The Muslim WORLD

Torture and Television in the United States

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> What exactly, we must ask ourselves, is missing from our world that we should require spilled blood and incinerated flesh, and the fear such havoc and loss create, to feel alive?
> Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (23).

> Many scholars of American culture see our national preoccupation with female rescue as mere cover story, a pretext employed to justify the sanguinary pleasure our pioneers took in the slaughter of the continent's natives and the decimation of the wilderness . . . But what if the reverse is also true? What if the unbounded appetite for conquest derives not only from our long relish for the kill but from our even longer sense of disgrace on the receiving end of assault? . . . What if the deepest psychological legacy of our original war on terror wasn't the pleasure we now take in dominance but the original shame that domination seeks desperately to conceal?
> Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (213).

> Although much of this book details how easy it is for ordinary people to begin to engage in evil deeds, or to be passively indifferent to the suffering of others, the deeper message is a positive one. It is by understanding the how and why of such evils that we are all in a better position to uncover, oppose, defy, and triumph over them . . .
> Philip Zimbardo (creator of the landmark Stanford Prison Experiment), *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, Forward (viii).

Torture-Culture?

Part of Abdullah Antepli's anti-torture appeal in 2011, which appears in this volume, was for American citizens to risk the moral injury of viewing real footage of torture. In this, he and I shared an assumption. We assumed that most people in the US had been avoiding such viewing. As conference organizer Matthew Elia explained in the months leading up to the event, the planning team thought we were asking people to make a shift — to "turn their eyes in this direction" and pay attention to what was being done in the name of American security. But, during the course of the conference, it became clear that there was a sizeable, and not idiosyncratic, segment of the population that *wanted* to view torture. American eyes had already been looking in the direction of interrogation since 9/11, turning to the Fox Broadcasting Company's

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television show *24* each week for nearly a decade (2001–2010), as a character named Jack Bauer from *24* did "whatever it takes" to keep Americans safe. Robin Kirk named this pattern specifically in her talk, here in essay form: Why did a significant part of the United States wish for scenes of torture?

This question assumes that it does not lie within a default pattern of human behavior to seek out images of another human being suffering. Working with that assumption for over a year after the conference, I am willing to venture an interpretation. It is by no means a novel one, but it is one that I think bears repeating. 9/11 involved a mass spectacle of violation that continues to shape conceptions of gender, sexuality, and safety in the US. One need not be steeped in Freudian analysis to perceive the visual of the felled towers as emasculating, and several generations of viewers in the US watched the grand display of cruelty and vulnerability on screen, together, also watching one another's reaction to national impotence. For a segment of the population, the horror was not only unimaginable, but it threatened basic notions of the home and family. That is, the spectacle of American castration was repeated as children watched adults in immobilized fear, as they watched the screen, and adults perceived the critical, confused gaze of children, who were watching them watch the screen. With Susan Faludi, I believe that the event tapped into anxieties about masculine authority, and, following her lead, I suggest here that torture on television (specifically, through the Fox Broadcasting Network's serial drama *24*) provided a kind of collective catharsis — a way many Americans sought manageably to endure violation and also to recalibrate a myth of afflicted, but yet still potent, masculinity.[1] I also interpret the widely-popular spectacle of violence on the new (2011) Home Box Office television show *Game of Thrones* better to understand the work *24* did for viewers. By watching characters suffer and die in horrific ways, viewers may have been trying to form a kind of affective callus to cover over past fears, to harden current fears of vulnerability, and to steel themselves for potential, future loss. I posit in closing that such viewing, while seemingly therapeutic, may leave a generation of viewers less capable of both self-dignity and empathy toward the designated enemy.

This question has confounded me to such an extent that I will not even attempt to untangle two related questions. First, who is to say who makes up the "we" and the "our" for any reading public? The authors of the opening quotes above use first person, plural pronouns. In Faludi's *The Terror Dream*, she works through American myths and memories, and the ways that these shape "our" imagination. It is fair to say that she does not seek to analyze or give voice to non-dominant myths and memories, except inasmuch as she recounts how white women's resistance to dominant myths were squelched. Corey Robin writes about the "unspectacular, quotidian fear" that permeates the lives of Americans by considering the multiple permutations of domination that

[1] S. Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

make up what appears "normal" to us — the forms of fear that constitute the "American way of repression."[2] Robin does tell stories of resistance, but his appeal of "we" is to a particular, book-reading segment of Americans. Philip Zimbardo, as a social psychologist, attempts both to cut through and diagnose the particularity of torture-culture, and to delineate scientifically the collective conditions that made up Abu Ghraib in a way that can warn peoples across the specificity of time and place. I appreciate each focused effort to understand "ourselves," and I here limit myself to beginning the sufficiently confounding task of sorting through the desire for scenes of torture, with little attention to counter-narratives and sub-narratives of resistance.

Again, this is an imposing enough question to begin asking here: How did people I know and love, citizens of the US who consider themselves loyal Democrats as well as those who are passionately, evangelically Republican, come reliably to partake of storylines in which torture seems to secure the homeland? Why did "we" make torture part of "our" lives? Fox's television show *24* seems to have functioned as a kind of romantic bond for some of its fans in the US. Over the course of this research, I personally heard about a couple who took the first six seasons of *24* on their honeymoon, and about a couple whose weekly date nights consisted of watching each episode. These two couples might have eschewed one another at any social gathering, but they had in common a few decades, their race (white), and a basically Christian upbringing.

Regarding the second unanswered query, I will not try to solve the chicken and the egg question of whether a) Americans get what we want *from* the media, or b) Americans are told what to want *by* the media. Mostly, I will ask questions about a). But, regarding b), permit me a long, preliminary remark. It is now considered politically-aware, common sense that mainstream media, after 9/11, made torture appear a customary component of national security. *Fox News*'s unapologetic, rightward leaning, pro-torture commentary in the US is overt, but the more mainstream *New York Times* and liberal-leaning *National Public Radio*'s reticence to use the term "torture" (much less offer an ongoing account for the prohibition of torture) has done its part in acclimating Americans to a culture of torture as well.[3] I hope eventually to probe the various ways that the effort at equating torture with everydayness has been concerted. The Rupert Murdoch scandal in 2011 forced a reckoning with the well-organized, power politics of Western media, but that pattern is far from new. For the skeptical, I will cite a salient example. Recently, the WYNC radio series *On the Media* featured a historical piece entitled "White House Meddling in First Film about the Atomic Bomb," noting how MGM and political architects of the Manhattan Project sought one another out to sell and

[2] C. Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20.

