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# Mediating the Female Terrorist: Patricia Hearst and the Containment of the *Feminist Terrorist* Threat in the United States in the 1970s

Amanda Third\*

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**Abstract:** »Die Medialisierung des weiblichen Terroristen: Patricia Hearst und die Eindämmung der feministischen terroristischen Bedrohung in den USA in den 1970er Jahren«. In January 1976, the trial of Patricia Campbell Hearst caused a Western media sensation. Representing the culmination of her spectacular kidnapping and *conversion* to the terrorist cause of the *Symbionese Liberation Army* (SLA), Hearst was on trial for her participation in the Hibernia National Bank robbery almost two years earlier. As of the commencement of the trial, the story of the heiress-come-female-terrorist had been captivating Western media audiences for two years. This article analyses the ways that mainstream media coverage of this event operated to contain both the threat of this particular female terrorist, and the threat of second-wave feminism more broadly. Within Western culture, there has historically been a concern with the need to regulate the mainstream media's coverage of terrorist events. In this line of thinking, the mainstream media are a precondition for, and a potential site of the contagion of, terrorism. However, as I demonstrate, ultimately, mainstream media coverage of terrorist events in which women are key protagonists operates to recuperate the threat of terrorism. In doing so, it reproduces and reasserts dominant patriarchal gender relations and thus works in the interests of dominant culture, rather than against them.

**Keywords:** Gender, female terrorist, media, terrorism, Patty Hearst, second-wave feminism, United States.

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## 1. Introduction

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*Terrorism has unfortunately become a form of mass entertainment.*  
Frederick J. Hacker (1983)

*Women terrorists have but recently begun to lay serious claim to the attention of scholars and practitioners [...] Through the actions of a few extremely vicious examples, the world has come to the shocking, and almost certainly correct, realization that, after all, the female of the species may well be deadlier than the male.*  
H. H. A. Cooper (1979)

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In January 1976, the *New York Times* reported on the international media crowd gathering in San Francisco to cover the Western news media event of the moment, the trial of Patricia Campbell Hearst:

The Germans have come, the French, the Spanish, the English, the Swedes and the Australians [...] Here is someone from *The National Courier*, a semi-monthly publication in Plainfield, N.J., and someone from a weekly in Idaho. And there are reporters from virtually every large newspaper and television and radio station in the United States. Altogether, there are 300 to 400 representatives of the news media here to cover the Patricia Hearst trial, to record for audiences around the world the latest episode in the story of the apparent newspaper heiress who was kidnapped and now must face a jury on a charge of bank robbery (Fosburgh 1976).

Representing the culmination of her spectacular kidnapping and *conversion* to the terrorist cause of the *Symbionese Liberation Army* (SLA), Hearst was on trial for her participation in the 1974 Hibernia National Bank robbery.<sup>1</sup> As of the commencement of the trial, the story of the heiress-come-female-terrorist had been captivating Western media audiences for two years. This article analyses the ways that mainstream media coverage of this event operated to contain both the threat of this particular female terrorist, and the threat of second-wave feminism more broadly.

Within Western culture, there has historically been a concern with the need to regulate the mainstream media's coverage of terrorist events. In this line of thinking, the mainstream media are a precondition for, and a potential site of the contagion of, terrorism. However, as I demonstrate, ultimately, mainstream media coverage of terrorist events in which women are key protagonists operates to recuperate the threat of terrorism. In doing so, it reproduces and reasserts dominant patriarchal gender relations and thus works in the interests of dominant culture, rather than against them.

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## 2. Terrorist Contagion? The Media's Relationship to Terrorism

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Debates over the definition and *correct* usage of the term *terrorism* have been tirelessly rehearsed within the literature of terrorism studies, a sub-discipline of political science that emerged in the 1970s, and which seeks to generate solutions to the problem of terrorism that is thought to periodically afflict Western

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Campbell Hearst was known as Patty Hearst in the mass media. However, Hearst has repeatedly insisted that she finds the public's use of her shortened name overly familiar and presumptuous, and that she wishes to be known as Patricia. I have tried to abide by Hearst's preference here, except where it is necessary to distinguish between Hearst and her parents; or Hearst's two mediated personalities – *Patty* and *Tania*.

democracies. Yet, despite a vigorous debate over more than 35 years, the definitional problem still plagues academic, government and security industry scholarship. Nonetheless, there is general consensus within the literature of terrorism studies that the mainstream media and terrorists have a symbiotic relationship, the nexus of which is their complementary interest in audience maximization. For many commentators, it is terrorism's desired outcome of affecting audiences – of conveying a message to, and inflicting psychic harm upon, a wider public – that is thought to mark terrorism as distinct from other forms of violence.

For example, for Lawrence Zelic Freedman, terrorism is “the use of violence when its most important result is not the physical and mental damage of the direct victim *but the psychological effect produced on someone else*” (Freedman 1983, 3, my emphasis. See also Tuman 2003, 5; and Schmid and de Graaf 1982, 15). Further, in an important 1982 book in which they were concerned primarily with explicating the role of the news media in disseminating terrorist messages to audiences, Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf suggested that “without communication there can be no terrorism” (Schmid and de Graaf 1982, 9). Like many other commentators on terrorism, Schmid and de Graaf argue that terrorism's motives are primarily publicity-centered, and that their victims function merely as vehicles for terrorists to potentially proselytize large audiences to their cause. Conceiving terrorism as violence deployed for the purposes of propaganda, they argue that terrorism must be understood first and foremost as a communication practice, which

does not murder to kill somebody but to obtain a certain effect upon others than the victim [...] The immediate victim is merely instrumental, the skin on a drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience [...] For the terrorist the message matters, not the victim (Schmid and de Graaf 1982, 14).

In this logic, the media provide the vital link between terrorists and their audiences; they are a *precondition* for both the occurrence and the affective impacts of terrorism.

This kind of analysis in turn produces a medium of commentary in which the media are, to varying degrees, causal of terrorism, and also the site of its potential containment. That is, in the search for so-called *solutions* to the problem of terrorism in the Western world, the media are often constructed as a locus for the containment and control of terrorism, leading to calls for the media in democratic societies to self-regulate. For example, in a speech to the American Bar Association in 1985, shortly after the high profile hijacking of TWA flight 847 and the murder of Navy SEAL, Robert Dean Stetham, Maggie Thatcher, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, famously argued that “civilised societies” must respond to terrorism by taking “every possible precaution to protect ourselves”, including “starv[ing] the terrorist [...] of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend” (Thatcher 1985). Whilst Thatcher did not go as far to suggest that Western governments should impose censor-

ship on the media's coverage of terrorism, she advocated that the media "agree among themselves" to impose "a voluntary code of conduct [...] under which they would not say or show anything which could assist the terrorists' morale or their cause" (Thatcher 1985). In Thatcher's formulation, Western democracies – what she describes as "civilised societies" – are particularly vulnerable to terrorism because of their tolerance of political diversity and their commitment to the liberal ideal of a *free press*.<sup>2</sup> Echoing Schmid and de Graaf's analysis, her claim drew upon the Western dominant cultural idea that "the media is crucial to the success of terrorism" (Bassiouni 1983, 178) because it secures the access to audiences necessary to ensure terrorists their political message will be heard.

