Searching for the human(ness): resisting detachment in the specters of IR and the shadows of the drone

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Searching for the Human(ness): Resisting Detachment in the Specters of IR and the Shadows of the Drone

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in International Studies

by

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April 28, 2017
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Acknowledgements

I am so thankful for my wonderful advisers, Professor Himadeep Muppidi and Professor Jamie Kelly, who have both generously given me so much meaningful advice, support, and guidance throughout this process. Thank you to the International Studies department and to Tim Koechlin for giving me the opportunity to write this thesis and for all of your encouragement. I am also very grateful for my family: Mom, Dad, Tara, Michael, Grandma and Grandpa (and all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins)- thank you for always being so loving, supportive, and kind-hearted (and for putting up with me for all these years). To Grammy and Poppa, I love you and I hope I am making you proud wherever you are. Thank you to all of my fantastic friends, housemates, classmates, professors, co-workers, and loved ones for all of your support, kindness, compassion, and love. Finally, to those who will never read this writing, but who live with this violence every day: I am thinking of and praying for you.
Introduction:

When thinking about violence, death, loss, and grief in the world through the lens of International Relations, it is necessary to question and challenge the mainstream modes of relating with others. It is imperative to rethink why certain bodies matter and others do not; why some ways of thinking are obvious and others become peripheral; why some deaths count and others are not counted. If the world(s) in which we inhabit has become one where ‘out of sight, out of mind’ dominates, what might this mean for those whose bodies, voices, experiences, and lives have become invisible? In an attempt to move toward an ethical and thoughtful reconsidering, I wish to say that there are, however, those of us who do mind this selective political violence.

It is necessary to engage with the political and philosophical implications that are implicit in this type of killing in the world when thinking about drone violence. Through this exploration of the discourse and politics surrounding drone strikes, I am attempting to disrupt the mainstream language surrounding drone violence. The emergence of highly technological and mechanized weaponry has aided the ‘modern state’s’ project of killing. This detached, dehumanized, and remote form of violence is reflected in the international response, selective presence in the western news and media, and the language used by those who defend (as well as those who criticize) drone strikes. In this paper, I will disturb the normalization of this type of violence and this way of thinking of others in the ‘international sphere.’ Throughout my thesis, rather than perpetuating the distant, detached, and impersonal nature of the discourse surrounding drone violence, I wish to offer a more thoughtful and intimate engagement with this form of killing in order to find the humanness that has all too often been disavowed.
When considering the responses to this type of violence, the image of Omran Daqneesh comes to mind. Omran, a five year-old boy from Syria, has gained international attention after a Russian airstrike in Aleppo destroyed his building in 2016. This photo and the video of Omran’s tiny, dust-encrusted body sitting on a (far too big) orange ambulance chair, with his small legs dangling over the edge, caught the interest of thousands of people, “jarring even a public numbed to disaster.” After seeing this image, it made me wonder what it was about this photo that brought me to tears. Why did my heart catch for Omran? Perhaps it was his disheveled haircut or his half-bloodied face. Or maybe it was his big, wandering, saucer eyes, which searched desperately for something familiar to fix onto. There was something about this image that spoke directly to that part of one’s soul that could feel the pain of another person. Omran’s eyes pleaded with us, staring directly into our deepest parts. What is it about this photo that made Omran a symbol for Syria’s suffering? Did he ask for this? Does he know what effect his misery has on those across the world, who are now paying attention? Does he know that he was circulating social media and international news, appealing to a collective care for about a month?

In the response from the mainstream news and media, Omran has become a ‘symbol’ for the suffering in Syria and for children who have become victims of violence in war. The outrage, empathy, and compassion that have been performed by those who have encountered this photograph are apparent. Later in this thesis, I will explore the ways in which Omran has become

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a ‘perfect victim’ through the documentation of photography, locating him as a silent ‘object-victim.’ I will also return to the problematics of empathy in this response. This position in which Omran finds himself, serves to feed into neocolonial rescue narratives and to perpetuate the location of the West as the savior figure. I will return to this photo later in this piece and will consider what exists within this image, while wondering what (and who) might be missing.

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“A Confession
Samah Sabawi

I stand between my shame and relief
I breathe...
The missiles missed this time
Truth is, they didn’t really miss
Someone’s house is destroyed
but not the house I know so well
Someone’s family is grieving
but not the one whose name I carry
I linger...
Between my shame and relief
I breathe...
I... breathe...
I tell myself
‘this flesh, torn and scattered,
is not flesh I have ever embraced.’
I soothe myself,
‘Nor are these small lifeless hands
the ones with I crayon I’ve traced.
I... breathe...
This time... the missiles missed
those whose names are engraved on my lips

This time
they didn’t stop
those hearts beating in my chest
They live...
I breathe...
...
And when it’s over
And while a less fortunate family weeps
I stand between shame and relief
I breathe...
I breathe...
Thank God my loved ones were spared
This time.”

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As Achille Mbembe argues in his essay entitled *Necropolitics*, biopower emerges in sovereign states through the power to determine who should live and who must die. Mbembe uses Foucault’s concepts of the state of exception and emergency as the basis upon which to distinguish the right to kill. For those who live at the other end of drone violence, the state of exception has become normalized and has perpetuated the violence of humans as objects. Mbembe also argues that “the perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security” is characteristic of modernity itself (Mbembe 18). This is facilitated by the hyper-mechanized weaponry of airstrikes. The location of the enemy elsewhere (even as an Other within the Self) has become an element particular to the sovereignty of the modern West. In other words, “sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who

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5 Throughout this thesis, when referring to the ‘modern West,’ I choose to define it as the secular, capitalist, liberal, progressive, hegemonic, rational, sovereign, objective, patriarchal, militaristic, strategic, and at times colonialist nature of the United States and those who locate themselves within this ‘modern West.’ I realize that there may be multiple Wests and multiple modernities and that the various and plural ways of being in the world (which may not
does not, who is disposable and who is not” (Mbembe 27). This conceptualization of sovereignty, modern state power, and biopolitics is reflected in the violence of the drone, as the modern, western hegemonies that deploy airstrikes are in control of determining which bodies are ‘collateral’ and which are not. These concepts and theories are useful in tracing a genealogy of the deployment and the politics of drone violence.

In my first part, I will explore the ways in which violence and empathy are interrelated. I will look into the reasons why certain images enter into the modern, western political consciousness and a particular type of empathy, while others may not. Here, I will return to the image of Omran Daqneesh. I am also interested in the reasons for which this particular image gained so much attention in the media and in the news, while other victims of drone strikes remain invisible to the modern, western imaginary. I will trace the way in which this shocking image enters into this political imaginary and will question why other images might not. However, I will also attempt to engage with a deeper critique of a participation in a politics of empathy. In addressing the appeals, as well as the limitations and shortcomings of this type of empathy, I will also call forth possibilities for different types of compassion, which may not be located within the modern West. In departing from the form of empathy of the European Enlightenment and moving toward other ways of thinking about compassion and relating with others, I wish to offer an entry point into another mode of thinking about empathy, which may be useful in an engagement with violence in the international realm.

In the second part of this thesis, I will engage with the various politics of language that are invoked in the discourse of those who defend drone strikes as well as those who criticize them. In this section, I am hoping to challenge the ways in which the supposed ‘precision,’ ‘efficiency,’ and ‘accuracy’ of drone violence are reflected in the abstract, remote, detached, and distant form adhered to by these categories of ‘modern’ or ‘western’) within the geographic West may depart from these aspects of what I define as the ‘modern West.’ In this way, I define the ‘modern West’ more in terms of a theoretical and conceptual space, which cohabitates with other ways of living and thinking about the world. I believe these particularities of the ‘modern West’ become necessary in the deployment of drone strikes and a certain way of relating with others.
of language spoken by “defense intellectuals.” This type of language treats certain lives as peripheral or collateral, which normalizes the violence and renders the destruction of these lives as thinkable, due to the economistic language of humans-as-numbers. This ‘sanitized’ language, which neglects possibilities of invoking the humanness of victims, survivors, family members, and loved ones of those at the other end of drone violence, mirrors the fictitious notion of drones as precise and efficient weapons that reduce loss of life. However, in addition to criticisms of the language used by drone strike defenders, I am also interested in rethinking the terminologies and lacking languages used by certain humanitarian organizations and those who condemn these drone strikes. In this section, I engage with questions of the ways in which moral objections to drone violence become conflated with concerns related to its legality. I am also interested in the ways in which certain lives are reduced to numbers, even within reports that appear to mourn the loss of these lives. In this section, I re-conceptualize the modes of thinking about drone violence and the often times problematic language used in various contexts.

After tracing the ways in which language reflects certain types of this violence, in my third part, I will attempt to complicate the so-called modern, western political imaginary, using Judith Butler’s concepts of “First Worldism” and vulnerability (Butler 8). I challenge the notion that drones are somehow morally superior in their killing than other types of violence. I will look into other forms of violence here, such as suicide bombings, which are viewed as ‘horrific,’ ‘barbaric,’ and showing no regard for human life. By using this comparison, the concept of drone violence as ‘clean’ or ‘sanitized’ killing will be questioned. Here, I will look into the ways in which suicide bombings are seen in the modern West in such a horrific way. In contrasting seemingly opposite forms of violence (one extremely distant and detached, and the other extremely intimate), I wish to contest the support for one and the negation of the other. In this

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way, I will consider the figure of the suicide bomber and will rethink the ways in which they are viewed in the modern West. I will also reconsider the ways in which female suicide bombers are spoken of, especially within western, white feminism. The way of thinking that the West perpetuates by locating suicide bombings in its own past reflects the idea of the modern, progressive, linear timeline that western hegemony inflicts upon the subaltern. This way of thinking should be challenged and rethought.

