

Drone queen of the homeland: The gendered geopolitics of TV drama in the age of media convergence

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Introduction

Of the many feminist disruptions and contributions to the discipline of geography and its cognate areas of scholarly inquiry, some of the most significant have come from feminism's insights into the gendered dimensions of contemporary geopolitics. Geopolitics, both in its formal political and academic forms, has traditionally embodied male and masculinist concerns that emerge from and focus on "statesmanship," conflict, war and the control of borders and territories. Feminist geopolitical scholarship has, however, drawn our attention to the ways in which foreign and domestic policy, security and international relations are discursively and materially gendered, including in their embeddedness in and responsiveness to various gendered dynamics of everyday life. Feminist scholars have emphasized the inseparability of top-down geopolitical decision-making (by government leaders, military commanders and supranational bodies such as the UN and NATO) from the micropolitics and spaces of everyday life, where people of all genders form relationships, engage in paid and unpaid work, reproduce their households and immediate social relations, engage in practices of story- and truth-telling, encounter and resist sexual violence, consume products and services, and participate in various kinds of political activism.¹

The existing feminist scholarship in critical geopolitics works across a range of texts, arenas and sites, including the realm of media and popular culture, which has

coalesced into a subfield known as popular geopolitics. Post-9/11 television offers one productive route to insight into the entanglements of geopolitics and gender. Numerous media and cultural studies and American studies scholars have analyzed post-9/11 TV in a range of ways (see, e.g., Spigel, 2004; Takacs, 2012; Martin and Petro, 2006; Winston Dixon, 2004; Tryon, 2016), but geographers, including even those associated with popular and critical geopolitics, have been slower to engage with television (Glynn and Cupples, 2015)—though some have taken up our encouragement to do so (see for example Saunders, 2017, 2018). Nevertheless, TV’s neglect by many geographers is surprising, as the medium continues to be widely consumed and influential, is as much part of the process of digitalization and media convergence as other media forms commonly studied by geographers, and is undergoing cultural and political transformations that are of geographical significance. Furthermore, television’s engagement with contemporary geopolitical issues spans a range of generic territories, from news and current affairs to political dramas, sitcoms, cartoons, talk shows, satirical “fake news” programmes, dramedies, and so on. TV remains as much a key site for popular engagement with the geopolitics of the post-9/11 world as it was during and immediately after the Cold War (cf., Curtin, 1995; Doherty, 2003; Kackman, 2005; Schwoch, 2009). However, in the current conjuncture, “post-network” television (Lotz, 2007; Spigel & Olsson, 2004) has ushered in new formations of interactive popular geopolitics that engage with questions of gender in interesting ways. The remainder of this chapter will discuss these developments and conclude with an analysis of Showtime’s *Homeland* (2011-present), a fixture of the new televisual geopolitics that explores gendered dimensions of the War on Terror.

Televisual transformations

Post-9/11 interactions between entertainment TV and geopolitics have occurred in parallel with, and are facilitated by, a range of contemporary transformations within the practices of television production, distribution and reception. Dramatic changes in the contemporary television and wider media environment are closely associated with, but not reducible to, technological innovations and processes of media convergence (cf., Jenkins, 2008). Hence, there has been an expansion of various forms of user-driven interactivity and transmedia practices facilitated in part by social media and the spread of devices such as tablets and smart phones. New modes of media consumption, modification and recirculation have enabled audiences to appropriate and rework content produced by media companies and to “speak back” to these massive global megaconglomerates. In television’s network and “multi-channel transition” eras, spanning from roughly the 1950s to the start of the new millennium (Lotz 2007: 8), many viewers watched TV shows at the time of broadcast and discussed them in person with family, friends and colleagues. These audience reception practices are still widespread but are now increasingly unmoored from broadcasting schedules and are accompanied or even replaced by online conversations. The “channel surfing” of television’s early age of abundance has given way to the binge-watching associated with DVD box sets, smart TVs and digital streaming, for instance. Today, many viewers are likely to have watched a show that their family, friends and colleagues have not (yet) seen, but are able to listen to podcasts about it and engage in discussions over it with distant friends and family members or with people they have never met on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, show-related wikis, internet forums, digital newspaper comment sections, and online dedicated fan forums such as Digital Spy, TV Time, Overclockers and the