Western world counterterrorist approaches since the 1970s have thus been dominated by an overriding concern about the role the mainstream media – and in particular, the news media – play in distributing the *aberrant* politics of terrorist organizations to Western audiences, and thereby, the capacity of the media to potentially undermine the legitimized politics underpinning dominant culture. That is, there has been a pervasive concern about the ways that the mainstream media might *play into the terrorists' hands* and further their political ends. In this register, terrorism operates to problematize the limits of the mainstream media's role in informing the citizenry in liberal democratic nation-states, raising questions about *whose side* the media is on and constructing them as a potentially subversive variable in the struggle to counter terrorism.

Such assertions, however, rest upon the idea that audiences are merely the passive recipients of terrorists' messages. They conceive of terrorism as a "violent communication strategy" that requires "a sender, the terrorist, a message generator, the victim, and a receiver, the enemy and/or the public" (Schmid and de Graaf 1982, 15). The power of the terrorist message derives from "the nature of the terrorist act, its atrocity, its location and the identity of its victim" (Schmid and de Graaf 1982, 15). Schmid and de Graaf thus explain terrorism's communicative dimensions in terms of the relatively straightforward transmission of information from senders to receivers – a conceptualization which falls within the theoretical frame of the *transmission* (McQuail 2000, 52-3) or *process* model of communication (Schirato and Yell 1996, 1-21). In this model, audiences are affected by the mainstream media's coverage of terrorist aims and practices in predictable and quantifiable ways, emphasizing an understanding of communication in which the sender and the message are determinant of meaning.<sup>3</sup> Thus, if the media are rendered potentially subversive in these for-

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, formulating terrorism in these terms presumes that terrorism is practised by small clandestine groups against democratic governments, producing the view that, as Herman and O'Sullivan claim, "whereas the West is continuously under siege from terrorism, the East is free from this scourge" (Herman and O'Sullivan 1989, 39).

<sup>3</sup> This model of communication has been a useful ally of the media effects tradition, which has historically sought to draw conclusions about audience responses to messages based on content analyses of media texts.

mulations, so too their audiences are rendered as overly malleable and vulnerable to the seductions of terrorists. In short, the fear is that *any publicity is good publicity* for the terrorist cause. In this way, media coverage is configured as a mechanism of the contagion of terrorism, representing a site for the potentially widespread destabilization of the social and cultural order that underpins Western liberal democratic nation-states.

However, these claims about the power of media coverage of terrorism within Western culture – and in particular the claim that audiences comprise politically malleable subjects that are vulnerable to terrorists’ spectacular hijackings of mainstream media spaces – requires further scrutiny. Since the 1990s, in the context of the so-called cultural turn within media and communications theory, scholars have sought to address the limitations of the transmission model of communication and account for the processes by which audiences *actively* make meanings from texts in their everyday lives (Seiter 1999, 9). This has sparked a re-valuation of qualitative methods of media and communications research directed towards the conditions and possibilities of audience reception (see for example Ang 1991). As Michel de Certeau states, “once the images broadcast by television and the time spent in front of the TV set have been analyzed, it remains to be asked what the consumer *makes* of these images and during these hours” (de Certeau 1988, 31). Whilst de Certeau is referring to the images that proliferate in consumer society more generally, his comments are equally relevant to the consumption of terrorist spectacle.

To what extent, then, might audiences’ consumption of mainstream media representations of terrorism be implicated in the work of reproducing dominant social formations? In what ways do mainstream media representations work to contain the threat of terrorism, even though they may take the appearance of fuelling the publicity aims of terrorists?

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### 3. Conceptualizing Terrorism

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Like many commentators, Ghassan Hage observes that *terrorism* circulates within the spaces of mainstream Western culture as “the worst possible kind of violence” (Hage 2003, 126; see also Jenkins 2003, 18). In order to understand how terrorism achieves this status, it is necessary to move beyond traditional understandings that constitute terrorism as objectifiable *political violence* towards a more nuanced understanding of terrorism as *symbolic violence* – a form of communication that is embedded in a representational economy, and a practice that implicates audiences in the generation of *affect*.<sup>4</sup> *Terrorism*, that

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<sup>4</sup> All forms of *violence* and *criminality* can be understood as forms of communication (see Bardsley 1987). However, in the case of terrorism, the communicative dimension is explicitly foregrounded.

embodiment of so-called *absolute evil* that we know intimately without necessarily experiencing it as an immediate victim, is produced in and through discourse, “a culture’s determined and determining structures of representation and practice” (Terdiman 1985, 57). It is only in relation to discourse that terrorism can menace, whilst simultaneously assuming the appearance of an objective political truth. Like Giovanna Borradori, I would “deny that terrorism has any stable meaning, agenda, and political content” (Borradori 2003c, xiii). Instead, *terrorism* must be understood as *the discursive effect of a communication process*; a construct that is called into being via the complex negotiations between terrorists, audiences, sites of institutional power and texts. Importantly, then, the mainstream media constitute but one component of a network of relations governing the production of the meanings of *terrorism* in Western liberal democratic societies.

Jacques Derrida has suggested, in relation to the attacks of September 11, 2001, that terrorism presents in the cultural imagination as a “major event.” In making this claim, he draws upon Heidegger’s notion of the event as “a hap-*pen*stance that resists appropriation and understanding” (Borradori 2003b, 149). For Derrida, a major event is:

That which in the undergoing or in the ordeal *at once opens itself up to and re-sists experience* [...] a certain *unappropriability* of what comes or happens [...] The event is first of all *that which* I do not first of all comprehend. Better, the event is first of all *that* I do not comprehend (Derrida in Borradori 2003a, 90).

Derrida argues that an act of terrorism presents with the quality of immediacy, manifesting as momentous, unforeseeable, and, *ultimately unassimilable*. He suggests that because terrorism produces a fundamental incomprehension, this produces attempts to bring the experience of terrorism within the realm of the knowable, to produce the terrorist act in ways that will contain the threat it poses (Derrida in Borradori 2003a, 90). Thus, in the aporia that opens up in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, Western dominant cultural responses to terrorism are characterized by the desire to subordinate the radically unfamiliar to a familiar and established regime of knowing. In this context, I argue, despite noisily rehearsed concerns to the contrary, media coverage operates in favor of dominant cultural interests.