In the fourth part of this thesis (and throughout), I will use interviews, poetry, music, and art created by those who live at the other end of drone violence. Through these forms, I will attempt to center this section and my thesis on the ways in which drone violence has pervaded the everyday lives of these ordinary people. Rather than perpetuating the violent and economistic reduction of humans to numbers, these artistic and poetic expressions will not only center the voices of those at the other end of drone violence, but will also contribute to the treatment of these people as full humans. Before engaging with the poetic and artistic forms of resistance, I will use interviews and testimonials from people who have been affected by a U.S. drone strike on March 17, 2011 on a community meeting in North Waziristan, Pakistan. Through these first hand accounts and stories, I will complicate the supposed isolated singularity of these atrocity events by expanding the violence temporally, to demonstrate its pervasiveness into the beforehand, during, and aftermath of airstrikes. The nature of this highly technologized and mechanized form of killing haunts those at the other end after its destruction and before it is deployed. Through this rethinking of the distinctiveness of drone strikes, the permeation of drones into the everyday lives of ordinary people is emphasized. Along these lines, I will use the poetry, art, and music that those at the other end of drone violence create, in order to show the ways in which this form of violence pervades into so many parts of their lives. In looking at these types of expression, I will disrupt the data-centered, empirical, economistic way of thinking about humans-as-numbers, and instead will try to think of this type of evidence as an expression
of the human that may not be completely ‘rational,’ yet is tremendously meaningful. I wish to complicate the type of ‘rationality’ that hard-nosed, strategy-centered drone strike defenders claim to embody, by exposing their irrationality and questioning whether this rationality should have a place in a thoughtful and ethical engagement with international relations and the world. I choose to invoke these artistic forms through interruptions throughout my thesis in addition to centering the last section around them. This last section will act as a culmination of the assemblages of elements surrounding drone strikes, outlined throughout the other parts of my thesis, while acknowledging the humanness of those at the other end.
Part I: Navigating Empathy and Violence in International Relations

The Role of ‘Shock-Pictures’ and Images of Object-Victims:

In the international response to drone strikes, it is interesting to consider what draws people in. What is it that makes a person feel empathy for something that has been done to another human being? Why do certain images of pain and suffering speak to one’s emotions and invoke a reaction, while others may not? What purpose do these images serve? In thinking about the media’s response to certain remote-controlled violences, I return to the image of Omran. It is necessary to wonder what type of empathy this image elicits and what the function of this compassion means for those at the other end of violence. The impact and role that ‘shock images’ such as Omran’s have in the world is unquestionable. For the viewer, it serves the purpose of invoking a certain type of care and empathy. What does this empathy mean in international relations? When is it invoked and when does it expire, leaving our consciousness with dust in its wake? As images such as Omran’s serve to disturb the faceless violence that airstrikes claim to deploy, they also play an important role in humanitarian responses to certain types of violence. Those who justify drone strikes claim that this type of violence is detached, removed, and clean, using sanitized language (as I will discuss in Part II). Their discourse professes a justification for this distant form of violence by stating its precision and goal of targeting ‘suspicious activities,’ whose actions validate ‘collateral damage.’ However, as the spectator has identified in Omran’s image, this collateral damage seems to have a face.

In the abstraction of Omran as a symbol of all of Syria’s suffering, and of the pain of drone strike victims, it is important to think about which images are shown to the modern West and which are rendered invisible. It is essential to return to the question of what it is about the figure of Omran that summons such a strong international humanitarian response. Here, it is necessary to think of the role that an understood innocence plays in an invocation of empathy. As
Miriam Ticktin describes in her essay, *The Problem with Humanitarian Borders,* humanitarianism relies on the figure of the perfect victim as its reference point in establishing categories and degrees of innocence. “Humanitarianism sets up a distinction between innocent and guilty, leaving no space for the experiences of life. The quintessential humanitarian victims bear no responsibility for their suffering. Their innocence is what qualifies them for humanitarian compassion. As innocents, they are pure, without guile, and without intent – they are seemingly outside politics...” (Ticktin). It is interesting to think about what a humanitarianism that relies on innocence and vulnerability might mean for international politics.

As Ticktin notes, the figure of the perfect victim and those who are viewed as ‘innocent’ rely on a binary of opposites, invoking the other figure of the non-innocent, or the guilty. In the case of drone strikes, those who are seen as guilty, or at least deserving of violence, are neglected and made invisible. It is interesting to wonder which violences have a face and which are rendered faceless. Because Omran is a child, he is immediately and automatically viewed as an innocent victim. However, at what point will he outgrow this innocence? When does it expire? In general, children are the embodiment of the perfect victim. However, what is it that makes us unable to see the same innocence that we see in Omran, in other victims of drone strikes? Why are young adult men in North Waziristan, Pakistan, labeled “combatants,” if they are of a particular age, and are seen as guilty until proven innocent (“posthumously”) after violence has already been done? What is it that limits our empathy in this way, prohibiting our compassion and care from being applied and extended to these young men? Why is their pain and suffering erased?

It is interesting to think about the function of Omran’s innocence within humanitarianism. The care, compassion, and empathy activated by humanitarianism are rendered outside of the

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9 Ibid.
realm of politics, as they are located within spaces of emergency. This type of care is fleeting and only relies on a call to action that would actually perpetuate the violent structures already in place in the geopolitical sphere. By depoliticizing the innocent, perfect victim, the humanitarian industrial complex maintains its position of offering a limited care and empathy only within certain conditions and specific circumstances. The restriction of care, only applied and deployed within certain constraints, contributes to a critique of humanitarianism.

One of these conditions relies on the act of locating the oppression and violence in a temporal or spatial elsewhere. In this case, Omran was a victim of a Russian airstrike. In this way, because the violence was done by a country other than the United States, it allows the U.S., as well as humanitarian organizations within the U.S., to freely condemn this violent action. Locating oppression elsewhere is a key component of the foreign policies of the United States, as I will describe in Part III. Positing the blame on powers other than the U.S. makes it easier for those who condemn violence to feel less complicit. ‘Shock pictures,’ such as Omran’s, have a function of creating feelings of empathy and compassion amongst those who view them. However, it is worth questioning the implications of a politics of care, compassion, and empathy.

As Susan Sontag describes in her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* images and specifically “shock-pictures” of mangled bodies and victims serve the purpose of making the unreal more real (Sontag 9). She explains how “Walter Lippman wrote in 1922: ‘Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real’” (Sontag 22). Photography plays the role of documenting atrocities and rendering violence visible to the imaginations of those who are “only nominally concerned about some nasty war taking place in another country. The photographs are a means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (Sontag 9). If this is the case, then it is imperative to think about why it is that

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seeing is believing. Why are we unable to feel compassion unless we see it for our own eyes? What does this say about the need for evidential documentation when responding to international violence? Why are images necessary in the invocation of empathy?

However, even if we were to extend our empathies further than their current limitations allow in our world(s) so that it is more inclusive, what might this mean for our political engagement? What would a politics of empathy mean for us? It is interesting to ponder whether or not it is something that we truly wish to strive for when responding to violence in the world. Empathy is undoubtedly problematic due to its inherent limitations. When we empathize, it is usually short-lived, easily forgotten, and skewed toward those who are obviously ‘innocent.’ It is also usually self-referential, spoken in the language of ‘he could have been my son or brother’ or ‘what if this had happened to me or one of my loved ones?’ Why must empathy always evoke the Self? Perhaps this speaks to the self-interested nature of the way in which we relate to other humans in the modern West. This type of politics, a politics of empathy, has serious shortcomings. Perhaps empathy may not actually be what we are aiming for in an ethical and thoughtful engagement with violence in international relations.

Although the care, compassion, and empathy invoked in the international response to Omran’s photograph is a welcome change from the dominant self-interested audience in the modern West, it is necessary to question what role these images, and the feelings that arise from them, play. Why must these people only have a presence in the international realm as victims and objects, understood to be asking for help, care, and compassion? Why do these bodies “appear only as object-victims to be saved but not as speaking subjects? Why do they only confirm, affirm the international but never speak to it?” (Kumarakulasingam 63). In other words, why is it that certain bodies are only legible to modern, western humanitarianism as victims, not as full humans? What does this mean for our conception of the international and the violence and pain

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that is suffered through it? How might we think about an alternative way of relating with other humans and other bodies without perpetuating the violent structures and systems already in place within western humanitarianism? Perhaps the first step in imagining an alternative political way of thinking might be to recognize the ways in which shock pictures and the objectification and reduction of certain bodies into something other than humans, function in our world.

**Alternative Imaginations of Empathy:**

What ways of thinking about the world would allow for those who live at the other end of drone violence, who are not recognized in the dominant international sphere as the perfect victim, to be seen as fully human? What new international order would need to be in place for Omran’s innocence to be extended, for the object-victim to have a voice, rather than just a body, and for a politics of thoughtful selflessness to take the forefront, rather than self-centered sympathy? Could this alternative politics ever be thinkable? Before imagining a new world order, it is necessary to work through various ways of thinking about the human that exist in the here and now, but have perhaps been relegated to the periphery. It may be impossible to imagine a utopian future due to the power dynamics inherent in the geopolitical sphere. As soon as one system of oppression is dispelled, it is immediately replaced by another violent form. Perhaps it is a failure of imagination that limits these dreams of a better future. However, it is important to rethink the urge to do so. It is necessary to question the forms of empathy, compassion, sympathy, and care that are deployed through humanitarianism and human rights projects; as these forms are products of the ‘universal’ Reason that is rooted in European Enlightenment thought. In this way, a more complex understanding of the various modes of thinking about the human and how people relate to one another may be useful.

It is necessary to invoke issues of power, colonialism, marginalization, and oppression that are central to thinking about different ways of defining and relating to the concept of empathy. “When empathy is understood as the experience of ‘co-feeling’, it is suggested, this not
only invites problematic appropriations or projections on the part of ‘privileged’ subjects, it also risks obscuring their complicity in wider relations of power in which marginalisation, oppression and suffering occur” (Pedwell 6). In this postcolonial rethinking of the concept of empathy, Pedwell questions the modern European notion of co-feeling. In her brilliant exploration of the politics of memory and memorials, Katherine Hite mentions a certain way of thinking about empathy. “Pity, the ‘feeling sorry for’ that characterizes sympathy, may foreclose our reach toward empathy, the more profound ‘feeling with’ another’s pain” (Hite 57).

However, perhaps it is not enough to only question conceptions of pity and sympathy, advocating for an engagement with empathy, or ‘feeling with,’ because even that is entrenched in power dynamics, colonial histories, and feigned care. In reality, “there exist many varied and overlapping cultural paradigms of emotion – from the ancient Sanskrit topologies of ‘Rasa and Bhava’ to Indigenous Canadian theories of ecological affects” (Pedwell 6). Pedwell goes on to explore other ways of thinking about emotion and affect in the world, which diverge from European empathy, and open up entry points into alternative modes of thinking about affect and its movement throughout the geopolitical sphere.