[3] See G. Greenwald, "The NYT's nice, new euphemism for torture," Salon (June 6, 2009), http://www.salon.com/2009/06/06/nyt_5/. Also, for examples of NPR avoiding the term "torture," see this website: http://nprcheck.blogspot.com/search?q=torture.

tell a particular story about atomic weaponry. As Greg Mitchell explains in the radio interview, General Leslie Groves was given script approval authority, with the goal of shaping public perceptions of "The Truth":

> One of his main goals was to downplay the impact of radiation, so there was a portion of the script that was rewritten to show that radiation wasn't that big a deal. Each variation of the script adhered more and more to the official Hiroshima narrative, that there was no choice but to use the bomb and that the President not only made the right decision but there was really no controversy around it . . . One of the planes in the attack, they changed the name on the side of the plane from Boxcar to Necessary Evil, which I love the blatant nature of that. In the explanation in the movie, both in what Truman says and what others say, continually talk about Hiroshima being basically one big military base, which was not true at all. There was a military base there but 95 percent of the casualties were civilians, mainly women and children. He claims that they dropped warning leaflets on Hiroshima beforehand, which was — it was completely false. The film also does not mention Nagasaki at all.[4]

There are many more such stories. Might some enterprising thinkers under the Department of Defense's "Public Affairs" umbrella have colluded to create the Fox television series *24*, or to shape the plotlines once the show was off and running? We would be underestimating their ambition if we did not at least allow for the possibility.[5] But I would wager that even the brilliant men and women of the pro-torture propaganda machinery in the US could not have successfully created desire in the viewer out of thin air. The popularity of television depictions of torture tug on the pain and pleasure impulses in the mix of "our" current culture. It is incumbent on "us," as Zimbardo urges, to "uncover, oppose, and defy" the pro-torture memes that have shaped our imaginations.[6]

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[4] "White House Meddling in the First Film about the Atomic Bomb: Transcript," *On the Media* (August 13, 2010), http://www.onthemedia.org/2010/aug/13/white-house-meddling-in-the-first-film-about-the-atomic-bomb/transcript/.

[5] The reverse has been documented, in that numerous Bush administration officials were explicit in their appreciation and emulation of the show:

> According to British lawyer and writer Sands, Jack Bauer-played by Kiefer Sutherland-was an inspiration at early "brainstorming meetings" of military officials at Guantanamo in September 2002. Diane Beaver, the staff judge advocate general who gave legal approval to 18 controversial interrogation techniques including waterboarding, sexual humiliation and terrorizing prisoners with dogs, told Sands that Bauer "gave people lots of ideas." Michael Chertoff, the Homeland Security chief, gushed in a panel discussion on 24 organized by the Heritage Foundation that the show "reflects real life." D. Lithwick, "The Fiction Behind Torture Policy," *Newsweek* Vol 152, Issue 5 (Aug 4, 2008), 11.

[6] P. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2008).

Television as Cathedral

On December 19, 2012, "The Stephanie Miller Show" replayed on their radio broadcast footage of a right-leaning television commentator, as he appealed to left-leaning commentators not to politicize a tragic, school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut the week before. He argued, "Television is the cathedral where the American public goes to mourn after an event like this."[7] It seems a helpful phrase. Although there are an infinite variety of options on the screen for distraction from what counts as national news, there are only a few choices for partaking of and sorting through the official, common-sense account of what counts as national news in the US. There was a need, the commentator argued, for an atmosphere of structured, common purpose to be presented to a viewing public suffering from trauma and stricken by grief. The cathedral is a useful heuristic, I believe, for thinking about the function that widely popular television shows serve in the US. Until the splintering of the Protestant Reformation, the general population in Western European cities attended the liturgies that marked particular feast and fast days in cathedrals. And there, through words, bodily practices, static and moving images, and music, they were influenced to perceive their daily lives and human history in particular ways. When, years ago, one of my Yale Divinity professors noted that our own American culture had no narratives in common — that we had lost a sense of common story — I (irreverently) began singing the theme song to *Gilligan's Island*, a CBS situation comedy that ran in syndication on US television for decades. Everyone in the seminar except the two international (German) students hummed along. There are common, meaning-making narratives in American culture, many of them televised.

So, in October, 2012, when President Obama said that another Fox Television network series, Showtime's *Homeland*, was among his favorite television shows, he did not have to justify an eccentricity.[8] This very popular US drama series features an established, female darling of American television, who previously struggled with adolescence on the critically acclaimed ABC drama *My So-Called Life*, now, as an adult, attentively tracing and then tearfully raging against plots of Muslim terrorism in the US. This image has become a new icon in the cathedral that is television. In the first season of the show, millions watched screens as actress Claire Danes watched a potential terrorist on her own screen, in an unsubtle joining of voyeurism and arm-chair (or couch) military intelligence gathering. As one reviewer notes, it is a perfect terrorism serial for a purportedly gender-egalitarian administration conducting remote drone attacks.[9] Our female heroine bests her on-site male colleagues with her stationary, off-site screen sleuthing. The creators of the new Fox series *Homeland* had accom-

[7] "The Stephanie Miller Show," December 19, 2012.
[8] Stephen Battaglio, "The Biz: President Barack Obama Reveals His Favorite TV Shows," http://www.tvguide.com/News/President-Obama-Favorite-Shows-1055287.aspx
[9] R. Beck, "Threat Level: Against Homeland," *n+1* (Dec 3, 2012), http://nplusonemag.com/threat-level.

plished cultural iconography a decade prior, with another baby-faced, blonde darling of a previous generation, Kiefer Sutherland and Fox's *24*.

