

2015

# Marine to Muslim: Islam, Terror, and United States Foreign Policy on Homeland

Maia McCabe

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior\\_capstone](https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone)

---

## Recommended Citation

McCabe, Maia, "Marine to Muslim: Islam, Terror, and United States Foreign Policy on Homeland" (2015). *Senior Capstone Projects*. 428.  
[https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior\\_capstone/428](https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone/428)

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Window @ Vassar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Window @ Vassar. For more information, please contact [library\\_thesis@vassar.edu](mailto:library_thesis@vassar.edu).

Vassar College

Marine to Muslim: Islam, Terror, and United States Foreign Policy on *Homeland*

Maia McCabe

Media Studies Program

Advisors: William Hoynes and Philip Scepanski

April 24, 2015

### **Acknowledgments:**

It's hard to believe I've come around to writing the acknowledgments section of this thesis. Finishing the thesis means I've finished my major, and that graduation is close. How time goes. I am so thankful for the support I have received on this project. To my advisors, Professor Hoynes and Professor Scepanski, also known as the Bill and Phil duo, I am so grateful for the sincere attention you have given my thesis over the past months. Bill, I am so glad to have stumbled upon you as an advisor per Tom Ellman's recommendation when I transferred here as a sophomore. You are so thoughtful, and I have always appreciated your ability to make everyone feel comfortable in academic situations through your inclusive and humble personality, stellar academic guidance aside. Phil, how lucky I am that you arrived this year! I am so grateful for the energy, time and attention you have spent on my thesis. It is certainly disappointing that I won't have a chance to take a class with you, but I think we made up some time in our lengthy meetings (Again, thanks). I will fondly remember our conversations about *Homeland*, other shows, and other stuff. Additional thanks to Heesok and my fellow MEDS seniors, our seminar was helpful for me, and it is so nice to have a cohort in all of you smart people. Thank you also to Tarik Elseewi who first inspired me to think about *Homeland* in an academic context. Thanks to my friends and family and anyone else who sent well wishes throughout this process. And last but certainly not least thank you to my beloved dog, Bear, who is my definition of perfection.

## Table of Contents

Introduction: 4-7

Chapter One: The Television Drama After September 11: 8-18

Chapter Two: The Economics of HBO, and What Constitutes a 'Quality' Program: 19-28

Chapter Three: Inside *Homeland*: 29-40

Chapter Four: The Critics Have Spoken: The Public Conversation Concerning *Homeland*: 41-52

Conclusion: 53-57

Works Cited: 58-60

## Introduction: A Seedling Grows

I became fascinated with the events that took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 during my senior year of high school, while taking a class called “World Crises,” which featured a significant unit on the attacks. In class, we read *The 9/11 Commission Report* in order to understand exactly what went wrong on that day, and how the hijackers were able to successfully execute their attack from the moment they set foot in America to when the last plane crashed. Perhaps more importantly, we examined the aftermath: the media frenzy, the political discourse, and the eventual war in Iraq.

September 11<sup>th</sup> was a topic worthy of study under the “World Crises” title as it made worldwide news and proved to many that an attack planned and executed by international actors could take place on American soil and potentially kill a large number of Americans; acts of war or political violence were no longer only on the news, or far away in foreign countries. 9/11 disturbed the notion that our huge army or our economy could keep us safe. The attacks figuratively shook the world and will undoubtedly go down as one of the most, if not the most, significant single historical and political events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since my World Crises history class, my curiosity regarding September 11<sup>th</sup> as both a historical event and cultural phenomenon, as well my more general interest in terrorism, politics, and media (and the ways they intersect), has only grown stronger.

The television program *Homeland* premiered on Showtime on October 2, 2011. *Homeland* was adapted for American television, as it is based upon an Israeli show called *Prisoners of War*. The plot of its first season centered on a bipolar, manically brilliant but rebellious CIA agent named Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes), in her mission to stop a

terrorist attack. Carrie believes a U.S. Marine named Nicholas Brody, who has been held captive in Iraq for eight years, may have committed himself to Islamic jihad, and will execute the impending strike. In its themes, characters, and plot lines, *Homeland* grapples with innately sensitive, and politically relevant, subject material

Upon watching, it is apparent that *Homeland* offers more complex interpretations of terrorism and terrorists than had been found on other television shows with themes similar to it, such as FOX's immensely popular *24*. Personally, I found the way that the show dealt with these heavy political issues in the first season very striking and different from anyway I had seen terror addressed before on television. Additionally, *Homeland* received mixed reviews regarding its treatment of these topics, with some critics (Rosenberg, 2012, Hogan, 2012) hailing the show as a progressive alternative to more conservative others such as FOX's *24*. But others (Kundnani, 2015, Kumar, 2014) deemed it nothing more than another incidence, if a better disguised one, of potentially harmful Islamophobic content in the American mass media. This thesis first examines the contextual background of *Homeland* in the form of its network (Showtime), and comparable television. Next, *Homeland's* textual content is analyzed, and the major critical circles of thought are highlighted. Ultimately, there are compelling arguments made both in favor of and against *Homeland* and it would be unwise to claim that the show *is* either Islamophobic or progressive. It is indeed both, and this thesis explains why.

Studying *Homeland* is important because the mass media is quite possibly the main force of information and thus is behind the common perceptions of the way the world works. This thesis is particularly political in the sense that part of what drives it is

an interest in real world international relations. The vast majority, if not all adult Americans, is aware that the U.S. has a history of conflict with the Middle East. Relating to this, the religion most commonly associated with Middle Eastern countries is Islam, while in America it is Christianity. The discussion of various U.S./Middle Eastern conflicts in the mass media and by political figures has historically included biased descriptions of Muslims and Arabs, leading to Islamophobia, and particular definitions about what terror is. Popular media are influential whether they are negative, positive, or misleading. While it is debated just how powerful mass media's influence is, it is certainly not a neutral stimulus. In order to make sense of popular media and increase our agency in consuming it, we can learn to think and study it critically. We can notice our own and other's reactions in an observational way to better understand what we, as both consumers and creators of culture, are producing. What is communicated through mass media outlets is informative about what we want to see, and what we want to say, which is what makes *Homeland* worthy of study.

The first chapter focuses on mapping a landscape of television after September 11<sup>th</sup>. As stated above, the attacks were influential in more than solely political ways, and noticeable changes occurred throughout the television landscape, ranging from news programs, to comedy, to drama of all specificities. Chapter one examines trends noticeable among dramas in order to understand common responses to the attack and to see which of these post-traumatic molds *Homeland* adopted. The second chapter begins the process of considering *Homeland* specifically by observing its network. As previously mentioned, *Homeland* is a product of the premium cable channel, Showtime. This means that it exists in a very specific, and relatively exclusive place, as Showtime is not

included in a basic cable package. The second chapter gives a brief history of premium cable networks, and addresses how Showtime distinguishes itself through its branding as well as its entertainment content. This chapter enlightens the final two chapters, which focus specifically on *Homeland*.

Chapter three is a close textual analysis of *Homeland*, focusing on both the first as well as the fourth and most recent season. This chapter observes specific scenes, characters, and plotlines in the show, especially those concerning its treatment of Islam. There is also a comparison element to see if and how the show has evolved from its first season to its fourth, perhaps in response to criticisms. Using textual evidence, this chapter argues that while *Homeland* has problematic elements to it, and at its artistic core has the potential to perpetuate Islamophobia, it is deserving of the praise it received for offering more complex political narratives. Finally, Chapter four offers a review of the diverse public conversation and critical reviews directed at *Homeland* in order to better understand the controversy and the consequences of the program.

## Chapter One: The Television Drama After September 11

Post September 11th, 2001 new doors opened in the television world; there arose a potential for themes born out of the attacks. The public discourse following that fateful day was one that inspired fear for personal safety, and more specifically fear of another unforeseen attack by a terrorist group. While President Bush can be credited with making a distinction at times between al Qaeda and Islam, the loudest discourse, fostered mostly by his administration and conservative news outlets, evoked Xenophobia and Islamophobia. When asked “Why do they hate us?” by press in an address to the nation on September 20, 2001, President Bush so infamously responded, “They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.” (Bush, 2003) In this answer, Bush laid the groundwork for a post-9/11 narrative that channeled Samuel P. Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*, which argues fundamental and irreconcilable cultural differences between Eastern and Western worlds.

Moreover, Americans were forced to question the notions of personal safety and security that they had taken for granted for so many years. “I thought this didn’t happen here,” they pondered, “This is America, a country free of fear, not a warzone!” Perhaps in an effort to take some action and calm the masses, the President declared a war on a concept: “terror,” resonating Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” Observing various mass media is crucial during times of historical significance as it provides insight into the state of national consciousness. After events happen, if they are worthy, every news channel in the country will cover them, and from what messages are transmitted by these

stations, a discourse and common way of communicating is formed. This discourse, or various discourses, become a part of our culture, and inevitably morph into fictional outlets. Surely, fictional television evolved after the trauma of September 11th. In order to better understand *Homeland*, it is important to gather a sense of other thrillers and dramas that featured similar content. Many thematic changes and trends in television programming can be traced to the attacks, and a review of the literature reveals common reactions observed by many scholars interested in post 9/11 television. Repeated themes included shows that mirrored specific characteristics of the attacks and their aftermath in their plots, the reappearance of the hero, as well as the fulfillment of a duty by offering a lesson, or an alternative to an Islamophobic stereotype.

One way that the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks permeated the realm of entertainment television was in the simple fact that they propelled terror to a status more suitable for entertainment. Terrorism was not only reborn as a fear and a reality in the minds of entertainment creators and consumers following the panicked post 9/11 discourse, but also in the culturally representative medium of entertainment television. Andrew Martin and Ina Rae Hark write about how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *24* directly mirror characteristics of the specific September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in their plots.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is an example of a show that reflected a certain cultural concern after 9/11, that of the elusive and unclear enemy. Andrew Martin says that in its final season (year 2003) the evil threats facing Buffy and crew were much more multifaceted than in earlier seasons. He writes, "...The evil forces that Buffy must confront became increasingly more complex, powerful, and better organized until the final season, when a powerful force called 'The First' begins to make itself felt." (Martin,

114) This complex, elusive force observed in *Buffy* is comparable to the terrorists President Bush described after 9/11. In a speech given five years after the attacks, the President described the stateless terrorist: “The terrorists who declared war on America represent no nation. They defend no territory. And they wear no uniform...They operate in the shadows of society. They send small teams of operatives to infiltrate free nations. They live quietly among their victims. They conspire in secret. And then they strike without warning.” (Bush, 2006) In addition to this development in enemy characteristics, Martin also argues that *Buffy* directly symbolized U.S. foreign relations in its last season.