In thinking about empathy and its various iterations throughout non-dominant, subaltern forms of thought, it is necessary to negate the location of this type of thinking or conceptualizing in the temporal past. Rather than speaking of “Sanskrit topologies of ‘Rasa and Bhava’” as “ancient,” as Pedwell does, it is important to instead view these modes of thinking as useful ways of relating with empathy without perpetuating the destructive, colonial, and simplistic relationship with forms of knowledge. This location of certain ways of knowing and being in the world as temporally prior is destructive and violent. However, it is important to acknowledge and think about other relationships with concepts such as empathy, compassion, sympathy, and care.

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that may not subscribe to the modern, western form of thought, as the modes of knowledge from Adam Smith and David Hume are embedded in power dynamics and colonial histories.

In order to challenge the forms of empathy that have been deemed ‘universal’ within the modern, western political thought, it is necessary to question how and why this form of thinking has become so universal and seemingly obvious. “The human rights/humanitarian project’s universalizability is predicated upon it being based on reason. In the age of reason, every individual has certain inalienable rights. This truth is universal and hence has to be and can be universalized. Yet the humanitarian turn to affect suggests that reason is not, or cannot be, devoid of affect. Isn’t this why care, compassion, guilt, and apathy are at the forefront of advocacy rather than complexity and context?” (Kumarakulasingam 65-66)\textsuperscript{15}. It is characteristic of the reasonable western figure to universalize suffering in a way such that its recognition is seen as obvious in the collective horror it invokes. However, what would it mean to think about suffering and empathy in ways that do not subscribe to the obvious and universal nature of the European Enlightenment logic of Reason? It is important to complicate the modern, western notion of empathy in order to acknowledge the layers of power and colonialism in which it is entrenched.

To do this type of work, it is necessary to not only think about alternative ways of relating with concepts such as empathy, compassion, sympathy, and care; but also to refrain from translating these subaltern concepts into modern, western, or ‘rational’ ways of thinking. In fact, this may mean that these ideas might not be completely understandable to the modern, western subject. However, this is welcomed. Perhaps it is better to search for “empathies that open up rather than resolve, that mutate rather than assimilate, and that invent rather than transcribe” (Pedwell 27). The untranslatability of some concepts may serve to unsettle the modern, western audience; thus bringing to the surface its discomfort with the lack of universality and

smoothness. “Bennett is seeking ‘empathy not grounded in affinity (feeling for another insofar as we can imagine being that other) but on a feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible’” (Hite 57). This empathic unsettlement allows for an understanding of difference that accepts the inaccessibility and perhaps unattainability of various forms of empathy. “For Gayatri Spivak, for example, translation ‘is the most intimate act of reading’, and a translation practice that does not simply reproduce neo-colonial paradigms requires that the translator be motivated by ‘love’ – not as a romantic ideal, but rather as a ‘surrender to the text’” (Pedwell 21). Perhaps this love is necessary in a re-conceptualization and reconsideration of understood notions of modern, western ideas of empathy. However, it is necessary to abstain from thinking of these other forms of feeling as a lack, as this would contribute to an additional violence and imposition of one ‘superior’ form of empathy. It is also important to try not to universalize these alternative ways of relating with the world, but rather to attempt to engage in an intimate translation of these emotions and affects through love.

In order to explore the various modes of ‘nonwestern’ or ‘non-modern’ empathy, it is necessary to think through the European Enlightenment form of sympathy, as described by Smith and Hume. In his consideration of various forms of sympathy in Provincializing Europe, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, “the capacity to notice and document suffering (even if it be one’s own suffering) from the position of a generalized and necessarily disembodied observer is what marks the beginnings of the modern self” (Chakrabarty 119)\(^\text{16}\). In this way of thinking, the ability to feel sympathy for another is inherent in human nature, not specific to one or a few. Another particularity of the sympathy of the modern subject relies on a certain self-recognition of the Self in the Other. As Adam Smith wrote, “we sometimes feel for another ... because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination” (Chakrabarty 126).

What might it mean to think of sympathy or empathy in a way that does not center the Self? How can we think of Omran as deserving of respect because he is another human being, not because he ‘could have been my brother or myself’? What is it that constricts our ways of feeling such that we are only to feel for another when a sense of sameness is involved?

Perhaps it is useful to acknowledge other forms of ‘feeling with’ that have, at times, conflicted with dominant European notions of sympathy. In the Bengali concept, *shahanubhuti* and its inborn capacity of having *hriday* (heart), it is possible to feel with another person without the identification of a Self in the Other. “The capacity for *shahanubhuti* (*shaha* = equal, *anubhuti* = feelings) was, unlike in European theory of sympathy, not dependent on a naturally given mental faculty like ‘imagination’; it was seen rather as a characteristic of the person with *hriday*, the word ‘hriday’ being assimilated in the nineteenth century to the English word ‘heart’” (Chakrabarty 126). As a matter of fact, *hriday* was seen as quite rare, as only a few possessed it, making it exemplary and exceptional, rather than universal. Possessing *hriday*, “…an excess of compassion in one’s character was a rare gift from the world of the gods” (Chakrabarty 129).

What might it mean to think about feeling in this way? What are the translation practices involved in our attempts to understand alternative modes of feeling throughout the world? How might this be useful in our conceptions of how to relate with other humans, especially through encounters with shock-pictures of object-victims?

When thinking through “alternative topographies of the self” as Appadurai calls for, as well as other ways of thinking about various types of feeling and sentiment, it is imperative to refrain from seeing these as temporally prior, as that would impose a violent western, modern, linear, and progressive timeline upon other forms of living. It is not useful, either, to attempt to universalize concepts such as *hriday* due to the imposing translation practices that might require. However, it is important to think through these alternative ways of feeling, as this aids one’s

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interpretation of the empathy that is invoked when looking at shock-pictures, such as Omran’s. There are so many other examples of subaltern ways of relating to feeling, as described in Sneja Gunew’s *Subaltern Empathy: Beyond European Categories in Affect Theory*[^18], which may be useful to one’s way of thinking about violence and suffering. These modes of being in the world offer an entry point into another kind of thinking, which could be more empathetic than the dominant form to which the modern West has become accustomed.

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“Come, look straight into my eyes, attack my heart.
Come on destroy everything, come destroy everything.”[^19]

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[^18]: Ibid.
Part II: The Politics of Language

Perhaps it is not a failure of empathy that is to blame in the problematic international response to drone strikes, victims, and images. Instead, it might be a failure of imagination and, above all, language. It is helpful to go beyond the limits of the European Enlightenment, ‘modern’ form of empathy and to focus on the politics of language. After thinking through the need for alternative forms of feeling, it is also imperative to investigate the forms of language and their functions within the international geopolitical sphere, in relation to the violence of drone strikes.

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In response to drone operators, who refer to kills as ‘bug splats,’ an art installation in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa, Pakistan, challenged this by trying to change the way the drone sees its ‘targets.’ The child in the poster lost both of her parents and two siblings in a drone strike.20

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The Power of Abstraction:

Language has a tremendously important function in the deployment of words in warfare. Each carefully chosen, imagined, invented word (or set of words) is surrounded by a web of meanings and politics. The language surrounding drone strikes and, more generally, modern warfare in the 21st century, is used for very intentional purposes. Three functions of this language, which I will describe later on, stem from its abstract, vague, and ambiguous nature.

The purposes of the language used by defenders of drone strikes are: 1. To detach the U.S. public from the realities of political violences (in which it is inherently complicit), reflecting the nature of the violence of drone strikes; 2. To simplify and reduce the complexities of political violence so that the binaries that arise from, and are deployed by, the ‘war on terror’ seem obvious, which perpetrates the imperialist, colonialist, capitalist, and patriarchal violences of the U.S. with little to no ‘valid’ objections; and 3. To perpetuate and employ the economistic language and way of thinking about the world such that humans are seen as and are reduced to numbers (through statistics, reports, or their invisibility within these evidence-based forms of proof and truth). This contributes to the notion that certain lives are more valuable than others.

First, it is necessary to identify and problematize certain key terminologies that are used in the context of drone strikes and the ‘war on terror.’ These terms are “closely linked with an entire vocabulary of equally questionable concepts, each of which has its own history” (Collins 164)\(^{21}\). The language that must be questioned, defined, and rethought include these terms: ‘civilization,’ ‘barbarism,’ ‘evil,’ ‘justice,’ ‘targets,’ ‘precision,’ ‘efficiency,’ ‘collateral damage,’ ‘side effects,’ ‘terrorism,’ and ‘cowardice,’ to name a few. This vocabulary is employed by those who defend military violence of the U.S. or “defense intellectuals,” as Carol Cohn refers to them.\(^{22}\) Terms such as ‘terrorism’ and ‘barbarism,’ for example, clearly denote an essentialist binary of ‘our’ violence versus ‘their’ type of killing. State violence is never defined through terms of ‘terrorism,’ but rather as self-defense or necessary violence in the best interest of the nation. Terms such as ‘barbarism’ invoke an added violence of relocating the actor of the violence temporally and spatially elsewhere, often with racial undertones. These terminologies are entrenched with a web of meanings and uses that benefit the American war machine, while invalidating the political and human needs and voices of the Other.


\(^{22}\) Cohn, Carol. “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals.” *Signs,* Vol. 12, No. 4, Within and Without: Women, Gender, and Theory. 1987, pp. 687-718
The first function of this highly abstract language, which cannot necessarily be defined, yet elicits such recognition in the modern West, is dangerous for many reasons. Above all, this language contributes to the project of condemning, depoliticizing, and negating certain types of political violence, rendering them ‘unthinkable,’ while ignoring the imperialist and colonialist violences of the modern West. This legitimizes certain types of violence, while dismissing other types as ‘barbaric,’ ‘evil,’ and ‘unimaginable.’ This language, when used by the web of western institutions (the government, academy, think tanks, corporations, the military, and the media), gains power and legitimacy without questioning its history, function, and propagandist purposes. For example, as John Collins describes in his chapter entitled “Terrorism,” in the book Collateral Language\textsuperscript{23}, the political violence committed by the U.S. and its allies can never be described as ‘terrorism,’ and instead is justifiable through terms such as ‘counterinsurgency,’ ‘counterterrorism,’ ‘low-intensity conflict,’ ‘self-defense,’ and ‘war.’ In other words, any violence committed by the U.S. (and/or its allies), is viewed as legitimate, necessary, and political; whereas, violence committed against the U.S. (and/or its allies) is automatically categorized as ‘terrorist,’ ‘barbaric,’ ‘radical,’ and ‘evil,’ as it threatens the ‘goodness,’ ‘innocence,’ and ‘democracy’ of the U.S. and the modern West.