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#### 4. The 1970s Discourse of Terrorism

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In 1981, Irving Louis Horowitz claimed that, within the United States over the course of the 1970s, a shift had taken place in the grammar of official politics that saw terrorism become “front and center in the political stage” (Horowitz 1983, 38-9). Indeed, the 1970s saw the US government’s recognition that terrorism was not the distant problem of foreign nations but one that increasingly threatened close to home. Anthony C. Quanton argues that in this very same

period terrorism “became part of America’s popular political vocabulary” (Quainton 1983, 53), highlighting that terrorism’s arrival in the vernacular occurred as the US government began to perceive itself as the victim of terrorism and mobilized the force of its institutional powers to contain the threat. We may read both Horowitz and Quainton as signaling the production of a new discourse on terrorism. Indeed, the 1970s mark an important moment in the history of the West’s conceptualization of the practice of terrorism because, during this era, the new discipline of *terrorism studies* institutionalized the study of this apparently *novel* and *menacing* political phenomenon. And this same discourse, articulated only slightly differently, structures our present day understandings of the practice of terrorism.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see in a moment, this is the precise moment when the female terrorist first becomes a preoccupation for both counterterrorism and popular culture alike.

In *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry*, Herman and O’Sullivan make a political economy argument about the ways *terrorism* has been mythologized and managed in the Western world, and in particular, in the US since the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> They claim the ways terrorism articulates in the US imagination have been the product of a government public relations agenda that sells the nation’s foreign policy activities to citizens of the US and other Western nations alike. The “‘terrorism’ industry” is a constellation of government bodies, research institutes, and intelligence and security organizations that cross public and private sector institutions, which “manufactures, refines, and packages for distribution information, analysis, and opinion on a topic called ‘terrorism’” (Herman and O’Sullivan 1989, 55). Together, the organizations comprising the “‘terrorism’ industry”:

Establish policy and provide opinions and selected facts about official acts and plans on terrorist activity in speeches, press conferences, press releases, hearings, reports, and interviews. [They also provide] risk analysis, personal and property protection, and training, and a body of terrorism ‘experts’ (Herman and O’Sullivan 1989, 55).

As a set of institutions that collaborate in the production of *scientific* knowledge about terrorism, the terrorism industry is a key site in the production of dominant discourse on terrorism. It produces the object of *terrorism*,

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<sup>5</sup> Many of the key scholars of terrorism studies that contributed to the production of 1970s discourse on terrorism have contributed to recent literature deployed to make sense of the events of September 11, 2001. For example, Laqueur, perhaps the pre-eminent scholar on terrorism, whose 1977 text, *Terrorism*, has been a touchstone for many analyses of terrorism, has recently published *The New Terrorism* (Laqueur 1999); *History of Terrorism* (Laqueur 2001); *No End to War* (Laqueur 2004a); and *Voices of Terror* (Laqueur 2004b). See also Jenkins (2003), and Hoffman (1998). These scholars have also played an important role in advising governments about how to respond to terrorism in the new millennium.

<sup>6</sup> Here I distinguish between the traditional and critical political economy approaches. For an elaboration of the differences (see Golding and Murdock 1991).



governing the way that terrorism is meaningfully talked about and reasoned about within mainstream US culture.

The framework of understanding provided by the terrorism industry works overwhelmingly in consonance with the interests of the state: “The analysts supplied by the private sector of industry, along with those working in government, constitute the ‘experts’ who establish and expound the terms and agenda demanded by the state” (Herman and O’Sullivan 1989, 8; see also Zwerman 1992). The high level of knowledge exchange between institutional powers means the information made available to the public is tightly controlled, narrow in focus, and echoes the interpretations of terrorism expounded by terrorism studies scholarship. In this context, Zwerman argues, “conservative ideologues [...] in the government, the courts, and the mainstream media” determine “what is ‘known’ about recent incidents of political violence and the background and motives of the individuals involved in these actions” (Zwerman 1992, 134).

Under the reign of mass media, the news media have historically been an important source of information about terrorism for public consumption and a crucial site for the reproduction of dominant discourse on terrorism.<sup>7</sup> The news media rely heavily on *expert* opinion in their reporting of terrorist incidents, legitimizing the *official* line on terrorism:

Most materials that appear in the media can be traced to a small number of official agencies [...] which enjoy a very high degree of credibility [...] The news media generally treat this kind of official information as authoritative [...] The media often seem content to serve as the mouthpieces of the law enforcement bureaucracy (Jenkins 2003, 139).

The reproduction of dominant discourse on terrorism via the mass media, however, is not restricted to news media representations. *Terrorism* is a fundamentally intertextual phenomenon. As such, public perceptions of terrorism are formed in audiences’ interactions with a variety of representations of terrorism that circulate in both fictional – films, television, novels – and non-fictional – historical and true crime – texts. These texts reproduce stereotypical understandings of politically motivated violence and thus are equally important in shaping popular understandings of terrorism (Jenkins 2003, 150). Jenkins claims the products of the media-entertainment industries are heavily implicated, like the news media, in the production and circulation of discourse on terrorism, and that the majority of these texts tend to reproduce terrorism in the *safe* terms of dominant discourse, re-inscribing the understandings of terrorism that emanate from the terrorism industry.

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<sup>7</sup> In the era of digital media, due to the rise of interactive media formations, this is arguably changing. Nonetheless, it is plausible that television, radio and newspaper coverage of terrorism still plays an influential role in constructing the public’s perceptions of terrorism. This would constitute a productive line of future inquiry.

Both fictional and non-fictional popular cultural texts typically personify terrorism such that the demonized terrorist operates as shorthand for the demonization of terrorism more generally. Further, the terrorist is constructed quite narrowly and ahistorically as the origin of terrorism. As Jenkins suggests:

The message from popular culture is that the problem [of terrorism] is chiefly *the work of a handful of very evil individuals* and understanding this menace is perhaps less difficult than comprehending the diverse factors (political, social, economic, spiritual) which drive the faceless terrorists of real life. Terrorism can thus be personalized in the form of Carlos, Colonel Qaddafi, or Osama bin Laden (Jenkins 2003, 151, my emphasis).

Jenkins suggests that the personification of terrorism that we see in popular cultural texts simplifies terrorism for public consumption in a way that disavows the situatedness of terrorism, dehistoricizing and depoliticizing it. Jenkins continues:

There is little space in a film or novel for anything more than the sketchiest reflection of the [...] background of a terrorist movement, the issues and grievances driving it. Placing any emphasis on such social or political factors would undermine the simplistic struggle of good versus evil that so often provides the narrative framework of these stories (Jenkins 2003, 151).

Zwerman also notes that the mainstream media frequently describe terrorist perpetrators as “members of ‘fanatic’ left-wing, nationalist, or religious groups” targeting “property or citizens or officials who represent ‘free’, ‘democratic’, nations, as defined by the United States government” (Zwerman 1992, 134). Writing about news media representations of terrorism, Aida Hozic explains that reportage others the terrorist by depriving them of their human face and presenting terrorists out-of-context such that their actions seem “as distant and devoid of reason as a natural catastrophe” (Hozic 1990, 73). The terrorist that seizes the popular imagination is thus highly irrational – a monster devoid of reason and humanity – eliding the political contexts and aspirations motivating terrorism.