once brilliant Television without Pity. Furthermore, the mass audiences of the old media environment have given way to a post-Fordist logic of extreme fragmentation of audiences and revenue streams, which has in turn led to an expansion of nichification, cultification, and greater openness toward experimentation within the TV industries (see, e.g., Reeves et al., 1996; Gwenllian-Jones & Pearson, 2004; Mittell, 2006). While audiences for commercially successful shows are now much smaller than they once were, they are also likely to be more loyal, to stick with their shows over multiple seasons, and to engage with programming on multiple media platforms. To promote audience loyalty and even cultish devotion, producers have intensified the complexity of narrative forms and serialization practices (see, e.g., Mittell, 2015a; Dunleavy, 2017; Clarke, 2013).

In the multiplatform television era, then, narrative forms and reception practices that scholars have long associated with cult TV and media fandom have expanded and become increasingly mainstream. While television has long trafficked in hybrid narratives that combine and experiment with various forms and permutations of serialization, it has in the age of media convergence departed farther than ever before from both linearity and the episodic structures that once defined its most recognizable conventions. Like the cult TV that forms one node in the prehistory of TV's new modes of complex seriality, the latter often prominently foreground moral ambiguity, transgression, supernaturalism, characters who defy normalization, and multiple, simultaneously unfolding narrative arcs that stretch over numerous shows and entire seasons (Dunleavy, 2017). This complex seriality also often plays with alternative epistemologies that constitute the otherworldly televisual equivalent of magic realism that Glynn (2003) has characterized as "popular subjunctivity." Television's complex seriality has developed alongside new practices

of “forensic fandom” whereby “dedicated fans embrace” narrative complexities “and seek to decode a programme’s mysteries, analyze its story arc and make predictions” (Mittell 2015b). The show *Lost* (2004-2010), for instance, which attracted a large, multinational audience that stretched across many parts the world, is often held to exemplify the complex seriality of the new multimedia environment. *Lost* engaged amply, albeit often in displaced and allegorical ways, with myriad aspects of post-9/11 geopolitics and gave rise to a sprawling online repository of diegetic knowledge and fan speculation known as Lostpedia. In the words of one blogging devotee, Lostpedia “became an incredible resource for fans to keep track of all the twists and storylines within the show as they obsessively documented everything from the number of crash survivors still on the Island, to more bizarre stuff like how many times a season [fan favorite character] Hurley said ‘dude’” (Baker1000, 2015). Through their narrative and fan engagement practices, *Lost* and its viewers, who vigorously and extensively discussed all aspects of the programme online, participated in constituting and reshaping the discursive and imaginary terrains of post-9/11 geopolitics.

One important feminist critique of the discourses and practices associated with the age of media convergence concerns gendered distinctions that have formed around what has often been called television’s “third golden age” of the past 15 or 20 years. During this period, the cutting-edge technologies and narrative forms associated with digitalization and media convergence have been frequently touted as “cinematic,” which has thus become a key term in the contemporary discourses that reproduce cultural hierarchies, and therefore inequalities, by differentiating between television’s texts and audiences who are worthy and those who are less so (cf., Newman and Levine, 2012). As Newman and Levine (2011: 10) write, “that television has been

classified as feminine, and therefore as a less worthy, significant, and serious medium, has been a fact of its history.” TV has, perhaps more than any other medium, been consistently identified with cultural decline, “massness” and feminization. Prominent discourses of television’s “third golden age” thus reinscribe gendered distinctions and hierarchies within domestic spaces of media consumption by mobilizing the emergence of new televisual technologies and narrative forms that ostensibly transcend (mere) television-ness to achieve cinematic heights and dimensions.

There are parallel hierarchicizing discourses that differentiate the “serious” and worthy from the insignificant and trivial in the realm of geopolitical analysis. Traditional Geopolitics has historically emphasized statecraft, the realm of the traditional public sphere and policymaking, and the terrains of war and conflict—in short, the core concerns of “statesmanship” and of the “hard news,” in masculinist journalistic parlance. As regards televisual taste and “quality programming,” the often derisively-used terms “soap opera” and melodrama neatly capture the confluence of feminization and trivialization widely invoked to derogate programming that falls outside the category of “serious” (masculine-oriented) fare of one sort or another. In this way, *gender* and *genre* form intertwined and co-constitutive systems of categorization and distinction in relation to television production, circulation and consumption. Programmes like *Homeland* are of interest in part for their deconstruction of such categories and distinctions. As Diane Negra and Jorie Lagerway (2015: 131) argue, *Homeland* is “a consummate example of melodramatic political discourse [. . .] that does not seek to and never can quell the anxieties of the present moment with which it so forcefully engages.”