He says that Buffy as a character represents the United States, and her network represents a smattering of potential allies in the War on Terror. In the final season, Buffy has more conflict with many of her friends but she can always count on an English mentor to guide her through the most challenging of times. Martin compares this to the United States having England as its only ally in the Iraq invasion, to the dismay of much of the international community. (Ibid) Buffy, like Bush, struggles to organize her troops for a final showdown against the evil force, and the show adopts a military tone. Martin writes, “Buffy, too, would find it difficult to negotiate a working battle plan with her international coalition of the willing. Under these circumstances, the language of the show became increasingly militaristic.” (Martin, 115) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s more militaristic tone correlated with, and supported, the growing militaristic atmosphere that existed in post 9/11 America. And though *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is categorized as fantasy and does not overtly focus on terrorism or even politics as we typically understand them, the show was still noticeably affected by 9/11.

Unlike *Buffy*, FOX's *24* would not be filed in the fantasy genre. *24* premiered on November 6, 2001, less than two months after the attacks. It featured a heroic counterterrorism agent named Jack Bauer as the main character. The show also had a unique format: each hour-long episode of *24* is meant to be a real-time hour in Bauer's day, making a twenty-four-episode season just one action-packed day. This format alone heightens the show's essence of realism. By simply adjusting the clock of the show to the actual clocks of our day, the viewer is able to better relate to what they are watching, as they too live their lives hour by hour.

Ina Rae Hark observes the ways in which *24* mirrors 9/11, and concludes that *24*'s themes and storylines were similar to the actual nature of 9/11 throughout the entire nine season series. Interestingly, even the pilot episode contained content resembling the actual attacks despite the fact that it was filmed before they happened. The timing of the attacks combined with the content of the pilot episode actually caused it to be pulled for editing before airing. The episode was then revised and aired in November 2001. The revisions were deemed necessary because the episode centered on the aftermath of a deadly explosion on a commercial jet in mid-flight, the result of a terrorist's bomb. (Hark, 121) President Bush's concept of a new and more sophisticated enemy can also be seen in *24*. Season One is composed of Jack Bauer rushing from place to place in order to put a halt to threats in geographically different areas.

Of course, the attacks on 9/11 were executed by four separate plane hijackings, adding an extra element of stress and chaos to the tragic day. How could anyone know when the last plane had crashed? Were counter terrorism units equipped to handle this many hijackings at once? Concurrent threats are a key theme in Season One of *24*.

Though the entire season is supposed to be only twenty-four hours long, and it would be perfectly reasonable if Jack pursued just one enemy, or possibly even a connection or lead to an enemy, the show goes in the opposite direction, and Jack faces multiple threats within the one day. This is likely in part to make more exciting television through less effort, as adding another obvious villain into the mix is both less difficult and less exciting than trying to artfully draw out the same one for more episodes. Though cheap heightened thrill and excitement on screen is certainly part of the appeal of concurrent threats, they are also attractive for their realism; the first season of *24* echoes the real events of September 11<sup>th</sup> in its basic plot material, and its more specific storyline choices.

September 11<sup>th</sup> inspired *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *24* to mirror and adapt elements of the attacks on that day, and in the case of the latter, counterterrorism proved a sufficient focus upon which to base an entire series. While the aforementioned programs drew upon the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks for their plots, some shows engaged with the national trauma in a more specific way. A second theme that stands out whilst completing a literature review of post-9/11 television is that which claims that, after the attacks, the hero America needed for revenge returned on screen. Professor Stacy Takacs says that while the initial national mindset after the attacks was to revel in innocence, this sentiment was soon replaced by anger. She writes, “If the immediate response to 9/11 was to celebrate national innocence by constructing trauma narratives oriented around victimization and passivity, such self-pity soon gave way to a national desire for vengeance and action.” (Takacs, 65) Takacs argues that this national mindset “provided fertile ground for the proliferation of spy programs” such as *24*, *Alias*, and *The Agency*. (Ibid)

*The Agency* ran for two seasons on CBS and one of its taglines was filled only with buzzwords. Below a picture of serious and concerned looking agents it read: “Terror. Nuclear Threats. Biological Warfare. A New Era. A New War.” Similarly to *24*, *The Agency* also had to pull its pilot episode, as it centered on a threat of attack in London by al Qaeda, and consistently referred to Osama bin Laden. However, unlike *24*, in *The Agency*’s pilot episode, the attack is stopped. Takacs says that this episode had to be recalled, as it would remind viewer of the CIA’s failure to stop 9/11. She writes, “The successful containment of the threat provided a fantasy of institutional competence that belied the reality exposed by events on the ground.” (Takacs, 66) Once President Bush’s “Operation Enduring Freedom” was underway, CBS chose to air the episode originally intended to be the pilot, as extra reassurance that the CIA is competent in fighting the War on Terror. (Ibid)

Takacs also highlights a notable distinction between seasons one and two of *The Agency* concerning its genre. She writes, “...*The Agency* undertook a full face-lift to bring it more in line with the conventions of the thriller genre, whose emphasis has always been on heroic individualism... The previous emphasis on information gathering, analysis, and agency culture was abandoned in favor of the streamlined, action-oriented follies of O’Mara’s character.” (Takacs, 67) Jason O’Mara played Agent A.B. Stiles, a classic super strong, handsome, young and energetic protagonist. (Ibid)

Takacs claims that with the exception of one miniseries entitled *The Grid*, every political thriller employed the hero trope. She writes, “Every counterterrorism series would adopt a similar pattern, with distinct heroes, action-centered plots, technology that rarely failed, and a relentless, driving pace designed to create a heightened sense of

urgency.” (Takacs, 68) Takacs claims that the appeal of these characters to viewers is intertwined with the President’s declaration of War on Terror, and that heroic characters such as Jack Bauer and A.B. Stiles validated the turn to violent force used by the United States as a counter to the 9/11 attacks. (Ibid)

Carrie Mathison of *Homeland* is far from the hero described by Takacs, far from being the female version of Jack Bauer, which proves an interesting contrast seen in a show made ten years after 9/11 instead of immediately following it. Carrie suffers from bipolar disorder, and the viewer watches her struggle with her mental illness as much as they watch her succeed in her professional life. While Jack does have his vulnerable moments, such as when his wife dies, he is otherwise a traditional hero, similar in character to James Bond and the like. Bauer is a sort of super human; a consistent force of unstoppable lethal power, coolly overcoming all obstacles while Carrie is often just scraping by, brilliant but disobedient, and usually on the verge of losing her job. *24* and *Homeland* are especially interesting to compare as Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon, who co-wrote for *24*, created *Homeland*. They explain in their own words some differences between Jack and Carrie. Gordon says:

Carrie is in many ways a more complex character. Jack’s a father, he’s a husband, he’s a secret agent who doesn’t suffer fools and punches them in the nose when he doesn’t get his way. Carrie doesn’t have that advantage. She’s younger, she’s a woman, she’s got a mood disorder, and as effective as she’s been she’s also someone whose been marginalize by her behavior. (Gordon)

The complexity of Carrie’s character speaks to the larger themes of realism and direct engagement with September 11th on the show, which will be further discussed later on.

While Takacs points out a widespread reliance on the hero archetype, Lynn Spigel and Evelyn Alsultany instead discuss the trend of fictional television programs

interpreting 9/11 as an opportunity to divert from this norm and assume an educational or progressive stance, taking advantage of their ability to reach and potentially influence a large amount of viewers. Specifically, Spigel argues that post-9/11 television involved an increase in “history lessons” across all types of programming, including news, comedy, and drama. She says that this was an attempt to “resuscitate nationalism” during traumatic times, and that, specifically for fictional prime time dramas, the inclusion of a history lesson acted as a sort of threshold shows needed to cross before they returned to pure entertainment immediately after the attacks. (Spigel, 242) She uses an episode of NBC’s political drama *The West Wing* as an example of a show that added a blatant historical and moral lesson to an episode in response the attack.

The episode entitled “Isaac and Ishmael” began with cast members extending their gratitude to the New York Fire and Police departments. It then continued centering on a class of high school students who happen to be on a tour of the White House when a bomb threat is called in. The students are locked down and they begin to learn about terrorism from a White House employee, who Spiegel describes as a “spin-doctor.” (Spigel, 243) Though the employee does attribute some fault to the United States, the overall conversation focuses not on political issues or conflict, but on cultural differences, such as the lack of freedom for women in Muslim countries. Spigel argues that this episode sends simplified orientalist messages to viewers about the superiority of America, and the devaluation of the other. She says, “In this regard, the episode uses historical pedagogy to solidify American national unity *against* the “enemy” rather than to encourage any real engagement with Islam, the ethics of U.S. international policy, or the consequences of the then-impending U.S. bomb strikes.” (Spigel, 244) Spigel uses

*The West Wing* as her case study to exemplify media creators sidetracking from regular programming after September 11<sup>th</sup> in an attempt to teach the public a lesson.

Relating to this, a major issue faced by television executives was that of how to depict Muslims, Arabs and terror on screen. Evelyn Alsultany discusses a group of post-9/11 television which makes an effort to present alternative narratives that work to complicate the basic good and evil storylines surrounding terror that the Bush administration and other media outlets perpetuated immediately following the attacks. An example of one of these overly simplified plotlines would be an Islamic terrorist who is envious of the Western lifestyle and hopes to execute an attack, or a narrative similar to the one Spiegel describes from *The West Wing* episode (one that views terrorism as a cultural rather than political problem.) The hero trope is also prone to participation in this narrative. More complex presentations described below by Alsultany were and are attempts by producers and writers to do their part at reducing the heightened levels of Islamophobia in the United States.