Hozic notes that the spectacularization of terrorism within popular culture grants terrorists publicity, and as such, appears to fulfill terrorist aims. She writes, “the whole spectacular machinery gives terrorists an incredible and quite undeserved importance, publicity which they on their own could never dream of acquiring” (Hozic 1990, 73). However, as Hozic herself goes on to point out, this process of spectacularization ultimately works to underline the legitimacy of state power by “present[ing] terrorism in such a way that it start[s] working for and not against society” (Hozic 1990, 78).<sup>8</sup> By focusing attention on the dehumanized and pathologized figure of the terrorist, and dehistoricizing and depoliticizing the terrorist’s actions, mainstream media cover-

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<sup>8</sup> The kidnapping of Aldo Moro by the Italian *Brigate Rosse* in 1978 is one example of the ways this plays out (see Wagner-Pacifici 1986); see also Hof (2013).

age ultimately works to other and delegitimize the terrorist, to contain and annul the threat he – and by association, terrorism – poses.

The ways terrorism circulates within mainstream culture are the legacy, then, of a discourse on terrorism that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and which was profoundly shaped by the institutional knowledge production of terrorism studies. It is precisely this moment in history when the female terrorist first became a preoccupation for governments, law enforcement agencies and popular culture more generally in the Western world. At this historical moment, women began to gain prominence in the so-called terrorist activities of a range of underground organizations operating in the West, such as the *Weathermen* and the *Symbionese Liberation Army* in the US, the *Brigate Rosse* in Italy, and the *Rote Armee Fraktion* in Germany. Thus, the institutions of Western culture began their project of delineating the specific threat of female terrorism, and the female terrorist became the subject of various forms of dominant cultural knowledge production, from counterterrorism, law enforcement, and psychology to the news media, pulp fiction, and film.

If mainstream media representations of terrorism have tended since the 1970s to reproduce the legitimacy of dominant cultural formations, how are they implicated in the cultural work of reproducing the gender relations that underpin social order in the Western world?

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## 5. Deadlier than the Male but not a Proper Terrorist: Representing the Female Terrorist

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The normative understandings of terrorism generated by the *expert* analyses of the “‘terrorism’ industry” and reproduced in popular cultural representations of terrorism construct the standard terrorist as male. As noted above, according to Jenkins, within the popular imagination, terrorism is personified by a range of masculine figures including Carlos the Jackal, Colonel Qaddafi, and Osama bin Laden; that is, the terrorist is almost exclusively a *he*. The use of the pronoun *he* to describe the terrorist constitutes an example of what Elizabeth Grosz describes as the more generalized invisibility of masculinity in Western culture, “the unspoken of the male body” (Grosz, cited in Naffine 1997, 8). As Susanne Greenhalgh notes, the qualities associated with terrorism are those that are generally associated with masculinity (Greenhalgh 1990, 161). In this sense, terrorism signifies not only violent resistance to established régimes of power by small clandestine operatives, but also as the mechanism of a dispute that is fundamentally *between men*. In this kind of way, terrorism, claims Greenhalgh, is constructed as “a man’s game” (Greenhalgh 1990, 161). Given that the terrorist, and by extension, terrorism, signify as masculine, the female terrorist is positioned as a highly ambiguous figure within mainstream media representations.

As I have argued elsewhere, the female terrorist generates an excess of affect in that she is thought to constitute a particularly pernicious threat to social order (Third 2006, 2014). The representational strategies mobilized to contain the female terrorist within the spaces of Western culture are fundamentally paradoxical. Dominant discourse on the female terrorist is characterized by an (often irrational) excess of fear. On the one hand, she is constructed as an acutely violent and potent threat to social order – more radical, more subversive, and more violent than her male counterparts. Female terrorists are routinely constructed as highly motivated, excessively emotional beings with the capacity to commit the most heinous of crimes and show no remorse, and they are reportedly more difficult to rehabilitate.<sup>9</sup> She is constructed, that is, not only as non-feminine but also as more terrorist than terrorist – as *hyper-terrorist*. On the other hand, however, the female terrorist is also written into dominant discourse as fundamentally emotional, incapable of divesting herself of her feminine propensity for passion-inspired irrationality. Like the male terrorist, she is thought to suffer from a form of madness. However, her madness differs from that of the male terrorist in that it is a madness that is coded peculiar to women – a kind of hormonally driven madness that is written into her biology.<sup>10</sup> To construct the female terrorist in these ways operates to render her comprehensible within the range of culturally ascribed typical feminine behaviors. Indeed, within dominant discourse, the female terrorist represents the *logical limit* of these behaviors – she is a manifestation of excessive femininity, she is *hyperfeminine*. She is thus at once hyperterrorist (and therefore non-feminine) *and* hyperfeminine.

We can understand the paradoxical nature of the representation of the female terrorist as an effect of the female terrorist's operation as what Lacan calls the "symptom". As Lynda Hart explains, the symptom is a representational construct that marks the limits of any particular system, in this case the system of gender identity that underpins Western patriarchal order. The symptom is:

Constitutively paradoxical, for it is an element at once necessary to any system's ability to constitute itself as a totality *and* the site that marks the system's instability. The symptom then both manifests and corrupts [...] The symptom is what gives support to being; it is what allows a signifying system to appear consistent, and yet it is always in excess in that system, for it cannot be fully circumscribed within it (Hart 1994, 8).

As symptom, the female terrorist operates to demarcate the category of femininity, enabling its production as a relatively stable and coherent category. Situated as Other to legitimized femininity, the female terrorist marks the limits of the system of gender identity. She is simultaneously *outside*, and necessary to (*within*) the signifying system of gender. However, her exclusion as Other also positions her as a threat to the system's coherence. She is that which

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<sup>9</sup> These attitudes are documented in MacDonald (1991).

<sup>10</sup> For an exposition of this argument, see Georges-Abeyie (1983).

threatens from the borders, reminding the system of its fragility. She represents the system's excess, and thus signifies as a site of instability and potential subversion. Indeed, the female terrorist threatens the possibility of representation itself. Positioned within the representational economy as the "inversion of an inversion" (Young 1996, 29) and in as much as she reminds the system of the contingency of its limits, the female terrorist represents a threat that must be obsessively contained.

As we shall see, this impulse towards containment played out in relation to the kidnapping and *conversion* of Patricia Campbell Hearst by the SLA.

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## 6. Nuclear (Family) Terrorists: Media Representations of the Kidnapping and *Conversion* of Patricia Campbell Hearst

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On the evening of 4 February 1974, the US experienced its first "political kidnapping" (West and Belcher 1975, 25) when the left-wing SLA kidnapped Patricia Campbell Hearst in a violent attack on her home near the University of California's Berkeley campus, beginning an ordeal that would see the US public spellbound by an intense media spectacle that lasted for over two years. In the aftermath of her abduction, Hearst was held captive in a closet for a couple of months, subjected to a rigorous process of *brainwashing*<sup>11</sup> and subsequently declared via a communiqué to the news media that she had decided to join the terrorist group in their fight against "the corporate enem[ies] of the people" (Morgan 2001, 189). Authorities treated this declaration with some degree of disbelief until Hearst was caught on security camera wielding a rifle in a bank robbery executed by SLA members in San Francisco. The event caused sensation, not only because the kidnapping was perceived to attack the heart of the US establishment, but also because, in announcing her new loyalty to the *revolution*, Hearst vehemently denounced her family. Strong mainstream media speculation about the nature of Hearst's involvement with the SLA continued until well after she was arrested and tried for bank robbery in early 1976.