Any discourse used to defend drone strikes and the violence that they create inherently invokes an additional violence, which stems from the nature of this abstract language. When speaking about the victims of drone strikes, “military language in the media softens the visceral impact of the violence on ordinary citizens...” (Collins 8). Instead of using language such as ‘casualties,’ ‘collateral damage,’ ‘side effects,’ or ‘unintended targets,’ could it ever be imaginable for the media, or those defense intellectuals, to speak of drone strike violences and their victims in human terms? What if, instead of an ‘airstrike,’ this violence was reported in terms of ‘mass murder’ or ‘widespread killings of innocent people?’ Or perhaps ‘a family was

just murdered in Syria/Pakistan/Yemen, etc.’? Could we ever be exposed to their distorted bodies or bloody limbs? What would this mean for our understandings of this violence? The viscerality and human compassion of the listener, viewer, or reader would be avowed, rather than their indifference or emotional separation. “To speak of ‘collateral damage’ is a far cry from acknowledging the blown-off limbs, the punctured eardrums, the shrapnel wounds, and the psychological horror that are caused by heavy bombardment; even speaking of ‘civilian casualties’ deflects attention from the real effects of the bomb” (Collins 8).

This language sanitizes, without speaking to the emotional aspect of relating with other humans. “This language has enormous destructive power, but without the emotional fallout, without the emotional fallout that would result if it were clear one was talking about plans for mass murder, mangled bodies, and unspeakable human suffering” (Cohn 691). This additional violence mimics, reflects, and perpetuates the detached and removed violence of drone strikes, which emphasizes the “astounding chasm between image and reality that characterizes techno-strategic language” literally far away from the violence in the physical reality of drone strikes, and figuratively in the theoretical abstraction of this language (Cohn 692).

This linguistic reflection of the actual violence of drone strikes serves the purpose of familiarizing, normalizing, and making less strange the violence of drone strikes upon fellow human beings, thus making this type of violence seem acceptable and necessary. The ways in which the media, military, academy, and other facets of the ‘institutional web’ speak about drone strikes and their victims assures the public that this new technological weapon is the obvious choice. Or better yet, that there was no choice and that they needed to deploy these weapons out of ‘self defense’ and for the purpose of protecting American values and interests. Perhaps this may come at the ‘cost’ or ‘price’ of some. But of course, this was unintentional and necessary. This discourse has disturbing underlying assumptions and implications. The economistic

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24 When using the language of ‘we’ and ‘our’ in this paragraph, I am speaking about those who locate themselves within the so-called ‘modern West,’ which I have described in the fifth footnote.
language refers to a certain way of thinking about the world that reduces some humans to numbers and stems from the implied understandings of certain lives as more valuable than other lives. American troops are spared thanks to the detachment of drones, at the expense of some casualties.

In Carol Cohn’s *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*²⁵, the ‘rational,’ economistic, and gendered way of thinking about the world in Cohn’s encounter with nuclear strategic analysis is exposed and questioned. In her brilliant work, Cohn outlines the irony and hypocrisy of the language used by “defense intellectuals” and the purposes of their abstract and euphemistic terms, as well as the sexual and patriarchal subtext (Cohn 687).

Equating disarmament with emasculation, nuclear weapons with sexual domination and conquest, Air Force Magazine’s advertisements for new weapons with Playboy’s catalog of images of men’s sexual fantasies demonstrates the underlying sexual implications of the appeal of this type of violence. In addition, Cohn emphasizes the competitive masculinity that in turn ties into patriarchal ideas of virginity, familiarization, domestication, and normalization of weapons in relation to nuclear discourse. “To have human bodies remain invisible in that technological world precisely because that world itself now *includes* the domestic, the human, the warm, and playful” (Cohn 699) is another way in which language distorts, disturbs, and inverts notions of human compassion or care, replacing them with seemingly friendly or familiar ways of thinking about destruction. “The imagery that domesticates, that humanizes insentient weapons, may also serve, paradoxically, to make it all right to ignore sentient human bodies, human lives” (Cohn 699). This language is used specifically in order to make some humans become less deserving of compassion, respect, and decency. “Sanitized abstraction and sexual and patriarchal imagery, even if disturbing, seemed to fit easily into the masculinist world of nuclear war planning” (Cohn 697). The seemingly ‘rational’ or ‘obvious’ nature of the nuclear

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discourse of these defense intellectuals is exposed and questioned in the reconsidering of their patriarchal, sexual, and sanitized language.

The common theme that arises from the language used by those who defend drone strikes and defense intellectuals is the use of economistic terms in order to render certain acts of political violence as thinkable. The numericized way of thinking about the world and about other humans in the world has direct connections with the economization of bodies under colonial rule. “The ‘numerical gaze’ has functioned quite well in a number of ways in the contemporary international system. It has, among other things, acted to constitute, unilaterally, the ostensibly universal and seemingly objective character of the categories and modes of knowing of the colonizer” (Muppidi 51-52)²⁶. It is not incidental that the language used by defenders of drone strikes includes a combination of abstracted and detached language (when speaking of violence on human bodies) and hyper-specific language (when referring to the main point of reference, the weapon itself). Using the drone as a form of extension of colonization into the sky, while disavowing the fears, emotions, and stories of the full human lives, who are seen as ‘targets,’ ‘side effects,’ and ‘collateral damage,’ demonstrates that the economistic language used in historical colonial rule is not, by any means, over. As a matter of fact, it is the technology of the drone that assists the project of defense intellectuals, as its removed, detached, distant, and impersonal nature normalizes the abstracted language that is used to speak of the violence caused by this new weapon. It is necessary to pay attention to the functions of this type of insidious language, as it masks the true destruction and fear that seeps into the lives of so many people. By giving meaning to certain lives, by valuing them more than others, as we can see in the economistic and abstract language used to describe the victims of drone strikes, as deployed by those who truly see them as ‘side effects’ and ‘collateral damage,’ the perpetuation of colonial violence continues.

Iterations of this abstracted language have become normalized in the current administration and the political climate in which it inhabits. An excerpt from a *New York Times* article entitled “Trump Administration Is Said to Be Working to Loosen Counterterrorism Rules” makes explicit this economization and prioritization of certain subjects over others:

> “On Jan. 28, Mr. Trump signed a presidential national security memorandum directing the military to give him a plan within 30 days to defeat the Islamic State. It said the plan should include ‘recommended changes to any United States rules of engagement and other United States policy restrictions that exceed the requirements of international law regarding the use of force,’ a veiled reference to rescinding the 2013 limits on airstrikes. But the momentum for rapid change broke, the officials said, after the Yemen raid, which resulted in numerous civilian deaths, including of children; the death of a member of the Navy’s SEAL Team 6 and the wounding of three others; and the loss of a $75 million aircraft.”

It is only when one of us (of the U.S)
-Our troops or Our drone-
Is killed or wounded

That the murder of hundreds
Of thousands
Of lives—of mothers, fathers, children, sisters, brothers, grandmothers and grandfathers
Aunts and uncles and best friends and teachers and neighbors

Is interrupted and put on pause;
The momentum then breaks
When the drone is injured

Because the life of the (war) machine
Is more valuable than
The mangled bodies
or the rubble of the forgotten.

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The (Lacking) Language of Legality:

When speaking about the ‘rightness’ of drone strikes, those who criticize these airstrikes often invoke the language of legality. If drone strikes are viewed as ‘extrajudicial,’ they are obviously deemed as ‘wrong’ or ‘illegal.’ However, would this mean that something is only seen as wrong if it is located outside of legality? Is this the only premise for objection in modern, western thought? If certain actions are only objected to based on their legal status (or lack thereof), what would this mean for an understanding of what is right and what is wrong? Would an action, airstrike, or attack only be viewed as unjust or wrong if it is deemed such by its exclusion from the written and documented law? If the same action were to be viewed as legal, would that change its sense of what is right or ethical? Should there be another basis for condemnation other than its legal standing, or is this enough? However, if one feels morally sound with their concept of the law as an ethical guiding point, what might they respond with when presented with issues of immoral or unethical laws throughout history? It is no secret that several unjust policies and atrocities were once justified by the law of the land. Who decides what the law should or should not be? Is it not the case that only the powerful have complete control over the law? Who, then, would have the responsibility of interpreting the law? Perhaps this might call into question the concept of legality as an ethical point of departure. However, this presents questions about what might guide a person’s notion of what is right and what is wrong in the world. If it is only a law that prevents people from murdering one another, what would it mean if this were to be deemed lawful?

In an Amnesty International Report on drone strikes, entitled “Will I be Next?: U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan,”28 the condemnations and objections of those who have conducted and wrote this report, mostly stem from the legality of the killings. “Amnesty International is seriously concerned that these strikes may have resulted in unlawful killings, constituting

extrajudicial executions or war crimes. Like the more recent drone strikes covered by this report, all of the killings carried out by U.S. pilotless aircraft in Pakistan have been conducted in virtual secrecy aided by the remote and lawless nature of the region...” (Amnesty 14). Not only does this part of the report express concern only if the law has been broken by this killing, but also has posited blame (that perhaps should be placed upon the U.S. government) upon the “lawless nature of the region,” as if their form of law is a lack. However, perhaps a lack should instead be posited upon what the U.S. lacks in humanity in its colonization of the sky in so many areas, especially in this part of North Waziristan. “If the attack occurred outside any actual armed conflict, then it would have violated the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of the right to life, and could constitute extrajudicial executions. It is the responsibility of the U.S. authorities to present the legal and factual justification for this attack” (Amnesty 27). Amnesty International calls for the legal and evidential justification of the attack, which might then absolve perpetuators of violence of any blame or guilt. However, is it only this justification that would determine if this action was morally right? The main concern with signature strikes in Amnesty’s report is that “such strikes are likely to lead to unlawful killings. They appear to be incompatible with the requirements of human rights law and, where applicable, could also lead to violations of international humanitarian law” (Amnesty 28). This legal language is problematic, due to its preference of the law and legality (or lack thereof) over objections stemming from human compassion, love, or kindness. Moving beyond concerns of the law, their critique can go deeper here.