After the *Council on American-Islamic Relations* accused them of too often associating Muslims with terrorism, *24* felt pressure avoid plotlines with the potential to offend. Alsultany writes about how *24* attempted to diversify its portrayals in her essay “*24: Challenging Stereotypes.*” According to Alsultany, there are a few classic ways to avoid accusations of Islamophobia. These methods are seen repeatedly, and are used by both *Homeland* and *24*. Alsultany says that the tactics rely heavily on character-based changes, such as “portraying Arab/Muslim Americans as patriotic Americans or as innocent victims of post-9/11 hate crimes, humanizing Arab/Muslim terrorists, and presenting an array of terrorist identities.” (Alsultany, 85) As mentioned above,

throughout *24* terrorists come from all over the world, and once *24* realized that it was accumulating bad press regarding its engagement with Islam, producers even went as far as to preach acceptance of difference during commercial breaks; Producers had Keifer Sutherland, who plays Jack Bauer, make a public service announcement about tolerance and understanding. (Alsultany, 86)

*Homeland* also falls into the category described above. It is an interesting show initially because it is difficult to determine what it is trying to communicate to its viewers. *Homeland* is the first show to premise itself (at least in Season One) on the question of whether or not a white, American marine has made a pledge to al Qaeda to execute an attack on United States soil. By significantly diversifying the characteristics of its antagonist, *Homeland* can be clustered into Alsultany's group of television programs that make an effort to stray from blatantly Islamophobic narratives.

Alsultany says that *24* is just one of many shows using these strategies in an attempt to do their part. She says that though she recognizes the importance of these nuanced narratives, she believes that ultimately they are not successful in their desired goal. She writes, "However, for all the show's innovations, *24* remains wedded to a script that represents Arabs and Muslims only within the context of terrorism and therefore does not effectively challenge the stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims." (Alsultany, 89) Furthermore, Alsultany believes that not only are the more complex shows unhelpful, they are actually harmful, as they misrepresent the current treatment of Muslims in America. She writes, "Sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 give the impression that racism is not tolerated in the United States, despite the slew of policies that have targeted and disproportionately impacted Arabs and Muslims."

(Alsultany, 90) Alsultany believes that the best type of television program for challenging Islamophobia is the one that does not situate Arabs or Muslims in a context related to terrorism, such as TLC's show *All-American Muslim*, which showed the daily lives of ordinary Muslim families. (Alsultany, 91)

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The West Wing*, *24*, *The Agency*, *Homeland* and many more are all at some level intertwined with September 11<sup>th</sup> and more broadly the threat of terrorism as it is perceived in the United States. There is thematic overlap between these shows that can be traced to the aftermath of the attacks. As threats of terror permeated the national consciousness new trends arose in television. These trends included a realization about the nature of terrorism on screen, as witnessed in *24*'s format and style, and *Buffy*'s darker tone. Many programs also offered Americans a hero they needed in the form of a fictional character. Finally, there was a new pressure felt by media executives to participate an educational or forward thinking narrative following the attacks, as seen in *The West Wing*, *24*, and *Homeland*.

## Chapter Two: The Economics of HBO, and What Constitutes a ‘Quality’ Program

After reviewing the broad post-9/11 television landscape, it is helpful to take an altered look at *Homeland*'s specific context. *Homeland* is broadcast on Showtime, which is commonly known as a “premium cable” channel. Showtime is premium because it subsists off of monthly subscription fees instead of relying on sponsorship from advertisers. The goal of this chapter is to better understand the abilities and characteristics of premium cable and recognize how *Homeland* is a product of these different guidelines. Evidently, Showtime and other premium channels distinguish themselves from basic cable channels through branding efforts that conflate their programs with high culture. There are also noticeable differences in content, such as the common personality traits found among basic cable protagonists, and those of pay cable, as well as censorship differences. The majority of the literature discussing this type of network is centered on Home Box Office (HBO), the most established of the premium channels. However, Showtime's economic model is the same as HBO's, so the research applies to both.

HBO was founded in the early 1970s on an entirely different economic premise from that of traditional cable: Instead of supporting itself by the means of advertising contracts, HBO would instead subsist off of the subscription fees paid by individuals. Consequently, this economic format allowed for an increased consideration of viewer preferences. Gary Edgerton, who contributed to *The HBO Reader* writes, “HBO's subscriber format focused all of the channel's attention on pleasing and retaining its viewing audience.” (Edgerton, 1) For HBO to succeed, it needed to focus most heavily on content, which had to be of a certain caliber for consumers to purchase the channel, be satisfied with it, and not cancel their subscriptions. (Edgerton, 2) Part of this mission

relies on the creation of a brand, one that can be quickly associated with high quality material. Edgerton says that HBO's slogan "It's not TV, it's HBO" encompasses this branding effort. He writes, "What this branding slogan implies is that the series and specials produced by and presented on HBO are a qualitative cut above your usual run-of-the-mill programming." (Edgerton, 9) Edgerton states that thirty years after HBO's launch, it was clear that they had successfully established a desirable brand. Nevertheless, a nice label alone is not necessarily a sufficient way to remain relevant and economically prosperous, and HBO executives made some additional efforts in the late 1980s. (Ibid)

One involved adding original television series to HBO's repertoire. HBO again found success in this endeavor, as their first original series' *Sex and the City* (1998) and *The Sopranos* (1999) were hits, and 26% of American television households subscribed. It is also significant that HBO is not a cheap service, and at a \$15 per month subscription fee the company was earning huge profits. According to Edgerton, HBO customers were and are paying for "something different, challenging and more original." With this new option, consumers refused to settle for "the least objectionable programming they could find" on regular cable. (Edgerton, 11) HBO's liberating economic model also allowed executives to spend the subscriptions fees in a useful way: attracting creative talent.

The success of HBO proves that not all television need be a slave to ratings, and that other fiscally prosperous options were available. Because HBO was not required to meet a ratings standard approved by sponsors, it had the freedom to branch out and create television that would not necessarily satisfy advertisers, but was worth the price according to audiences. Edgerton writes, "Freed from direct ratings pressure, HBO invested its considerable cache of subscription dollars into hiring the best available talent,

reaching deeply into the creative community.” (Edgerton, 13) Artists were attracted to HBO as HBO was to them, because the premium channel had earned a reputation as a space with fewer restrictions on creativity. Edgerton writes, “The network’s tendency to permit creative freedom made it a magnet for experienced producers, directors, and writers looking for an outlet for projects to which they [were] deeply committed.” (Ibid) Commitment is significant in this instance because while a director, producer etc. may be willing to sacrifice and alter certain projects in order to see them on basic cable, they would be more hesitant to change their most precious works. Of course, this also forms a direct connection between quality and HBO, if artists are saving their best for premium cable.

The creation of HBO and the crucial branding efforts that enabled its success are actually part of a larger trend of narrowcasting in television, which emerged in the late 1960s. Aniko Bodroghkozy writes about how this trend began during the famous youth rebellion in *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion*. During this time, network executives realized that the youth of the time was not tuning into the programs popular with the older generation. Bodroghkozy writes, “Warning bells were ringing within industry circles, suggesting that the seemingly successful formula of escapist fare consisting of sitcoms, westerns, cop shows, variety shows, and the like were quickly alienating younger and highly educated viewers.” (Bodroghkozy, 202) Executives realized that youths were not looking to use television as a means of escape, but rather as a medium for further validation of their radical beliefs. The programming managed to successfully adapt with shows such as *M\*A\*S\*H* and *All in the Family*, which featured protagonists rebelling against the patriarchy and otherwise aligning with the popular

sentiments of the youth rebellion. Bodroghkozy writes, “The socially relevant dramas attempted to appeal to sophisticated and disaffected baby boomers by giving them characters of their own age group who mouthed their sensibilities and values.” (Bodroghkozy, 234) In the same way that major networks catered specifically to sophisticated youth in the late sixties and early seventies, premium cable channels are also looking to attract sophisticated audiences today.

Showtime launched shortly after HBO, and while the latter is Time Warner’s child, CBS parents Showtime using the same original economic model. Thus far, Showtime is proving a worthy rival to HBO. Edgerton quotes CBS president Leslie Moonves saying, “As Showtime continues to add high-quality programs there is no reason it won’t become for CBS what HBO is for Time Warner.” (Edgerton, 15) Former HBO CEO Chris Albrecht is also quoted saying he appreciates Showtime and other competitors. He says, “We showed what was possible to do on television. I think what that did was to bring more people into the category and to spend more money on original scripted programming. It’s good for everybody when the bar gets raised.” (Edgerton, 16) HBO and Showtime’s unique economic model is important for further understanding *Homeland* as a creative piece; the only approval *Homeland* needs is from its audience, and the show and its counterparts are not subjected to screening by any company trying to sell a product during the airtime of the program.

There are evident differences between basic and pay cable that speak to television’s capacity when executives are free to focus purely on artists and audiences. Perhaps the most obvious distinction between the two is apparent in censorship. On regular cable, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) places restrictions on

obscene material ie. Language, violence, nudity and sex. But premium cable networks are able to run free when it comes to this commonly forbidden material, as they do not use the public spectrum to transmit their programming, and therefore are not regulated by the FCC. (Koerner) Additionally, many advertisers do not wish to associate their brands with “unwholesome” content, but premium networks do not need to meet these standards and can include as many obscenities as they please.

Judging from personal experience, this lack of restriction results in premium programs with plenty of “obscene” content, which, though advertisers shy away, has come to be associated with not only premium cable but also with notions of quality rather than obscenity. It is interesting to consider how and why this distinction has come about. Of course, there are many possibilities as to why audiences prefer their television with swears, sex, and violence, and surely one could complete an entire thesis on this question, but for now a few theories: One is that, when it comes to the dramatic genre, so called obscenities give the viewer the impression that they are watching more a mature, thoughtful, intense, or serious program; Including sex, violence, and profanity bring television, ever thought of as a lesser form of entertainment, up to the level of film where restrictions have not historically been as strict. And while violence and profanity are perhaps in a league of there own, it is, for obvious reasons, not at all surprising that audiences enjoy the sex scenes they can find on premium cable. Finally, there is the possibility that these obscenities are preferred to censored basic cable precisely because they have become associated with premium, highbrow television. Avi Santo further discusses how premium networks distinguish themselves in general, and specifically regarding the protagonists featured on their programs.