Patricia Hearst was a member of one of the most influential families in San Francisco's Bay Area. Her father, Randolph (Randy) Hearst, was Chief Executive of the media empire inherited from Patricia's millionaire grandfather, William Randolph Hearst, whose life inspired the film, *Citizen Kane* (1941). Patricia's mother, Catherine Hearst, was the daughter of a wealthy family from Atlanta. At the time of Patricia's kidnapping Catherine was a member of the University of California's Board of Regents; a conservative body that imple-

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<sup>11</sup> Brainwashing is the popular term for what is also known as coercive persuasion, thought reform or psychological reprogramming. See for example Lifton (1961).

mented several restrictive policies to curb the revolutionary activities of the student movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result of her position on this committee, Catherine had been the victim of a failed assassination attempt in 1972.

From the moment when Randy and Catherine Hearst presented themselves to the media on the steps of their Hillsborough mansion in San Francisco the morning after Patricia's kidnapping, the Patty Hearst event was constructed by the mainstream news media as a breach against the nuclear family. Even before the SLA's first taped communiqué was broadcast, the media, along with state representatives and the Hearsts themselves, unanimously began describing the 20 year old Patricia in ways that positioned her as a member of a family; sometimes as a child but primarily as a daughter. Catherine appeared dressed in black, assuming the role of a mother grieving for her disappeared daughter, and newspaper reports were filled with stories detailing the kidnapping of *Randolph Hearst's daughter* accompanied by sympathetic images of Randy, head bowed with fatherly concern. Media coverage of the Hearsts' responses in the initial days of the Patty Hearst event thus constructed the abduction in terms of an attack on the Hearst family and, in so doing, their plea for the safety of their daughter tapped public sympathy by appealing to fears and concerns about the vulnerability of families more generally (see Boulton 1975, 82).

As Hearst pointed out via a subsequent communiqué addressed to her parents and sent to Californian media outlets, *everyone* was implicated in this attack: "This is a warning to *everybody* [...] This is a political issue and this is a political action [the SLA] have taken" (Boulton 1975, 94-5, my emphasis). And it seems this breach hit a raw nerve with the wider US public. For example, Jerry Belcher, a journalist for the *San Francisco Examiner*, with a daughter of similar age to Patricia, recalls going home the evening after the kidnapping and removing the nameplate from his family's mailbox: "Silly, probably. But Randy Hearst never thought his daughter would be kidnapped either" (West and Belcher 1975, 35). David Boulton, too, notes that the event tapped the latent fears of every family (Boulton 1975, 9) but had an immediate impact in particular on upper class North American families (Boulton 1975, 82). As the case developed, Hearst came to signify, as Shana Alexander so aptly expresses it in the title of her account of the trial, "anyone's daughter" (Alexander 1979). That is, the mainstream media constructed the event as an attack against *all* families, framing the event in ways that resonated with the structure of social relations underpinning and reproducing dominant cultural order through time.

Situating Hearst's kidnapping in relation to the nuclear family evidences the ways mainstream media coverage of this terrorist event operated to contain the threat of terrorism and reassert the conservative gender relations that underpin dominant cultural order. Luce Irigaray argues that the exchange of women forms the legitimate basis for relations among men, and as such, constitutes the "symbolic system" (Irigaray 1985, 173) that structures both the collective pro-

cess of imagining *society*, and the relations between men, which, under patriarchy, comprise the social (Irigaray 1985, 171). For Irigaray, “women’s bodies – through their use, consumption and circulation – provide for the condition making social life possible” (Irigaray 1985, 171). The exchange of a woman between two men is marked, argues Irigaray, by branding women with the “name-of-the-father,” and this “determines their value in sexual commerce” (Irigaray 1985, 31). Like all commodities, women’s value takes two forms: a use value, which for Irigaray is a reproductive value produced in relation to individual men’s desire in *private*; and an exchange value whose production is fundamentally *social/public*, carried out by, and between, men (Irigaray 1985, 31). Reading the SLA’s kidnapping of Patricia Hearst through Irigaray’s argument, at the level of dominant discourse, it threatened the socially legitimized exchange of women, and the social order it reproduces. In mainstream media accounts of the kidnapping, Hearst was positioned as a commodity in a relationship of exchange between men in a “new form of illegitimate capitalism” (Alexander 1979, 11) that threatened the libidinal economy underpinning patriarchal order.

In the first instance the SLA’s intention – declared via a series of communiqués to the mainstream news media – was to secure the release of their imprisoned colleagues, Joseph Remiro and Russell Little, in exchange for the safe return of Hearst.<sup>12</sup> However, when it became clear that the state would not capitulate to these demands, the SLA resorted to a different strategy. Unbeknownst to the outside world, they held Hearst hostage in a closet for almost two months, subjecting her to a rigorous process of thought reform, or *brainwashing*, as it was commonly termed in mainstream media representations. Eventually, in a communiqué sent to the mainstream media on 3 April 1974, Hearst declared her decision to join the terrorist gang and fight for *the revolution*. For Hearst’s parents, representatives of the state and the Western audiences who were watching, this moment in the Patty Hearst event marked the SLA’s possession of Patricia Hearst. The SLA marked their new possession as their own by renaming her *Tania*, after Che Guevara’s mistress.

The Hearsts and the mainstream media responded to this breach of dominant gender relations with claims that Patricia had been coerced – drugged, hypnotized, tortured or, as Randolph Hearst stridently and publicly asserted, *brainwashed*. In doing so, the mainstream media, and the US establishment more broadly, activated a long Western cultural tradition of essentializing women as emotional, malleable, irrational, and impulsive (See Lloyd 1993; Pateman 1988; and Chesler 1989) in order to render Hearst’s behavior comprehensible and contain the meanings of the SLA’s terrorist breach. Further, it was assumed that Hearst’s decision to join the SLA was the mark of her sexual domination, and from this point on, Hearst became, for those involved, the illegally ac-

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<sup>12</sup> Remiro and Little had been arrested for the murder of the first black Californian Superintendent of Schools, Marcus Foster, on 10 January 1974.

quired *property* of the SLA and her exchange value in legitimized relations between men was undermined. The mainstream media's ongoing speculation that Hearst's *conversion* could be attributed to her sexual domination by members of the SLA reproduced conservative discourses of gender by insisting that, as a woman, Hearst could not have made this decision for political reasons but, rather, must have been *seduced*. That is, the mainstream media, at this stage in the Patty Hearst event, emphasized Hearst's *hyperfemininity*. Thus, the mainstream media spectacle that ensued mobilized the idea that Randolph Hearst, as Patricia Hearst's father, was therefore her rightful *owner*, reasserting the dominance of the nuclear family and the patriarchal structure of gender relations it implies. Such a reassertion of patriarchal gender structures was bolstered by recourse to longstanding cultural ideas about femininity that position women as irrational, prey to their passions and as an ever-present threat to gendered order – or what Rousseau termed “the disorder of women” (Pateman 1994, 108-19) – that requires strategies of containment and control. As one newspaper article described it, Hearst was “a *mentally unstable child*, motivated by misguided political idealism” (Luce 1975, my emphasis). In this kind of way, rather than promoting the terrorists' radical aims, mainstream media coverage of Hearst's kidnapping operated primarily to reinscribe the gendering of dominant cultural order.

