

# Homeland and Orientalism: An Examination of Arab Muslim Identity and US Nationalism

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## Abstract:

*Homeland* is a popular show with American audiences. However, it has also garnered harsh criticism for its representations of Arab Muslim communities. Critics argue that these representations present Arab Muslims as violent, one dimensional, and primitive, all of which are tropes present in Orientalism as defined by Said in his revolutionary 1978 book. Orientalism frames the Middle East as a negative inversion of the West, creating a setup in which the East is portrayed as primitive and inferior in comparison to the modern and superior West. This paper examines the presence of Orientalism in the show's representations of both Arab Muslim identity and of US nationalism. This study links concepts of Orientalism to the production of narratives surrounding Arab Muslim identity and US nationalism. My research question therefore is as follows: how does *Homeland* represent Arab Muslim identity and US nationalism in the context of Orientalism as defined by Said? That is to say, how does *Homeland* frame and link Arab Muslim identity and American nationalism as inherently antithetical to one another? My examination concludes that despite the appearance of complex narratives in *Homeland*, the writing falls victim to the same outdated stereotypes of Arab Muslim identity and US nationalism that are rooted in Orientalism.

"*Homeland* is an edge-of-your-seat sensation," according to the official website of the show. *Homeland*, a spy thriller television series currently renewed for its seventh and eighth seasons starting in 2018, is broadcasted on the cable channel Showtime. It is based on an Israeli series titled *Prisoner of War*, which was acquired by 20th Century Fox Television and adapted into *Homeland* for American audiences (Otterson, 2017). The original series was produced by Keshet, an Israeli media production company, that was brought on as a producer of *Homeland* as well. The executive producers are Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon, both of whom additionally worked on the early 2000s American spy thriller *24*, a show that also featured an American counter-terrorism unit (IMDB) and themes similar to those of *Homeland*. *Homeland* has been at the center of intense controversy; despite the fact that the show has won two Golden Globe Awards, as well as multiple Primetime Emmy Awards for Best Drama Series and Outstanding Lead Actors, it has also garnered harsh criticism on the basis of its depictions of Arabs and Muslims (IMDB; Edwards, 2017). The show is rated Mature and as such, is clearly geared toward a slightly older audience; however, despite its mature rating and the fact that it is aired on a premium cable network, the show has been vastly popular, consistently garnering viewership in the

millions (O'Connell, 2013 ; Otterson, 2017).

The series follows brilliant but volatile agent Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) as she works for the Central Intelligence Agency in their counter-terrorism unit. At the beginning of the first season, Sergeant Nicholas Brody, who was presumed dead after being captured in Iraq eight years prior, is found and returned home. Abu Nazir, a Palestinian terrorist and al-Qaeda commander who is the show's main antagonist, held Brody captive. While Brody is heralded as an American hero, Carrie is not so easily convinced of his intentions; she had been warned that a US prisoner of war had been radicalized and suspects Brody is the double agent. The majority of the first and second seasons focus on Carrie's struggle to determine Sergeant Brody's intentions. Eventually, the CIA discovers that Tom Walker, another US prisoner of war presumed to be dead, is alive and had become radicalized. Although suspicion then shifts towards Walker, it eventually becomes evident that Brody and Walker had been working together in plotting a domestic terror attack along with another couple who had become radicalized, Faisal and Aileen. Brody eventually plans to assassinate the Vice President of the United States and many of his staff using an explosive vest; however, he changes his mind at the last moment. Brody's terrorist inclinations are finally discovered by the CIA at

large and after intense interrogation and manipulation, they convince him to work with them to eliminate Abu Nazir. Brody struggles to balance his work as a newly elected congressman with his role working for the CIA as an undercover agent in Nazir's in-group. This group includes Roya Hammad, a terrorist sympathizer and reporter, as well as a local man serving as a bomb-maker. As more of Abu Nazir's contacts come to light and the situation becomes increasingly complicated, Carrie and her team struggle to keep things under control. At the conclusion of season two, Abu Nazir is captured and killed; however, his death does not stop a bomb from exploding at a CIA headquarters event, killing over 200. Nazir frames Brody for the explosion and Brody and Carrie are forced to flee. The show additionally follows Carrie's challenges as she grapples with mental illness, Brody's struggles as a convert to Islam, and the challenges of Brody's wife Jessica and their two children, Dana and Chris, face as they attempt to adjust to Brody's return and the consequences of his bizarre behavior.