In “Para-television and Discourses of Distinction,” Santo seeks to analyze how premium cable separates itself from basic cable significantly enough to be deemed a rewarding investment by consumers. Like Edgerton, he emphasizes that this process begins in HBO’s short slogan “It’s not TV, it’s HBO.” He argues that the tagline is an important part of a larger branding strategy meant to “effectively convince potential subscribers that HBO offered something fundamentally different than what they could already get for free on other channels.” (Santo, 31) This elusive “something” is meant to be unique, and superior in quality to basic cable.

Santo says that while HBO’s “aesthetic criteria” are “lauded by critics and fans alike,” defining quality is not simple, and actually has much to do with perceived exclusivity. He writes, “...’quality’ now denotes a distinction between HBO and other television networks, which is primarily marked by the exclusive access and cultural capital subscribers receive, which in turn, separates them from the masses who must settle for ‘must see TV.’” (Santo, 32) Santo references Pierre Bourdieu and describes cultural capital as a set of desirable personal characteristics one can attain. He writes, “Pierre Bourdieu argues that cultural capital grants its owners access and knowledge that enables them to distinguish themselves and gain elevated status in a society.” (Santo, 33)

Santo elaborates on commonly found details of cultural capital. He writes:

Cultural capital is also usually associated with an appreciation of high art, once again foregrounding discourses of aesthetic superiority found on HBO, and marking a (fuzzy) distinction between those who appreciate and those who consume...this distinction has an even more ambiguous relationship to television, a medium long derided for its lowbrow appeal to the greatest common denominator of viewers and for its imbrication in the proliferation of consumerism. (Ibid)

Santo examines an interesting trend regarding the personality traits of the protagonists on pay cable programs that he believes is used to distinguish premium cable as a worthy piece of cultural capital. He writes that current premium series “...generally lack empathy toward their protagonists, depicting them as vapid, neurotic, and willingly compromised. Viewers are encouraged to laugh at them, to feel superior to them, rather than to empathize with them.” (Santo, 38) Santo’s statement is thought provoking, and he does provide evidence from some HBO programs, such as *The Sopranos*. However, his article is from 2008 so *Homeland* is not included in his discussion. Initially, Santo’s claim is slightly surprising, as it is considered common knowledge that audiences respond well to characters they can relate to and identify with. But as has been stressed, HBO and its counterparts are trying to differentiate themselves from basic cable in more ways than just different economic models, and they have proven that it is possible to create successful shows without traditional, relatable protagonists.

It is difficult to determine whether or not Carrie fits into Santo’s proposed category. Carrie is certainly a unique protagonist, and not a run-of-the-mill female lead. She is not classifiable as a heroine, and quite possibly could be dubbed an anti-heroine. Opinions vary on Carrie, but many *Homeland* viewers find her annoying, completely out of control, and extremely skilled at making bad decisions and mishandling situations. An article written for *The Atlantic* in October 2014 entitled “*Homeland*: The Case Against Carrie” points to some of these complaints. The author, Sophie Gilbert, writes, “Carrie—inefficient, erratic, egotistical, inconsiderate, unprofessional Carrie—is neither a superhero nor an antihero, but just a once intriguing character who has become grotesque.” (Gilbert) Carrie’s intense (and frequent) crying face has also become

somewhat of an Internet sensation, with gifs and Tumblr pages abound. Personally, a friend once told me that Carrie is his least favorite protagonist of any show he has ever watched.



Carrie's "Cry face" Source: vulture.com

That said, it is debatable whether Santo's other adjectives apply to Carrie. While she is neurotic, (or mentally ill, rather) she is not dull, or particularly funny or laughable. Watching her struggle with bipolar disorder is often painful. While audience members may feel superior to her in terms of mental health, personal pursuits, and sometimes judgment skills, throughout every season Carrie makes some impressive achievements at work (especially when she is experiencing a manic episode), and most viewers would not claim that they could fight terror more successfully than she does.

Santo would contend that viewers do not "empathize" with Carrie as they would with the typical protagonist found on basic cable shows. Empathize is a very particular word choice on the part of Santo. While viewers definitely sympathize, sometimes deeply, for Carrie, Santo is right that she does not evoke empathy; not many have been in her shoes. Santo makes an astute observation about the differences in protagonists on 'quality' versus 'low-brow' television. As it turns out, all that is needed in terms of a main character is gripping personal qualities and depth.

Finally, it is important to discuss why Showtime as a premium cable network is a good place for *Homeland*, a controversial show about Islam and terror. While basic networks and advertisers may be hesitant to host and sponsor a program with such touchy subject matter, it is not a concern for Showtime. Secondly, the lack of censorship on Showtime is certainly appealing to the creators of *Homeland*, as it signifies a space where they can write and show what they want, doing full justice to their creative work. And with a show based upon such dramatic subject material, Showtime provides a platform to make the *Homeland* viewing experience as intense as possible. The quality television consensus would concur that *Homeland* is a more powerful thriller because it is not censored, and that its emotionally loaded material is not suited for basic cable. The creators of *24* and *Homeland*, Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon, addressed in an interview why they prefer to write for Showtime over FOX. They mention both the “appetite” of Showtime viewers, the formatting of an advertiser-less space, as well as the lack of censorship. Gansa said, “There just isn’t the appetite or the patience on network television to do something like that [*Homeland*]. And just the obvious language and sexual stuff. You’re just freer, and it becomes sort of more like little independent features rather than stories that are broken up by commercials every ten minutes.” (Gansa)

HBO, Showtime, and other premium cable networks truly changed television, taking it to a more respected place. With viewers as the only important consumers, the premium networks have the ability to give audiences exactly what they want, while remaining a sustainable company. On top of that, the monthly fees, and overall deregulation means that HBO and Showtime can hire the best, and that those artists want to be a part of their mission. Pay cable networks have succeeded by creating an exclusive

and highbrow brand, while actually differentiating their content. As Santo explained, there are key differences in character traits between the average basic cable protagonists and their more expensive peers. It is interesting to remember these factors and the relatively liberated space of premium channels in the context of the following chapter, which focuses on Islam and terrorism on *Homeland*.

### Chapter Three: Inside *Homeland*

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, various factors shifted the threat of terrorism into the forefront of American consciousness. With this realization that gaps in security could lead to lethal repercussions came a whole slew of other questions: Who are terrorists? What do they want? How can they be stopped? And, most famously, why do they hate us? Though it has been upwards of twelve years since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the answers to these questions and ones similar to them are still not, and never will be, agreed upon.

However, in the years since the attacks, many sources ranging from political, to scholarly, to entertainment, to journalistic have offered their answers, and their takes on terrorism and U.S. foreign relations more generally. These answers are culturally reflective, reach many people, and influence thinking and behavior. In regards to September 11<sup>th</sup>, the perpetuation of Islamophobia by various sources is a major issue. As mentioned above, *Homeland* is a crafted and fictional outlet for addressing political realities in a certain way. This chapter takes a detailed look at *Homeland* to discover how it interprets these issues on screen. While individual seasons present well-defined ideological positions, the series as a whole offers complex and sometimes contradictory politics. Season One offers an alternative take on terrorism and U.S. foreign policy that serves to dispel Islamophobia in audience members, but the same cannot be said of Season Four, which depicts Pakistan in a negative light.

Of course, a major concern after September 11<sup>th</sup> surrounded the identity of the perpetrators and their motives. Once it was discovered that al Qaeda orchestrated the attack in the spirit of Jihad (holy war), the religion of Islam became a crucial part of the public discourse concerning the event and terrorism in general. As explained earlier,

through his speeches President Bush perpetuated a message that was for the most part Xeno and Islamophobic. Though he did say that ‘Muslim’ is not synonymous with terrorist or al Qaeda supporter, he painted the attacks as the result of ‘Eastern’ versus ‘Western’ cultural and religious differences, rather than an angry, desperate, and extreme response to political relations.

Resulting in part from these messages, as well as from the fact that the attacks were indeed carried out by Islamic extremists, many Americans felt a heightened fear of Muslims, or at least were concerned about Islam’s violent and radical potential in a way that had not worried them before (though this is not to diminish a longer history of Islamophobia.) As it is widely acknowledged, mass media can and does play a role in influencing public perception and opinion. Certainly after 9/11, the media, and major news outlets in particular, were in a great position of power as the entire nation looked to them for answers, and literally only news programs were broadcast while everything else was put on hold after the emergency. (Spigel, 242) Later though, and still, entertainment media had its chance to grapple with the discourse surrounding the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, and more specifically the fresh wave of Islamophobia.

### **Realism in *Homeland*’s Introduction Sequence**

Chapter One analyzed a few trends and themes consistent throughout the drama genre that resulted from and or intensified after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. One of these trends was the mirroring of September 11<sup>th</sup> like events in the fictional plotlines of shows such as *24* and *The West Wing*. As for *Homeland*, it goes further than replicating or borrowing elements or characteristics true to the realities of that day. *Homeland* situates itself not in an alternate yet similar world, but rather in our world exactly, with a few

names changed. This drastically heightens the sense of realism felt while watching the show. One way the show effectively situates itself in an explicitly post-9/11 story world is through its unique and complex introduction sequence, which features a dreamlike mix of superimposed videos, imagery, and sound. *Homeland's* title sequence is important to consider because it helps to implicitly emphasize how its creators felt was the best way to introduce the show and reduce many episodes down to one telling introduction.

The opening begins with a little girl (presumably a young Carrie) asleep, and in a matter of seconds the color tones over the video change from black and white, to gray-blue, to sepia. Little Carrie then sits in front of the television, and practices her trombone next to Louis Armstrong practicing his, and then she is back in front of a blank television. The montage runs very quickly in flashes and the same image will often recur. Next we see the little girl standing in a maze wearing a lion mask, as well as a young boy in his home. In the next frame, the boy is grown up, standing in the maze wearing a Marine uniform, and eventually a grown Carrie is seen standing in a separate place in the maze. There are close up shots of Carrie's fluttering eyes, jerky videos of women in hijabs, and army helicopters. The audio of the sequence is as frenetic as the imagery, consisting of voiceovers, sound effects, as well as eerie piano and jazz.

