**Terror, Gender and Ethics in American Media after 9/11:**

***Zero Dark Thirty* and *Homeland***

**Bio**

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**Abstract**

Traditionally, in popular media representations of national struggles, men are positioned at the front, defending the nation. Yet, a decade after 9/11, quite a few active and resourceful women appear in leading roles in films and TV dramas dealing with terror and counter-terror. I suggest that this swap of gender roles is related to the new world of terror and to the epistemic and ethical crisis involved in it. In the following analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Homeland*, I will show how the female agent at the front enables to represent and at the same time to contain this crisis. Following Judith Butler’s ideas about the universal precariousness of life, I will further suggest that through similarities between the heroines and the terrorists, and through their shared vulnerability, some visibility is subversively given to the terrorist Other. An alternative ethical approach towards him is offered through this break with conventional gender representation.

**Introduction**

“The defining feature of American war narratives is that they are a ‘man’s story’ from which women are generally excluded,” argues Susan Jeffords in her study of gender and the Vietnam War.[[1]](#footnote-1) Indeed, traditionally, in representations of national struggles, such as war, spy, action and disaster films and TV shows, men are fighting at the front, defending women and the nation. Yet, a decade after 9/11 – a time that saw violent actions on both sides of the terror arena – while male heroes continue to lead in popular representations, quite a few active, resourceful and successful women appear in leading roles in films and TV dramas dealing with terror. In TV series such as *Covert Affairs* (USA, 2010-2015), *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-today), *Scandal* (ABC, 2012-2018), *The Blacklist* (NBC, 2013-today) and *Quantico* (ABC, 2015-2018) the lead character is a woman fighting against terror, defending others. In films as well women are represented at the forefront of the battle, as they are, for example, in *Rendition* (Gavin Hood, 2007) and *Eye in the Sky* (Gavin Hood, 2015), where Meryl Streep and Helen Mirren respectively portray officers at the top of the commanding line. In the film *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2012) it is the female CIA analyst who brings about a national closure.

Why at this point in time, a decade or more after 9/11, in representations of the struggle against terror, figures of women receive this precedence, which they have not enjoyed in the past? I suggest that this swap of gender roles should be understood in relation to the new world of terror and the unprecedented challenges involved in it.

In this article, I will focus on the figures of CIA analyst Maya (Jessica Chastain) in the film *Zero Dark Thirty* and CIA agent Carry Mathison (Claire Danes) in the TV show *Homeland*. *Zero Dark Thirty* follows actual events in the ten years search, by a female CIA analyst, for Osama Bin Laden, resulting in the US Navy SEALs’ night operation of capturing and killing him in Abbotabad, Pakistan, in 2011. *Homeland* is a fictional TV series, based on the Israeli show *Hatufim* (Hebrew for “prisoners of war,” created by Gidi Raff, Keshet, Israel, 2010-2012). Yet, it too indicates, in a number of ways, its relation to actual events in the struggle of America and its allies against terror. In the first three seasons, which are at the focus of my current analysis, Carrie is based in Middle East countries and Washington, alternately. Her target of investigation, then lover, is the US Marine turned terrorist, Nicholas Brody (Damien Lewis).

The war against terror, as revealed to policy makers and the public alike during the decade following 9/11, involves unique challenges. When it is difficult to identify terrorists within the civil population at home and abroad – when it is difficult to distinguish between “us” and “them” – America is facing an epistemic and ethical crisis. In the following analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Homeland*, I will show how the female agent at the front enables to represent and at the same time to contain this crisis. In each of these texts, the woman plays a double role in the national discourse: at once symbolizing the nation and the Other within. On the one hand, the heroines are identified with the nation as women and as part of the national agency active in its defence. On the other hand, they are distinguished from the men, set back by the masculine security system, and represented as similar in thinking and in action to the terrorist Other. Both Maya and Carrie present exceptional skills in deciphering the enigma of the terrorist Other. Yet, in their closeness to the terrorist Other they serve as the focus of terror’s problematic influence on the American Self. They represent the “otherness” that has penetrated the nation, while keeping the male collective at a safe distance from it.

As scapegoats bearing the proximity of the Other to the American Self, these women experience what Judith Butler calls "the precariousness of life." Following Butler, I propose that their pain and vulnerability bring them even closer to the terrorist Other. Butler’s main lesson from 9/11 is that all lives are precarious, dependent on others, sometimes on others that we do not select, or even know. The precariousness of life, physical or emotional, is a universal state that unites the Self and the Other, on both the personal and the national level. For Butler 9/11 is as an opportunity to consider who else might be exposed to unexpected violence and suffering.[[2]](#footnote-2) I claim that in *Homeland* and *Zero Dark Thirty* the lead female figures represent a new proximity between the American Self and the terrorist Other, not only in traits and motivation, but also in vulnerability and pain. Through similarities between heroines and terrorists and through their shared precariousness, some visibility is subversively given to the terrorist Other, and an alternative ethical approach towards him is offered.

**A woman at the front of the battle against Terror**

On September 11, 2001 the American public came to know a new political Other – the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist. He replaced the Communist Other, who had become a matter of the past only twelve years earlier, with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Following 9/11, America and its allies embarked on two wars, in Afghanistan (2001) and in Iraq (2003), but terrorist attacks on Western assets and people have continued, as has the global counter-terror effort.