Television is a meaning-making medium, and the form of that meaning matters. In 2002, Gregory M. Lamb, staff writer for *The Christian Science Monitor* wondered at the precipitous increase in television violence after 9/11: "So much for media critics' expectations that grisly fictional violence on TV would abate after the sobering events of September 11. Instead, scenes of torture and sadism appeared on network entertainment TV at a rate nearly double that over the previous two years."[10] The piece names in particular a Parents Television Council (PTC) study, the same organization that, in 2008, characterized *24* as the biggest offender: "A Parents Television Council review found that *24* showed 67 scenes of torture in the first five seasons. [The main character of *24*] Jack Bauer has been involved in more than 160 separate instances of violence since the show began (all six seasons) and has killed at least 71 individuals." But other television programming was keeping up: "there were 110 scenes of torture on prime time broadcast programming from 1995 to 2001. From 2002 to 2005, the number increased to 624 scenes of torture. Data from 2006 to 2007 showed that there were 212 scenes of torture."[11] Why? Lamb gives one clear answer, and, by way of a metaphor, a helpful interpretive tool. He quotes Jamsheed Akrami, communications professor at William Paterson University: "Violence, as odd as it sounds, can have a sort of cathartic effect on people. When they are exposed to violence there is something of a vicarious element . . . [of] participation that could have a soothing effect on them." Lamb also likens the increase in violence with "the proverbial frog in a pot of warming water."[12]

Was there a desire on the part of many in the television viewing public, after 9/11, to partake of violence in a controlled, scripted manner, and, more specifically, to view torture as a form of cultural catharsis? As the PTC study notes, there was not only an increase in the number of torture and sadism scenes, but there was a shift. The supposedly "good guys" were practicing torture and sadism. And, by watching "our own" "good guys" torture again, and again, and again, saving "our own" women and children, were we like frogs, with the temperature rising just slowly enough that we were eventually willing to accept as par for the safety course the images of naked, hooded prisoners piled in a pyramid? I mean, at least the interrogators at Abu Ghraib had not severed the prisoner's heads, right? That's what Jack Bauer did to one recalcitrant informant early in the second season of Fox's show *24*, after all, and he had saved the entire West Coast as a result.

[10] G. Lamb, "TV's higher threshold of pain," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Aug 23, 2002), http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0823/p13s02-altv.html.

[11] "Parents Beware of *24*," *Parents Television Council* (Nov 21, 2008), https://www.parentstv.org/PTC/publications/emailalerts/2008/wrapup_112108.htm.

[12] G. Lamb, "TV's higher threshold of pain," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Aug 23, 2002), http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0823/p13s02-altv.html.

Susan Faludi builds her hypothesis in her book *The Terror Dream* by linking example after example of erroneous but gripping storytelling after 9/11. The actual firefighters who entered the actual buildings died, in large part, due to an ill-funded force with faulty radio-equipment. In the post-9/11 mythic narratives, however, they became superheroes who died saving vulnerable women and children, even though the victims of the 9/11 murder were overwhelmingly male. As a rule, the widows of those male victims were not eager to become domestic heroines, holding down the suburban fort with apron and cupcakes, but there was a concerted effort to have them tell such a story, again and again. Faludi shows how the actual survivors of the trauma — the ones whose lives were directly shaped by the murders — were resolutely trying to deal with reality. Meanwhile, those of us in the US who were surviving the trauma from a distance, trying to go about our daily lives while intermittently viewing scenes of horror, seemed eager to buy (literally) a story written as a familiar, domestic myth of effective male protection and female vulnerability. Why? Faludi suggests that the hero/damsel myth was a well-worn way to deal with the shame of an unspeakable national failure, a well-worn set of gender myths built up after the prolonged period of conflict with Native Americans under American expansion:

> We perceive our country as inviolable, shielded from enemy penetration. Indeed, in recent history the United States has been, among nations, one of the most immune to attack on its home soil. And yet, our foundational drama as a society was apposite, a profound exposure to just such assaults, murderous homeland incursions by dark-skinned, non-Christian combatants under the flag of no recognized nation, complying with no accepted Western rules of engagement and subscribing to an alien culture, who attacked white America on its "own" soil and against civilian targets. September 11 was aimed at our cultural solar plexus precisely because it was an "unthinkable" occurrence for a nation that once could think of little else. It was not, in fact, an inconceivable event; it was *the* characteristic and formative American ordeal, the primal injury of which we could not speak, the shard of memory stuck in our throats. Our ancestors had already fought a war on terror, a very long war, and we have lived with its scars ever since.[13]

I believe it is helpful to apply Faludi's hypothesis to interpret the popularity of shows that have depicted escalating torture as an efficacious and necessary means of preserving (or saving) the social body.

I will also go one step further, to suggest that the gender politics of such shows may take their form from the same cultural impulse that led to the ritualized emasculation of Muslim prisoners in places like Abu Ghraib. Why were prisoners not only intimidated, but sexually violated, when study after military study has shown that such methods are ineffective for securing intelligence information? As Zimbardo explains in detail (using

[13] S. Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 208.

government reports) in his book *The Lucifer Effect*, the story that sexually intimidating and violating practices at Abu Ghraib were the result of the unique depravity of the "Abu Ghraib Seven," is disproven repeatedly: "This thorough investigation [the Jones/Faye report] by two Army generals should lay to rest any claims that the MPs on the night shift of Tier 1A abused and tortured the prisoners solely out of their personally deviant motivations or sadistic impulses. Instead, the picture that is emerging is one of complex multiple causality."[14] One of the causes, according to The Schlesinger Report, was the toxic mix of institutionalized dehumanization that Zimbardo himself had documented in his Stanford Prison Project. And, as Zimbardo explains, the Schlesinger Report highlighted in particular the ways that nakedness had been used to dehumanize the prisoners, rendering them violable within a system of perpetual fear of attack, unlivable filth in an overcrowded torture facility (that the U.K. military command had tried to condemn as obviously unusable), and the overall disorientation of the Iraq war. Dealing daily with their own vulnerability, and the pressure to produce "intelligence results" that would "save American lives," military police officers dehumanized and violated the prisoners under their watch.[15] I believe it possible to view American viewing habits after 9/11 in a related way. Due in part to the shame of violation, we desired a narrative of necessary, controlled, and effective violation. By this reading, the treatment of Muslim men suspected of terrorism involved their standing in not only for the terrorists who got away, by dying on 9/11, but all of the original, Native American terrorists in mythic, American memory, who had repeatedly rendered male colonists, settlers, and pioneers impotent.

"Get Your Hands Dirty" on *24*

This section title comes from a key scene in the second season of Fox's *24*. The first episode of the second season opens immediately with a scene that is unambiguously, blatantly of torture. A man is stretched across a table, while his torturers, all of some unspecified Asian descent, administer electric shock to break his silence. He "breaks" and tells the interrogators what they were seeking, and they walk down the hallway to tell the US military officers the news. It is the first extended, obvious torture scene in the series, and it is important to note that the foreign torturers seem to have been hired to do the repugnant work for the US military. Viewers sitting in their living rooms have to choose whether to watch the torture scene or, like the fastidious men in the other room, avoid the spectacle. Are you "man" enough to watch what must be done? This is the implicit question posed, already, in the very first scene of the second season. Soon after this, in case viewers had not gotten the point, Jack excoriates a key character with the "Counter Terrorist Unit" for just such squeamishness: "That's the problem with you,

[14] P. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2008), 397.
[15] See especially P. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 362, 346, 333.