All of it provides a dark and chaotic, rushed tone that is difficult to process beyond the basic levels of affect. What stands out are the actual snippets of footage and audio of Presidents Reagan, Herbert Walker Bush, Clinton, Obama, as well as former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld describing and discussing various terror attacks and strategic response. The succession of politicians fits well with Carrie's growth throughout the title sequence, reminding the viewer that this problem was a part of

Carrie's life from the beginning, something she has witnessed on television since she was two or three. *Homeland* creator Alex Gansa gives his read on the title sequence in an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*: "What I like about it is it clearly shows how the last 25 years of bad news, in terms of the War on Terror, might have influenced a little girl growing up with bipolar illness...and is affected by these images in a way that is more intense than other people, and chose to devote her life to stop that from happening again." (Gansa)

The title sequence also includes home video footage of the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, with the buildings burning, smoke everywhere, and people sprinting away. Over this footage, a newscaster says, "We've got a plane crashed into the World Trade Center...thousands of people running!" The next screen is an upside-down image of President Obama saying, "We must, and we will, remain vigilant at home and abroad." What this introduction sequence does as a whole is effectively is situate *Homeland* in a very real place. Compared to the thrillers reviewed in Chapter One, *Homeland* stays in especially close dialogue with actual international counterterrorism discourse through its opening titles, as well as its consistent buzzword filled dialogue (Pakistan, al Qaeda, bin Laden, 9/11, Taliban, Hezbollah), and overarching plotlines.

While the Season Four introduction sequence will not be covered in as much detail as that would be redundant, it is worth noting that while *Homeland* did have to change the sequence in response to Brody's death, as well as the change in setting and antagonist, it remained wedded to the realistic style of the original introduction. The Season Four opening is also a frenetic montage supplemented with jarring voiceover and recognizable political motifs. A picture of Bin Laden superimposed over a map of

Pakistan is shown as a newscaster reports “The U.S. found and killed Osama bin Laden outside Pakistan.” Real video footage of politicians speaking is also included in the most recent introduction, though the clips are now specifically related to Pakistan. John Kerry says, “There are things that Pakistan has done, as complicated as the situation is...” And tape is shown of Hillary Clinton saying in a frustrated tone her famous quote, “You can’t keep snakes in your backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbors,” in which she is discussing the issue of Pakistan harboring terrorists, which, as we will soon see, is a major plotline in Season Four. This new introduction sequences premises the latest season while continuing to place itself very much in the realm of the real.

By using recognizable historical figures and their speeches as well as footage of and reference to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in its introduction sequence *Homeland* somewhat subverts the fact that is an entertainment program and not an inside look at the inner workings and missions of the Central Intelligence Agency. From the first minute and a half of each episode, the show reminds the audience of its relevance and close connections to the War on Terror. It is necessary to understand this fact in order to compare *Homeland* to its counterparts, as well as when considering the show’s potential to dispel or perpetuate Islamophobia; because this show does not *seem* like a work of fiction, it may hold more influential power, which Roland Barthes called the “reality effect.”

### **Sergeant Nicholas Brody: Terrorists are Just Like You and I**

One of *Homeland*’s most important facets lies in the character of Sergeant Nicholas Brody, a returned prisoner of war (POW). Through Brody, *Homeland* humanizes and rationalizes the actions of terrorists. Season One begins with the

miraculous rescue of Brody from a hole in the ground, where he has been kept as a prisoner of war for eight years. Brody returns home, is reunited with his wife and two now grown children, and is hailed an American hero. Privately, though, he struggles to assimilate back to normal life. His wife had moved on romantically from him to his best friend, and Brody is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, made worse by his new life in the public eye. Meanwhile, CIA agent Carrie Mathison has just received intelligence that “An American prisoner of war has been turned,” a quote also featured in the introductory credits. Carrie is convinced the newborn terrorist is Brody. However, her boss and mentor, Saul Berenson, refuses to authorize a surveillance operation due to a lack of sufficient evidence. Carrie is not one to take no for an answer, though, and she pursues Brody on her own.

Despite everyone at the CIA doing his or her best to stop a predicted attack orchestrated by Abu Nazir, the Osama bin Laden of the show, the first half of the season is spent fumbling on leads. Neither the audience nor the characters know whether or not Brody has been turned. In the last half of the season, though, the pace starts to pick up. It is revealed that Tom Walker, a thought dead fellow POW of Brody’s is actually alive. Walker is an excellent sniper, and is believed to be planning an attack on the President. For a period of time, Carrie is no longer concerned about Brody, and that is when the audience learns once and for all that Brody is indeed a terrorist working for Nazir.

Episode nine, entitled “Crossfire,” is the season’s most salient episode. It provides an in-depth look into Brody’s life as a POW, and his conversion to terrorism. It is revealed that Nazir accepts Brody into his home to tutor his son, Issa, in English. We see Brody and Issa bond over soccer, prayers, reading, coloring, and other typical father-son

activities. And then Issa is killed along with eighty-two other school children in a U.S. ordered drone strike targeting Nazir. This incident is Season One's major critique of drones. To make matters worse, U.S. Vice President Walden denies the attack, claiming Nazir and al Qaeda enacted it in an attempt to make the America look bad; He is never tried for what Brody considers a war crime. While mourning, Nazir and Brody watch Walden's bogus explanation on television, and Nazir says through gritted teeth, "And they call us the terrorists." His statement is thought provoking, and also is resonant with a question that has become popular as of late: Can state actors ever be considered terrorists?

In the final episode of Season One, Brody makes a tape recording explaining his motivation for murdering the Vice President and other government higher-ups by means of a suicide vest. He specifies that his action is to avenge the specific drone strike that killed Issa and the other children. He also emphasizes that he was not "broken," "turned into a terrorist," or taught to "hate his country" despite being tortured in captivity. He says, "People will say I was broken, I was brainwashed—people will say I was turned into a terrorist, taught to hate my country. I *love* my country. What I am is a Marine...and as a Marine I swore an oath to defend my country from enemies both foreign and domestic. My action this day is against such domestic enemies." Brody's suicide tape further humanizes him, and solidifies terror as a response to political, not cultural, actions on the part of the U.S.

None of the terrorist attacks throughout *Homeland* that are planned or executed are targeted specifically at innocent civilians, despite the fact that 9/11 did target the public. In Season Two, Abu Nazir sets off a car bomb at the CIA headquarters, killing

many government officials, including the Director of the CIA, David Estes, who is also depicted unflatteringly throughout the show. Estes usually proves a useless bureaucratic block to Carrie, and collaborated with the Vice President to cover up the drone strike that killed Issa. And in Season Four, antagonist Hassaim Haqqani attacks the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, a place generally free of ordinary citizens. The villains are called terrorists due to their methodology, but their victims are different from those targeted by Bin Laden, Mohammed Atta, and the seventeen other hijackers on September 11, 2001.

*Homeland* portrays Brody as a logical, traumatized, and angry man who cannot seem to find another way to cope with his discontent. It is easy to sympathize with him, and viewers may find themselves actually rooting for him. *The Atlantic* titled one of its articles “*Homeland* Finds Humanity in Terrorism,” and conservative columnist Debbie Schluskel called *Homeland* “a show written and produced by liberals who blame America for Islamic terrorism and who tend to root for—and definitely sympathize with—the Islamic terrorists.” (Schluskel) While my personal affective experience consisted mostly of anxiously hoping that Carrie would catch up to Brody in the metaphorical maze, I will not forget in class sophomore year when someone mentioned rooting for Carrie, and the professor responded, “Are you really rooting for Carrie? Or are you rooting for Brody?”

The depth of Brody’s character makes him an unusually complicated and deeply examined terrorist compared to other terrorists on television including those who plague Jack Bauer. His qualities are enlightening and effectively counter larger discursive narratives, which dehumanizes terrorists completely. The central issue pushing Brody to terrorist tactics is based in politics, and *Homeland* makes a specific effort to dispel the idea that Brody was coerced into a violent position. In *Homeland*, there is no clear-cut

good side and dark side. The United States officials featured in the show, Vice President Walden and CIA Director David Estes, are power hungry, corrupt, drone-happy criminals who destroy the lives of innocent people without remorse. *Homeland's* premiere season was eye opening, and an notable counter to a prejudiced dominating discourse surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup> and terrorist identities and mindsets. Unfortunately, Season Four's depiction of the Pakistani government is unfair, misleading, and could lead to Xenophobia among viewers. Despite this, *Homeland* continued to critique U.S. drone policy in Season Four.

#### **Drones and the Pakistan Government in Season Four: Contradictory Messages**

For one of my analysis samples, I watched the last five episodes of the fourth season of *Homeland* looking for significant material regarding the depictions of terrorists, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and American policy makers. The fourth season is also intriguing due to the death of Brody at the end of Season Three. Show creators also used the opportunity to remove the focus from al Qaeda as the antagonist. Season Four is set in Islamabad, Pakistan and Carrie's new enemy is a Taliban leader, Hassaim Haqqani, who is suspected of plotting a terror attack in retaliation for a drone strike targeting him that killed most of his family while they were attending a wedding. This fictional plot line is reminiscent of when a U.S. drone hit a Yemeni wedding in 2014, and thus functions in keeping with *Homeland's* desire to stay closely connected to reality. While season four of *Homeland* continues to criticize U.S. drone policy and portray terrorists in a relatively rational light, its bold depictions of the Pakistani government as terrorist supporters make it undeserving of a liberal or progressive label that it may have earned following its first season.

The beginning of Season Four continues the anti-drone theme that has been prevalent throughout the entire series. It is Carrie's birthday, and everyone in the office is hailing her as the "Drone Queen." In this early episode, Carrie's team executes a drone strike on a farmhouse in Pakistan where they believe Haqqani is hiding. Afterwards though, they realize that they have actually struck a wedding and taken out hundreds of innocents, while Haqqani was not even in attendance at the wedding. We see the fallout from the strike in the following episodes, mostly in the form of protests in Pakistan, and Carrie's distress over not knowing how to fix her mistake.