In traditional representations of national struggles, to this day, it is usually the men who are positioned at the front. Rebecca Bell-Metereau shows how “clear patterns appear in the roles women have played in some of the most popular box-office films from before and after 9/11”.[[3]](#footnote-3) These patterns, which Bell-Metereau sees as part of the patriotic wave immediately following 9/11, assign women with roles such as the nurse/doctor waiting during the fight, then serving as the sexual prize for the survivors, in *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, USA, 2001) and *Sum of All Fears* (Phil Alden Robinson, 2002) (146). In *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, USA, 2006), the first film dealing directly with 9/11, fire fighters are caught in the aftermath, while their clueless wives wait at home.[[4]](#footnote-4) When women do take an active part in the struggle against terror their role is secondary to that of a man leading the battle, as it is for example in the TV series *24* (FOX, 2001-2010) where Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) fights against diversified terror threats, defending his spouse, his daughter and his granddaughter, among others. The appearance, a decade or so after 9/11, of quite a few active, determined and effective women in leading roles in TV shows dealing with terror, such as *Covert Affairs*, *Homeland*, *Scandal*, *The Blacklist* and *Quantico,* and in films such as *Rendition, Eye in the Sky* and *Zero Dark Thirty,* seem to go against traditional gender roles. I will show how these unconventional representations of gender roles are linked to the political and ethical crisis involved in the new world of terror and counter-terror.

Feminist writers have pointed out that figures of women who are active outside of the domestic sphere often indicate a crisis in gender ideology and in the dominant ideology in general. Tasker, for example, discusses figures of active women who appeared in main roles in action films in the early 1990’s.[[5]](#footnote-5) In these films the female presence in the public, masculine domain creates or intensifies a crisis. Sexual desire or romance often interfere with the search for knowledge and disturb social stability.[[6]](#footnote-6) For Linda Mizejewski figures of female detectives complicate the very link between investigation and knowledge. A female investigator testifies to epistemological doubts about the ability of the masculine system to reach truth and knowledge.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Hilary Neroni observes that in diverse genres the inflicting of violence is traditionally associated with men and manhood.[[8]](#footnote-8) Neroni argues that representations of violent women in similar roles recur in times of crisis, when the prevailing gender ideology is exposed as a structure, as it can no longer support the understanding of events.[[9]](#footnote-9) Films with a female actively involved in violence perform a dual mission – they express the crisis through this break with gender conventions, and at the same time they contain the crisis by containing the violent woman in various ways in the narrative.

Another relevant example of a woman crossing conventional gender boundaries is the woman soldier. Tasker finds that “the female soldier is a contradiction in terms” (287), not exactly a woman, not exactly a soldier (5).[[10]](#footnote-10) As an abnormal, unstable category, she threatens the social order. Jeffords shows how solidarity between combatants, which is vital for their survival, is typically defined within gender lines.[[11]](#footnote-11) A female soldier among the male combatants threatens the solidarity between them. For the masculine collective at the front, women, along with the enemy, are the excluded Others.

In battle the woman is the excluded Other, yet the woman waiting at home, a home the men are called to defend, often symbolizes the nation. As Anne McClintock shows, this dual position has deep roots in the roles constructed for women in the frame of the national project.[[12]](#footnote-12) Women often symbolize the nation yet are excluded, in both space and time, from any active part in its history. While men are active in the public sphere, promoting change and progress, women are traditionally associated with the private space and with the past. In the domestic space they are responsible for ensuring stability and continuity by maintaining tradition, and by “proper” reproduction. A representation of a woman active in the public sphere, influencing the future of the collective, is an exception that feminist writers see as indicating a crisis.

What then is the nature of the crisis behind the recurring female figure at the front in representations of the struggle against terror created a decade after 9/11? Terror, and counter-terror, are examples of what researchers call the “new war”.[[13]](#footnote-13) Up until the middle of the 20th century wars were fought between states in conflict over territory, interests or ideology, by armies in uniform, which met for decisive battles, aimed at reaching a conclusive, lasting result. Lines between the Self and the Other were drawn along state borders. Wars were defined in terms of time and space. From a declaration of war to surrender or a peace agreement, wars were held in known battlefields, along known front lines, if possible away from civilian population.

Today diversified groups, often without uniforms, have joined states in carrying out political violence. Identity politics creates unstable boundaries between the Self and the Other inside states and across state borders. Combatants hide and operate among civilians and tactics on both sides affect civilian populations. Struggles are no longer marked by a clear beginning or end, nor are they limited to a certain territory or location.

The “new war” poses a double challenge – epistemological as well as ethical. As Raya Morag points out

In the new war traditional contrasts that either have been dismantled or are in crisis are terror-war… front-home, “us”-“them”, civilian-soldier… victim-perpetrator, defence-offense, beginning-end, victory-defeat, war-peace, moral-immoral.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The epistemological crisis lies not only in the challenge of identifying the enemy, but more deeply in the fact that binary concepts that have been at the base of thoughts about armed conflicts no longer hold. In fact, the very binary thinking is now in crisis, including that about the Self and the Other.