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## 7. Feminist Terrorists and Terrorist Feminists: The Cross-Wiring of the Terrorist Threat with Second-Wave Feminism

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If mainstream media representations of the kidnapping worked to contain the political challenge of the SLA by reasserting the value of the nuclear family and patriarchal gender relations, they also played into broader events shaping the US political and cultural landscape in the 1970s, evidencing the ways that mainstream media coverage of terrorism in democratic cultures can work to close down avenues of political contestation in times of perceived national crisis (Giroux 2004, 9).

By all accounts, Hearst enjoyed all the comforts of an upper middle class upbringing and was considered by those around her as an exemplary young woman. However, while still at high school, Hearst fell in love with her young mathematics teacher, Steven Weed. When he accepted a teaching fellowship at the University of California's Berkeley campus, she moved in with him, despite not being married, and studied art history at the radicalized campus – decisions that her parents were less than enthusiastic about. On the request of her parents, shortly before Hearst was kidnapped, Patricia and Steven announced their engagement. In the aftermath of her very public denunciation of her family, and again when Hearst was finally arrested in 1976, Hearst's histo-



ry of minor revolt was disinterred by journalists seeking to locate Hearst's conversion within a familiar narrative about rebellious teenagers and deviant sexual experiences. That is, narratives emerged within the popular domain to explain the hyper-sexualized terrorist *Tania* that had proclaimed her love for her male revolutionary comrade and her despise of bourgeois values and institutions, problematizing the image of Hearst as an exchangeable woman, "a young woman who was living the American dream – born to a happy family, well educated, financially secure, and soon to be married" (Isenberg 2000, 656).

The Hearst family responded to this public scrutiny of Patricia's upbringing by releasing images from their family photo album for publication, attempting, as Nancy Isenberg notes:

To reclaim Patty's image through photographs that normalized her upbringing, publicly displaying snapshots from her seemingly unexceptional life [...] Photographs of this kind capture images of happy families, but most importantly, the dignity of the family is reinforced by Patty's carefully coded sexuality, which is contained through safe and normal images (Isenberg 2000, 651-2).

The publication of the Hearsts' family photos – images that ranged from First Communion to cheerleading shots – operated to locate Hearst within the normative framework of feminine sexuality, reinforcing the image of the integrity of the family,<sup>13</sup> and, as such, dominant order. The photographs were used, literally, to construct the normalcy of Hearst's female psychosexual development in black and white *truth*-speaking terms. The photographs also worked to assert Hearst's pedigree in *proper socialization* within the closely guarded structure of the nuclear family, a point that Randolph Hearst was keen to affirm when the shadowy gun-toting figure of *Tania* made her high-profile debut: "We've had her for twenty years. They've had her 60 days, and I don't believe that she is going to change her philosophy so quickly and permanently" (cited in Isenberg 2000, 655). Here, Randolph Hearst attempts to contain the subversive threat of *Tania* by asserting "his prior claim as the progenitor of her true identity" (Isenberg 2000, 655). The strength and durability of the family is produced discursively through the idea of socialization, which grounds the family within the structure of linear and routine time, granting it a sense of permanence. Nonetheless, as Isenberg suggests, "as a sign and commodity, *Tania threatened the most basic beliefs of socialization*" (Isenberg 2000, 655, my emphasis).

This threat resonated with broader political and cultural threats to the nuclear family that were gripping US culture in the 1970s; namely the threats posed by both the counterculture and second-wave feminism (also known as women's emancipation or women's liberation). As Shana Alexander writes, the SLA's kidnapping of Hearst "was a family event occurring at a time when the family

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<sup>13</sup> The publication of these photographs privileged a narrative about the normalcy of the Hearsts' family life and cut across the class divide that threatened to separate the Hearsts from potentially sympathetic audiences.

as an institution was in disunion and disrepair, when real families withered and shattered, and pseudofamilies thrived. The SLA itself was a pseudofamily” (Alexander 1979, 6). Indeed, by the mid-1970s in the US, the nuclear family was commonly perceived to be in crisis. The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed major transformations in civil society and a fundamental crisis in the power and legitimacy of the state. This overtly political and ideological challenge to liberal hegemony was unleashed by the younger generation, who were determined not just to refashion society, but to dismantle the institutional and ideological matrix that sustained it and to construct an alternative, utopian society in its place.

Riding on the crest of the civil rights movement, the peace movement and the free speech movement, all of which gained considerable momentum on the radicalized university campuses, droves of young people *dropped out* and turned to the counterculture. This was perceived in the mainstream media as a significant political threat; a failure in the socialization of the younger generation. As one newspaper article stated: “We deceive ourselves if we fail to see that the counter-culture thrust is not towards reform, or even social revolution. It is towards terror and nihilism, violence and anarchy. Its impact upon American youth is not receding – it is growing” (Luce 1975). The counterculture promoted a kind of voluntary ghettoization; a policy of non-participation in mainstream society and the creation of an alternative society based on new patterns of living, family and (non)work (the countereconomy) (Clarke et al. 1976, 62). The counterculture’s rejection of bourgeois values and social formations included a critique of the nuclear family as an instrument of hegemonic socialization. It sought to destabilize the hegemonic nuclear family by rejecting monogamy and promoting communal living arrangements.<sup>14</sup>

The sense of the-family-in-crisis was further fuelled by the rising momentum of the women’s liberation movement. As Sara Evans notes, “although women’s liberation was shocking and alienating to many, especially as seen through the lens of a hostile media” (Evans 1979, 221-2), women’s liberation was asserting itself as a formidable force for social change, and impacting the sphere of everyday cultural politics:

By 1975 a new sense of rights and possibilities had led women to assert their belief in equal rights and opportunities for females in greater numbers and with greater intensity than men. Within the context of such massive shifts of opinion, as millions of women readjusted their view of themselves and of the world, many thousands also moved to activism and into the burgeoning women’s movement [...] The issue of sexual equality had become a subject of dinner conversation in households across the nation (Evans 1979, 221-2).

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<sup>14</sup> Many women embraced the counterculture as an opportunity to explore alternative modes of organizing everyday life that encompassed feminist ideals. However, the counterculture did not necessarily translate into more congenial circumstances for women – indeed, often to the contrary.