Reducing Lives to Labor

However, this report also includes stories from those who live at the other end of this violence: drone strike victims, family members, and people who live in the community. This inclusion of stories from victims, survivors, and family members is rare in many reports in the mass media and in news stories. However, even though Amnesty has included these voices, they
are modified and tailored to adapt to the modern, western language and form of valuing humans. On July 6, 2012, a group of “laborers” from Zowi Sidgi village had gathered under a tent after work and were killed and injured by drone strikes (Amnesty 24). This attack killed eighteen people and injured twenty-two of those who were either at the tent to begin with or who came to the scene afterwards, becoming victims of an additional missile attack. Although the report includes some of the voices and stories of those who witnessed this event, when listing the names of those who were killed by the drone strike on the Zowi Sidgi village, the only information about these victims that was provided along with their names is their age, occupation, and marital status.

However, it is worth examining the selection of information included here. How has a person’s occupation and age become the most important information about them? Is there not an addition violence here of reducing the lives of the victims to their occupation or age? Is “Saleh Khan (aged 14), sold wood” really an accurate or full encapsulation of a human’s life (Amnesty 25)? This violence is located in the capitalist and economistic way of thinking about people in the world, such that it is thinkable for human lives to be reduced to their occupation or work. It is worth wondering why and how this became an adequate representation of human beings. Why is there not at least a recognition of a certain type of violence in this lack of sufficient information about the victims? Perhaps doing justice to the memory of those killed in this attack was not a priority for this report. Even this Amnesty International report, which includes a great deal of information and many different perspectives, may not be the most ethical approach to thinking about this violence, as it perpetuates certain violences in its focus on legality and the reduction of humans to their occupation, marital status, and age.

In the language of those who criticize drone strikes, moral and ethical claims are used. Just war theorists and humanitarians speak of proportionality and asymmetry, yet neglect to engage with the underlying colonial power relationships in the geopolitical sphere. These
arguments also fail to include the voices of those at the other end of this violence, and when they do (as the Amnesty International report demonstrates), it conforms to the modern, western language and way of valuing humans. Only paying attention to and valuing the legality and ‘documented evidence’ of these killings is incurring an additional violence on behalf of well-meaning humanitarians and just war theorists.

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“Names of the Dead II
Floyd Cheung
of the ones we don’t know
of the ones not published in The New York Times
of those who fight on the other side
of those who are caught in between
of their hometowns, ages, and
by whom they are beloved”

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Part III: Complicating the First World Imaginary

In this section, I am interested in complicating the modern, western political imaginary, or drawing from Judith Butler, the “first world privilege”, and the ways in which drone strikes are perceived by this way of thinking (Butler xii) 30. The sanitization and detachment that stem from the notion that drone strikes are ‘precise,’ ‘efficient,’ and ‘effective’ (and therefore morally just) should be questioned. In this section, I will challenge the form of thinking that emerges from this hegemonic political imaginary by comparing the violence of drone strikes with the violence of suicide bombings as well as the international response to these types of killing. I am not attempting to justify or condone either type of violence, but rather to challenge the notion that one type of killing is morally superior to another. It is worth questioning why suicide bombings are seen in the modern West as barbaric, backward, horrific, and repugnant, whereas drone strikes are viewed as clean, sanitized, detached, and efficient. Here, I will look into the ways in which the suicide bomber inverts the modern, western political imaginary and the reasons for which this way of thinking dismisses this violence as temporally prior, horrific, and morally wrong.

Uncovering Conflicting Conceptions of Horror and Justice:

It is useful to think about the figure of the suicide bomber and what this figure represents. In accounts and reports of suicide bombings, the person who commits the violence is always seen as having no respect or regard for human life. However, how did it become more ‘respectful’ or somehow better to push a button from thousands of miles away, seeing the destruction that has been created as collateral damage or as a side effect? The suicide bomber, on the other hand, inverts the modern, liberal sense of justice by dying with their victims. However, in some modes of thinking, this action may show a certain respect for the humanity of those who they have killed. In some ways, this places suicide bombers in a different moral positionality,

due to their willingness to be hurt. Suicide bombers have been called ‘cowardly’ for their actions, whereas drone strike operators have been lauded for their ‘precision’ and ‘efficiency’ and then studied for the trauma that they have undergone through their killings. How do these contradictions make sense? Is this even about the different types of violence being deployed or is something else happening here?

Perhaps the horror in the response to suicide bombings could be attributed to a certain ‘modern’ way of thinking of the world, which positions the West as somehow ‘ahead’ on the progressive, linear timeline of history. The notion that the modern West is always one step ahead on the ladder of development or somehow always earlier to arrive at modernization, which, in the eyes of the West, is equivalent to civilization, is problematic in many ways. The nature of the violence of drone strikes and that of suicide bombings should not be ignored. Following Chamayou’s argument in *A Theory of the Drone*[^31], the violence of drones requires that there is complete disengagement, whereas the suicide bomber is predicated on their complete engagement. In the case of the latter, the body is the weapon. In the case of the former, however, the weapon has no body. In contrast to Walter Benjamin’s evolutionist description of the temporality of emergence of the kamikaze and the drone, Chamayou argues that they “did not succeed each other chronologically, one following from the other as history follows from prehistory, on the contrary, they emerged together, as two opposed but historically simultaneous tactics” (Chamayou 84). In this way, Chamayou questions the temporal categorization of certain forms of violence as older or prehistoric, and others as modern.

Chamayou also recognizes the geopolitical economic power structures at play when thinking about various types of violence. When speaking about suicide bombings versus drone strikes, Chamayou writes, “The polarity is primarily economic. It sets those who have nothing but their bodies with which to fight in opposition to those who possess capital and technology”

(Chamayou 86). This acknowledgement of the ways in which economic forces have a direct role in the deployment of various types of violence and the forms that they take is astute and necessary in thinking about the reasons for which different types of killing are used. It is helpful to think about the economic inequity and disproportion here, as this is an important element that is overlooked in dominant narratives surrounding drone strikes and suicide bombings. “A member of Hamas stated that ‘we utilize martyrs because we don’t have the F16s, the Apaches, the tanks and missiles’” (Cavarero 95)\(^{32}\). With one ‘side’ of the violence unable to have access to the types of weapons that are used against them, the uneven aspect of this ‘modern warfare’ is constrictive. However, viewing suicide bombers as having a lesser sense of respect for life disregards the economic pressures and inability to have their voices heard otherwise.

Another element of the modern, western political imaginary’s attitude toward suicide bombings is their location of this violence as temporally elsewhere. This positing of a certain type of killing in the temporal past is an additional violence, as it contributes to the imposition of the modern, progressive, linear timeline of the western hegemony upon the subaltern. A component that is particular to a type of colonial western modernization is the condemnation of ways of relating with the world that are viewed as outside of its own political imaginary. However, it is not solely the insistence of this location of suicide bombings in the past that is occurring, but also a recognition of suicide bombings in the West’s own historic past. This imposition of ‘our’ past onto the ‘other’s’ temporal present is essential in the modern, western, colonial world-making project.

An additional aspect of this western neocolonialism that is being deployed through this attitude towards the violence of drone strikes and suicide bombings is the othering of moral repugnance. However, it takes a lot of political work for this belief that drone strikes are morally superior to be assumed. As Chamayou invokes in his book, Eyad El-Sarraj, the director of the mental health program in Gaza asks, “‘How can you believe in your own humanity if you do not believe in the humanity of the enemy?’” Chamayou then poses the questions: “In what respect might it be less horrible to kill without exposing oneself than to share the fate of one’s victims? In what respect might a weapon making it possible to kill without danger be less repugnant than the opposite?” (Chamayou 88). This reversal of the dominant narrative that has been displayed, perpetuated, and performed, explores the possibility for difference in thought and perspective. In questioning the western narrative and justification for drone strikes, which claims their moral
superiority, Jacqueline Rose asks why “‘dying with your victim should be seen as a greater sin than saving yourself’” (Chamayou 88). In this way, it is understandable how some might view drone attacks as cowardly, as opposed to moral.

Talal Asad proposes the idea that the repugnance activated in the modern West in its response to suicide bombings might be a result of the inability to enact a certain type of justice. “By dying with his victim, coagulating both crime and punishment within a single action, he makes punishment impossible and thereby deactivates the fundamental resort of a form of justice conceived in the penal mode. He will never be able to ‘pay for what he has done’” (Chamayou 88). After having been horrified by the presence of a suicide bomber and their actions, a witness will draw from this experience of seeing this shock a certain “righteous anger directed at the perpetrator of the deadly violence” (Asad 89). However, it would be interesting to wonder why this manifestation of justice becomes a desire for revenge or vengeance. Following Asad’s argument, the understanding of the horror in response to suicide bombings stems from the nature of its crime and thus there exists a desire to punish the perpetrator of this crime. However, this act combines crime and punishment, which disavows the realization of any desire for revenge or justice. It might be useful to question this obsessive craving for vengeance when responding to horror or death. Why must this always be the immediate reaction instead of searching for a different type of mourning or dealing with loss?

I understand the wish for justice, especially after a wrongful death has occurred. It is not my intention to dismiss or negate valid feelings that arise after horrific and heartbreaking killings occur. However, it might be necessary to interrogate that which leads to this justice. Why is it revenge or vengeance that must lead to a desire for justice? Is there another way of thinking about justice and dealing with grief and loss without immediately resorting to a militant revenge to lead us there? In Emile Durkheim’s thesis on criminal law, he describes that “all legal

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punishment is based on a sense of popular outrage and is therefore motivated by passionate vengeance” (Asad 90). The question of why suicide bombing, specifically, is viewed as horrific, shocking, and intolerable may stem from a certain Judeo-Christian way of viewing the meaning of life in terms of, and centering, death. This relies on a love for all the dead, which is then unachievable in the case of suicide bombings. “This is impossible on the occasion of a suicide bombing because there is no redemption there – none for the perpetrator, none for the victims, and none for those who witness or contemplate the event” (Asad 91). Perhaps the only way of viewing the destruction of innocent lives is when it fits into the modern, western sense of justice and when it ‘makes sense’ to this way of thinking.