George. You want results, but you never want to get your hands dirty. I'd start rolling up your sleeves." Jack Bauer then uses a hacksaw to sever a man's head from his body, right there in a CTU board room.

I have avoided graphic espionage and police dramas like *24* not because I am morally superior, but because I am morally nauseous. Watching violence makes me physically ill. When my first daughter was a baby, I gave up television, and I have not looked back. After 9/11, I intentionally stayed away from visual images of the horror, hearing only news reports on the radio. They were enough to make me never want to fly again. But, in the midst of the fear, I absolutely was uninterested in watching a show that involved people inflicting pain on other human beings, for any reason. So, in preparation for this essay, I had to watch from scratch, so to speak, the first two seasons of *24*, along with multiple episodes of *Homeland*, and *Game of Thrones*. I like to fancy myself the ideal, naïve, interpreter. I have become so unused to television that all of the tricks work on me. I became hooked on all three shows and had to swear off of further watching in order to avoid more nightmares.

In case any other readers have been able to avoid *24*, this basic summary, from Jane Mayer's piece on *24* creator Joel Surnow may be helpful:

> Each season of *24*, which has been airing on Fox since 2001, depicts a single, panic-laced day in which Jack Bauer — a heroic C.T.U. agent, played by Kiefer Sutherland — must unravel and undermine a conspiracy that imperils the nation. Terrorists are poised to set off nuclear bombs or bioweapons, or in some other way annihilate entire cities. The twisting story line forces Bauer and his colleagues to make a series of grim choices that pit liberty against security. Frequently, the dilemma is stark: a resistant suspect can either be accorded due process — allowing a terrorist plot to proceed — or be tortured in pursuit of a lead. Bauer invariably chooses coercion. With unnerving efficiency, suspects are beaten, suffocated, electrocuted, drugged, assaulted with knives, or more exotically abused; almost without fail, these suspects divulge critical secrets.[16]

As Mayer recounts later in the article, the man at Fox who secured the series for the network explained to her, "[It] doesn't have much patience for the niceties of civil liberties or due process." "Extreme measures," he explains, "are sometimes necessary for the greater good." The show features a repetitive liturgy of moral meaning, and it draws on different storytelling genres — cliffhanging serial, soap opera, film noir — to pull the viewer into a world where the lived details of family, kinship, local and national politics, are all set on a precipice, dependent on the charisma and potency of one man. A colleague told me, when I explained I was going to watch as much of the series as I could stomach, that he thinks *24* is "Scooby-Doo for grownups," referring to a wildly popular cartoon franchise for children in the US, featuring a goofy dog and

[16] J. Mayer, "Whatever It Takes: The politics of the man behind '24'," *The New Yorker* (Feb 19, 2007), http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/02/19/070219fa_fact_mayer.

a sleuthing band of teenagers, which aired for decades on Saturday mornings. *24* is similarly formulaic. The resolution of the besetting conflict on *24* does not come until the end of the season, whereas for Scooby-Doo and his pals the resolution comes at the end of each half-hour episode. But the comparison is useful, down even to the predictable musical score for each show. Watching *24*, I came to foresee fairly quickly which sort of music would accompany which kind of scene. As with Scooby and his best friend Shaggy, Jack Bauer's snooping around where he wasn't wanted came with an initially creepy, but, after so much repetition, eventually reassuring type of score. And *24* routinely plays Wagnerian-Important music when Jack Bauer must c-o-n-c-e-n-t-r-a-t-e to keep his cool, much as Scooby-Doo played bubble-gum pop tunes when Shaggy and Scooby had to stop running in place and actually RUN. (This being one of the regular gags on the cartoon series.) One big difference: the series *Scooby-Doo, Where are You* was intentionally created as a non-violent alternative to the usual children's television programming at the time: a team solving a mystery without weapons.

People who think about the meaning of television as a story-telling device explain that "the basic mechanisms of following a story are not 'natural' or simply automatic. We must learn how to process the fragmented camera shots, multiple streams of auditory material, and conventions of visual composition, turning them into a story that typically appears 'realistic' even though we never experience the real world through such devices." Jason Mittell continues, "Viewers learn to comprehend media by building mental schemata, or cognitive patterns, that process visual and aural information into recognizable conventions that can be applied to any moving-image example."[17] And, in a serial, the writers are able to repeat these cognitive patterns in such a way as to shape cognition itself. One of my most rudimentary, teaching examples on this point involves the game of checkers. After playing the game for hours, I found myself thinking of pieces of furniture, people, whatever object, as set up in a pattern to allow for a good move on the board. When taught repetitively to think in a pattern, many of us maintain that pattern in other, totally unrelated arenas of life. (If this example does not work, I ask students to consider how often they wish they had a "mute" button to apply to a live person.) The creators of *24* well matched form with content for a show on terrorism and US counter-terrorism policies, in that their use of various serial, even soap-opera, motifs allowed for what one teacher called "an indefinitely expandable middle." Tania Modleski continues the interpretation of soap operas, explaining that "successful soap operas do not end." Indeed, "they cannot end."[18] *24* works like a soap opera, in that it is set up for repeated non-resolution, formally identical to the "War on Terror" which

[17] J. Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative." In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. D. Herman. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 163, 164, 167.

[18] D. Porter, 'Soap Time: Thoughts on a Commodity Art Form', *College English* (Apr. 1977), 783. Quoted in: T. Modleski, "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Opera." In *Loving With a Vengeances: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women.* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 29–40, 29.

cannot end either. Fox Network's new series, *Homeland* continues the *24* soap opera, set appropriately for the Obama administration.