This was reflected in, and bolstered by, significant legislative gains masterminded by institutional feminists of organizations such as the *National Organization of Women* (NOW) – including the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, followed quickly by the US Supreme Court’s 1973 legalization of abortion (Faludi 1991, 233). US attitudes towards *the fairer sex* began to undergo a paradigm shift, manifesting in, for example, new modes of speech – such as Ms, chairperson, and congressperson – and novel conceptions of advertising’s female target audience. Of the various forms of actions popularized by women’s liberation, radical feminism<sup>15</sup> often opted for “guerrilla theatre” to draw mainstream media attention to their political message, or what the Yippies<sup>16</sup> called the “theatre of the apocalypse” (Raskin 1998, 220). For example, at “the Miss America demonstration of August 1968 [...] young women crowned a live sheep to symbolize the beauty pageant’s objectification of female bodies, and filled a ‘freedom trashcan’ with objects of female torture – girdles, bras, curlers, issues of *Ladies Home Journal*” (Evans 1979, 213-4).<sup>17</sup> Like their terrorist counterparts, then, through their staging of media spectacles, radical feminists seized widespread public attention. As Echols notes, the Miss America Beauty Pageant protest “marked the end of the movement’s obscurity because the protest [...] received extensive press coverage” (Echols 1989, 93). Second-wave feminism had thus begun to stake a sizeable claim on the “mind share” (Klein 2001) of North Americans, paving the way for the mainstreaming of feminist ideas and practices (Gerhard 2001, 152).<sup>18</sup>

Beginning with the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, second-wave feminists of different persuasions critiqued women’s subordination via their confinement within the domestic realm and the nuclear family. For example, Valerie Solanas’ sharp critique of patriarchal society condemned “a ‘society’ based on the family” that “unscrupulously violat[es] the female’s rights, privacy, and sanity (Solanas 2004, 46-8). And Shulamith Firestone

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<sup>15</sup> From the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s, radical feminism was the dominant activist paradigm shaping the women’s liberation movement in the United States. Opposed to the liberal feminist agenda of groups such as the *National Organization of Women* (NOW), which argued for women’s equality *within* the system, radical feminism proposed the overthrow of *the system* (see Echols 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Echols notes: “The Youth International Party (or Yippie) was formed in December, 1967 and functioned primarily as a vehicle for Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, two Movement activists who delighted in offending middle class sensibilities. “Their guerrilla theatre actions were not designed to raise the consciousness of average Americans whose ‘straightness’ put them beyond the pale as much as they were calculated to capture time on network news programs” (Echols 1989, 76).

<sup>17</sup> This is the event that inspired the widespread myth of feminist bra burning, even though feminists did not set any undergarments on fire.

<sup>18</sup> Radical feminist activism in particular had given rise to a significant underground press that helped to distribute the feminist message widely and in a way not possible via mainstream media outlets which, in general, remained hostile to feminist ideas and practices.

advocated undoing “the link between families and reproduction, a link that depended on women” (Gerhard 2001 97). And radical feminists conceived and popularized the practice of *consciousness-raising* (known as CR) as one that could politicize women by educating them in the fundamental oppressions at the heart of personal and ordinary life. Its methodology consisted of women’s discussion groups, designed to facilitate the recasting of women’s experiences of personal problems as “social issues fought together rather than with personal solutions” (Echols 1989, 93). Radical feminists thus took the feminist struggle to the heart of everyday cultural practices, calling for women’s negation of the everyday roles they inhabited, and in particular, the refusal of the gendering of the routines prescribed by the operation of the nuclear family and the domestic.

Second-wave feminism’s growing popularity was greeted in the mainstream media by fierce condemnation – what Susan Faludi describes as a “backlash” (Faludi 1991) – particularly from the New Right, which excoriated women’s liberationists for their attempts to “restructur[e] the traditional family, and [...] downgrad[e] the male or father role in the traditional family” (Paul Weyrich, cited in Faludi 1991, 232). Whilst the New Right protested most loudly, it by no means had a monopoly on anxieties about feminism. As Susan Faludi suggests, “the mainstream would reject [the New Right’s] fevered rhetoric and hellfire imagery, but the heart of their political message survived” (Faludi 1991, 230) in mainstream media representations.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, the threat of second-wave feminism began to be discursively crosswired with the threat of “home-grown terrorism” (Zwerman 1992, 140) in the US. As noted above, the female terrorist becomes a preoccupation within the specific criminological field of terrorism studies, and within dominant culture more generally, at the precise moment when home-grown terrorism – terrorism carried out by US citizens on US soil – begins to be perceived as a threat to dominant order. This moment is simultaneous with the rise in strength and consolidation of women’s liberation in the US. In the period under question, proponents of terrorism studies repeatedly draw attention to the coincidence of the rise of second-wave feminism and a seemingly dramatic increase in numbers of women participating in terrorism.<sup>20</sup> In so doing, they establish an explicit connection between the rise of feminist politics and the occurrence of

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<sup>19</sup> A notable example of this in the cultural sphere was the release of the 1975 film, *Stepford Wives*, directed by Bryan Forbes (London: Cinema Club, 1997, VHS video). This film can be read as a backlash against the crisis in the gender relations underpinning the nuclear family that was brought on by the consolidation of feminism in the mid-1970s. See Stratton (1996, 224).

<sup>20</sup> This concern about women’s involvement in terrorism unfolded against the backdrop of a broader criminological concern with what was perceived as a significant rise in women’s perpetration of, and prosecution for, ‘violent crimes.’ Whether or not prosecutions of women committing violent and/or terrorist crimes increased in the 1970s is debatable. See Simon and Sharma (1979, 392).

terrorism in the US. Indeed, a number of these so-called experts construct a commitment to feminism, however loosely defined, as a necessary precondition for women's participation in *revolutionary terrorism*.

Counterterrorist scholar, H. H. A. Cooper's 1979 description illustrates this point:

The female terrorist has not been content just to praise the Lord and pass the ammunition; she has been, as often as not, the finger on the trigger [...] This new woman revolutionary is no Madame Defarge patiently, if ghoulishly, knitting beside the guillotine while waiting for heads to roll. The new breed of female terrorist not only must have its hands firmly on the lever but must be instrumental in the capture of the victim and in the process of judgment, as well as in dragging the unfortunate death instrument (Cooper 1979, 151).

Discernible here is a preoccupation with the shift in the balance of gendered power relations produced by the struggle for women's liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Cooper alludes to the influence of feminist ideals of equality and emancipation on women's roles in the left-wing terrorist organizations of the era. The assumption is that the actions of female terrorists are informed by feminist ways of being.

Such assertions also underpin the logic of popular cultural representations of female terrorism of the era.<sup>21</sup> Eileen MacDonald observes that mass media representations of female terrorists invariably ask: "How could a woman do this?" The answer [...] seemed to be that they were all [...] feminists gone mad" (MacDonald 1991, 5). Terrorism, so the popular mythology goes, is the refuge of women with feminist informed aspirations for self-determination, and terrorist organizations provide a commodious environment for the avid – or perhaps more precisely, the extreme – feminist. The female terrorist thus represents "one of the excesses of women's lib" (German Interior Ministry Official, cited in MacDonald 1991, 6) – the unsettling threat of feminism.