Themes of American nationalism, Arab identity, and Islam all prevail in the show. These detailed and strategic frames reflect larger underlying beliefs about an implied dichotomy between the global East and global West. My research question therefore is as follows: how does Homeland represent Arab Muslim identity and US nationalism in the context of Orientalism as defined by Said? That is to say, how does Homeland frame and link Arab Muslim identity and American nationalism as categories that are inherently antithetical to one another?

First, the paper examines previous research conducted on the representation of Arabs and Muslims in American media, the concept of US nationalism, and how Orientalism plays a role in American self-concept as well as attitudes towards the Middle East, and how that overarching framework is demonstrated in our media content. Immediately following, I analyze how Homeland addresses concepts of Orientalism in general, as well as Arab Muslim identity and US nationalism in particular, and the sociopolitical relevancy of these representations.

## Literature Review

Through a long and rich history of textual analysis and study, it has been established that the media play a vital role in both forming a framework through which audiences see the world and in setting the agenda to establish what is or is not important in a current sociopolitical landscape (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). Media both informs and is informed by social perception of the world. Ground-breaking work by Gerbner in 1976 established his

idea of 'cultivation theory,' by which a particular way of seeing the world is established and internalized through repeated exposure to that framework. Although cultivation of a framework is only one of many pieces of audience beliefs, Gerbner's work set an important precedent for understanding the relationship between media production and viewership. Hall's work additionally builds upon this idea by examining the creation and maintenance of ideologies in media, particularly racist ideologies (2003). On inferential racism, Hall argues that there are "naturalised representations of events and situations relating to race, whether 'factual' or 'fictional', which have racist premisses and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions" (2003, p. 90). The naturalization of certain beliefs and the ways that lines between a set ideology and what is objectively "true" about the world become blurred must form our understanding of how racist and Islamophobic ideology is presented in media.

A negative ideological framework has pervaded media representation of Islam and the Middle East. Ahmed and Matthes (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of media representations of Muslims, examining 345 studies published from 2000-2015. They found that Muslims were overwhelmingly portrayed in a negative manner, and that furthermore, media discourse relied on Orientalist tropes to frame Muslims as the 'Other.' Shaheen (2003) went back even further, detailing the lengthy history of representation of Muslims and Arabs in his work by examining over 900 films from more than a century. He found that stereotypes describing Muslims as "heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics" have become pervasive in media through the years (Shaheen, 2003, p. 171). Alsultany has updated and expanded this representational work, developing categories for a variety of stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, particularly in the overarching category of what she refers to as "simplified complex representations." According to Alsultany, simplified complex representations are the contemporary form of Islamophobic representations, in which it may appear that Arabs are now presented as having more well-rounded and rich characterization in media, but beneath the surface, characters are still trapped in the same reductive storylines revolving around terrorism. Alsultany claims that "Post-9/11 television is testimony to the fact that the stereotypes that held sway for much of the twentieth century are no longer socially acceptable—at least in their most blatant forms. But this does not mean that such stereotypes (and viewers' taste for them) have actually gone away; they have only become covert" (Alsultany, 2012, p. 27-28). Alsultany also did research on the ways in which nonprofit advertising in