Post-9/11 television and gender

Since the 9/11 attacks, television has engaged amply with the gendered consequences of the so-called War on Terror. Fictional television's activities in these regards have been particularly important in light of the "absence, erasure and invisibility" (Stubblefield 2014: 4) that was characteristic of the approach of conventional news and current affairs programming in the face of the Bush administration's extreme attempts at image and information management (Mirzoeff, 2005; Glynn, 2009; Takacs, 2010). During the Bush years, for instance, journalists were banned from accessing, photographing or filming the arrival of coffins of fallen soldiers at all US military bases (Vann, 2003). Paradoxically, Thomas Stubblefield (2014: 4) argues, this absence, erasure and invisibility were products of the logic of spectacularization that engulfed the 9/11 event itself and engulfed, by implication, many events that followed in its wake, including the spectacle of the Iraq War:

Following the logic of implosion rather than explosion, the World Trade Center withheld its contents from view as it fell; its stories "pancaked" on top of one another rather than turning themselves inside out. With the vast majority of the dead dying behind the curtain wall of the towers' facades, "the most photographed disaster in history" failed to yield a single noteworthy image of carnage.

Nevertheless, while sometimes succumbing to it, television drama also found ways to circumvent spectacularization and invisibility, and to interrogate dominant post-9/11 geopolitical logics and images. It often did this by exploring how geopolitical dynamics reshape intimate relationships and position men, women, boys, girls, brothers and sisters differently in relation to significant events. A 2006 episode of long-running hospital drama *ER*, for example, plumbs the emotional depths

surrounding the loss of a major character, Dr. Michael Gallant, when a roadside bomb explodes near his position while he is offering medical assistance in the war zone near Mosul (Season 12, Episode 22 “The Gallant Hero and the Tragic Victor”). Gallant’s young and widowed wife, Dr. Neela Rasgotra, then finds herself in the same place as many other post-9/11 US military families who are left empty to mourn fallen loved ones with only funereal military spectacle offered to them in lieu of adequate explanation, compensation, justification or political accountability (Season 12, Episode 23 “Twenty-One Guns”). Consequently, Neela joins the anti-war movement (Season 13, Episode 23, “The Honeymoon is Over”). Similarly, *Six Feet Under*, a show about a family-run funeral parlor in Los Angeles and that is in many respects taboo-breaking (see Akass and McCabe 2005), also began to connect with gendered dynamics of the War on Terror. In a 2005 episode (Season 5, Episode 11, “Static”), the daughter/younger sister of the family, Claire Fisher, who is high on drugs at the time, yells at the grieving sister of a deceased soldier who was euthanized in the hospital after losing all of his limbs in Iraq. The soldier’s sister is driving an SUV sporting a “Support Our Troops” bumper sticker, which provokes Claire into an enraged tirade that covers a range of political angles on the war in Iraq: “Why don’t you try driving something that doesn’t consume quite so much gas for starters, if you’re so fucking concerned?” “Dozens of fucking Iraqis are dying every day. The whole world hates us for going in there in the first place!” “They bring the wounded soldiers back at night, so the press can’t even film it and nobody sees!” Viewer commentary in response to a clip of this scene on YouTube reveals the modes of civic engagement with the geopolitical that Claire’s impassioned speech provoked:²

Let’s be honest, she made a good point. The Iraqi War was nothing but a bunch of bullshit, causing mass suffering and great hostility among

the young generation of adults who have no way of stopping it. What have we done in Iraq besides given the middle east more motivation to oppose us? Oh and spending \$3 trillion of tax.

This episode affected me deeply at the time as a cousin of mine was serving in Iraq, and the fact that I was pissed about Bush being re-elected the year before.