If the violence of drone strikes does not adhere to humanitarian or human rights law, and if these attacks are located outside of modern warfare (as the U.S. did not declare war on Pakistan or Yemen), then why have drone strikes become a violence that is morally superior to other types of killings? Perhaps the difference here also arises from the fact that drone strikes are located within the realm of state violence, whereas suicide bombings are seen as completely outside of the sphere of law. “But the law itself is founded by and continuously depends on coercive violence” (Asad 92). The language of legality here also serves to justify certain acts, while condemning others for the purpose of maintaining the rationality of violence that ‘makes sense,’ while denouncing that which may not. Another reason for which the abstract language of legality is used so often in the discourse surrounding drone strikes originates from the nature of this type of violence, as it relegates the human body to the periphery. As Adriana Cavarero describes:

“Occupying the entire war scene and consigning it to the imaginary, the high-precision destructive machine, translated into digitized images, transforms the body of the warrior into a peripheral element of its mechanism, rendering it unworthy of media focus... In a ‘post-heroic’ war that no longer requires the tribute of blood and aspires to a ‘zero
casualty option’ for its robotized soldiers, the engineering of devastation triumphs
over bodies and swallows them up, concealing them” (Cavarero 94).

The invisibility of bodies in this new construction of war demonstrates the manipulation
that the modern West utilizes in order to create the perception of a body-less war. Without the
constraint of having to confront and engage with the bodies of those who have been killed from
afar, the killing machine of the high-precision drone claims a certain moral superiority, which
arises from the falsehood that their violence has no victims.

The Imposition of Suicide Language:

Taking a step back here, it is necessary to rethink the language of the modern, western
classification of terminologies of those who carry out killings, while sacrificing their own lives,
as ‘suicide bombers.’ In working through the politics of this language, it is useful to understand
the ways in which this lexical characterization might be problematic. It is imperative to closely
examine the ways in which the modern West defines this violence, as opposed to the ways in
which the people who carry out this violence would describe it. This stems from a certain way of
thinking about death in different types of relating with the world. For example, the ways in
which the modern West relates with death is through concepts such as murder, homicide, and
suicide. However, the usage of the term ‘suicide’ may be an imposition upon other ways of
thinking about this type of death.

Before opening this discourse up to other ways of relating to this type of violence (or
sacrifice), it might be helpful to think of other ways in which the modern West has imposed the
concept of ‘suicide’ upon other ways of relating with death. An example of the imposition of this
term upon that which might be characterized otherwise is present in the case of Roop Kanwar’s
death. Roop Kanwar has become a controversial figure, as she was a devotee of the Goddess
Rani Sati and, after her husband’s death, was said to want to become a sati, which would mean
that she would sacrifice herself upon the funeral pyre of her husband. There have been
conflicting reports in the media, with some accounts attributing her death to pressure and taunting from her family, thus forcing her to die. Other accounts, however, have attributed her death to her devotion to the Goddess Rani Sati and her wish to become a sati. In some of these media accounts, violent language has been used in order to temporally relocate this religious practice, “‘On September 23, Home Minister Buta Singh declared the sati incident to be reminiscent of the ‘dark ages’” and others posed the sati as an “archaic and inhuman practice” (Goswami 203). These modes of speaking about sati reflect a temporal displacement through this language, which serves to invalidate these religious practices. In many news reports of this event, western media only used concepts of suicide in order to talk about this death, if the agency were given to her. Acknowledging the fact that this event is far more complicated than I can discuss in this context, that no one will know what Roop Kanwar was thinking at the time, and that any imposition of a political interpretation upon her is violent due to the fact that she is unable to make her voice heard, it is useful to think about this case as well as the response to it.

This imposition of a certain way of thinking about death demonstrates a problematic inability to imagine other forms of relating with death. When thinking about the various and plural modes of encountering and understanding death, it is helpful to reconsider the ways in which western notions of death categories, such as ‘suicide’ and ‘murder,’ impose upon that which might be defined otherwise. Perhaps ‘sacrifice’ or ‘martyrdom’ have become located in the temporal and political past. I am making this comparison not to think of these types of deaths as similar in any way. As a matter of fact, there are many differences in the nature and motivations for these deaths. However, I do believe it is useful to think about other examples of the modern West’s infliction of concepts such as ‘suicide’ upon those who may relate to the death in other ways.

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In the case of what the West refers to as ‘suicide bombings,’ those who enact this violence may not define their actions as such. For many of them, this way of dying with their victims and their sense of sacrifice stems from a certain respect for the humanity of their victims. “Going by the news reports, the Western imaginary seems to be struck above all by the scandalousness of the suicidal act as a manifestation of disdain for human life, in particular for one’s own” (Cavarero 92). However, there also are many examples, which Cavarero draws upon, of figures in the West’s own historical past, who have used military strategies in war, who have knowingly faced their certain death. These examples, though, have not been categorized as suicides. “A famous example in this respect (not by chance an integral part of the schooling of children in Europe) might be the episode of Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans, who fell gloriously at Thermopylae” (Cavarero 92). In addition, Cavarero draws from the example of Pietro Micca, who became a heroic martyr after lighting a fuse in order to blow up a tunnel, leading to Turin, which he knew would also blow himself up. In this way, “the figure of the martyr-suicide is not entirely unknown to the Western tradition” (Cavarero 92). So, then, what is truly new or particularly scandalous about this type of violence?

In response to this question, it is necessary to consider the reasons for which this horror arises. Perhaps it is due to the horrific images of the defenseless victims who were killed by this act, rather than the suicidal element. However, this would not follow, as the violence of “decorporealized destructive technology,” such as drone strikes, also creates defenseless victims (Cavarero 95). The myth of precision, efficiency, and accuracy would counter the acknowledgement of the corpses they have created. Essential to the project of drone strikes and their violence is the dismissal and ignorance of the destruction of so many lives on the other end. However, the anger and pain that are generated from this type of remote-controlled killing leads to a certain desire to have the voices of those living at the other end of drone violence heard in

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some way. Although there is an inability to make their voices heard politically, as the source of destruction under which they live is located thousands of miles away from them, the last resort might be violence. So, then, why has this violence become viewed as irregular, illegitimate, unfair, and thus depoliticized when the violence of drone strikes remains valid in the political realm?

Rethinking the Role of Figures of Female Suicide Bombers:

Another interesting element in the discourse surrounding ‘suicide bombings’ stems from the ways in which women who enact this violence are spoken about in the modern, western political imaginary. There is often an urge to treat these female suicide bombers as passive victims of outside pressures and patriarchal oppression, rather than active, intentional agents. The need to identify these women as helpless sufferers who “have no way out” may be attributed to the assumed “subordinate role of women in Islamic society” (Cavarero 100). This location of women as helpless, oppressed, and defenseless is violent in its racist undertones. I do not wish to imagine that I could know or understand what it means to these women who take up arms and become ‘suicide bombers.’ Perhaps they are driven to this position due to manipulation, pressure, or force. However, I do not want to perpetuate the violence of assuming that they are in a position of helplessness. The maternal role of women comes into play here, which adds to the shocking quality of this type of horror, when a woman, “whom we would expect to be a caregiver” creates such destruction (Cavarero 101). The female suicide bomber is “a female body that age-old tradition, both in the East and in the West, has always regarded as extraneous to the masculine realm of violence and historically destined to undergo it rather than perpetuate it” (Cavarero 100). This complicated concept of a female figure as a body bomber is one that must be engaged with in the disturbance of a simple binary of horrific suicide bombings and sanitized, detached drone strikes.
In many ways, the imposition of horror upon suicide bombings and the subsequent othering of moral repugnance while neglecting to confront the destruction that drone strikes create is constitutive of the modern, western colonial project. It is a continuation of the binary that the modern West believes in, which is that of the civilized versus the uncivilized, the moral versus the repugnant, the modern versus the backward, and the humane versus the cruel. However, it is necessary to complicate, question, and rethink these rigid binaries, as they serve to simplify and make obvious certain ways of thinking about the world, while negating others. The conception of the violence of drone strikes as somehow clean, sanitized, removed, detached, precise, efficient, and thus morally superior to other types of killings is problematic in many ways. The imposition of terms such as barbaric, horrific, repugnant, and backward upon those who engage in suicide bombings is also violent in its infliction of a temporal past upon the contemporaneous realities of many people.

In thinking about other ways of imagining various relationships with death, grief, and loss, as well as motivations for different types of violence, it is imperative to not only complicate the dominant narratives that are being deployed by the modern, western hegemony, but also to resist generalizations or efforts to understand the realities of others. In this section, I have traced through a genealogy of horror through drone strikes and suicide bombings. Through the impossibility of a true knowledge of the intentions or feelings of the people who live at the other end of this violence, I can only imagine other modes of thinking about these violences.
“Unrhymed Drone
Ayman Shahari

Below us:
A furnace for tyrants
Above us, drones?

The friendly drones, the enemy
Which makes death fall
Overhead
As though we are fields
And death our downpour.”³⁶
Part IV: Resistance Through Other Voices

In thinking about drone violence, it is necessary not only to think about suffering, but also about the presence of power. However obvious it may seem, the need to address geopolitical power dynamics is clear. Although there is a great amount of research done regarding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) amongst those who operate drone strikes, I will center this section around those whose trauma is not researched, studied, or documented in the same way. I wish not to invalidate the trauma of the drone operators, as their suffering is completely legitimate, but rather to center the voices of those at the other end of this violence and to validate their trauma as well. It is a particularity of the United States, and more generally the modern West, to be concerned with its own citizens, troops, and people, however they choose to define them. This leads to a prioritization and hierarchy of forms of life in which the public in the modern West is invested. The emergence of drone strikes arrives from the need for the lives of American troops to be detached and removed from violence.

This prioritization and arrangement of certain lives over others contributes to the function of terminologies of oppression, such as ‘terrorism,’ ‘targets,’ and ‘collateral damage.’ This language, which I have previously described, stems from the unequal and economistic valuing of ‘our’ lives over ‘theirs’ without recognizing context, circumstance, or human experience. In this way, it has become acceptable to outwardly care and show concern for our troops and their trauma, while negating that of those living at the other end of the violence. As this form of thinking has become obvious, so has the research into the ways in which U.S. soldiers and drone strike operators come back from killing others and are not the same. This is given the diagnosis of PTSD, as if there is something psychologically unnatural about their inability to kill other humans and remain unchanged. Has the trauma of those living under the threat of this violence ever been studied or diagnosed? It is for these reasons that I will not be centering this section
around the PTSD of the U.S. drone operators, as this type of trauma has already gained a great
deal of academic and psychological attention.