Georgio Agamben discusses the ethical implications of the blurred line between “us” and “them” in a struggle that has no definite beginning or end.[[15]](#footnote-15) Agamben focuses on the legal concept of ‘a state of exception’. This concept allows the sovereign to declare a state of emergency in times of danger to society or to the social order. In this exceptional state the sovereign is paradoxically entitled, under the law, to exclude certain individuals from the protection of that same law. Those individuals remain as “bare lives”, with no legal status, rights or protection. In the US, five days after 9/11, President Bush proclaimed a national emergency, and government agencies were consequently allowed to compromise some constitutional rights of US citizens[[16]](#footnote-16) and rights by international law of detainees off shore.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Such exceptional imbalance between the power of the sovereign and that of the law that normally controls it, is based on the assumption that any state of exception is temporary. However, in the decade following 9/11 the US has been involved in an ongoing battle against terror. In this continuous state of exception, asks Agamben, what is the legal and ethical code of action guiding the US?

The ideas of Michel Foucault, about the double power of the modern state, are also relevant to the ethical question raised by Agamben. As Foucault points out, traditionally, the sovereign had the right to put his subjects in mortal danger or to kill them (or to allow them to live). Since the late 18th century, an additional right has been granted to the sovereign state – the right to manage the life of its population, which Foucault termed as “bio-power”.[[18]](#footnote-18) The state became involved in biological processes such as birth and mortality rates, sexuality and reproduction, children and their development, public health, productivity and so on. This dual power – to kill and to manage life – demands of the authorities to draw a strict line between the lives for which it is responsible and those who have to die or to be excluded for the welfare of the first. However, in the current conditions of the struggle against terror, when it is impossible to isolate terrorists within the population or to clearly define “us” and “them”, this political task becomes more ethically challenging.

The existence of “bare lives” in the struggle against terror indeed became evident when, soon after 9/11, President Bush declared, based on documented legal opinion, that detainees held by the US are entitled to no legal procedure or protection under national or international law.[[19]](#footnote-19) Detainees of multiple nationalities, suspected of aiding the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other organizations, received the unique and united title of “unlawful combatants”, a term serving to deny them the legal status of prisoners of war.[[20]](#footnote-20) During the following decade it became evident that in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo US personnel inflicted torture and sexual abuse on some of these detainees. US Drone attacks in Afghanistan and elsewhere have occasionally resulted in injuries to civilians[[21]](#footnote-21) and revenge killings by US soldiers took place, for example, in Haditha, Iraq.[[22]](#footnote-22) The publication of these facts rose a heated public and political debate in the US. During the decade following 9/11 it became clear, then, that the continued battle against terror involves epistemological challenges, and political and ethical conflicts.

In the following analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Homeland*, I will show how the epistemological and ethical crisis involved in the new world of terror and counter-terror is both expressed and contained through the unconventional female figures at the front. Both heroines are part of the national agency defending the nation. At the same time they are in constant conflicts with the masculine system, and represented as similar in traits and in motivation to the terrorists. As such they represent the effect of the continuous struggle against terror - the “otherness” that has penetrated the nation. When the heroines suffer, they expresses the crisis. When their impact is restrained by the masculine system or the text, the crisis is contained. Yet through the proximity between the woman and the terrorist, and their parallel vulnerability, an ethical concept of the terrorist Other, as a subject, emerges.

**The American Self and the terrorist Other: *Zero Dark Thirty***

The unconventional representation of a woman leading a national mission to success is one of the ways *Zero Dark Thirty* reflects on the limitations of conventional representations, including that of the terrorist Other. Through presenting Maya as different from the men in the system, and through similarities between her and the terrorists, the film shortens the gap between the American Self and the terrorist Other, even in the bitter frame of 9/11, even in a popular film about a proven success of US security forces.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The film opens with a black screen. On the soundtrack authentic voice recordings from 9/11, from various sources, eventually focus on a dialogue between a woman caught in a fire in one of the towers and a helpless, traumatised rescue operator, also female. No male prince is coming to the rescue of the woman trapped in the tower. The dark screen and the sound track immediately attract attention to the representational crisis associated with the trauma.[[24]](#footnote-24) The absence of images also reflects on the spectacular, cinematic images of the twin towers on 9/11, repeatedly broadcasted in the media, to a numbing effect.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The film’s prologue is followed by a long, at times graphic, sequence of torture inflicted by American investigators on a prisoner named Amar (Reda Kateb). A caption informs us that the investigation takes place in a “Black Site, Undisclosed Location”. The word “black” connects this sequence with the black screen of the prologue, creating a parallel between the two situations of extreme violence. Whereas the prologue leaves us with no visuals of hurt bodies, neither of victims nor of perpetrators (the bodies of the terrorists vanished with the rest), [[26]](#footnote-26) the torture scenes are explicit, sometimes difficult to watch, focusing on the bruised and abused body. In opposite ways the prologue and the torture sequence both challenge the gaze of the audience, and in projection, of the nation is general, the gaze at suffering victims, on both sides. [[27]](#footnote-27)