America attempts to sell the idea of a diverse and multicultural society that is inclusive of Muslim Americans. The issue became increasingly complicated after September 11th, when national confusion and fear was heightened. "In addition to government practices that defined Americans and Arabs/Muslims as binary opposites," Alsultany wrote, "government and media discourses relied on old Orientalist tropes that positioned American national identity as democratic, modern, and free and the Middle East as primitive, barbaric, and oppressive" (2007, p. 594). Halse (2012) found additional Orientalist beliefs creeping in to media representation. He examined the show 24 and discovered a post September 11th shift to a new Muslim stereotype: the radicalized Muslim in disguise as the average American. In fact, the show was promoted using the phrase "They could be next door." According to Halse, 24, which was produced by the same individuals as Homeland, builds on the idea of the East and the West as fundamentally antithetical to one another. Powell (2011) also examined the framing of Islam and Arab communities in a post September 11th world. Her research found that media representation framed "Muslims/Arabs/Islam working together in organized terrorist cells against a 'Christian America'" (Powell, 2011, p. 91). Her work is important in addressing the other side of the equation: the development of an identity for the West that can be presented as antithetical to the East. It is here that the concept of US nationalism becomes important to understanding this implied dichotomy.

In his book examining the concept and creation of nationalism, Anderson (1983) defined a nation as "an imagined political community" in which people find an identity in their sense of nationalism. This sense of unifying identity forms a "deep horizontal comradeship" (1983, p. 49 & 50). In a population searching for meaning, nationalism fills a gap and creates unified meaning. However, the identity that becomes formulated can have dangerous implications. In an examination of the paradoxes of nationalism, Pei (2003) argues that "American nationalism is hidden in plain sight" (p. 34). American is highly nationalistic, yet does not believe itself to be. Two important aspects that are relevant to this piece can be drawn from Pei's research. First of all, according to Pei, when examining statistics about American attitudes, it becomes clear that "Americans not only take enormous pride in their values but also regard them as universally applicable" (2003, p. 32). There is a very strong belief in the superiority of American policies and values, as well as a strong belief that they could benefit the rest of the world. Yet another aspect of US nationalism can be directly linked to this—what Pei referred to as "the willingness of

ordinary citizens to contribute to the public good" (2003, p. 32). Although military prowess is not discussed in this piece, it is easy to see how this confidence in US values and a willingness to contribute can lead to a strengthening of American military powers. In his work examining American nationalism in the context of United States foreign policy following September 11th, McCartney (2004) argues that following the September 11th attacks, attention was immediately and successfully diverted to the war in Iraq. He argues that "enduring nationalist themes provided the basic structure in which Americans organized their comprehension of and reaction to the terrorist attacks" and that a part of the reason for intervention in the Middle East was to change the world "to suit American interests by making it more consistent with American values," which he argues has always been an aspect of American nationalism (2004, p. 400). The attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center provided a perfect backdrop to seamlessly connect American nationalism to interference in the Middle East. Monten (2005) agrees with McCartney's assessment, arguing that US nationalism "has historically been defined in terms of both adherence to a set of liberal, universal political ideals and a perceived obligation to spread those norms internationally" (p. 113). This attitude extensively shaped American politics following the events of September 11th. These ideals and beliefs are strongly rooted in the history of Orientalism.

Edward Said famously coined the term Orientalism in his 1978 book. Orientalism, which Said defines as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'", is vital to defining the relationship between the East and West (1978, p. 112). Orientalism posits the global West as the antithesis to the East, setting up a dichotomy in which the East is defined as inferior, backward, and primitive, while the West is defined as superior, modern, and progressive. Orientalism arose from a long history of interaction between the Middle East, France, and Britain, which involved complex power dynamics and intense conflict. However, it is important to note that the East, herein referred to as the Orient, does not reflect the Middle East; the Orient is a creation of the West with little basis in fact. It is this inaccurate and offensive concept of the East that is posed as the antithesis to the West. Said's research revolutionized the ways in which scholars examined the relationship between the global East and West. Kumar (2010) examined the resurgence of Orientalist concepts during the second Bush administration. According to Kumar, Orientalist beliefs have once more become dominant after September 11th. Coverage on major news