Examining Other Types of Expression and Knowledge:

Instead, I am interested in questioning and rethinking dominant forms of caring
(designated only for those who commit the killings) by looking into the resistance from those at
the other end of drone violence. It is important to allow for these voices to emerge, as it is their
trauma that should be addressed. The ways in which drone violence affects the everyday lives of
so many people who live under this threat are not often acknowledged in dominant accounts or
reports related to drone strikes. It is necessary to also think about how these voices appear within
mainstream American media. For example, if interviews are being used, it is imperative to
address the complicated ways in which certain dynamics might manipulate the responses and
testimonies. It is important to be aware of the problematic power structures that might manifest
themselves through leading interview questions or fears of identification from those who are
interviewed. Due to these complicated forces, it is also necessary to bring in voices through
forms other than testimonies and interviews.

In addition to addressing voices of those who are usually relegated to the peripheries
through interviews, while acknowledging the problematics of this type of encounter, this section
will also draw upon other forms of expression that reflect the voices of those living under the
threat of drone violence. These forms will include art, rug making, music, poetry, and graffiti
that those at the other end of the violence create. In looking at these types of knowledge or
expression, the data-centered, empirical, economistic way of thinking about humans-as-numbers
will be disrupted. Instead, this alternative type of ‘evidence,’ an expression of the human that
may not be viewed as completely ‘rational,’ is incredibly meaningful for an ethical and
thoughtful approach to studying the emergence of resistance through various voices.
Although the form of interviews has its shortcomings, it is a useful way of accessing various perspectives and insights from those whose voices are not usually recognized or valued within the international geopolitical sphere. It might be helpful to think about a specific event, as it may represent various elements that are particular to the nature of drone strike violence. On March 17, 2011, a U.S. drone strike was deployed on the town of Datta Khel in North Waziristan (a region of Pakistan). Although the United States claimed that those who were killed in this strike were “insurgents” who were planning an attack, numerous witnesses, survivors, and family members contradicted this. In several accounts, the U.S. drone strike targeted a jirga, a community meeting where people help settle disputes in the town, which killed forty two people. In examining these accounts, it is clear the ways in which drone strikes have affected the everyday lives of victims and family members of drone strike victims.

The drone strike, which targeted the jirga on March 17, 2011, was classified as a ‘signature strike,’ which specifically targets ‘suspicious behavior.’ Although the people who were attending the jirga told Pakistani authorities about this meeting at least ten days prior, they were still attacked. However, it is useful here to question the implications of signature strikes. People who are living under the threat of this type of violence avoid being targeted in this way by having a consistent schedule and predictability. Any ‘unusual’ or ‘abnormal’ behavior is deemed ‘suspicious.’ Thus, signature strikes not only create fear amongst ordinary people, but they also inflict and impose a certain western, modern sense of time, in a way punishing those who do not conform to western notions of efficiency, punctuality, regularity, and precision. These signature strikes impose not only physical violences, but also the additional colonial violence of a destruction of different relationships with time.

In many reports of the drone attack, the jirga was convened in order to settle disputes in the town regarding the ownership of chromite deposits in the region. While a Pakistani military

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chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani condemned the attack, stating “it is highly regrettable that a jirga of peaceful citizens, including elders of the area, was carelessly and callously targeted with complete disregard to human life,” American officials denied the innocence of the victims of this attack. “These people weren’t gathering for a bake sale,’ an American official said. “They were terrorists.”

Although the target of this airstrike was clearly a jirga, a peaceful meeting to settle conflicts, American officials still justified the violence by invoking reductionist language that diminishes humans to figures whose lives can be targeted and destroyed.

Following Forms of Violence: Here and There; Now and Later:

When news reports and media documentation of these violent events occur, the victims are never named or discussed. Their faces never appear on the screen or in the newspaper. In this way, the violence of drone strikes, as well as the threat that it poses, is rendered invisible in the news media. However, in addition to this erasure, the concept of a singular ‘atrocity event’ should be complicated. The actual event of a drone strike is incredibly traumatizing, violent, and destructive in many ways. However, there are additional violences that are present as well. In accordance with the temporality of a past, present, and future, it is worth looking into the ways in which the presence of drone strikes has permeated all three of these temporal categories.

In the beforehand of drone strikes, the threat of this type of violence is ever-present. The overwhelming and omniscient presence, although not necessarily seen, is felt in many people’s lives. Not only do children fear playing outside when the sky is blue, but the humming presence has become a source of overpowering anxiety, worry, fear, terror, and fright amongst ordinary people, who happen to find themselves at the other end of this threat. Where are the extensive studies about their trauma? Why is this form of violence somehow viewed as less important than the PTSD of U.S. drone operators? “I prefer cloudy days when the drones don’t fly. When the

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sky brightens and becomes blue, the drones return and so does the fear. Children don’t play so often now, and have stopped going to school. Education isn’t possible as long as the drones circle overhead” (McVeigh). Not only does the threat of drone strikes affect education and children’s play, but also has permeated the everyday lives of ordinary people, producing anxiety and worry for their lives and their loved ones. The notion that drone strikes are singular, isolated events must be complicated. The violence that is deployed through these attacks is more ever reaching, insidious, and pervasive than the dominant narrative lets on.

Not only does this violence occur during and before the event, but it also exists in the aftermath of the attack. How to deal with loss and grief is perhaps one of the most meaningful elements of what it means to be human. The ways in which people deal with this loss is a particularly significant part of their lives. When dealing with the deaths and destruction that the drone attacks have imposed, it is necessary to think about the ways in which the families and loved ones of drone strike victims have navigated this painful terrain. As described in the NYU and Stanford report, entitled “Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan,” the difficulties and pain that come from trying to deal with the destruction left from the airstrikes is emotionally and physically exhausting.

“Unable to identify the body parts lying on the ground, all Khalil Khan could do was ‘collect pieces of flesh and put them in a coffin.’ Idris Farid, who survived the strike with a severe leg injury, explained how funerals for the victims of the March 17 strike were ‘odd and different than before.’ The community had to collect [the victims’] body pieces and bones and then bury them like that,’ doing their best to ‘identify the pieces and the body parts’ so that the relatives at the funeral would be satisfied they had ‘the right parts of the body and the right person.’ The trauma of the strike was felt not only

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by those who witnessed its immediate aftermath, but also by the families left behind.”

(60)\textsuperscript{41}

This destruction and despair left behind by drone attacks have made it so that people are unable to recognize the bodies of their loved ones, which have become mangled, distorted, and unidentifiable because all that is left of them are pieces. This fragmentation of bodies recalls a certain inability to see people who live at the other end of these attacks as full humans, even when they are alive. Terminologies such as ‘terrorist,’ ‘target,’ ‘collateral damage,’ and ‘side effect,’ as I have discussed in Part II, evoke a certain negation of the status of full humanness. As the description of the inability to deal with loss, grief, and trauma due to the annihilation of bodies illustrates, the way of dealing with this pain has been disavowed even further. This deprivation of such an integral part of human experience (dealing with loss) is perhaps one of the most violent forms of power that the drone strike deploys. This additional violence demonstrates the necessity to challenge the idea that a drone strike is a singular, isolated event. Not only does it permeate the ways of being in the world for those whose lives are threatened by the humming presence of drone strikes, but it also invades into the aftermath of the attack. The destruction of these bodies from afar involves a specific type of insidious violence, which then neglects to acknowledge the ruin it has created. The recognition that the violence exists in the beforehand, the attack, and its aftermath is useful in the complication of a simple conception of a singular atrocity event. The trauma from drone strike victims and their families and loved ones can live on and haunt them for lifetimes.

Engaging with Other Forms of Resistance:

In order to complicate other dominant ways of thinking about drone strikes and the victims they produce, it is important to bring in other types of ‘documentation’ or evidential knowledge. As opposed to the economistic and empirical obsession with numerical data, here I

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
will step away from forms of documentation that have become heavily relied upon, such as interviews, reports, and statistical data. In order to contest these modes of thinking and of knowing, it is necessary to engage with other forms of expression. These ways of relating with the world include art, poetry, music, narratives, and rugs. These seemingly marginal modes of expressing feelings, emotions, traumas, fears, and loves are incredibly important in thinking about violence in the world and about thoughtful ways of relating with others. In thinking about these forms of art, it is also necessary to keep in mind the understanding that (in my case, personally) I cannot truly know the pain, trauma, and suffering that the writers, singers, artists, carpet-makers, and speakers have endured, and continue to endure. However, with these types of expressions and voices, another pathway of relating to other people and experiences is opened. These forms represent various other entry points into different ways of thinking about the world.

Nazia Iqbal, a Pashto singer from Pakistan highlights the feelings of helplessness in her poems: "My love, you are far away from me, and these drones will target you. I am helpless and can't stop them, and my tears are dropping from my eyes as if water is dropping from a spring." This poem illustrates the feelings of complete powerlessness in the face of the overwhelming immensity and capacity of drones. Not only does the poem recall the pain and heartbreak of the condition of love, with all of its vulnerabilities, but it also evokes the helplessness attributed to the feeling of living under the threat of drone strikes and fearing for the lives of those who live under this threat.

The heartbreakingly beautiful poem by Nazia Iqbal evokes the idea of helplessness and vulnerability. In Adriana Cavarero’s *Horrorism*, she describes the differences between these two concepts. Vulnerability is the condition of being able to be wounded at any time. This is an unchanging condition, where there is always potential for someone to be exposed to a *vulnus*.

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However, the concept of helplessness is different. Only under certain circumstances can a person be helpless.

“As its etymology suggests, the ‘helpless one’ (‘l’inerme,’ literally ‘the unarmed one’) is he who does not bear arms and thus cannot harm, kill, or wound. But in everyday usage, rather than this incapacity to take the offensive, the term ‘helpless’ tends to designate a person who, attacked by an armed other, has no arms with which to defend himself. Defenseless and in the power of the other, the helpless person finds himself substantially in a condition of passivity, undergoing violence he can neither flee from nor defend against. The scene is entirely tilted toward unilateral violence. There is no symmetry, no parity, no reciprocity” (Cavarero 30).