The following comment, which was posted on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) in response to the series finale, captures the show's resonance with the gendered and familial realities of the Iraq War, including for those serving in Iraq:

I've watched plenty of show finales in my lifetime. Many had great endings and some had decent ones. I recently finished watching every episode of all 5 seasons of this amazing show while deployed in Iraq. From start to finish, I was completely captivated by the characters as they went about their every day lives. After the credits commenced to roll in Season 5's Series Finale "Everyone's Waiting." I just sat there in my chair completely flabbergasted at "Alan Ball's" incredible and yet honest ending. Of course, that is after I wiped the tears from my eyes and took an enormously deep and saddened "SIGH." I replayed that ending over five other times and still felt the same chills as though it was the first time. The Series finale has inspired me to regain my artistic composure, which I had temporarily lost for the last year and a half. It motivated me to call my wife and kids every day to tell them I missed and loved them so much. It very well has changed the way I look at life itself. I know it sounds kinda weird but it did. "Everyone's

waiting” is the best ending I’ve ever seen in any medium of entertainment.³

While *Six Feet Under* and *ER* were shows that predated 9/11 but began to engage with its politics, *Brothers and Sisters* was launched in the aftermath of the War on Terror. It explores the lives of the large and affluent Walker family of Pasadena, California and emphasizes that while post-9/11 military interventions may well be happening “over there,” the impacts of the War on Terror nevertheless permeate family life at home in the US. In the Walker family, everyday dramas and arguments over such things as business and professional life, marital affairs and terminal illness are shot through with and shaped by the legacies and impacts of the War on Terror. These include son Justin Walker’s deployment to Iraq and subsequent battle with PTSD, high-flying daughter Kitty Walker’s professional and political entanglements with and passionate support for the Republican Party, and matriarch Nora Walker’s staunch opposition to conservative politics in general and the Bush/Cheney administration in particular. These are a few of the TV dramas that delve melodramatically into the complex modes of gendered and familial sense-making around sacrifice, security, nationhood, and terrorist threats and have invited substantial online (and presumably offline) audience engagement. While these shows have strong female protagonists and deal with some of the War on Terror’s impacts on family life, *Homeland* features a female CIA agent whose work involves putting the War on Terror into practice.

Homeland

Homeland (Showtime, 2011-), which at the time of this writing has completed seven seasons, is focused around US counter-terrorist strategy in the aftermath of 9/11

and in particular on the work of the CIA. Its protagonist, Carrie Mathieson, begins the series as a CIA agent who struggles, unbeknownst to the agency, with bipolar disorder. Seasons 1-3 are focused on her complicated entanglements with a former US marine turned Al-Qaeda sympathizer, Sergeant Nicholas Brody. Prior to his rescue and return to the US in 2011, Brody had been held hostage by Al-Qaeda for eight years, during which time he converted to Islam. He also lived for a time with Al-Qaeda commander Abu Nazir and taught English to Nazir's son, Issa, who was later killed by a US drone strike, an event that impacted profoundly on Brody. Carrie correctly suspects that Brody has turned against the US and plans a terrorist attack; she subsequently manages to recruit him to work for the CIA. Brody and Carrie then embark on a sexual relationship, as a consequence of which Carrie becomes pregnant and gives birth to Brody's child, Frannie, shortly after he is publicly executed in Iran for treason at the end of Season 3.

As Dunleavy (2017) notes, contemporary TV narratives often feature morally complex and transgressive figures who invite awkward and uncomfortable forms of identification. Carrie does her best intelligence work when she is "off her meds," at which times she experiences heightened states of both mental acuity and instability, and is capable of making brilliant insights into cases that her colleagues and superiors have misunderstood, and of breaking open difficult and extraordinarily complex investigations. She is often sexually manipulative and sometimes sleeps with CIA assets and informants. She drinks a fair amount (we often see her pouring herself a very large glass of white wine to wash down her medication), and she routinely defies normative notions of "good mothering" by, for instance, repeatedly abandoning Frannie to the care of Carrie's sister, Maggie. Indeed, in Season 4, Carrie takes a seductively challenging and dangerous CIA station chief posting in Afghanistan that