sources has led to the naturalization of an epistemological framework rooted in Orientalist beliefs and attitudes. She addresses and refutes five of these prominent Orientalist concepts, including the ideas that Muslims are inherently irrational/backward as well as the idea that they are innately violent. She also addresses the “clash of civilizations” theory, coined by Lewis in the 1950s, which resurged during the Bush administration. This particular theory posits that conflict in this case is due to inherent cultural and religious differences between the global East and West. Asad, in his 2007 book on suicide bombings, addresses this idea, arguing that the problem with this theory is that it ignores a lengthy history of interaction between the East and West, and the fact that neither of these parts of the world developed in isolation. Asad also addresses why terrorism and ostensibly legitimate warfare are seen differently, concluding that the main difference is that killing that is sanctioned by governments is legitimized. Furthermore, he argues that justifications for categorizing something as warfare instead of terrorism are additionally predicated on the supposed status of the nation: “it is not cruelty that matters in the distinction between terrorists and armies at war, still less the threat each poses to entire ways of life, but their civilization status. What is really at stake is not a clash of civilization... but the fight of civilization against the uncivilized” (2007, 37-8). This argument neatly ties together Orientalism, differentiation, and state-level justifications of violence. As George W. Bush said in 2006, “We face an enemy that has an ideology. They believe things. The best way to describe their ideology is to relate to you the fact that they think the *opposite* of what we think.” This idea of the East as the antithesis of the West is strongly rooted in American society historically and currently, and has become a justification for foreign policy, ubiquitous in media representation.

## Analysis

### *Orientalism*

A thorough analysis of *Homeland* indicates that it is predicated upon concepts of Orientalism. The dichotomy of terrorism/counter-terrorism goes deeper than simply an attack/protect plot line; throughout the series, it is shown that the true dichotomy is in the way that the Middle East is posited as antithetical to the West. Characters within the Western hemisphere, defined by a sense of US nationalism, are held up as the opposite to everything the Muslim Arab world represents. The inherent, underlying values and belief systems of each are detailed as completely different and mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the show depends upon an ethnocentric depiction of the Mid-

dle East. A specific idea of the Orient is created through a Western gaze, and that idea of the Orient is posited as the antithesis of the West; the ‘real’ Middle East is never relevant. Narratives stemming from the Middle East are completely ignored in the show, which solely utilizes its particular concept of the Orient as a counter-argument to the West. The West is moral, civilized, and modern, as are its people; the East is inherently immoral, violent, uncivilized, and completely backward, as are all those who stem from that area. The only possible way to salvage such a society is through violence, or rescuing the occasional Arab woman from such a dangerous place. Nationalist values are furthermore presented as the moral of the story, inspiring average Americans to take up arms to defend their homeland. Furthermore, a sense of US exceptionalism comes into the picture; the West resorts to extreme acts of violence, but only because they have been “backed into a corner,” so to speak, and have no other choice. In reinforcing this narrative, despite the violence of its Western characters, *Homeland* reifies the dichotomy of the moral West positioned against an immoral East. These aforementioned concepts of Orientalism are demonstrated through the entire show, particularly in the way they intersect with *Homeland*’s narratives surrounding Arab Muslim identity and US nationalism.

### *Arab Muslim Identity*

One of the most salient issues in the show is the representation of Arab Muslim identity. Statistically, Arabs comprise a relatively small percentage of Muslims worldwide; however, *Homeland* conflates Arab and Muslim identities as being indistinguishable. In doing so, they draw from a long and rich history of stereotyped and statistically inaccurate representations of Arab Muslim communities (Shaheen, 2003). This representation has been at the forefront of criticism of *Homeland*; many individuals and organizations within the Arab and/or Muslim community argue the show draws upon offensive, stereotyped, and one dimensional representations of their people (Alsultany, 2007; Alsultany, 2012). An analysis of the first two seasons of *Homeland* suggests that their concerns have validity.