In this way, Cavarero points to the concept of helplessness and the circumstances under which a person may be categorized as such. In this love poem, the feeling of helplessness is clear. It is a poignant and disarming form of expressing a pain that seems overwhelmingly impossible to counter. However, it is interesting to look into the various ways in which people engage with this pain by resisting through artistic and poetic forms. The realm of art, music, and poetry is perhaps the most powerful form of resisting due to its emotive and political qualities. One interesting form that has been used by certain people who chose to exhibit the realities and pervasion of drone violence is through rugs.

Drones have begun to appear on rugs in certain places in Pakistan. These ‘war rugs,’ as they are referred do, have previously featured AK-47s and tanks in the 1980s, but now are reflecting the presence of drones. “One of the older local weavers, now in her 80s, told me that
the reason for weaving drones on carpets by women here is to show to the West that their brutal killing machines are always under our feet.”

The anger and frustration toward drone strikes and their unwelcome existence in the everyday lives of so many people, especially for these women who were displaced from Afghanistan after the Soviet war and now live in refugee camps in Pakistan, is expressed in these rugs. The market for these rugs is mostly in the West, so the expression of frustration is particularly pointed and poignant. Having been rendered voiceless against drones in other ways, these war rugs allow for their voices to be heard through this economic exchange. Perhaps these manifestations of images of drones on war rugs will force those who do not think about this violence on a daily basis to realize that the threat of drone violence has become omnipotent and pervasive for those who make the carpets under which they stand.

Street art and poetry have also become significant forms of resistance in Yemen. Street art, or graffiti, specifically, has become an important part of the public opposition to drone strikes, allowing for this type of art to be accessible to anyone who walks by it, rather than just on the white walls of contemporary art galleries. In this way, the distance between the graffiti and the viewer is diminished, allowing for more engagement with this art. One of Murad Subay’s public art campaigns in 2013 in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, was called “12 Hours,” which

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discussed twelve social and political issues in Yemen. One of these issues was U.S. drones. For this issue, a spray painting depicted a seven-foot long U.S. drone, under which an image of a child appears with: ‘Why did you kill my family?’ written in red letters in both English and Arabic. This usage of street art as a new form of communicating with people in the community is another way in which the frustration, pain, suffering, and heartbreak is demonstrated. “[Art] galleries in Yemen belong to one class. Graffiti is for all people.” Subay mentions this influence of street art as something that does not just belong to a certain group of people, but is for all of the community. The threat of drone attacks there does not just target one group, but it is present for the entire community.

Poetry has also become an important part of resistance against drones in Yemen, as an anti-drone poetry contest has become another artistic medium through which to express anger. The poems were submitted by more than thirty people, with lines such as, “From above, death descends upon us,” “Drones are the friend of our enemy,” “Do you fight terrorism with terrorism?”, and more. Although the uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the threat of drone strikes has become ever-present and overwhelming, poetry, art, graffiti, and other creative forms of artistic and poetic expression offer another imagination of how to express voices in a condition in which those voices have constantly been rendered silent and invisible.

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
Conclusion:

After having outlined a few of the ethical, philosophical, and political aspects of drone strikes and their violences, it is necessary to think about what questions remain as well as what entry points into other ways of thinking are possible. When thinking about drone violence, it is useful to think about the hyper-technologized and mechanized nature of the killings as a facet of the atrocity, but not the entirety of the violence. Perhaps it may be helpful to think of the type of violence that drones deploy as facilitating the violence, but not truly causing it. The war machine that the U.S. continues to perpetuate is one of the main, driving factors of this type of violence. What, then, are the remaining questions, puzzlings, implications, or concerns that stem from drone killings? How might it be possible for these issues to be addressed within the language of the modern West and its political realm? Or would it be more beneficial to use an alternative language or form of thinking about this type of violence in the international arena in order to include more voices and more perspectives (especially from those at the other end of drone violence)? How might these lingering questions assist us in pursuit of a more thoughtful, ethical, and inclusive way of thinking and writing about violence in the international sphere? Here, I will outline some of these remaining questions that persist throughout the four parts of this paper.

Perhaps it is time to revisit the shocking image of Omran Daqneesh, a figure who became symbolic of the suffering of an entire group of people. It is useful to question and rethink the conditions through which Omran enters into the Western political imaginary. Earlier in this
thesis, I have problematized the ways in which this specific image, rather than other images, has gained such large amounts of media attention. However, there remains another aspect of this image and the political mechanisms that operate around it, which is worth considering. About a month after Omran’s picture was released, another young boy gained international media attention as well. Alex, a six-year-old boy from Scarsdale, New York also gained attention after his family posted a video of him reading a letter he wrote, addressed to former President Obama. In this letter, Alex asked if Omran could come to the U.S. and live with him and his family. “Since he won’t bring toys, I will share my bike and I will teach him how to ride it. I will teach him addition and subtraction. My little sister will be collecting butterflies and fireflies for him... We can all play together. We will give him a family and he will be our brother.”48 The heartfelt, sincere, genuine, and touching words of this young boy were so powerful that former President Obama referred to them in his speech to the United Nations in his remarks at the Leaders Summit on Refugees. “The humanity that a young child can display, who hasn’t learned to be cynical, or suspicious, or fearful of other people because of where they’re from, or how they look, or how they pray, and who just understands the notion of treating somebody that is like him with compassion, with kindness – we can all learn from Alex.”49 I understand and appreciate Alex’s kind words and the compassion, empathy, and kind-heartedness that he displays through his letter. I also acknowledge the thoughtful message that former President Obama was sending through this speech.

48 Corkery, Claire. “‘He will be our brother’: US boy asks Obama if he can adopt Syrian refugee.” CNN, 22 September 2016.
However, with these words, the humanity that is being invoked is imparted mostly upon Alex. What would it mean to allow this same humanity to be conveyed upon Omran as well, rather than viewing him as a victim or object? Is there a way to think about Omran without perpetuating the savior complex that is so engrained and embedded in the modern West’s humanitarian project? Could there be a way to give the same humanity to Omran that has been awarded to Alex? In other words, is there a way of seeing Omran as a full human, just as Alex is viewed as such? As I discussed in the first part of this thesis, I wonder if there is a possibility of extending this concern to those who may not usually be depicted in these shocking images that enter into the modern, western political imaginary. Would a politics of empathy truly be the best way to engage in an ethical relationship with the international and its violences? What might this mean in the search for a more thoughtful engagement with violence in the world?

In thinking about the questions that stay with me from the second part of this thesis, it is worth wondering what possibilities an alternative language would present in a departure from a certain detached, abstracted, and sterile linguistic form that has been used by defenders of drone violence. What would this alternative language look like? What would it mean to involve human terms and intimate language when speaking about this violence? Perhaps on a more practical level, would this make a difference in the international response and the potential anger, outrage, or compassion that is created by those who receive the news of this violence? Would the moment of heartbreak that has been collectively felt after witnessing Omran’s photo become normalized and desensitized? Or would these human stories and narratives of suffering lead to a greater political engagement and politics of care and compassion? Is it possible to engage in a linguistic world that would stray from the language that deploys an economistic reduction of humans into numbers? In my second part of this paper, I have also traced through the various ways in which legal language has become conflated with moral and ethical objections and condemnations, which raise several complicated philosophical questions. In this section, I have attempted to
follow the lexical web that surrounds drone discourse, while rethinking certain deployments of language as well as offering potential alternatives to this impersonal, detached, and abstract form of speaking and thinking about drone violence.

In the third part of this thesis, I have attempted to complicate the first world imaginary by comparing the killings of drone strikes with the violence of suicide bombings. Although these violences are very different in their nature, motivations, and deployment, they also are quite similar as well. Both of these types of violence enter into the spaces of everyday life for many people, who live in fear and under the threat of this potential killing. Both of these forms of killing operate from a point of supposed invisibility, one deployed from the sky and the other from the body. However, the moral grounds upon which these kinds of killing are posited are different. It is interesting to wonder why it has become obvious that drone violence is morally superior to that of suicide bombings. Both of these forms of killing result in human deaths and destruction of lives, yet one type is viewed as a better, more sanitized, precise, efficient, and effective way of killing. In this rethinking of an unequal moral supposition and location, a larger, more insidiously pervasive web of the modern, western way of thinking is disturbed. The question that remains from an exploration of this web stems from the infliction of a temporal otherness upon the subaltern. Through the imposition of ‘our’ past upon the ‘other’s’ temporal present, how did one way of killing become so much more accepted and morally superior to the killings of the Other? Why is violence in the international sphere only recognized as horrific, barbaric, and repugnant in some forms, but as sterile, clean, detached, and precise in other ways? In other words, why are some types of violence viewed as politically valid, and others are acts of terror?

Through the progression of this paper, arriving at the fourth part has become a sort of culmination of the modes of thinking and of studying drone violence that I believe should be centered. By invoking the stories, music, art, poetry, and rug-makings that have been created by
those at the other end of drone violence, I have centered these voices, which have been usually relegated to the peripheries (or have been viewed as collateral). After recognizing that the method of interviewing is problematic in many ways, I also acknowledge that this form of gathering stories and testimonies is also useful in understanding how drone violence has permeated the lives of so many people. By looking at a drone strike targeted at a community meeting in North Waziristan, Pakistan, I invoke the trauma and hopelessness that have become normalized and expected on an everyday basis. Here, I have also complicated the notion of a singular atrocity, as the threat and the aftermath are extremely violent as well. After exploring the voices that emerge through forms such as poetry, art, music, graffiti, and rugs, I have challenged the data-centered and economistic way of treating humans, and have tried to focus on other modes of human expression, which contribute to the treatment of those who live at the other end of drone violence as full humans.

Although there are many facets of drone strikes and their violences that can be studied and explored, the four parts of my thesis represent the aspects of drone violence that I found most important. Although there are still many remaining questions, problems, concerns, and implications that linger after having reconsidered various features of drone violence, this paper reflects the significance of engaging in meaningful ways of thinking about violence in our world(s). Upon reflection, I realize that this paper may not offer concrete solutions or alternatives to the current web of violent systems in place. However, it does attempt to raise important questions and perhaps to offer different ways of thinking about this type of violence. With this thesis, it is my intention to move toward a more ethical and thoughtful mode of thinking and relating with others and with the world, through a questioning, challenging, complicating, and reconsidering of the dominant discourse that surrounds drone strikes and their violences.
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