*Homeland's* inclusion of drone strikes as a repeating point of contention, and Carrie's birthday title of "Drone Queen" speaks to President Obama's tactics, as Obama himself could be called the "Drone King." His liberal use of drones under hazy guidelines will likely go down in history as the most significant and regrettable repeated misstep of his presidency. A March 2015 Huffington Post article reads, "The drone program, in many ways, has become a hallmark of the Obama administration's foreign policy, juxtaposing surgical precision with a broader counterterror strategy that has seen little closure or resolution over the administration's six years in office." (Watkins)

In *Homeland*, drones are never represented as brilliant new technology that can reduce casualties on the American side. In Season Four, they are the reason for a tragic loss of innocent life, and the cause of much emotional turmoil for Carrie as she tries to pick up the pieces. Carrie's face is not proud when she sees that her birthday cake reads "The Drone Queen;" She wears her title reluctantly. *Homeland's* critique of U.S. methodology is important because it erases any possibility of a clear-cut, good versus evil binary. The U.S. is not "good" and not every antagonist is thoroughly evil; Haqqani's

character is not examined nearly as closely as Brody's, but *Homeland* makes it clear that his eventual attack on the U.S. embassy in Islamabad is a retaliation for the drone strike that killed so much of his family at the wedding. He says to his counterparts, as he marches through an underground tunnel to attack the embassy, "How long have they flown over our homes? Murdered our women and children? We will drive them from our skies, we will show their crimes to the world."

Despite their continued critique of U.S. drone policy, *Homeland* came under major fire in regards to its portrayals of the Pakistani government in the latest season (a New York Post headline reads "Pakistani Officials Furious over "*Homeland*."") In Season Four, while pretending to work in cohorts with the CIA against Haqqani and his minions, the Pakistani Intelligence Agency (ISI) is actually sabotaging Carrie and her team, and is depicted as Taliban and terrorist supporters working to throw the CIA off Haqqani's trail. At one point, they even switch Carrie's bipolar medication for hallucinogens, hoping her bad reaction will lead her to be discharged. And in the episode, "Halfway to a Donut" U.S. ambassador Martha Boyd and CIA Director Andrew Lockhart have a striking exchange of words after it is revealed that the ISI has breached security policy. Lockhart says, "I feel like I'm in a fucking war...isn't Pakistan supposed to be on our side? I really don't know how you do it...sit across from them day after day knowing all they want is to stab us in the back." Boyd responds defensively, "I'm a diplomat it's my job." Lockhart sneers, "To eat shit?" Boyd says, "To suck it up. To find areas of common interest." And Lockhart says definitively before exiting, "They hate us. Good luck finding common interest in that."

This interaction is significant because it clearly shows two different attitudes towards U.S./Pakistani relations: Lockhart, the pessimist, or realist, and Boyd the incredulous optimist. Out of the two, though, Lockhart's sentiments ring truer in the context of the show, and his suggestions that Pakistan hates America and is only looking to back stab us understandably did not go over well with Pakistani critics. This representation of Pakistan adds to the dividing rhetoric suggesting that there is no use in attempting to have peaceful relations with the Middle East because they are just too *different* from us. Though in its fourth season *Homeland* succeeded in continuing to emphasize the devastating fallout risked through an excessive drone policy, and dispelled a clear good versus evil narrative, their consistent depiction of the ISI as terrorists and Taliban supporters is certainly xenophobic. The next chapter documents critical reception of the show.

#### **Chapter Four: The Critics Have Spoken: The Public Conversation Concerning *Homeland***

*Homeland*'s debut season was popular when judged on aesthetic criteria, and Claire Danes has won two Emmys for her portrayal of Carrie. Though critics who considered purely its artistic style lauded *Homeland*, it received mixed critical response concerning its depictions of Islam, terror and the Middle East. Many were angered by *Homeland*, claiming it was most definitely perpetuating Islamophobia, while others thought the opposite, deeming the show progressive. In the previous chapter, I made a case for *Homeland* citing Brody's deeply examined character, and the continuous critique of U.S. drone strikes as forming a nuanced narrative, especially when compared to the cultural and political discourses that immediately followed 9/11. Though I was impressed with the media messages I gathered from the premiere season especially, my opinion was by no means unanimous. Though I was not alone either, many critics voiced their opinions regarding *Homeland*'s problematic portrayals of Islam, terror, and the Middle East.

Professor Arun Kundnani wrote an article entitled "On *Homeland*, Islam Means Terror," in which he makes a variety of points condemning *Homeland*'s depictions of Muslims and Arabs. One claim (a popular one among those who consider *Homeland* Islamophobic) is in regards to the program's conflation of Middle Eastern political groups, nations and names. The show is surely guilty of interchanging al Qaeda, Hezbollah, the Taliban, Saddam Hussein, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and other nations in the region. Some mix-ups are particularly cringe-worthy, such as the supposed al Qaeda-Hezbollah connection, when the political reality is that those two hate each other. (Kundnani, 2) The connection between Iraq/Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda is also

extremely problematic considering that that exact misinformation was the grounds for starting an eight-year war in 2003.

Additionally, many of the characters in the show have Middle Eastern names that do not match up with their country of origin. For example, one minor antagonist is named Roya, which is Persian. However, the character is supposed to be Palestinian. Along these lines, Abu Nazir's son's name "Issa" is pronounced by characters as "Eye-saa" when the correct pronunciation is "Ee-sa" (Kumar) *Homeland* also offended Kundnani and others by depicting modern Beirut, which is commonly known as the "Paris of the Middle East," as a dangerous, decrepit, scary place when that is not the reality. (Ibid) He argues that these careless errors serve to associate terrorism with cultural issues, rather than political ones. He writes, "The series' lack of concern for the differences between Hezbollah and al Qaeda, or between Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with its ridiculous portrayal of Beirut as a terrorist enclave, give an impression of terrorism as a general cultural problem in the Middle East disconnected from specific political contexts." (Kundnani, 2)

Professor Deepa Kumar, also disapproves of *Homeland's* what she calls "mishmashing" of Middle Eastern culture and Islamic enemies. She emphasizes that conflation such as those in *Homeland* build the foundations for Islamophobia. She says, "The way that Orientalism or Islamophobia works is you create an amalgamation of all these people, you completely disrespect differences, and you create this monster terrorist threat where everybody is collaborating." (Ibid) While this disrespect is certainly problematic and offensive, it remains ambiguous whether or not, if *Homeland* had corrected every careless error and nonsensical interaction, the show would be less

Islamophobic practically speaking. It would be a more culturally sensitive show, but its basic subject matter would remain the same: it would still be a show about scary Muslims with the potential to perpetuate Islamophobic sentiment; this is not to say that Kundnani and Kumar are in the wrong for finding *Homeland's* blending of groups, nations, and cultures problematic.

At its core creative premise, *Homeland* relies on a connection of Islam to extremism and a liking for terrorist strategy. While neither Kundnani nor Kumar explicitly call for the show to be pulled from airing or anything of the sort, they also do not acknowledge that it is impossible to create a television program that pits Islamic terrorists against a CIA team while still managing to avoid this connection. So, after reading Kundnani's piece, one can infer that the only solution to avoid aiding an anti-Islam discourse is to not make a show about Muslim terrorists, which would be a fair recommendation. Though Kundnani does not explicitly state this in his argument, Evelyn Alsultany, whose ideas were recorded in Chapter One, does in her piece, which maintains that a diversification of terrorist identities, backstories, and motives are ultimately unhelpful because the sole pairing of Islam and terrorism will induce Islamophobia. Though *Homeland's* subject matter is arguably inherently Islamophobic, freelance journalist Yair Rosenberg wrote an article for *The Atlantic* in which he defends *Homeland's* efforts to distinguish Islam from terror.

Rosenberg takes a very detailed approach in his analysis, focusing on specific scenes that speak to the *Homeland's* conception of Islam and terrorism. To start, he recounts an interaction that Dana, Brody's daughter, has with her classmates after she has discovered her father's new religion. Dana scoffs when her classmates suggest that

America should bomb Iran because Arabs do not value human life, and that their objective is to annihilate Americans, so we need to protect ourselves. Dana gets angry, calls her classmate a douche, tells him that Iranians aren't Arabs but Persians, and says, "And what about mass murder? Do we tolerate that? Because that's what he's really saying, isn't it? He's talking about turning Tehran into a parking lot." Rosenberg suggests that Dana's disdain is one example of *Homeland* being pro-Islam. He writes, "By placing these sentiments in the mouth of one of its sympathetic leads, *Homeland* establishes from the outset that it has little patience for ignorant caricatures and stereotypes of Muslims, or for jingoistic rationales for the use of force against Muslim countries." (Rosenberg)

He points out that Muslim informants often help Carrie. He writes, "Carrie is aided by a longtime Muslim informant in Beirut, as well as the wife of a local imam in Washington D.C." (Rosenberg) Additionally, the American soldiers who give last rights to Abu Nazir (when he is eventually captured and killed) are Muslim. Rosenberg says, "And in its second season finale, the show makes a point of showcasing the U.S. Army Muslim chaplains who perform last rites over the body of Abu Nazir before his burial at sea." (Rosenberg) There is also a main character named Fara, a Muslim who works on Carrie's team.

Furthermore, at one point in Season Three, Brody is on the run after he is suspected for orchestrating a successful car bomb attack after being framed. It is known publicly that he is a culprit, and this leads to him being turned away from a Mosque by an Imam who does not approve of his terrorism. And finally, at one point Brody is about to be assassinated by a U.S. government agent who still believes he is a terrorist. But the assassin sees Brody praying and is too touched to kill him in that moment. The assassin

sees an expression of Islamic faith not as a reason to attack, but one to refrain. Rosenberg also point out that while Brody wavers back and forth regarding his commitment to terrorism, his Islamic faith is constant proving that Islam and terrorism are “wholly distinct.” (Rosenberg) Rosenberg concludes that the above exemplify important distinctions between terrorism and Islam made by the show that its harshest critics tend to ignore.

Finally, Kundnani argues that *Homeland* repeatedly shows Brody struggling between choosing the terrorist path, and embracing the benefits of Western culture. He writes, “Brody’s inner conflict between his love for his children and the pull of his indoctrination is depicted as an identity crisis, a battle between American values (symbolized by his family life) and Islamic values (presented as implying terrorism).” (Kundnani, 2) While Brody is ultimately swayed to abandon his attack after an emotional phone conversation with his daughter, who suspects he is up to something, Islam is not separated from family in *Homeland*. It must not be forgotten that the death of a family member, of a child, is the key motive for Nazir and Brody’s attack; Islamic values include family very clearly in the show. There is also no evidence that would suggest a non-American terrorist would not struggle to martyr himself and leave behind his children.