Something that struck me quickly with the first season of *24* is the anxiety over marriage, motherhood, sex, and fatherhood. The series is well-constructed to attract female as well as male viewers, and not only because it features the aesthetically normative Kiefer Sutherland. Faludi seeks to understand why the murders of 9/11, ostensibly by an anti-Western, anti-feminist movement, became a catalyst for anti-feminist, pro-maternal and downright paternalistic ideology in the US. One quotation she cites, from a May 10, 2004, piece by Kay Daly, "Happy 'Security' Moms Day," is helpful to hear the tone:

> On a clear September morning in 2001, the most basic instinct of mothers — protection of home and family — took top priority over any other concerns. In an instant, all other concerns outside the realm of survival seemed trivial. Suddenly, the enemy had not only invaded our nation, but the realities of everyday life.[19]

The storylines in both of the first two seasons of *24* intertwine a terror threat around issues *within* the family: marital conflict and struggle between children and parents, most specifically around paternal authority, female sexuality, and feminine vulnerability. On the packaged DVD set of the first season, the background image for the concluding episodes is helpfully obvious. It shows an overlaid collage of Jack Bauer hugging his wife and daughter, with their heads visually muted into the outline of the continental US. The fate and future of the family is tangled up with the fate and future of the nation, and vice versa. What Anthony N. Smith writes about HBO's series, *The Sopranos*, is true of *24*, although *24* heightens the importance beyond an exotic, ethnic sub-culture in New Jersey: "it is likely that one storyline in a *Sopranos* episode will feature domestic concerns, while another graphic violence," and, "the utilisation of this traditional technique of cutting between disparate story-strands frequently presented Chase [the *Sopranos* creator] with many opportunities to cut between beats presenting mob violence [or, in our case, intelligence/terrorist violence] and beats documenting everyday suburban living."[20] Smith suggests, along with many others, that this back and forth allowed for the wide-spread popularity of a character as deceitful as Tony Soprano, and, I would suggest, a similar rhythm in *24* appealed to viewers anxious not only about national security, but about the ways that traditional, male authority within the homeland had been undermined after 9/11. After all, although Bauer was able to save the nation by the end of the first season, he still was unable to save his own wife. While critics at the time marveled at this turn in the storyline, I would suggest that Jack's failure to save

[19] S. Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 160, from K. R. Daly, "Happy 'Security' Moms Day," *GOPUSA* (May 10, 2004), http://www.gopusa.com/commentary/kdaly/.

[20] A. N. Smith, "TV or Not TV? The Sopranos and Contemporary Episode Architecture in US Network and Premium Cable Drama." *Critical Studies in Television.* 6.1 (2011), 36–51, 44, 45. Please note British spelling in the original.

his own wife may have been as visually therapeutic to viewers as the earlier scenes in which he tortured his wife and daughter's master-mind tormentor. Viewing Jack's helplessness may have allowed a kind of reassurance that even a hero can massively fail, and still return the next season to fight.

The conflict between Jack Bauer and his wife and daughter, and the conflict within the soon-to-be presidential Palmer family, is vital for setting up the arc of the *24* storyline. First, I will try briefly to relate the drama regarding the Bauer family. A key scene in the first episode of the first season involves Jack failing to be present when his own teenage daughter seems on the verge of having sex with a boy she has just recently met. Against the backdrop of the literally ticking time bomb is the race to save his daughter's virginity — not to mention, as it turns out, the ticking of his wife's ovaries. When Jack's wife searches a furniture warehouse for their daughter, who has gone on an escapade (turned kidnapping) with a girlfriend and two teenage boys (who turn out to be thugs-for-hire), the girlfriend's father (who, it turns out, is not really her father) helps Jack's wife find a condom package . . . wait for it . . . *torn open*. It is obvious, at that point, that one of the teenage girls has had sex. At this point, Jack's wife tries desperately to reach him, to give him the news that his daughter may have had sex. But, sadly, Jack is too busy saving the nation to save his daughter's virginity. Another aspect to this ongoing search drama in the first series is the viewer's expectation that Jack's wife, who is increasingly distraught and feeling abandoned by her super-intelligence-anti-terrorist husband, may turn to the other girl's (single) father for intimate solace. Within the first three episodes, the writers have interspersed anxiety about (protected) teen sex, and anxiety over what appears potentially to be (perhaps justified) impending marital infidelity with the first scene of dismemberment. Jack Bauer removes the extended finger of a dead man, chopping it off in a way that is quite unsubtly phallic.

The first scene of torture in the first series may not, at first, read as torture. But I would argue it is not only torture, but torture related to female sexuality. Jack Bauer's daughter has been kidnapped, in part due to her girlfriend's lack of judgment about teenage boys. Her girlfriend, as the viewers know, is the foolish one who has had sex in the furniture warehouse, and, after their kidnapping, the bad girl eventually ends up unconscious in the hospital. Jack has, in the meantime, figured out that his daughter's disappearance is likely linked to his role in the ongoing terrorist plot of the season, and he (finally) contacts his wife to tell her to watch out, lest the one person (his daughter's girlfriend) who can tell them about their daughter's whereabouts be silenced by someone posing as benevolent. So, the viewers, who are as clueless at this point as Jack's wife, watch as a new doctor enters the girl's room and administers shocks to resuscitate her. The question is left excruciatingly open. Was the girl actually in cardiac arrest, or was the entire thing feigned, so that she could be shocked to death by a counter-agent posing as her doctor. The first scene of possible torture is to the "bad" girl, who chose foolishly to have sex, and who, it turns out, will be eventually suffocated, while whimpering, at the hands of the man who has been impersonating her father.

I assert that this scene is the first torture scene, in part due to the fact that it repeats itself in the second season. Here, another young woman, barely out of her teens, is also submitted to electrical shocks, even as the doctor insists it might kill her — all because she may be able to remember computer codes that can help Jack Bauer trace the mystery of the season. In the latter case, it is obvious within the storyline that this young Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) employee suffers bodily violation for the sake of the cause. There is no question about the motives of the people ordering the shock treatment. They are the "good guys," willing in this case to dirty their hands even when it comes to a person for whom they have real affection. Both scenes are linked to a key part of the storyline in the second series, regarding the willingness of the President of the United States to countenance the torture of a colleague, through the same shock method, this time administered to his brain. Finally, to close the loop, although Jack Bauer's own daughter has avoided illicit sex, and, perhaps thereby avoided the fate that the series writers meted out to her bad friend, Bauer fails to protect his own wife from being raped in his daughter's stead.

The end of the first season thus ends with a "security mom's" nightmare. Jack ensconces his wife and daughter in what he hopes will be a "safe house" in the suburbs, complete not only with a male guard hiding out in a cherry-picker outside, but also a male guard mowing the lawn. When the viewer discovers that the terrorists have invaded the domicile, the camera shows . . . again, wait for it . . . the lawn mower is unoccupied. The good men have been shot, and the women eventually must, again, fend for themselves. By the end of the season, Jack's wife is not only pregnant, possibly by her rapist, but she is also dead, shot by Jack's former lover, a CTU rogue who returns in the second series to endure torture at Jack's hands. The themes of sex, marriage, torture and terror are obviously and explicitly intertwined, in ways that reveal a brilliant writing feat — the "War on Terror" is not only about ticking time bombs and torture. It is about real families living with the daily struggles of teen sex, infidelity, and paternal impotence.

