize women as inherently peaceful and responsible (despite the actions of many female leaders). Acknowledging this incoherence leaves us, and international law and development practitioners in particular, in a hard position: it strips us of an easy solution (women) to the world's most complicated problems (war and poverty).

It unleashes a new set of questions with no easy answers: If women might also cheat, gamble, and smoke, how will we decide who the trustworthy women are? If women can be violent, which women are the most violent? Which women threaten our peace, security, development, and democracy? Whose clothes will we look under in our screening rooms at the airport to help to ensure our safety?

Rosin's examples, and some of the scholarship she features, provide a window into the answers one may offer to these many questions. It is poor women, Muslim women, and poor women of color on whom we should focus our surveillance apparatus, and it is their clothes under which we should look—while we let the ladies in pantsuits saunter by.

³³ Doreen Carvajal, *A Female Approach to Peacekeeping*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 5, 2010), http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/06/world/africa/06iht-ftpeace.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (“For many military and police officers from poorer nations, a main attraction of peacekeeping is a special allowance financed by the United Nations and disbursed to the home countries of peacekeepers. It adds up to about \$1,000 a month, which – for peacemakers from third world countries – can be equivalent to five times their base pay.”).