Indeed, evidencing the discursive interdependencies of the mainstream media and the "terrorism' industry", the SLA was commonly constructed in the mainstream media as a feminist revolutionary terrorist organization. Although ostensibly led by a black man (Cinque), at the time of Hearst's kidnapping, the

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<sup>21</sup> Feminists have sometimes articulated similar ideas about the connections between feminism and female terrorism. Whilst feminist readings don't go as far to suggest that feminism might have been the direct cause of female terrorism, the idea that women's participation in terrorism is linked to the spirit of female emancipation is a subtext of a number of feminist analyses. See, for example, Mullaney (1983, 55). Feminist commentaries express an ambivalence towards the figure of the female terrorist. She has sometimes been celebrated by feminists. For example, Valerie Solanas was considered an inspiration by many radical feminists in the late 1960s (see Third 2014). At other points in history feminists have been reluctant to validate the female terrorist's violent methods, and have been keen to assert female terrorists as victims (as opposed to perpetrators) of patriarchal forms of violence (See Morgan 1979).

SLA comprised predominantly female cadres.<sup>22</sup> Media coverage frequently asserted that “women are the dominant force, the leadership of the Symbionese Liberation Army” (Reporter, Marilyn Baker as cited in Barry 1984, 155) and that they are “a regiment of women – two of whom [a]re known to be lovers – using Cinque as a figurehead to carry out their plans” (Davidson 1974). Whilst the implementation of feminism within the everyday life of this terrorist *family* appears to have been, at best, limited (see Hearst 1982), the women of the SLA – among them two self-identified lesbians – publicly constructed their commitment to revolutionary terrorism as a form of feminist revolution, and their actions were heavily informed by radical feminist theorizations and tactical warfare (Isenberg 2000, 642). For example, the SLA, like many other radical groups of the era, operated on principles of *free love* and open sexual relations as a deliberate strategy aimed at destabilizing the structure of the bourgeois family. Thus, the SLA’s appropriation of Hearst both resonated with fears about the stability of the nuclear family that are a permanent feature of modernity, and foregrounded the threat to the family implicit in second-wave feminism.

If Hearst’s abduction was interpreted in the mainstream media as a feminist attack, then, even more so, was the heiress’ transformation into *Tania*. Just two days after her debut performance in the Hibernia National Bank robbery, in the same stunning audiotape communiqué that denounced her family and declared her allegiance to the SLA, *Tania* also announced her feminist awakening. Insisting that speculation that she had been brainwashed was “ridiculous to the point of being beyond belief” (transcript of audiotape cited in Linder, 2007), she lashed out at the men associated with her former identity and, in particular, her ex-fiancée. As a *New York Times* article noted, gesturing the ways the Patty Hearst event was crosswired with the rising challenge to dominant culture posed by second-wave feminism:

In her good-by [sic] tape, Patty said she had discovered a new kind of love. She told Steven Weed: ‘I’ve changed, grown. I’ve become conscious and can never go back to the life we led.’ (In how many homes across the country recently has a woman delivered that message?) (Davidson 1974).

*Tania* publicly proclaimed (radical) feminist solidarity via the mainstream media until she underwent pre-trial psychological testing;<sup>23</sup> for example, fol-

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<sup>22</sup> The SLA had formed out of a black inmate visitation scheme known as *Venceremos* run by left-wing radical activists at California’s Vacaville Prison in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The only black member of the SLA, Donald DeFreeze (Cinque) became its titular leader after his escape from prison in March 1973. In addition to Cinque, the SLA comprised two men and, when ‘Tania’ joined them, five women.

<sup>23</sup> On the impact of Hearst’s pre-trial psychological testing, antipsychiatrist, Thomas Szasz notes: “Between the time of her arrest, when she identified herself as an *urban guerrilla*, and her appearance in court as a demure and dutiful daughter, Patty Hearst was no doubt influenced by her new captors and associates: no one calls this *brainwashing*” (Szasz 1976, 11).

lowing her arrest in 1975, images of Hearst giving “her clenched fist ‘loyalty’ salute to what she calls ‘revolutionary feminism’” (Reston 1975) were splashed across the print media. As such, to the outside world, *Tania* sounded more and more like the product of an intensive experience of feminist consciousness-raising.<sup>24</sup> In light of her repeated claims to have become a *revolutionary feminist*, speculation about Hearst’s brainwashing was revived, and assumed new dimensions. In the context of radical feminism’s gathering momentum, dependent as it was in no small part upon the significant successes of feminist consciousness-raising, for mainstream media audiences, Hearst’s problem, it seemed, was that she had succumbed to a process of *feminist* brainwashing. Hearst’s was thus a dual betrayal – she had defected to a terrorist group but, worse, to a *feminist* terrorist group; *a terrorist family in the control of feminist women*. As such, the mainstream media’s coverage of the Patty Hearst event reproduced the dominant cultural idea that female terrorists are “feminists gone mad” (MacDonald 1991, 5).

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## 8. Conclusion

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Patty Hearst was kidnapped in 1974, just as the feminist challenge began to consolidate and translate into concrete changes in the material conditions of women’s lives across the US. By the time Hearst was tried in 1976, the success of feminist legal and institutional reform, along with the significant, well-documented and highly publicised changes in cultural attitudes towards women, had begun to be met by the forces of a fervent and moralistic anti-feminist backlash. Second-wave feminism was constituted as a dire threat to the political, economic, and cultural survival of the US. In this context, the Patty Hearst event presented a timely opportunity for feminism’s adversaries to mount their own campaign for the reassertion of the primacy of the nuclear family and, by extension, social order, and to thwart the growing momentum of the women’s movement.

Thus, the Patty Hearst event – in which a daughter of the dominant class became a daughter of the revolution – was framed by mainstream media coverage as an assault on US social and cultural order emanating from, and resonating with, the crisis in the nuclear family. It constituted a site where competing definitions of the family and anxieties about the failure of the socialization of the younger generation played out. At a time when *pseudofamilies* seemed as if they were growing in number and might eventually outweigh the morally sanctioned bourgeois institution of the nuclear family – when radical feminists,

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<sup>24</sup> Indeed, during her trial, recalling the mechanized women of *Stepford Wives*, one male juror commented, “we don’t really know what she’s like, whether we were looking at a live girl or a robot” (as cited in Isenberg 2000, 664). *Tania*, it seemed, was a feminist automaton and not, as she might seem, a *real girl*.

alongside organizations like the SLA, the Manson gang (see Bugliosi and Gentry 1975), and Jim Jones' family of the People's Temple were actively challenging the validity of the nuclear family – mainstream media coverage of the Patty Hearst event performed the cultural work of reproducing dominant social formations. It operated to recuperate the specific threat posed to dominant order by *Tania* and the SLA, but also worked to discursively contain the threat to the gender relations underpinning social order in the US that was being posed by second-wave feminism. In this way, rather than a mechanism for the contagion of terrorism, mainstream media coverage of this event operated overwhelmingly in favor of dominant cultural (patriarchal) interests.

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