Intertwined with the Bauer drama is the Palmer drama, as David Palmer, candidate for US President (and, eventually President) must reckon with the past lies of his wife, who has deceived him ostensibly to save her children and his political career. To go through the serpentine details of this plot-line would test the reader's patience, so I will concentrate on one contrast. Whereas Jack Bauer's wife is thin (arguably anorexic), helpless, and relatively clueless, David Palmer's wife is hale, resourceful, and brilliant. But, a key aspect of the first two seasons is Mrs. Palmer's manifestation of what one friend called "pure evil." Mrs. Palmer, who is, we should note, African-American, serves as the stereotype of an emasculating matriarch, even masterminding a plan for her husband's infidelity so that she can potentially control him through the compliance of a younger, female aide. While the first season ends with Jack holding his dead wife, as he weeps and repeatedly apologizes for his inability to protect her, it also ends with David Palmer dismissing *his* wife in steely-resolved, humiliating fashion, stating that "You've lost touch with what it is to be a parent, a friend, a wife." Finally, in front of the secret-service agents assigned to protect them, he tells her through clinched teeth, "I just

don't think you're fit to be First Lady." The viewers have been prompted, by this point, to cheer him on.

In a *New York Times* essay entitled "Normalizing Torture on '24,' " Adam Green notes a pattern in subsequent seasons:

> What is most striking about torture on *24* is how it affects not only politics but also emotional and professional relationships. The C.T.U. data technician Sarah Gavin, interrogated with tasers to discover if she were a terrorist mole, subsequently returns to work showing no signs of trauma. Indeed, she marshals the clarity of mind to renegotiate her terms of employment with her superior, who approved her interrogation just hours earlier. The war-protester son of Secretary of Defense Heller, more alienated than ever after a session of sensory deprivation in a C.T.U. holding room, receives a strikingly paternal lecture from his father about why that treatment was appropriate. Even Audrey's husband, Paul, somehow rises above his grievance to view his erstwhile tormentor as a buddy, helping Jack extract documents from a defense contractor and fend off attack — and even loyally taking a bullet for him. In all of these interactions, torture doesn't deaden the feelings between people, rather it deepens them. . . . It is often noted that torture goes against the tenets of human community in two fundamental ways. Because torturers deny the basic humanity of their victims, it's a violation of the norms governing everyday society. At the same time, torture constitutes society's ultimate perversion, shaking or breaking its victims' faith in humanity by turning their bodies and their deepest commitments — political or spiritual belief, love of family — against them to produce pain and fear. In the counterterrorist world of "24," though, torture represents not the breakdown of a just society, but the turning point — at times even the starting point — for social relations. Through this artistic sleight of hand, the show makes torture appear normal.[21]

And torture is not just normal. Submitting to the suffering necessary to secure the safety of one's loved ones is a key part of a torture scene early on in the series (as I noted above) when the young female computer tech is submitted to electrical shocks to allow her to resume consciousness just long enough to regurgitate the code that might save the storyline. Soon after, as the doctor predicted, she dies. She is a heroine, albeit unconscious and involuntary, for suffering at the hands of her comrades. And, those who are willing to sacrifice their own friends for the sake of the cause may be even more brave than those who endure the torture itself. Affliction for the good of the group elicits love.

As a Christian ethicist, I must note that this may be read as a kind of macabre reversal and re-distribution of what some Christians call the Eucharist, in which the wound that saves the faithful is distributed back out to the faithful. Here, brothers and sisters willingly suffer the letting of their own blood, and the taking of one another's blood,

[21] A. Green, "Normalizing Torture on '24'," *New York Times* (May 22, 2005), http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/arts/television/22gree.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

because the blood of the Christian savior, Jesus Christ, was insufficient to bring about national security. *24* presents a kind of pilgrimage by way of violence, in a narratively compelling, if formulaic manner. Slavoj Žižek names this starkly in a 2006 piece about the series:

> It is here that we encounter the series' ideological lie: in spite of the CTU's ruthlessness, its agents, especially Bauer, are warm human beings - loving, caught in the emotional dilemmas of ordinary people. . . . Therein also resides the lie of 24: that it is not only possible to retain human dignity in performing acts of terror, but that if an honest person performs such an act as a grave duty, it confers on him a tragic-ethical grandeur. The parallel between the agents' and the terrorists' behaviour serves this lie.[22]

There are also sacrifices that do not bond but mutilate. The writers have intertwined suffering for one another with suffering that severs ties. Two families come apart at the seams in the second season, with a case of unambiguous domestic violence and a case whereby a young, elite Californian blonde woman turns against her family, and her Muslim fiancé, in order to serve the cause of her adopted terrorist group. A young man who attempts to help Jack's daughter in the second season breaks off their relationship over the phone, from the hospital. On the other end of the telephone line, she is confused, but the viewer watches as the camera rises to show him recovering in the bed, having had one of his legs severed. The writers of *24* give a simple answer to terrorism, again, and again, and again, intertwined with a complex set of stories that ask viewers to trust that all of the carnage will, eventually, lead to the remembering of all who have been dismembered.

"Winter is Coming"

As the study I noted above cites, the rise of television violence has been precipitous since 9/11. The increase in scenes of torture is set within a larger pattern of increasing "sadism," as the study names it.[23] I believe it helpful to think through the work of violence in *24* by considering another, currently popular show that also features routine acts of violation. This section's sub-heading serves as the motto of the family line for which many viewers are to cheer in the HBO series *Game of Thrones*. A horrific winter is coming, and there is only one family in the series apparently capable of toughening themselves for the impending disaster. Several former students suggested to me that I had also to view this series, if I am to begin to interpret the allure of television violence and sexual domination. When I posted online that I was fairly certain that something was amiss in the revival of medieval gore and supposedly "realistic" sexual hierarchy and

[22] S. Žižek, "The depraved heroes of 24 are the Himmlers of Hollywood," *The Guardian* (Jan 10, 2006), http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/jan/10/usnews.comment.
[23] Lamb, "TV's higher threshold of pain," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Aug 23, 2002), http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0823/p13s02-altv.html.

exploitation in the series, I was inundated with the defensive comments of fans — men and women, African-American and Anglo. It turns out that this is a wildly and widely popular series, with parents of my daughters' school-mates and with colleagues across disparate walks of life. "The stories just pull you in!" I heard again and again, in some form or another.