The prisoner Amar, suspected of transferring money to terrorists, but not of blood on his hands, is not entirely monstrous. The torture scenes alternate between rapid body and camera movements, and some pauses of the movement and longer shots that include dialogues between investigator and detainee. “You are a mid-level guy” says Omar to investigator Dan (Jason Clarke), “And you’re a money man, paper boy” replies Dan. With close ups on the detainee and shots-reverse shots of him and the investigator, the sequence creates a parallel between the American Self and the terrorist Other, who has a face and a name.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In its next section the film follows CIA analyst Maya on her long, Sisyphean search for Bin Laden. Neroni compares Maya in *Zero Dark Thirty* to Carrie in *Homeland*, calling the first a “bio-detective” and the second a “detective of the real”.[[29]](#footnote-29) According to Neroni, Maya relies on biological means heavily used by the system, notably investigation by torture. Torture is based on the assumption that the body is a vessel of secrets that can be extracted from it because its final motivation is to survive. Carrie, on the other hand, concentrates on the psychological level, tuning onto the desires and anxieties of her subjects of investigation. In contrast to Neroni, I consider Maya and Carrie to be both “detectives of the real”. In fact they both start with technical and biological means, attending or inflicting torture and endlessly watching recorded or live video footage of their targets. Yet both soon come to realize the limits of these means, eventually seeking knowledge of the Other elsewhere. They go on to seek and draw conclusions based on perceiving their targets as psychological subjects, driven by ideologies and passions, that do not exclude self-destruction. In doing so they distance themselves from their masculine colleagues, who disavow this level of knowledge. The failure of endless video footage in identifying the Other reflects on investigation methods as well as on conventional representations in general, including media and fiction representations of terrorists. The terrorist Other remains enigmatic. It takes a transgression of conventional representation, such as a woman at the front, who relies on unconventional methods, to know and to find the terrorist Other.

Maya’s unorthodox method is exemplified by her willingness to consider the motives for suspects’ behaviour, a willingness she does not share with her bosses. For example, the fact that all those investigated about her suspect **refuse** to talk about his name, location or current function tells her that he is important, that he is indeed directly associated with Bin Laden. “This is tradecraft”, says Maya about the inconsistent conduct of the suspected messenger. She suspects that he does what she would have done in his situation. When a suspicious house is revealed in Pakistan, everything about the compound tells her it is Bin Laden’s hideout even though, or precisely **because**, there is no positive proof of Bin Laden’s presence there. But “the President is a thoughtful, analytical guy, he needs proof” says a White House counsel and the green light for the attack on the compound is postponed until a positive, biological proof is found, such as DNA of Bin Laden in the sewage. In her willingness to rely on a lack, the gender aspect of which I will further discuss soon, Maya is singled out from the men in the system in a way that gives her an advantage in the search for knowledge about the terrorists.

In a long section of the film, it is indeed Maya who moves the investigation forward. In this part the film presents no knowledge that Maya does not possess. Close ups on her face ensure audience identification with her intense emotions. The audience supports her efforts as they move forward the plot and the action.[[30]](#footnote-30) Nevertheless, Maya is constantly held back by her male colleagues, especially her superiors in the hierarchic organization.

Maya is restrained both within the diegesis and by the movie itself, in terms of space and time. Her movements are restricted. On her first entrance to the US embassy in Pakistan, after a long process of clearance, Mark Boal’s script says: “The guard opens the door... Not many females come through that door.” Time and again we see her in confined, dark and claustrophobic spaces, such as torture rooms, her cubicle office or hotel room. Whenever she moves by car she is held back by checkpoints, inspections, demonstrations and even an assassination attempt, all by men. When Maya and her friend Jessica (Jennifer Ehle) go out socially, a bomb explodes in the Islamabad Marriott cafeteria. “Don’t eat out” says Maya to her colleague Debbie (Jessica Collins), “It’s not safe.” When the surveillance team wanders the streets in their van or by foot, Maya stays behind, in front of a map on the office wall. In a meeting at CIA headquarters Maya is asked to sit by the wall when all the men gather around the center table. These restrictions in space seem gender influenced.

Temporarily, Maya is focused on the past. She is motivated by revenge – of 9/11 and of the death of Jessica. As Daniel Hack explains, revenge, even when involving the planning of future actions, is always focused on past events.[[31]](#footnote-31) Maya’s passionate, almost fanatical pursuit of Bin Laden conflicts with her commander’s demand that she would focus on preventing **future** attacks. The temporal difference between Maya and the men is further expressed through the issue of technology. Throughout the film Maya operates only simple technologies, such as a car, DVD players and monitors, paperwork, a wig, a marker. For any advanced technologies, she is completely dependent on her superiors and on male operators, who take their time in joining her efforts.

These differences in space and time culminate in the last section of the film. As the men, a well-coordinated group of comrades, depart for their night raid, Maya is left behind, alone, returned to the conventional gender role of a woman waiting for the return of the warriors. The night attack, from which Maya is excluded, is a spectacle of futuristic technologies. The combatants arrive at the target in novel, undetectable helicopters that have never even been tested. With their gear and night vision apparatus they look like aliens or cyborgs from an advanced civilization, with four eyes each. By including green and grainy footage, shot with night vision apparatus, the film shares with the audience, but not with Maya, this enhanced gaze, along with some information that Maya does not possess in “real” time.