Additionally, *Homeland* does not paint an appealing picture of American family life, which further disproves Kundnani’s idea of an American versus Islamic values binary. Brody’s family life is broken when he arrives home. His wife, Jessica, has moved on romantically to his former best friend and fellow marine, Mike. His daughter is an angst-filled teenager, who consistently gets into trouble and fights with her mother. And

his young son has come to prefer Mike to him. Few are sympathetic towards his post-traumatic stress disorder, including Jessica, who berates him for his inability to preform sexually. Kundnani says that Jessica “embodies traditional American family values in the series” based upon the fact that she ceases her affair with Mike upon Brody’s return and tries her best to keep the family happy and together. He says that because Jessica is representative of these wholesome, relatable values, it is harmful when she reacts insensitively to discovering Brody’s conversion to Islam, as others will model off of her reaction. (Kundnani, 2)

This scene, in which Jessica learns of Brody’s conversion to Islam, is extremely important and is frequently used to support both pro and anti *Homeland* cases. When Jessica makes the big discovery, to some, her embarrassing reaction is cringe-worthy. It is a scene that portrays her as an ignorant and racist attacker, and him as an innocent victim. She scorns Brody for adapting the religion of his capturers and says that Muslims are the people who would stone their daughter to death if they discovered she was sexually active. To me, she came off like an idiot.

However, interpretations of this scene vary drastically, and it is discussed frequently among those who debate what *Homeland* is communicating to its audience. While Kumar does not explicitly second Kundnani’s claim that Jessica will serve as a model for viewers who relate to her character, she also finds her reaction to Brody’s new faith as problematic, and entwines it with the music played during his prayer scenes. She says, “...Every time he goes off to pray in his garage in secret, there’s this eerie music as if the very practice of Islam is something bad. And when his wife first finds out he’s

converted, she has a fit. You know, she can't believe. It's like a betrayal of everything the West stands for." (Kumar).

Separately from Kumar and Kundnani's articles, this scene was also debated over a Google hangout hosted by HuffPost Live entitled, "Is *Homeland* Islamophobic? The Debate About Showtime's Critically Acclaimed Series." Participants in the debate included Laila Al-Arian, a producer for Al Jazeera English, Dr. Jonathan Brown, a professor of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, Zach Novetsky, a law student and writer, and Mike Hogan, the digital director for Vanity Fair. In the debate, Novetsky argues that Brody is the sympathetic character in this scene, not Jessica, and he describes how he watched the scene with friends, and it made everyone cringe with repulsion. Again, this was the reaction I had to the scene, and, when I showed it to my Media Studies seminar class, they also agreed that Brody was the sympathetic character. Of course, it needs to be taken into consideration that my sample group consisted of a group of Media Studies seniors at a liberal arts college.

However, Al Arian and Brown, like Kundnani and Kumar, were also wary of Jessica's reaction, and the former two passionately disagreed with Novetsky in the debate. Brown says, "I don't know what planet you're on. I challenge you to find ten ordinary Americans who interpret the scene in that way." (Brown) Al Arian continues "I think its absurd to argue that Brody is the sympathetic character in that scene...it's an extremely dangerous message that the show is giving to people, that merely finding out your spouse is Muslim should engender that kind of reaction." (Al Arian) Al Arian has the same concern as Kundnani: that Jessica is a relatable, likable character and her

behavior will serve as a bad example for viewers. Hogan, however, has a different read of the scene. He says:

My assumption watching it the first time was, Jess, like everyone on the show, sometimes you like her, sometimes you hate her. But she's also a Marine wife, and I think it's fair to suppose that at least many military families don't have the most up-to-date politically correct views on religious equality...I understand what you're saying that people at home may be misinterpreting it, but I hope that you can give the viewer a little more credit than that and have them be able analyze this and say "Okay, she's got one point of view he's got another, just because a character I like or sometimes like thinks this doesn't mean it's true." (Hogan)

Based upon the diversity of reactions to this scene, it is impossible to suggest that it inherently *is* one way or another. While Al Arian, Brown, Kumar, Kundnani and Novetsky simply disagree on whether Brody or Jessica will win the viewer's sympathy in the scene in question, perhaps Hogan's more moderate argument succeeds in better predicting the big picture. Frequently, when studying the effects of mass media, scholars will underestimate the ability of the viewer to critically consume, and will assume the audience has less agency than may be the reality. Hogan voices his opinion that *Homeland* is trying to portray a realistic American military wife, and that even if viewers do sympathize with Jessica's character, they hopefully will not model off of her blindly when it comes to their own beliefs.

Like Kumar, the Huffington Post debaters also discuss the scene in which the audience first learns Brody has converted when they see him praying in the garage. Hogan says that the eerie depiction of Brody's praying condemned by Kumar is actually an example of *Homeland* encouraging viewers to observe their own prejudices. Because it is revealed that Brody is a Muslim before it is made known that he is indeed working for Nazir, audience members are supposed to evaluate any judgments they may make

when simply the fact that he has converted is discovered. If his new faith makes you believe that Carrie is correct in her suspicion that he is a terrorist, perhaps that can inform you to your own biases. Hogan says, “They play with stereotypes about everybody and I think they undercut them to a degree. I certainly understand that they’re not being undercut in some bold, incredibly brave way but they’re playing with the assumptions of people and over time undoing some of them.” (Hogan) Creator Howard Gordon also says that audience reflection was a goal for *Homeland* in general. He says, “We wanted to make the audience test their own perceptions and assumptions...we also wanted to challenge the assumption that there was a direct linkage between the religion and the endeavor of terrorism.” (Gordon)

Gordon goes on to say that, when it comes to his personal ability to perpetuate Islamophobia, he feels as if he is walking a fine line. He says,

I think the one thing that we [*Homeland's* creators] all felt very confident about—although we had a vigorous behind-the-scenes debate—was at what point are we loyal and beholden to good story telling, and at what level do you hold yourself accountable for things like stoking Islamophobia or promoting torture as a policy? There were just certain things that we needed to portray in order to make it feel thrilling—and real, even. (Ibid)

In this quote, Gordon is highlighting that media creators must make choices and find a balance between social responsibility and successful television. As unfortunate as it may be, shows preferred by Alsultany such as *All American Muslim*, which was not renewed for a second season, are not bound for success in the consumer market, at least as of right now.

From the above quote, it is also clear that Gordon recognizes the appeal of realism, likely in more than one sense of the word. This relates to a point Kundnani makes in his article. Kundnani brings up how *Homeland* characters support racial

profiling (Carrie's mentor, Saul Berenson, calls it "actual profiling"), and occasionally use or threaten torture. In Season Four, Carrie threatens "enhanced interrogation" when an informant refuses to comply with her questions. He retorts that the United States torture policy was repealed. Carrie smirks and replies, "Yeah, publically it was."

Inclusions such as these are not examples of *Homeland's* anti-Islam agenda as Kundnani asserts. Rather, they are further attempts by the show to present a realistic depiction of the way the CIA functions.

Finally, Kumar argues that shows like *Homeland* cause unnecessary paranoia. She says, "This [terrorism] is a completely exaggerated threat...if you look at the number of Americans killed internationally by terrorism-related incidents, you get a grand total of something like eighteen. So does the threat exist? Yes. But is it as big a threat as some of the other ways in which Americans die, such as lack of access to health care and so on? No." (Ibid) Kumar's point is interesting because it emphasizes how shocking and scarring the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks were for Americans. The nation was so shaken with the evidence that mass casualties could occur on United States soil, and this fear, for many reasons, has not dissipated. At least by the measure of taste in television programs, it remains an obsession. Jean Baudrillard also explores this cultural fascination in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, in which he argues that terrorism is powerful not only because of the actual physical damage it creates and the lives it takes, but because of the unique and haunting spirit it leaves behind. Kumar further supports her claim when she points out that, from 1990-2010, neo-Nazi white supremacists murdered more than fifteen times the people that Muslim Americans did. (Ibid)

But this is not what the American “propaganda line,” as Kumar phrases it, chooses to focus on, and she argues that it has sent America into a state of religiously and ethnically based paranoia. She writes, “. . . There certainly is a paranoia in this country around security. And that doesn’t come out of the blue. It’s a process that’s been cultivated. . . where notions of security are always a racialized notion of security. It’s about protecting the white family from the Native American threat, from the black rapist threat, and from the brown terrorist threat. . .”(Ibid) *Homeland* can certainly be interpreted as a product of that more generalized xenophobia that Kumar addresses.

The above are a just a sampling of the critical reception *Homeland* has received regarding its portrayals of Islam, terror, and the Middle East since its release. Though of course not every article written about the show was included in this chapter, the most popular arguments defending and condemning *Homeland* were included, with a heavier focus on the latter, as Chapter Three worked mostly in defense of *Homeland*. The bright side of a controversial program such as *Homeland* is that it prompts a public conversation and debate about current national cultural realities; at the very least, *Homeland*’s existence has prompted scholars and critics to examine how the nation has progressed since 9/11 using television to gauge the sentiments of media producers and consumers. (Hogan) One of *Homeland*’s creators, Alex Gansa, describes how he sees this progression manifesting in his own show:

I think we’re in a period of really questioning how were going to prosecute the War on Terror, how we’re going to project our power overseas, how we’re going to deal with this threat that’s never going to go away. So, I think whereas *24* was an action-thriller response to 9/11, this is a psychological response to where the country is ten years later. (Gansa)

Though Gansa sees his latest creation as progress, one can conclude that *Homeland* is far from a perfectly liberal, nuanced and progressive show, though, because *Homeland* is a product of its cultural moment, an altered, more politically correct version of the show would not be able to survive. This chapter has outlined the most frequently made arguments that accuse *Homeland* of perpetuating Islamophobic stereotypes of Muslims, as well as including original arguments supporting the show. Commentary by the shows creators helps to explain their choices as media producers, and it is also interesting to see how their narratives complement or contradict what critics have said.