In the first two seasons of the show, without exception, Arab Muslims are shown to be backward, violent, and uncivilized. “They yell ‘death to America’ no matter what we do,” Vice President Walden shouts during season two. Furthermore, *Homeland* fails to present even a singular Arab or Muslim character who remains uninvolved with terrorism. In the opening few minutes of the series, two different acts of violence are perpetrated by Arab



Muslim characters on Western characters. First, Carrie Mathison is violently dragged from an Iraqi prison by guards. Despite the fact that she was in the prison illegally, a stark point about the violence of the Arab world is made when her white body is dragged kicking and screaming down the filthy hallway of an Iraqi prison by multiple Arab men dressed in Muslim garb. Furthermore, Sergeant Brody is shown being tortured and imprisoned by al-Qaeda. This is demonstrated with visually disturbing images of brutality, involving beatings and blood. Furthermore, the Arab characters behaving violently toward Brody go a step further in their cruelty and brutality, forcing him to beat his fellow captured marine to the point of unconsciousness. In doing so, *Homeland* demonstrates that Arab Muslims not only seek violence against men from the West as a form of revenge, but enact violence for enjoyment as well.

From these initial moments of the show, there is little improvement. Every single scene taking place in the Middle East includes senseless violence on the part of Arab Muslim characters. Additional stereotypes include excessively wealthy characters, Arab men sexually possessing white women to the point of total control, abusive Arab husbands, violently rioting Arabs, a multitude of terrorist characters, and even more terrorist-sympathetic characters. Even Arab Muslims within the US are under suspicion by the federal government, solely for being Arab and Muslim, invoking the ‘insidious Muslim’ stereotype. It soon becomes clear that a journalist named Roya Hammad is a terrorist sympathizer, despite having a high profile career, being college educated, and working at the White House. A man named Faisal who was a college professor and husband buying his first house turns out to be a terrorist working on a plot to enact a domestic attack. Faisal and his wife even use the symbol of an American flag as an indicator that their safety is compromised; this drives home the point that although these Arab Muslims may look and act like Americans, and even own these symbols of overt patriotism, they are not one of us—they are secretly plotting the downfall of the West. Even working for the CIA, as Arabic-speaking and Muslim character Danny Galvez does, is not enough; when Carrie Mathison suspects there is a mole at the CIA, he is the first to be investigated, solely because he is Muslim. Additional comments about Muslims being “Qu’ran thumpers” and coming from “nomadic cultures,” as well as Muslim greetings (peace be upon you) and the Muslim statement of faith (there is no god but God and Muhammad is His prophet) are uttered solely in situations of terrorism and violence, clearly framing Arab Muslims as overly religious, backward and uncivilized, and inherently violent. As an addi-

tional point of interest, Arabic spoken by Arab characters is rarely translated on the show; Arabic spoken by white characters is translated. This difference further positions Arab Muslims in a position as Other, as if their native language is something inherently suspicious.

Furthermore, the show conflates of the entire Middle East regarding countries, names, and organizations. Barriers and distinctions are blurred to create a singular homologous, homogenized entity. The setting of the show consistently switches between Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Pakistan without clear reason; furthermore, it presents all of the countries as roughly the same. They are all inaccurately presented as speaking Arabic and lacking basic modern resources such as grocery stores, electricity, and coffee shops. One episode set in Lebanon sparked outrage for depicting the country inaccurately (BBC News). Carrie Mathison flees through the streets of what is supposedly Hamra Street in Beirut, running through decrepit and filthy buildings and down unpaved roads. She has changed her eye color and covered her hair, supposedly to blend in. In reality, Hamra Street is a flourishing economic hub for Beirut, drawing large groups of tourists year-round. It is a well-developed area, including clothing stores, street festivals, and even Starbucks. Furthermore, Hamra Street is filled with ex-pats who would not give a blonde haired, blue eyed, uncovered woman a second glance. However, in order to reinforce the concept of the Orient as uncivilized and backward, *Homeland* chose to frame Beirut as a place filled with violence and a complete lack of real culture or modern amenities. Furthermore, the long history of cultural interchange between the East and West is completely glossed over. These regions are presented as historically and currently completely separate.