precludes Frannie from joining her, even though a safer (but duller) chiefship in Istanbul that would have allowed the two to live together was available to her. There is a chilling scene in Season 4 when Carrie almost drowns Frannie in the bath. At other times, Carrie's intelligence work actively puts Frannie in serious danger. In Season 6 (Episode 5, "Casus Belli"), for example, Frannie is effectively taken hostage in her own home, which is surrounded by police snipers, after Carrie leaves her in the care of former CIA colleague and PTSD sufferer Quinn, in an incident the *Baltimore Sun* characterizes as asking "the unhinged professional assassin guy [to] watch your child" (Renner, 2017). As Robyn Longhurst (2008: 117-29) argues, discourses of "bad mothering" generate moral panics that target those seen to be "lacking" in relation to norms of femininity and familiarity. Carrie lacks a husband, lacks neurotypicality, and lacks a normative "maternal instinct" capable of regulating her threateningly excessive professional devotion and aspirations. She both lacks and exceeds maternal normativity, and thus poses a threat to the stable familial order that often stands metonymically for the nation in popular geopolitical narratives and representations.

Homeland's representational politics are highly complex, though many viewers object to its depictions of gender, race and religion, and some have carefully detailed factual and geographical errors they have identified in the show.⁴ Carrie is a professional woman who works in the aggressive, dangerous, and male-dominated world of anti-terrorism and national security. The fate of the nation, and indeed even of Western democracy, often hang on her ability to perform beyond competently. She sometimes puts her work ahead of her relationship with her child, and some suggest that *Homeland's* depiction of Carrie's "hysterical" mental instabilities dovetail too neatly with patriarchal discourses of women's madness (see, for example, Strauss,

2014, who nevertheless recognizes, as we argue below, that such a reading is not easily sustained). Kathleen McInnis (2012), who has worked in national security, believes that what she views as Carrie's blatant lack of professionalism ("making passes at the boss" and "taking classified materials home and displaying them on" her wall) does a disservice to women who work in this field. While Carrie resists domestication, she does so in the name of a racist and imperialist war. Thus, Carrie is an unstable figure who challenges both overtly feminist and anti-feminist readings; that she makes available a range of contradictory potential meanings is symptomatic of ongoing gender trouble that has been active for decades but roiled in particular ways in the post-9/11 geopolitical climate. As Bhattacharyya (2014: 378) argues, *Homeland's* narrative suggests that

femininity and feminism—both female bodies and a discourse of women's rights—can become central elements of the project of securitization. What appears to be a development is the use of familiar tropes of women's unreason to serve as an alternative justification of irrational actions by the state. The femininity that serves the security state here is the unruly femininity of the hysteric.

As regards representations of race and the War on Terror, criticism of *Homeland* is widespread. The *Washington Post* claimed that *Homeland* was "the most bigoted show on television," and accused the show of churning "out Islamophobic stereotypes as if its writers were getting paid by the cliché" (Durkay, 2014). The *Guardian* has asserted that *Homeland* offers nuance, as in its depiction of how Brody was "turned" in part because of the murder of an innocent child by a US drone, but also espouses "a dangerous set of lies about terrorism, American omnipotence and the very nature of international politics" (Cohen, 2013). Pakistani officials objected

loudly to *Homeland*'s depiction of a devastating US drone attack on a wedding in Pakistan in an episode from Season 4 that we discuss in the next section. One diplomat complained to the *New York Post* that "Islamabad is a quiet, picturesque city with beautiful mountains and lush greenery [. . .]. In *Homeland*, it's portrayed as a grimy hellhole and war zone where shootouts and bombs go off with dead bodies scattered around. Nothing is further from the truth" (Schram, 2014). Such criticisms have been echoed in some of the academic media studies literature. James Castonguay (2015: 139), for example, writes that *Homeland*

successfully exploits post-9/11 insecurities, psychological trauma, and narrative complexity to produce "quality" television propaganda for the Obama administration's "overseas contingency operations" and its unprecedented domestic surveillance on the home front under the umbrella of an \$80 billion US security state.

In Season 5, *Homeland*'s producers hired several street artists to embellish a Syrian refugee camp set with Arabic graffiti. Unbeknownst to the producers, the graffiti artists inscribed, "Homeland is racist" and other comments critical of the show on the walls of their set. After the scenes set in the camp aired, one of the artists, Heba Amin, stated,

We think the show perpetuates dangerous stereotypes by diminishing an entire region into a farce through the gross misrepresentations that feed into a narrative of political propaganda. It is clear they don't know the region they are attempting to represent. And yet, we suffer the consequences of such shallow and misguided representation.

[Quoted in Phipps, 2015].