Maya is not only singled out from the men, but she is also similar in a number of ways to the terrorists. According to Hack, in Western culture revenge is considered historically as a primitive, atavistic, irrational and uncivilized motive,[[32]](#footnote-32) qualities often associated with terrorists.[[33]](#footnote-33) Maya is obsessively dedicated to the task of revenge, totally sacrificing her personal life. Like the terrorists she has an almost messianic concept of her mission: “A lot of my friends died trying to do this. I believe I was spared so I could finish the job”, she says. She is in a sort of Jihad of her own.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In *Zero Dark Thirty* the terrorists, like Maya, don’t use modern technology. Not a single electronic signal is coming out of the suspected compound. “He has no internet access to the house, he makes no phone calls either in or out”, explains a CIA executive to the White House counsel. Modern technology is associated solely with the American men, never with Maya or the terrorists.

Singled out from the men in the system, and in proximity to the terrorist, Maya is the Other within. Yet, as a woman, she also symbolizes the nation. At CIA headquarters, when all the men gather at the center of the room, it is Maya who is standing next to the American flag on the wall, her profile reflected in its frame. In the ending scene, Maya is sitting alone in a large, vacant space inside the transport aircraft sent to pick her up, red stripes at her back, like a torn flag. “Where do you want to go?” asks the pilot. Maya has no answer. She is not sure where home is, because home has changed for ever- it is now full of hate, seeking revenge, facing ethical conflicts and a dubious, contaminated future. As the camera draws to a prolonged close up, we see tears rolling down her cheeks, manifesting the toll, on herself and on the nation, of the continuous struggle.[[35]](#footnote-35)

In her dual role, symbolizing the nation, and the Other within, Maya represents the operational, political and ethical “otherness” that has penetrated the heart of the nation in the struggle against terror. Serving as a scapegoat, Maya keeps the men at a distance from this “othernss”.[[36]](#footnote-36) Yet her unconventional figure, and her unique understanding of the terrorists, create a rupture in conventional representation through which an alternative ethical approach to the terrorist Other is offered, bringing him closer to the American Self.

**The Self and the Other in the womb: *Homeland*’s first three seasons**

In *Homeland* as well (and unlike its Israeli source) the main character is a woman. The seriesfocuses on the efforts of CIA agent Carrie Mathison to prevent terror attacks in the US or on US assets in the world. In the first three seasons, the enemy is Islamic fundamentalism, represented by the figure of Abu Nazir (Navid Negahban), an al-Qaeda commander, suspected of having turned USMC Scout Sniper Sergeant Nick Brody against the US, during the later’s captivity in Syria. After Brody’s rescue by Delta Force operators, Carrie suspects, based on previous intel, that the returning Marine is now a terrorist and a threat to US leaders and targets.[[37]](#footnote-37) Brody is received with great honour, and quickly climbs up the US political ladder. Yet, as viewers soon find out, he is indeed also an active terrorist.

The terrorist Other in *Homeland* is therefore much closer to home than in *Zero Dark Thirty*. He could be anyone. The series goes a long way to show that a religious, racial or ethnic background, are of no use in identifying terrorists. Almost everyone is “different” in one way or another. Saul (Mandy Patinkin), Carrie’s mentor in the CIA, is a Jew, married to a woman from India. David Estes (David Harewood), Carrie’s boss, is a black commander, whose divorcee and children converted to Judaism. Fara Sherazi (Nazanin Boniadi), a CIA teammate of Iranian descent, is reprimanded by her colleagues for her traditional Moslem attire. At the same time Roya Hammad (Zuleikha Robinson), a political journalist with access to top military and political personalities, is hiding her Palestinian origin, and her terrorist activities, behind British accent and conduct acquired during her education years in Oxford, England. Aileen Morgan (Marin Ireland), an American blond, is also an active terrorist, more so than her Saudi husband.[[38]](#footnote-38) In *Homeland* not only is it difficult to identify terrorists, but national loyalty itself is unstable. Two Marines, one white, one black, betray their country and become terrorists. Brody’s loyalty is unstable throughout the three seasons, until just moments before his death. Carrie herself operates both within and outside the law and later hinders CIA investigations for personal reasons. The series reflects not only on conventional representations of the terrorist Other, but also on the epistemological challenge of grasping that Other, who resides and operate among “us”.

In *Homeland,* then, the line between a friend and a foe, which according to Foucault and Agamben the state strives to define, is difficult to draw. Through Carrie’s unconventional and in many ways “other” figure, and through her relationship with the terrorist, the series defies the knowledge of such a line, even its very existence. Carrie’s romantic bond with Brody brings the terrorist Other ever closer to the American Self.