There are formal similarities to *24*, even while the two shows are from different genres. *Game of Thrones* is fantasy, and, although any military analyst will tell you *24* is fantastical, it is not strictly within the "fantasy" genre. As with *24*, the violence is intertwined with sexual and gendered themes. I watched the show in part to consider how gender and violence interact differently or similarly to *24*. In this case, many of its admirers suggest that the repeated scenes wherein women are sexually violated are warranted, because they are "realistic" to the vaguely designated time period in which the fairy tale is set, that is, once upon a time, in a land far, far away. . . . As with the case of another popular television show of the new millennium set in an earlier era, AMC's period drama *Mad Men*, the abominable treatment of women seems to provide a kind of masochistic/sadistic viewing pleasure justified somehow by a kind of purported, historical accuracy. If *24* is like *Scooby Doo* for grown-ups, *Game of Thrones* is like a popular medieval, role-playing game in the US called *Dungeons and Dragons*, combined with online porn for people who also love the novels of English author J.R.R. Tolkien. *Game of Thrones* is much more prone to show women naked and men dressed in large, metal armor than is *24*. The contrast between naked, female vulnerability and male strength is both more overt and more complicated than on *24*. But I would argue that ultimately the messages similarly undergird a gender binary of strength/vulnerability, encouraging a kind of emotional distance and preparing the viewer to suffer loss.

The depiction of violence in the two shows is similarly graphic, repetitive, gendered, and vital. Men and women must variously muster the strength to endure their own and their loved ones prolonged suffering and dismemberment. In both shows, characters are presented with complex personalities and motives, but, in each show, human beings are also presented as "mere meat," to use a phrase popular in post-modern film studies.[24] A key question in *24* is whether or not viewers will have the courage to watch, endure, and commit the torture necessary to protect the nation. As noted above, the series implies that a telling dynamic within a culture of torture is whether or not one is willing to endure suffering at the hands of one's own comrades, for the sake of proving his or her loyalty. And, in reverse, is one willing to commit torture, not only on one's clearly demarcated "enemy," but on one's ambiguously designated, potential loved one? *Game of Thrones* continues this question in a different form, presenting the challenge for viewers to endure, to watch, the deaths of characters designated as real human beings.

[24] For a helpful overview, see W. Brown, "Monstrous Cinema." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10.4 (2012), 409–424.

Richard Hofstadter suggested in his classic 1964 essay on "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" that "It is hard to resist the conclusion that this enemy is, on many counts, the projection of the self; both the ideal and the unacceptable aspects of the self are attributed to him."[25] I believe there is a kind of boomerang effect in American culture during a time of perpetual fear, whereby there is an urge to enact retributive violence on those who serve to symbolize our past and potential violators, but also a desire to endure a controlled viewing of our own suffering. Within the politics of fear after 9/11, there seems again to be a theme of self-sacrifice, and the necessity of sacrificing one's own attachments, for the sake of facing the monstrosity of terrorism and, perhaps in the midst of an economic recession, also the specter of fratricide during drastic austerity.

This, then, is the set-up in *Game of Thrones*, which (like *24*) plays on themes of temporality. The opening features not a map of the continental US and a digital clock-face (as in *24*), but an intricate, moving, miniature map of the fantasy-land and a medieval-esque globe-dial, resembling an astrolabe, spinning toward the resumption of another brutal, indefinitely enduring winter. Yet again, the clock is ticking. It is a time of urgency, when men and women must act to save the future. The first season sets up a world-view where kinship and friendship connections are simultaneously crucial, and necessarily, often violently, relinquished in the face of the preparations for winter. In the midst of impending apocalypse, viewers are themselves drawn in to see the unique vulnerabilities and gifts of even cursory characters, and compelled to watch while these individuals are killed.

The severing of heads from bodies seems particularly important in the series, and the symbolism fits. If one's face involves one's capacity to think, then the removal of head from body enacts the disconnection of individuality and relationality from a body. Within the very first scene of the very first episode, there are multiple beheadings, including one that sets up a central premise of the show. A member of the monastic military guard called The Night's Watch has just narrowly escaped the land from whence monsters and savages come. He has just viewed the brutal murders of two of his friends, but, having run away from the scene, he is considered a deserter and must, by the king's law, have his head removed from his body. But, before he is executed, he calmly but vulnerably avers his honesty — he has indeed viewed the monsters from the north. His desertion was not one of cowardice, he explains, but borne of the amoral chaos inflicted by what he has viewed. The youngest son of the hero's family, still a child, must watch this execution. He is told by his brother that their father will know if he looks away. He is told this not unkindly, but with compassion combined with stoicism. In order to prepare to be a man, he must watch as an honest man has his own eyes closed, by having his head chopped off. The viewer is given a similar challenge. Will we have the nerve to continue watching, even while, eventually, the hero himself is beheaded at the end of the first

[25] R. Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine* (Nov 1964), http://karws.gso.uri.edu/jfk/conspiracy_theory/the_paranoid_mentality/the_paranoid_style.html.

season? And, just to be clear, this is not a gender-specific challenge. The hero's oldest daughter must not only watch her father's beheading, but later view his severed head on a spike.

The relationship between sexual desire and violence is fraught in this series in ways similar to *24*. Both series simultaneously present sexually explicit scenes and punish those whose sexual desires reveal their vulnerability. And, again, beheading is a part of the symbolism. In one of the most cited, graphic scenes, a brutally successful knight who is felled during a joust stands up after his horse has thrown him, pulls out his massive sword, and chops off the head of his whinnying horse. (This is all shown in excruciating detail, please note.) The viewer soon learns that the dismembered horse has failed his master due to the fact that the other knight's mare was in heat. The cost of sexual distraction is death. Soon after this episode, the hero's most trusted guard, called on to protect him as they attempt escape from their enemy's compound, is momentarily distracted by the alluring gaze of one of the show's many naked prostitutes. This is the first sign of this man's humanity, as he is both tempted and visibly embarrassed by the woman's recognition that she has distracted him. It is the first scene in which the viewer sees him seeing, and being seen back, as an embodied person, rather than as a mere tool for protection of his master. Immediately afterward, when he walks out of the door with his master, this guard is killed by another swordsman, by receiving a knife through the eyes. The viewer watches as a person who has been caught viewing is punished with death by blindness.