This act of creative subversion highlights that the modes of sensemaking associated with popular geopolitical texts are both dispersed across and contested at a variety of different sites and levels, including those of production and the industry, of the text and its multiple and often contradictory discourses, and of audiences and their multifarious reception practices. Indeed, commercially successful TV dramas of the media convergence era tend to promote controversy and the formation of coalition audiences by staging “confrontations between competing perspectives, discourses, and ideologies” (Glynn and Cupples 2015: 279) and eschew “binary frameworks of understanding” (ibid: 275; see also Fiske 1987; Gledhill 1988). While it is thus possible to argue that *Homeland*’s storylines “reinforce the need for increased homeland security and the use of force in counterterrorism operations” and open up alternative possibilities only to then shut them down (Castonguay 2015: 141), we are suspicious of forms of textual determinism that seek to read audience meaning-making practices off of media texts themselves. Indeed, one study of *Homeland* audiences’ reception practices found that fans frequently read the text against the grain and produced a range of oppositional positions regarding CIA operations (Pears, 2016).

In our view, *Homeland* continually evades black and white political binarisms. As Richard McHugh (2016: 163) writes, the story arc that deals with Brody’s radicalization at the hands of Al-Qaeda reveals that Brody “was already radicalized as a US marine through the same government system that radicalizes the CIA agents as patriots.” The show makes clear that this patriotism involves the murder of innocent children with drones, which constitutes an “act of violence that pushed Brody further into his alternate-radical self” (ibid.: 164). In addition to its highly critical treatments of US drone warfare in Pakistan, *Homeland* also engages critically with Zionist

attitudes toward Israel's West Bank occupation. It is difficult to argue that *Homeland* valorizes the CIA, whose agents the show routinely depicts as flawed, corrupt, duplicitous, predatory, racist and villainous.

The entanglement of and interplay between motherhood, mental health and counter-terrorism function as key narrative drivers in *Homeland*. Some of the existing feminist literature on *Homeland* captures these textual complexities and underscores why the gendered dynamics of this show are of theoretical importance. Alex Bevan's (2015) discussion of *Homeland* emphasizes how gendered embodiment functions "as a nexus point for geopolitical discourses" (p. 151), as the pathological, "reproductive and sexual currencies of Carrie's body are burdened" with the symbolic task of territorializing and representing the "elusive terms of twenty-first-century warfare and geopolitical power" (p. 148). The management of Carrie's bipolar disorder, for instance, volatilizes the distinction between being surveilled and doing surveilling in ways that raise but do not settle questions about the degree of surveillance needed in the post 9/11 world and the consequences of its intensification. *Homeland* reveals not only how women's bodies are central rather than incidental to the project of securitization, but also how the "unruly hysteric is an unexpected complement to the securitized state" (p. 378). Audiences might thus come "to inhabit the logic of securitization" (Bhattacharyya 2013: 382) through identification with Carrie, but are just as likely to accept the text's implicit invitation to reflect critically on the security state and its gendered logics in ways that leave them more unsettled with regard to US foreign policy directions and actions. The text of *Homeland* permits a range of political positions with respect to both women's rights and the War on Terror and so remains polysemous and multidiscursive in its constant engagements with the multifaceted relationships between gender and geopolitics. In the final section, we

develop an analysis of one highly gendered geopolitical instrument, the drone, and its treatment in the show.

The drone queen

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones, first entered the War on Terror as a consequence of two US government surveillance and assassination programmes launched in 2002 to target Al-Qaeda sympathizers in Pakistan and Yemen—two countries *not* at war with the United States. The use of drone attacks as an implement of US foreign policy was escalated dramatically during the Obama presidency and was mostly shrouded in secrecy until 2012, when the US government admitted the existence of the programme but refused to say how many terrorists and civilians were killed by UAV strikes, which the government defended by invoking Orientalist, masculinist and medicalized discourses. Obama propounded the view that Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), near the border with Afghanistan, constituted the world’s most threatening and dangerous locale and must be brought to order; he thus established a space of exception amenable to missile penetration from above (Gregory 2017: 31), through the mobilization of “new visibilities” that “produce a special kind of intimacy that consistently privileges the view of the hunter-killer” (Gregory 2011: 193). As one drone operator put it, “sometimes I feel like a God hurling thunderbolts from afar” (Gregory 2011: 192). US officials have also commended drones for the “surgical precision” that enables them “to eliminate the cancerous tumor called an al-Qaida terrorist while limiting damage to the tissue around it” (John Brennan, Obama’s counterterrorism advisor, quoted in Crawford, 2012). Nevertheless, US drone strikes have, of course, killed

hundreds of civilians, including hundreds of children (Gregory 2017: 29), and provoked substantial protests and political opposition in areas subject to attack.