## Conclusion: Going Forward

When I first conceived this thesis around the question of whether or not *Homeland* was an Islamophobic show I was under the impression that by the end of my research I would have a simple “yes” or “no” answer. Now, at the end of this process, I realize that was naïve. *Homeland* is certainly part of an amplified post-9/11 Islamophobic discourse, but, simultaneously, it is a more progressive show than its infamous predecessor, *24*. To put it simply, *Homeland* generally succeeds at humanizing terrorists, and critiquing U.S. foreign policy, specifically drone strikes, in a way that *24* never did. Brody, Nazir, and their accomplices are not deranged, murderous, envious freedom haters as international terrorists have been made out to be. Instead, they are angry and desperate for justice that has not been served, the basis of their anger rooted in political issues. *Homeland* is also limited, as Gordon points out, by the need to remain a successful and entertaining program. As I watched the show for the first time, it was these efforts that stood out to me and communicated a powerful message. Though I logically *knew* that terror was not cultural but political, I had never seen this idea represented through an entertainment medium, and that emotional experience proved memorable for me, which also speaks to the importance of studying media’s influence.

Based on the interview with Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa that is featured in the last chapter, I took away from *Homeland* what the creators hoped to communicate. Unlike those who criticize *Homeland* would assume, the program did not make me a more Islamophobic person, instead it made me disappointed in the United States’ liberal use of drones, as well as resentful of our overbearing presence in the Middle East. For me, this message rang much louder than the fact that *Homeland* conflated Middle Eastern

organizations, potentially fostering a fear of an ambiguous Islamic Other, as Kumar argues. It was the dominant message of the show. I wish that I were able to say confidently that my own read of *Homeland* is every other viewer's read as well; But I cannot make this claim, as viewers are individuals who each watch and interpret the show with their own sets of political and social presumptions.

Instead of attempting to make a definitive claim that *Homeland* is or is not Islamophobic in nature, this thesis has traced the creation of the show, beginning by considering its broader genre and network, and eventually discussing its specific content and reception. It has reviewed how *Homeland* is similar to and different from other post-9/11 political dramas and thrillers, and also discussed premium cable channels and why Showtime is a suitable place for *Homeland*. The final two chapters examine *Homeland*'s content and the public conversations surrounding it. In these chapters, the most popular arguments in defense of and against *Homeland* are outlined, along with supplemental quotes from *Homeland*'s creators in order to understand their thoughts and ambitions regarding the show's portrayals of Islam and terror.

Arguments supporting *Homeland* emphasize the show's humanization of terrorists including Nicholas Brody, Abu Nazir, and Hassaim Haqqani, its critique of drone strikes, and its attempt at separating Islam from terror. Condemners of *Homeland* felt the show is inherently Islamophobic, does not do an adequate job of separating Islam from terror, or represents the entire religion as inhospitable to Western culture. Kumar also raised her additional concern that shows such as *Homeland* serve to exaggerate an unrealistic threat. My own experience watching *Homeland*, as well as the passionate concern of critics who deem the show Islamophobic, alludes to the fact that television is a communicative text,

and that entertainment media can influence, to varying degrees, the opinions of media consumers. Another example of this lies in the ways that *24* was brought into political narratives. Bauer's successful use of torture translated into an argument in favor of torture by U.S. officials in the field. Bill Clinton and Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia alike also referenced Bauer. (Gansa) While this thesis cannot claim that *Homeland* will surely directly affect American society or even its own audience in a, b, and c ways, the close examination of *Homeland* and other media remains crucial for cultural understanding. Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch stress this in their seminal piece "Television as a Cultural Forum."

In this article, Newcomb and Hirsch outline their overarching argument that in order to better understand the medium, television should be conceptualized as "process, rather than as product." (Hirsch, 563) The authors discuss television creators as "cultural bricoleurs" which means "cultural handymen" in English. They write, "They [television creators] are cultural bricoleurs, seeking and creating new meaning in the combination of cultural elements with embedded significance. They respond to real events, changed in social structure and organization, and to shifts in attitude and value." (Ibid) Newcomb and Hirsch elaborate saying that, in order to make decisions about what to air, producers must accurately interpret culture, as television is ultimately a way to examine culture. They write, "In short, contemporary cultures examine themselves through their arts, much as traditional societies do via the experience of ritual. Ritual and the arts offer a metalanguage, a way of understanding who and what we are, how values and attitudes are adjusted, how meaning shifts." (Hirsch, 564) These arguments clarify why television

studies are important not only because television can change minds, but also for the insight it provides into one's own culture.

As for *Homeland*, the series has been renewed for a fifth season, which will premiere later this year. Interestingly, news has been released that *Homeland*'s plotlines will be drastically shifted in the upcoming season. It has been confirmed by representatives for the show that the series will jump ahead two years in time, and that Carrie will be living in Germany, no longer working as an intelligence officer.

(Robinson) An article for Vanity Fair quotes the current President of Showtime David Nevins saying, "We're not necessarily going to stay [with addressing] U.S. relations in the Muslim world." (Ibid) Show executives have not given a specific reason for this switch, and one can only speculate about why the choice was made. One theory is that, now that they have garnered a hopefully loyal viewing base, producers and writers are freer to take characters and plots in directions that may not have originally attracted an audience. Regardless, it is important to note this divergence from the controversial content of *Homeland*'s first four seasons.

Before these changes were announced, there was speculation that *Homeland* would feature the Islamic State (ISIS) leaders as the villains of Season Five, but Gansa said at the 2015 Paley Fest that ISIS would never antagonize Carrie, on account of their barbarisms. An article for *The Independent* quoted Gansa saying, "For the last four seasons, *Homeland* has tried to portray our adversaries and humanize them...if you look at Abu Nazir, even at Brody, or look at Haqqani this past season, there was a real effort to make their concerns and lives understandable. That is very hard to do with ISIS."

(Denham) This quote is informative for two reasons. On a surface level, it further

emphasizes the mission of *Homeland*'s team, but on a deeper level the fact that it was considered a possibility that Carrie would take on ISIS highlights the connection of political situations to television, and how intertwined they are. It is difficult to predict what will happen next with *Homeland*, in the broader entertainment realm, or in the national or international political arena, especially in regards to Islam and terror. But there is no doubt that the questions this thesis has explored will continue to be relevant into the future.

## Works Cited

- Alsultany, Evelyn. "Challenging Stereotypes." *How to Watch Television*. Ed Ethan Thompson. Ed Jason Mittell. New York: New York UP, 2013. 85-94. Print
- Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect." *The Rustle of Language*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Spirit of Terrorism; And, Other Essays*. London: Verso, 2003. Print.
- Bodroghkozy, Aniko. *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. Print.
- Bush, George W. "President Bush Addresses the Nation." Washington District of Columbia. 20 Sept. 2001. *Washington Post*. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- Bush, George W. "Speech on Terrorism." Washington District of Columbia. 6 Sept. 2006. Speech.
- Denham, Jess. "Isis "Too Evil" to Feature in Homeland Season Five." *The Independent*. Independent Digital News and Media, 10 Mar. 2015. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- Edgerton, Gary R. "Introduction." *The Essential HBO Reader*. Ed. Gary R. Edgerton. Ed. Jeffrey P. Jones. Lexington: Kentucky, 2008. 1-19. Print.
- Gilbert, Sophie. "*Homeland*: The Case Against Carrie." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 12 Oct. 2014. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- Gordon, Howard, and Alex Gansa. "Interrogating the Creators of "Homeland"" Interview by Hamead Aleaziz. *Mother Jones*. N.p., 4 Nov. 2011. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.  
<<http://www.motherjones.com/media/2011/10/homeland-season-2-claire-danes-howard-gordon-alex-gansa>>.
- Hark, Ina Rae. "'Today Is the Longest Day of My Life": 24 as Mirror Narrative of 9/11." *Film and Television After 9/11*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. 121-42. Print.

Hogan, Mike, Laila Al Arian, Jonathan Brown, and Zach Novetsky. "Is "Homeland" Islamophobic?" Interview. Video blog post. *Huffpost Live*. N.p., 19 Dec. 2012. Web.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard U, John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, 1993. Print.

Koerner, Brendan. "Can the FCC Crack down on Cable?" *Slate*. N.p., 12 Feb. 2004. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Kundnani, Arun. "On *Homeland*, Islam Means Terror." *FAIR*. N.p., 01 Apr. 2014. Web. 14 Feb. 2015.

Kumar, Deepa. "The Islamophobia of "*Homeland*." "Reality Asserts Itself." *The Real News*. N.p., 5 Apr. 2014. Web. 14 Feb. 2015.

Martin, Andrew. "Popular Culture and Narratives of Insecurity." *ReThinking Global Security: Media, Popular Culture, and the "War on Terror"* N.p.: Rutgers UP, 2006. 104-17. Print.

Newcomb, Horace, and Paul M. Hirsch. "TV as a Cultural Forum." *Mit.edu*. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Robinson, Joanna. "Homeland Will Basically Be an Entirely Different Show Next Season." *Vanity Fair*. 8 Mar. 2015. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Rosenberg, Yair. "'Homeland' Is Anything but Islamophobic." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 18 Dec. 2012. Web. 14 Feb. 2015.

Santo, Avi. "Para-television and Discourses of Distinction: The Culture of Production at HBO." *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. Ed. Mark Leverette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Buckley. New York: Routledge, 2008. 19-46. Print.

Schlusel, Debbie. "Homeland: A Show For Liberals Who Root for Islamic Terrorists, Blame America First; Obama Loves It." *Debbie Schlusel RSS*. N.p., 30 Sept. 2012. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Schram, Jamie. "Pakistani Officials Furious over 'Homeland'" *New York Post*. N.p., 27 Dec. 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Spigel, Lynn. "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture After 9/11." *American Quarterly* (2004): 235-70. *Project MUSE - Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11*. Web. 13 Oct. 2014.

Takacs, Stacy. *Terrorism TV: Popular Entertainment in Post-9/11 America*. Lawrence: U of Kansas, 2012. Print.

Watkins, Ali. "Two Years Later, White House Still Hitting Roadblocks In Effort To Move Drone Program Out Of CIA Control." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 10 Mar. 2015. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.