Ideologies differ from one another in what they consider to be the right way to reach truth and knowledge. Currently the dominant ideology, through its operative agencies, bases its investigation of the terrorist Other on technological and biological means such as lie detectors, satellite imagery, video surveillance and so on, many of which are represented in *Homeland*. [[39]](#footnote-39) Carrie begins her investigation of Brody by planting surveillance cameras in the various spaces of his house, endlessly watching him on screens installed in her own private living room.[[40]](#footnote-40) Surveillance cameras have become very common in military and civil security systems, as they have in film and television.[[41]](#footnote-41) Audiences have come to recognize the grainy images they produce, often from a top angle, as conventional representations of authenticity. Their supposed real time, automatic indexiality gives them extra credibility.[[42]](#footnote-42) Some of the narratives including such devices confirm the surveyed body as a source of knowledge. Others, *Homeland* included, defy this fantasy.[[43]](#footnote-43) The excessive, voyeuristic gaze of Carrie, is legally and ethically problematic. It is uneasily shared by the viewers, and leads nowhere. Days and nights of watching Brody on screen, even after the surveillance permit time has ended, have given Carrie no proof, no clear understanding of Brody. The useless screens reflect not only on the methods used by national security systems, but also on the possibility of the series itself, and popular media in general, to provide an answer to the enigma of the terrorist Other.

Dissatisfied with the results of electronic surveillance, Carrie goes out to meet Brody in person, on a more equal standing. She is trying to overcome the hierarchy and distance between the Self and the Other embedded in security technologies. In this she becomes what Neroni calls a “detective of the real”, who is interested in the passions and anxieties of the subject of her investigation, as a complete human being.[[44]](#footnote-44) In her covert, independent and unorthodox actions, and the consequent conflicts with her superiors, Carrie is marked as an Other within the system.

Most significantly Carrie is marked as different by her bipolar mental disorder. Her hereditary manic depression is represented dialectically. On the one hand it weakens her and enables the system to temporarily exclude her from the public sphere (which is why she keeps it as a secret). On the other hand her manic mental state gives Carrie an epistemological advantage (which is why in season 5 she refuses medication). [[45]](#footnote-45)

Mary Anne Doane analyses mental pathologies of women as represented in “women films” of the 30’s and 40’s of the 20th century. According to Doane two central narratives appear in these films: first, an excessive, incoherent, sometimes hallucinate speech by the woman patient; secondly, a coherent and therapeutic narrative elaborated by an authoritative male (a doctor, a judge). Similarly, Carrie, hospitalized for concussion, experiences a manic episode which causes her to speak incessantly and quickly about imminent terror threats, so quickly that Saul finds it difficult to follow.[[46]](#footnote-46) The nurse asks Saul to take Carrie to her room, indicating a doctor will soon come to calm her down. This marks her conduct as pathological. It is used by the system to confine her and silence her narrative.

Seemingly, traditional gender roles are kept. Yet a closer look at Carrie’s pathology reveals that it differs from what Doane describes. In her excitement Carrie uses excessive chains of phonetically associated adjectives. For example, she describes one terrorist as “a part, a piece, a pixel, a pawn”. Chains of words linked by their sound and not by their meaning are known in Psychiatry as “clang associations”. Pathological clang associations, and pathological loose associations in general, are basically incoherent, requiring a special effort of deciphering by a psychiatrist.[[47]](#footnote-47) Yet Carrie’s clang associations are connected not only phonetically but semantically as well. They are perfectly understood by the viewers, if not by Saul. Her speech may be excessive, but her language is enhanced, not lacking in clarity. She presents a convincing, even attractive idea for the viewers, who already know that Carrie is closer to the truth than anybody else. The idea of an imminent attack, much larger than the one suspected by the system, raises the tension and the plot to a higher level.

Proof of her sharpened perception in the manic state is provided soon after, when Carrie gets home from the hospital. Enthusiastically marking documents in various colours, spreading them in chaos all over her living room floor, she figures out a gap in Abu Nazir’s terrorist activities, a period he was silent and inactive. To see this, Saul later needs to place all documents on the wall in a linear timeline, but Carrie does not need this linear order to see the gap. She is already focused on this lack of activity, rightly suspecting it includes a clue to the source of the terrorist’s trauma and passion for revenge. Her mental disorder, her otherness, brings her closer to understanding his motivation.

Like Maya in *Zero Dark Thirty*, Carrie is exceptional in her gift to make meaning out of a lack. Following Kaja Silverman this gift can be related to gender difference.[[48]](#footnote-48) According to Silverman, the existence of a penis and a long history of cultural influences, have constructed masculinity as disavowing castration, repressing anything that evades their knowledge and control. Women, on the other hand, aware of the absence of a penis in their anatomy, are less threatened by lack. In the lack of knowledge, understanding and control of the terrorist Other, the woman, with her own original lack, is selected in both texts to be the one trying to grasp the unknown.

Carrie is not only different from the men she reports to, but she is similar in a number of ways to Brody, the terrorist Other. Both Carrie and Brody have secrets and both struggle with internal demons: as Carrie copes with her bipolar disorder and with the trauma of 9/11, Brody, following his captivity, is having nightmares, hallucinations and outbursts of anger.[[49]](#footnote-49) They have both experienced personal traumas related to the national struggle. Blurring of the personal and the national and a deep sense of public mission disturb both their lives. For Anat Zanger, they both serve as scapegoats – woman and Marine are punished for crossing borders and for being others within and at the same time symbolize the nation and take the harm for it.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In *Homeland* the woman is not only similar to the terrorist but she further represents the crisis by forming a romantic bond with him, blurring the line between enemy and lover. As Carrie comes closer to the enemy, the series is making an effort to contain the crisis by withdrawing her from the public sphere, and returning her to the conventional role of women in the national project: their relationship results in a pregnancy, and Carrie is considering abandoning her career and starting a family with Brody. However, in this pregnancy Carrie does not fulfil her role as guardian of the borders of the nation through “proper” reproduction. On the contrary, the nation’s most inner, gendered space has been penetrated by the enemy.[[51]](#footnote-51) Carrie is carrying his DNA in her womb, promising continuity precisely to the terrorist. Nor does her withdrawal from the public sphere succeeds. Carrie and Brody separate and continue their via dolorosa, apart.