The CIA's use of drones for both surveillance and targeted killing has been a recurring feature of *Homeland's* narratives. The first episode of Season 4 ("The Drone Queen") deals with faulty intel that leads Carrie to order a late-night missile strike on a farmhouse in Pakistan, thus killing 40 innocent civilians attending a wedding there. Just before she turns in for the night, Carrie's colleagues surprise her with a birthday cake decorated with the moniker, "The Drone Queen." The scene of Carrie getting into bed for a restful night's sleep cuts to images of community members frantically searching through piles of rubble for the bodies of the dead and injured at what's left of the farmhouse. The next day, Carrie scrutinizes live footage relayed by drones trawling the scene of the previous night's strike and is clearly able to see row upon row of corpses, along with a young medical student, Aayan Ibrahim, who is looking through the bodies for his mother and sister, both of whom were killed in the attack. In a chilling moment that literalizes the reversal of surveillance practices that occurs when the watched becomes watcher, Aayan stares bitterly up at the encircling drone and into its camera as if to lock eyes on Carrie and the entire US military industrial apparatus with an accusatory look that clearly, momentarily, unsettles Carrie. The previous night, Aayan was filming children dancing at the wedding party on his cellphone when the US missiles struck. After Washington issues vehement denials of claims that their missiles hit a wedding party and anti-drone protests ensue outside the US Embassy in Islamabad, Aayan's roommate uses a proxy server to upload Aayan's cellphone video of the attack on the celebrants to YouTube without Aayan's consent. The video quickly goes viral and generates a major political conflict for Carrie and the CIA. In the storylines that ensue, Carrie seduces and becomes sexually involved

with Aayan in her efforts to use him to gain access to his uncle, the US-trained terrorist, Haissam Haqqani, who had been the original target of the missile strike on the farmhouse but who survived the attack. Her deception and betrayal of Aayan leads ultimately to his murder at the hands of Haqqani, which takes place in full view of an overhead drone as Carrie and her colleagues look on.

Just as drones respatialize war, so does *Homeland* respatialize drones and the techniques and consequences of their use in the media. Drones destabilize the boundaries between battlezone and non-battlezone, and render ambiguous the difference between combatants and non-combatants. Furthermore, they participate in the manipulation of “the visibility and concealment of socially sanctioned forms of killing” (Asaro 2017: 286). Peter Asaro writes that

even while the work of drone operators has become increasingly important to the military, and to national and international politics, the actual work of drone operators has remained largely hidden from public view and increasingly protected from the prying eyes of journalists and social scientists. And even within the military, drone warriors are subject to powerful social pressures not to reveal or discuss their work or its psychological or emotional stresses [ibid.].

Consequently, surveillance and killing by drone are rendered resistant to sustained public debate and made “difficult to perceive, bear witness to, or even conceive of” (Bevan 2015: 148). But while neither drones nor anti-drone protests in Pakistan have received much media coverage in the West (Parks 2017: 23), they have been subject to sustained fictional exploration in *Homeland*. In “Drone Queen,” for example, Carrie is directly confronted and challenged by the distressed and irate US soldier responsible for delivering the missile strikes on the wedding party and others, who

tells Carrie he's "sick to the stomach" over these killings and calls those ordering the attacks "fucking monsters, all of you." The respatialization of drones in TV drama thus helps audiences "imagine and speculate about covert US drone attacks in Pakistan through multiple positions and modalities—the air or ground, perpetrator or victim [. . .]—as part of the process of grappling with the killing of thousands of people, including civilians and children, that US officials have refused to account for" (Parks 2017: 23).