It is not incidental that the unequivocal, unambiguous heroes of the first season are soldiers sworn to monastic celibacy. And, following scene after repetitive scene of naked, female love-slaves, the heroine of the season first must suffocate her rapist-husband turned (we are asked to believe genuine) lover to his death, and then emerge naked but unscathed from a fire, a fire in which another, older woman is ritually burned to death (while screaming for mercy, no less). If the question left at the end of the first series is whether one, like the youngest son in the first scene of the first season, has the courage to continue watching as people we have come to care about are disemboweled, raped, tortured, and impaled, I declare failure.

I would suggest, following Faludi's thesis, that both *24* and *Game of Thrones* represent a kind of ritual, visual, cultural self-cutting, whereby viewers not only want to view with vengeance, but to master the violent loss and perpetual fear of future loss, whether such fear is conspiratorially promoted (which I believe it is) or viscerally, psychologically wired (which is perhaps also is the case). Regardless of the cause and effect (which I warned I would not try to answer) the spectacle continues to be widely, wildly popular, streamed reliably into the moral imaginations of American citizens.

Both Abdullah Antepli and Ingrid Mattson's presentations at the 2011 conference appealed to the common humanity of their listeners. They each appealed to our common sense of connection through our love for kin — through our capacity to relate to and empathize with our neighbors. If, through the viewing of violent suffering in shows like *24* and *Game of Thrones*, Americans are not only learning to hate our

neighbor, but also practicing a kind of liturgy of self-sacrifice and loss, then what will happen to such appeals for empathy? If we are practicing a stoicism born of shame, what will happen to our capacity for relationship? With deep sorrow, I now hear Abdullah Antepli's call for us to risk the viewing of torture as coming from within my own world of isolated idealism, a world where people actually experience a moral shift usually known as empathy when they view another human being in pain, rather than experiencing some kind of solace or affective armor through such viewing.

Inconclusive Postscript from *Homeland*

In a comment posted on the feminist website *Jezebel*, under a whimsical blog relating Fox's new show *Homeland*'s main character to another eccentric character in a comedy series, a person designated as "LarHar" states: "I am usually not into the whole, CIA, Military, Terrorist series, but I am hooked on Homeland. I didn't think I would like it, and now I freaking love it! I think Claire is brilliant."[26] By shifting the anti-terrorist operative to female, and by rendering her a non-threatening, typically feminine form of unstable (she is presented as "bi-polar" and weeps frequently), the former writers of *24* continue the soap opera of the perpetual War on Terror, which replaced the perpetual Cold War. Rather than being unhinged by necessary violence toward others and needing anger-management therapy (as did Jack Bauer), *Homeland*'s heroine is hysterical and needs to be protected from her own worst, self-harming impulses. She is a reassuring warrior for a new era of fighting the designated enemy of radical Islam. Writer Stan Goff names with his usual analytical clarity a Hollywood phenomenon he calls using "decoys." In his interpretation of the film *Man on Fire*, Goff names Denzel Washington as the perfect "decoy." By writing an African-American man as the cowboy savior who must use supposedly effective interrogation techniques like anal rape to save a young girl, the writers distract viewers from the racial context of America's current wars.[27] Similarly, I would suggest that the camaraderie between the hero and heroine of *Homeland*, portrayed by Claire Danes and Mandy Patinkin, as they work together to make the Western world safe from Muslim terrorists, distracts viewers from the gendered nature of selling war today. *Homeland* actually bests stories like *Man on Fire*, in that the writers have embedded concerns about female vulnerability into the storyline about a woman fighting terrorism. Claire Danes remains perpetually a version of the adolescent girl she played in her television debut, needing Patinkin's fatherly protection and also, repeatedly, eliciting the protective affection of the audience. She is brilliant but unstable, eventually giving herself "totally" over to the man viewers have been cued to perceive as a threat.

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[26] M. Davies, "Carrie on Homeland Is Actually Charlie on It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," *Jezebel* (Dec 7, 2012), http://jezebel.com/5966734/carrie-on-homeland-is-actually-charlie-on-its-always-sunny-in-philadelphia?tag=homeland.

[27] S. Goff, *Sex and War* (Lulu.com, 2006), 18–20.

I also believe it is no small matter when, in the first season, our heroine realizes a crucial piece of the terrorism puzzle just as she self-sacrificially submits to her own ritualized torture through electro-convulsive therapy. In doing so, she submits to her own pain, and through her acceptance of suffering, lying horizontal, strapped down to a bed, she gains her wisdom. This cannot be what Susan Faludi had in mind when she calls, at the end of *The Terror Dream*, for Americans to draw on "the talents and vitality of all of us equally, men and women both."[28]

Finally, I want to close with an appeal from Kalman Bland's essay in this volume, his paraphrase of the Jewish proscription of torture, as a prayer. If torture in America is in part a ramification of shame, may these words be of some use, to women as well as to men. Rather than steel ourselves, preparing for self-sacrifice, loss, and possibly the call to sacrifice our beloveds, may we be willing still to believe sufficiently in love.[29]

> Consequently, we are meant to hear God saying something like this: I know how humans tend to react to adversity. Precisely because you have been the victims of injustice and torture, your hearts are hardened and you are inclined to commit those acts yourself, for injustice and torture perpetuate themselves by scarring the soul, making it more difficult to empathize with the other. Physical violence and psychological abuse in one generation are among the major causes for reproducing abuse and violence in the next generation. I weep for your pain, with you I am lost in exile, but knowing the scars in your tormented collective consciousness, I command you, my people, to be extraordinarily vigilant in resisting the abominations and crimes of torture. Don't let your oppressive history have the last word. Overcome it. Don't commit atrocities. Don't torture.

Amen.

[28] S. Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 296.

[29] I would like to thank Kara Slade, Matthew Elia, Isaac Villegas, and the people at the National Religious Campaign Against Torture for organizing the conference that helped me finally to begin trying to write on this issue. Kara Slade continually helped with thinking and editing. I am grateful to my co-editor, Danny Arnold, for helping me process the misery of watching these shows, and to his brilliant wife, Kate Roberts, for her gender analysis of all things pop-culture. Thanks to my pastor Ryan Quanstrom, for the Scooby-Doo reference, to Namaan Wood for many helpful articles pertaining to media analysis, and to several friends and former students who allowed me to question them mercilessly about shows that they love.