Danger, vulnerability and suffering are common in the life of both Carrie and Brody. For Butler, 9/11 revealed that the precariousness of life is universal, that all lives are exposed to suffering inflicted by others. Following the ethics of Emanuel Levinas Butler suggests that after 9/11 we should become more attentive to the face of the Other, a face calling us to ensure her safety and well-being. Yet the possibility of hearing the call of the Other is influenced by the nature of the encounter with that Other, or by the lack of such an encounter. Butler points to a line that has been drawn between grievable lives and ungrieveable lives that remained outside the frame of representation in the struggle against terror and in the two wars that followed 9/11.[[52]](#footnote-52) She protests against the absence, or the dehumanization, or even demonization of some others in media representations of the time. In *Homeland,* on the other hand, Brody, the terrorist Other, is a traumatic and complex character. The spectators identify with his suffering, as they do with Carrie’s. Through their relationship the enemy becomes human, transformed from an inspected object, to a vulnerable subject. Thanks to Carrie, who yells out his name in agony at the time of his execution, in the end his life is grievable.[[53]](#footnote-53)

**Conclusion**

In this article, I have examined the appearance, a decade after 9/11, of unconventional figures of active, effective women at the front in film and television representations of the struggle against terror. I have suggested that this gender swap is related to the unique crisis in that struggle, as revealed during the decade following 9/11. At the center of this crisis is the challenge of distinguishing between “us” and “them,” between the Self and the Other, who became much closer geographically, in tactics, and in ethics. In both texts, the woman, who is at once a symbol of the nation, and the Other within, is used to express the crisis, and to contain it. In similarities between the heroines and the terrorists, and in *Homeland* in a relationship with one, both Maya and Carrie represent the blurring of the line between the Self and the Other. They represent the penetration of the Other to the heart of the nation, while keeping the men at a distance from his influence.

In their unconventional methods, Maya and Carrie extract that Other from the position of an inspected object and consider him as a subject. Vulnerability and suffering, physical or emotional, unite heroines and terrorists. As Butler has suggested, recognition of the precariousness of all lives, of the common vulnerability of “us” and “them,” could present ethical alternatives to the prevailing attitudes.