Lisa Parks (2017: 15-6) discusses what she calls "drone media," a category that includes grassroots and activist-made "photographs, video, maps, data visualizations, and infographics" that circulate on Internet sites such as YouTube and "convey grounded dimensions of drone attacks" and "challenge the widely-held assumptions that US military drones enable a remote and precise form of warfare that minimizes casualties and collateral damage." Drone media participate in exposing "how deeply and profoundly this 'surgical' method of warfare has affected lifeworlds on the ground," and thereby "model the kinds of knowledge practices that are needed when democratic states fail." Drone media can thus be considered as a form of counter-media that generates an alternative scopic regime wherein the very apparatus of state-sanctioned visualization, surveillance and killing becomes the object of a critical and interrogatory gaze. While Parks doesn't include TV drama in the category of drone media, our view is that shows such as *Homeland* participate in and extend a similar project of counter-visualization that constructs spaces amenable to a critical and interrogatory gaze, but also, through television's emergent narrative modalities, to forms of identification and affective engagement with remote sufferers and suffering. Lilie Chouliaraki (2013) argues for the importance of the "mundane acts of mediation" that through everyday storytelling on TV and elsewhere offer a

kind of “moral education” in the form of “a series of subtle proposals of how we should feel and act towards distant suffering” (p. 57). Such acts of mundane mediation are necessary, she argues, to the production of a “humanitarian imaginary” capable of stimulating forms of “sympathetic identification that may lead to action” (p. 44). Such identifications and solidarities are routinely provoked through TV’s new modes of narrative complexity and participatory reception practices.

As scholars have noted, television in the age of media convergence is marked by the development of new strategies of diegetic elaboration that facilitate intensified modes of audience engagement and the creation of “worlds that viewers gradually feel they inhabit along with the characters” (Sconce 2004: 95; Cupples & Glynn 2013). In the case of *Homeland*, we experience the devastation and suffering that missile strikes produce on the ground through the eyes and voices of characters we’ve gotten to know and maybe care about, such as Aayan Ibrahim or the son of Abu Nazir. Moreover, as the camera’s gaze shifts between the often abstract, top-down, surveillant perspective of the CIA command center and the quotidian routines and relationships of the people living within the drone’s field of vision—whom viewers have come to know as parents, friends, sons, daughters, and lovers—we are invited to draw connections between the deterritorialized discourses of counterterrorism and the strategic exertion of control, on the one hand, and the grounded and embodied experiences of those unjustly targeted, on the other. We might read such interplays as the televisual and popular cultural equivalent of the sorts of connections that have long been at the heart of good feminist geography scholarship. As regards ongoing US military interventions in South and Central Asia, *Homeland* can thus be read as a kind of response, in its own way, to the fact that “the space in which these continuing operations have been brought into public view remains strikingly limited,” and that

“the space of the [drone] target has been radically underexposed” in Western media (Gregory 2011: 204).

Conclusion: popular cultural citizenship

Homeland helps us to illustrate some of the ways in which popular culture in general and television in particular function as spaces of ideological mobilization, discursive struggle, and gendered political deliberation in the age of media convergence. While expert and specialist knowledges are mobilized in the construction of official policy documents and proceedings in ways that preclude widespread participation and minimize opportunities for the involvement of “ordinary people,” popular culture circulates discourses of securitization and surveillance, war and conflict, gender and geopolitics, race and religion in ways that invite popular affective engagement and contestation. Joke Hermes (2005: 3-4) uses the term “cultural citizenship” to explore the “democratic potential of popular culture” as a terrain where, “regardless of the commercial and governmental interests and investments that co-shape its forms and contents,” space is nevertheless continually made for “implicit and explicit social criticism” from a variety of locations and perspectives. Hermes’ reading of popular culture as a space of affective engagement, discursive contestation and political negotiation follows a well-established scholarly tradition associated with cultural studies. Feminist cultural studies, like feminist geopolitics, has long sought to trace the complex and often contradictory connections between the micropolitics of everyday lives, struggles and pleasures, and the macropolitical realm where the structuring forces of political and economic institutions operate most powerfully and effectively. By problematizing the geopolitics of gender, surveillance, securitization, and remote-controlled, state-sanctioned killing, television in the post-9/11 age of media convergence constitutes a

key site of both popular cultural citizenship and critical scholarly investigation and analysis.

Notes

¹ For introductions to feminist geopolitics, see Dixon, 2016; Glynn and Cupples, 2015; Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001; Sharp, 2000, 2007.

² Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CewNhrRhOtM>.

³ Available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0701989/reviews>.

⁴ See, e.g., the mistakes identified in Season 4, Episode 1 by viewers at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3284012/goofs>.

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