Another notable issue reflects the naming of characters. Abu Nazir’s son, Issa, is repeatedly invoked as the reason for Brody’s radicalization; however, his name is never pronounced correctly. Additionally, Roya Hammad, former refugee, White House reporter, and terrorist sympathizer, is supposedly Palestinian, but has a Persian name. Terrorist organizations are also conflated and mixed up. Abu Nazir is an al-Qaeda leader; however, at the beginning of season two, he is supposedly working with a Hezbollah commander. Although there have been isolated incidents of cooperation, in general, al-Qaeda and Hezbollah are at war with one another despite sharing the common enemy of the West. All of these may seem like smaller issues in the grander scheme of the show; however, they are indicative of a larger underlying issue at play. The Arab world is filled with a variety of distinctive, unique, beautiful cultures. However, none of this rich and meaningful historical and

cultural context is relevant for the purposes of Homeland. As Said said, the Orient, after all, is not an actual depiction of the Middle East, but instead an artificial creation by the West. Homeland demonstrates this clearly. Accuracy and distinctions regarding the complexity of the Muslim world are absent—rather, to service the purposes of the show, the entirety of the Middle East is conflated to create a reductive depiction of a diverse portion of the world and simply present an impoverished and homogenous hotbed for terrorism instead.

Additionally, Arab Muslim bodies are depicted as disposable and treated as less than human. When it is revealed that the CIA knowingly killed over 80 Arab children, the entire situation is treated as more of a PR catastrophe than a humanitarian crisis. During a raid, the CIA further kills several individuals who were praying at a Washington DC mosque; little sympathy is shown in this situation and it is simply framed as another PR disaster and another situation where a terrorist slipped away. Afzal Hamid, a captured terrorist, kills himself while in CIA captivity after someone slips him a razor blade; his storyline is subsequently dropped and what happened in that scenario is never revealed. After Faisal is killed by the CIA, Aileen negotiates a Muslim burial for him, but there is no follow-up. Even in the first episode, an Arab man who was a terrorist that supposedly had information on a radicalized prisoner of war is allowed to be executed by his country in the name of avoiding an international conflict. Brody kills an Arab bomb maker in the middle of the woods and the murder is dropped after one episode; what exactly happened to him post-mortem is never clarified, nor does the audience ever receive any background information on him. It is simply posed as a kink in the plans for detonating a bomb. In situation after situation, Arab Muslim bodies are treated as replaceable and worth less than their white counterparts. When they are featured in storylines, their characterizations are brief and one dimensional with no follow-up, and more often than not, there are no storylines in the first place. Arab Muslim lives are treated as expendable, interchangeable, and secondary, there only to enact violence and then be removed from the plot line.

### *US Nationalism*

US nationalism forms a main thread of Homeland; the main goal of the CIA counter-terrorism unit throughout seasons one and two is to protect the United States from an imminent attack. Even the title of the show indicates this fierce protectiveness of American soil and an obligation to not only commit to fighting terrorism abroad, but also domestically. However, the way that US

nationalism as a concept is created and reinforced in the show points to a variety of beliefs about identity that are rooted in Orientalism.

From the very first episode of the show, the need for an “American hero” is emphasized. The opening sequence sets the scene for the imminent danger of an attack on American soil; images of an innocent child playing are juxtaposed with explosions and audio visual clips of past US presidents speaking about terrorism. “We must and we will remain vigilant at home and abroad”, intones Obama in an edited press conference clip. Furthermore, in a voiceover, Saul Berenson, a CIA agent, says that “It was 10 years ago; everyone missed something that day” in a clear reference to September 11th, considering the first season of Homeland aired 10 years after the attacks on the Twin Towers. Carrie Mathison says that she “can’t let that happen again.” From the first minutes of the series, a clear precedent is set and is reinforced in each episode: America is in danger.