1. Jeffords, Susan. *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Indiana UP, 1989, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Butler, Judith. *Precarious life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso Books, 2006. Specific page no? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bell-Metereau, Rebecca. “The How-To Manual, the Prequel and the Sequel in Post-9/11 Cinema”. *Film and Television after 9/11*, edited by Wheeler Winston Dixon, Southern Illinois UP, 2004, 142-162, 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In *United 93* (Peter Markle, USA, 2006) roles are divided more evenly between men and women. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Such as *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1990), *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demi, 1991), and *Bodily Harm* (James Lemmo, 1995). Tasker, Yvonne. *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*, Routledge, c1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tasker, Yvonne. *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, Routledge, 1998, 89-115.p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mizejewski, Linda, “The Female Dick*: The Silence of the Lambs* and *Blue Steel*”. *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 45, no. 2/3, Summer-Fall 1993, pp. 6-23. Page? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Neroni, Hilary. *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*. SUNY Press, 2005. This point pages 8 and 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As was the case of women’s violent initiatives in film noir films, under the impressions of World War II (Neroni, 2005, note 8). This point pages 19-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tasker, Yvonne. *Soldiers Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television since World War II*, Duke UP, 2011, pp. 5, 12, 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jeffords, see note 1, p 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See McClintock, Anne. “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family”. *Feminist Review*, vol. 44, 1993, pp. 61–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See, for example, Kaldor, Mary. “Old Wars, Cold Wars, New Wars, and the War on Terror”. *International Politics*, vol. 42, no. 4, December 2005, pp. 491-498. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Morag, Raya. “The living Body and the Corpse – Israeli Documentary Cinema and the Intifadah.” *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 60, no. 3-4, Fall/Winter 2008, 3-30. This is from page 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Agamben, Giorgio. "State of Exception." *Nova Srpska Politička Misao, vol.* 12, no. 1and 4, 2005, pp. 135-145.‏ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See the PATRIOT ACT, signed into law by President Bush on October 26, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See President George W. Bush's Military Order of November 13, 2001: Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War against Terrorism. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Foucault, Michel. Chapter Eleven. *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*, translated by David Macey, edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, Picador, 2003‏, pp. 239-263. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Memorandum to the President, of January 25, 2002, by White House Counsel Alberto R. Gonzales. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “Unlawful combatants do not have any rights under the Geneva Convention,” said US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in an interview when the first detainees from Afghanistan arrived in Guantanamo (Reuters, January 11, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Shane, Scott. "Drone Strikes Reveal Uncomfortable Truth: US is Often Unsure about Who Will Die." *The New York Times*, 24 April 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Source? Reference? [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Doherty, Thomas. “Movie Reviews: *Zero Dark Thirty*.” *Journal of American History*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2013, pp. 303-305. This point from page 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. On the inaccessibility of trauma and the challenges of its representation see Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. This point pages 4-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Žižek, Slavoi. “Passions of the Real, Passions of Semblance.” *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, Verso, 2002, pp. 5-32. This point from page 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ann McClintock, qtd. in Burgoyne, Robert. “The Violated Body: Affective Experience and Somatic Intensity in *Zero Dark Thirty*.” *The Philosophy of War Films*, edited by David LaRocca, UP of Kentucky, 2014, pp. 104-108. This point from p 104. Look for original source? [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The film evoked a debate on whether or not it justified torture in the struggle against terror or not. See Bigelow, Kathryn. “Kathryn Bigelow Addresses ‘Zero Dark Thirty’ Torture Criticism.” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 January 2013 and a response by Žižek, Slavoi. “*Zero Dark Thirty*: Hollywood’s Gift to American Power.” *The Guardian*, 25 January 2013. I find that the film confirms that torture did happen but does not give a definite answer as to the question of whether or not torture provided vital information in the search for Bin Laden. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Judith Butler observes that in the pictures that leaked from Abu Grhaib the faces of the detainees, hooded or not, are never seen, only those of their prisoners (Butler, Judith. *Frames of war: When is Life Grievable?* Verso Books, 2016). This point p 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Neroni, Hilary. “Chapter 5, The Biodetective versus the Detective of the Real in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Homeland*”. *The Subject of Torture: Psychoanalysis & Biopolitics in Television & Film*, Columbia UP, 2015, pp. 115-138. Neroni borrows the term “the real” from Jacques Lacan, for whom the three levels of the Self are: “the symbolic”, “the imaginary” and “the real”, which is the level of desires (Lacan, qtd. In Neroni, 2015 128-129). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Some in the audience, especially in the US, as they watch the movie already know from prior news reports that the capture of Bin Laden was enabled by a female CIA agent. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Hack, Daniel. “Revenge Stories of Modern Life.” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2, Winter 2006, pp. 277-286. This point from page 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Hack, Daniel, Earlier note, this point from page 278 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Treverton, Gregory F. “The Intelligence of Counterterrorism.” *The Long Shadow of 9/11: America's Response to Terrorism,* edited by Brian Michael Jenkins and John Paul Godges, RAND Corporation, 2011, pp.*‏* 161-168.or former note. This point also from page 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Or “crusade” as one of her colleagues calls it. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For others who noted the gloomy ending of a film about a successful military operation see for example Burgoyne, Robert. “The Violated Body: Affective Experience and Somatic Intensity in *Zero Dark Thirty*.” *The Philosophy of War Films*, edited by David LaRocca, UP of Kentucky, 2014, pp. 104-108.This point p 108, Earlier notes? and Doherty, Thomas. Note 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Zanger, Anat. “Between *Homeland* and *Prisoners of War*: Remaking Terror.” *Continuum*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2015, pp. 731-742. This point pp 738-739 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “Pilot”, Season 1, Episode 1, 2 October 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. James Castonguay points out that although not all Moslems are bad, in the first three seasons, all terrorists are Moslems: This changes in the next seasons. “Fictions of Terror: Complexity and Insecurity in *Homeland*.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 54, no. 4, Summer 2015, pp. 139-145. This point p. 143. Give up on this comment? [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Neroni, Hilary. 2015, note 29. this point from p. 117 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. “Pilot”, Season 1, Episode 1, 2 October 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Kammerer, Dietmar. “Video Surveillance in Hollywood Movies.” *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 2, no.2/3, 2004, pp. 464-473. This point from p 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Levin, Thomas Y. "Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of ‘Real Time’.” *CTRL: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, 2002, pp. 578-593.‏ this point in 578-580. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Neroni, 2015 note 29, 24 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Neroni, 2015, earlier note, 129-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. “Super Powers”, Season 5, Episode 3, 18 October 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. “The Vest”, Season 1, Episode 11, 11 December 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Hoffman, Ralph E., Susan Stopek, and Nancy C. Andreasen. “A Comparative Study of Manic vs. Schizophrenic Speech Disorganization.” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 43, no .9, 1986, pp. 831-838. This point from page 831. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Silverman, Kaja. "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity."  *Cinema,* Routledge*,* 1990, pp. 110-127. This point 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Edgerton, Gary R., and Katherine C. Edgerton. “Pathologizing Post-9/11 America in Homeland: Private Paranoia, Public Psychosis.” *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 7, 2012, pp. 89-92.‏ this point page 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Zanger, Anat. Note 36. This from page 735, 739 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. On the use in *Homeland* of the woman’s body as a battlefield in a war that cannot be defined geographically, see Bevan, Alex. “The National Body, Women, and Mental Health in *Homeland,*” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2015, pp. 145-151.‏ this point p 148 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Butler, Judith*. Frames of war: When is Life Grievable?* Verso Books, 2016. Specific page n?‏ [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. “The Star”, Season 3, Episode 12, 15 December 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)