Because of this looming threat, violence enacted by Americans is framed as justified. Early on, it is clarified that the military has no desire to be in Afghanistan, but “the terrorists are still out there, for blood” according to the CIA and as such, America has no choice but to engage in violence. War and violence are clearly posed as undesirable, but are seen as an unavoidable necessity in the face of violence from the Arab world. Even a situation in which the CIA knowingly bombed and killed over 80 children is seen as justifiable; very few characters are depicted as being upset about it because those in power are presented as having had no other choice. The lives of those Arab children are posed as being a worthy sacrifice for American safety and peace of mind. Protecting the nation comes above all and can justify any act. In this case, the dividing factor is the depicted value set behind each group; whereas the Muslim Arabs are written as ruthless fanatics who enjoy violence and use it with impunity, American forces are written as being driven by moral concerns and only resorting to violence when they are backed into a corner. US exceptionalism is rife throughout the show. Anything the US does is acceptable; Middle Eastern countries, however, are never afforded the same luxury or opportunity to defend themselves. In fact, while interrogating and manipulating Sergeant Brody, Carrie Mathison reassures him, saying “that’s the Brody that knows the difference between warfare and terrorism.” The implication is clear; the violence of American forces is a legitimate military tactic, while the actions of Arab countries is simply fanatical and unreasonable violence.

Enter Sergeant Brody and his perfect nuclear

American family. They're hardworking, white, Christian, and moral. Brody and his wife Jessica were high school sweethearts; she worked two jobs in high school and he struggled for his education as well. They later married, had two children, and he joined the armed forces. They attend church and pray before meals. Furthermore, upon returning home, Brody is an American hero and is immediately forced to the forefront of every major news source, depicted as a returning American patriot. Brody is not inherently violent, but he is willing to do anything to protect America and make sacrifices for the larger goal of the nation. Jessica, his wife, was in a long term relationship with another man prior to his return; however, upon her husband coming home, she immediately recommits to him and to their original marriage vows. They pose for the cameras and interviews, showing off their perfect American lives. When he converts to Islam and his wife finds out, the ensuing conflict clearly demonstrates the identity conflict. "I married a US Marine," she yells at one point and the connotation is clear; being a US Marine and a Muslim are mutually incompatible. She goes on to describe how his conversion would shame the whole family and they would need to "hide their faces," further emphasizing this incompatibility. The implication is clear: American is not Muslim and Muslims are not American. With the exception of occasional cameos by the family members of other characters, no other family besides the Brody family is regularly depicted in *Homeland*; for the purposes of the show to be served, they only need this singular family. The Brody family encapsulates all the qualities of a picturesque American family. Their situation, down to every last detail, includes all the building blocks for US nationalism. They're white, they're Christian, they're educated, and they're committed to the causes of the United States military forces. Furthermore, when one of them steps out of line and tarnishes the all-American family picture, their incompatibility with US nationalism is emphasized. *Homeland* draws clear lines to indicate what is an identity rooted in American nationalism and what is not.

However, as the show progresses, it becomes clear that their family is beyond fractured. Brody is an undercover terrorist who is struggling with the mission assigned to him by Abu Nazir; his marriage with Jessica is distant and filled with discord; and their daughter is rebelling. However, even as their picture-perfect family disintegrates, the show is still very clear that they are not like those quantified by *Homeland* as the Other. Brody, despite working with terrorist leader Abu Nazir and planning to kill the Vice President via suicide vest, is still seen as reachable and is consistently humanized. He is continually

given second chances and explanations are offered for his behavior. His nuclear family relationships are repeatedly invoked to humanize him. He backs out of committing his suicide vest attack after an emotional call from his daughter. Later, Carrie reminds him that Abu Nazir "kills Danas and Chrises and Jessicas," once more invoking his family members. He is painted as a troubled man who is put in a difficult position but is ultimately saved by his commitment to his family. In this way, despite his blatantly terroristic actions—murder, tipping off a terrorist leader to an American-led attack, and almost setting off a suicide vest amongst others—the show puts a clear divide between him and the 'real terrorists.' He is neither heartless nor an inherently cruel individual; he is an American corrupted by the heartless and cruel Arabs. In contrast, Abu Nazir's son was killed by American forces when he was only a child; however, Nazir's connection to family is never invoked to humanize him or fill out his character. Family connection as a humanizing aspect and understandable motivation for behavior is reserved for characters from the global West.

Another example of the way in which white terrorists are still positioned as distinct from the Other can be seen in the example of Faisal and Aileen. Faisal, a college professor and terrorist, moves into a house near the airport with his white wife Aileen at the beginning of season one. When the CIA discovers they are terrorists, they immediately shoot and kill Faisal, while Aileen escapes. When the CIA finally catches up to her, she is personally driven back to headquarters in a car, while a CIA agent attempts to make conversation with her. The agent additionally takes her out for dinner and to visit his childhood town. Ultimately, through conversation, it is determined that she met Faisal while living in Saudi Arabia. The agent suggests that she never would have become radicalized had she not "fallen in love with a boy." Her behavior is excused, justified, and humanized in a way that the behavior of the Arab Muslim characters are not. Even though she is a confessed terrorist who was planning on carrying out an attack on American soil, she is still presented as separate from the 'real' terrorists.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *Homeland* is a continuation of many of the representations of Arab Muslim communities and US nationalism we have seen before. *Homeland* can be considered to simply present updated versions of the same stereotypes and tropes of the past. "If 24 was the quintessential television drama of the war's early phase—with its ticking-time-bomb scenarios glorifying torture, its

glorifying torture, its mass killings of US civilians by weapons of mass destruction, and its constant stream of one-dimensional terrorist enemies—Homeland is hailed as a liberal alternative, more appropriate to the Obama era,” writes Kundnani (2014). Alsultany’s simplified complex representations play out again and again in the show’s storylines; although it may appear that audiences are getting more complex and culturally accurate representation, in reality, the characterization boils down to the same one-dimensional representations. Furthermore, these representations draw upon Orientalist tropes, presenting the East as a negative inversion of the West. The Arab world is shown as a simplified and primitive place filled with violent religious fanaticism; Arab Muslims are seen as cunning, devious, and terroristic, present only to antagonize the Western characters before being disposed of. In contrast, the West is filled with ethical and progressive characters fighting to protect their homeland, clear products of a sense of US nationalism and identity. Although the storyline becomes increasingly convoluted as the show progresses, every character can still be boiled down to fall into one of these two categories, both of which are based in Orientalism.

Media play a large role in informing audience beliefs and attitudes. Viewers draw from media to develop their beliefs about what is or is not important and what is or is not true. In our current sociopolitical climate, what viewers believe is or is not important and true about America’s foreign relationships and our country’s Arab Muslim citizens could not possibly be more important. In our past election cycle, attitudes on Islam became a dividing factor between the two candidates and their respective political parties. Shows like Homeland may draw from real life events and issues, but they also simultaneously produce and reinforce beliefs in their audiences. When we present one dimensional, reductive characterizations of Arab Muslims, we do a disservice to millions; furthermore, when we define US nationalism as simply the antithesis to the Middle East, we create a singular and exclusive sense of what it means to be American. Furthermore, Orientalism creates real consequences regarding how America behaves in the Middle East. Until we can move into representations that allow for ethnorelative thinking and truly complex characterization, storytelling narratives will continue to intentionally or unintentionally produce the stereotypes and frameworks that have been identified as being present in our media for over a century. Orientalism is outdated, offensive, and inaccurate, and we need to do better.

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