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Shala Cachelin

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The U.S. drone programme, imperial air power and Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas

Shala Cachelin

for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This article argues that the conduct of state violence by the U.S. drone programme against FATA, with roots in racist and Orientalist discourse, is a contemporary manifestation of imperial air power. While the U.S. drone programme has had a devastating effect on the civilians residing within the programme's operational areas, this article will focus on Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). With its own colonial history and position as the epicentre for U.S. drone strikes throughout the War on Terror, this region's civilian population has been caught in the crossfire. Though incredibly valuable, the current literature pertaining to the tribal region is largely isolated from colonial realities, which are necessary to understanding the function of U.S. drones within a contemporary context. This article will examine the various levels of civilian harm endured by FATA civilians by analysing these experiences alongside the imperial nature and neo-colonial emergence of drones, as well as the region's colonial history. Although global attention has shifted away from this region as the U.S. drone programme has expanded into other areas including Yemen and Somalia, an understanding of the FATA civilian experience illuminates patterns of imperial air power and mechanisms of control actively weaponised against various populations.

Introduction

As stated by Leon Panetta, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, drones have become "the only game in town" (McCrisken 2013, 109). Though the destabilising and adverse ramifications of the U.S. programme are experienced throughout the Middle East region, this article will explicitly focus on Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This article will focus on FATA for three main reasons: its centrality in the War on Terror following 9/11, its own history with empire, and the extensive suffering experienced by civilians. For Washington, FATA can be considered "the most dangerous region on earth" (Williams 2010, 871) due to its inaccessible and semiautonomous nature, making it an ideal safe-haven for Taliban and Al-Qaeda members after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. With its own colonial history, the tribal territory has been regarded as an area of exception under Pakistan's Constitution.

Exploiting its unique legal status, the U.S. has used the region's lack of constitutional protection and ostracisation by the central government to perpetrate its state-sanctioned drone violence.

The main argument of this article is that the U.S. drone programme reflects a contemporary manifestation of imperial air power, rooted in Orientalist and racist discourse actively weaponised against FATA civilians. While early European imperialism has typically been characterised by state activities that involve the "expropriation of territory, settlement, and resource extraction" (Blakeley 2018, 325), this understanding has evolved and expanded. Thus, for the purposes of this article, imperialism will be theorised as pertaining to when American interests, authority, and "access is threatened [and] the US projects its power, deploying violence to terrorise those who would resist" (Blakeley 2018, 326). Addressing an important area of research, this article will analyse the ways in which the U.S. drone programme and its accompanying imperialist and Orientalist practices, have impacted civilian life within Pakistan's FATA.

In doing so, this article will contribute a new analysis of two distinct sets of literature (the civilian impact of drone strikes, and drones as a form of imperialism), which currently remain disconnected. Many non-governmental organisations have published their findings, filled with rich primary material and testimonies, highlighting the extensive damage perpetuated by drones on both the individual and community level (Amnesty International 2013; Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012; Center for Civilians in Conflict 2010; Center for Civilians in Conflict and Human Rights Clinic at Columbia Law School 2012; Reprieve 2013). While incredibly valuable, these findings, specifically the function of drones in the region, are isolated from the colonial realities which continue to inform the modern-day.

Separate from FATA civilians' experience is a vast amount of existing literature on drones as a form of imperialism. Such literature includes the exploration of the ways in which the U.S. drone programme is rooted in Orientalist, colonial, and racist discourse (Afxentiou 2018; Allinson 2015; Baggiarini 2015; Barrinha and Da Mota 2017; Blakeley 2018; Chamayou 2015; Emery and Brunstetter 2015; Espinoza 2018; Feldman 2011; Gregory 2011, 2014; Kaplan 2018; Munro 2015; Neocleous 2013, 2014; Parks and Kaplan 2017; Pugliese 2015, 2020; Satia 2014; Shaw 2013, 2016; Shaw and Akhter 2014; Wall and Monahan 2011; Wilcox 2017). While such literature provides a detailed account of the integral role of Orientalism, the contemporary manifestation of imperial power, and the ramifications of drones, these works have not directly applied these findings to FATA, a major target of U.S. drone strikes post 9/11. Additionally, while much of the literature focuses on the apparatus of drones, this article will shift attention back onto civilian harm. Through combining these two sets of literature, this article will build upon these works, making a contribution by exploring the influence of empire on the operation of the U.S. drone programme and its impact on the FATA civilian experience within a more contemporary context. By investigating the relationships between FATA civilian harm, the imperial nature and neo-colonial emergence of drones, as well as the region's colonial history, this article will highlight the violence, systematic coercion, and dehumanising racial prejudice that the current literature pertaining to the tribal area is not acknowledging.

Through drawing historical parallels with colonial practices, the extent to which the U.S. drone programme continues to extend its power over FATA civilians and reproduce particular racialised power structures can be better understood. To do so, the article begins with a background on the U.S. drone programme and FATA, including an analysis of the implications of the definition of a militant, followed by an in-depth analysis of the micro-level and macro-level effects of the U.S. drone programme's toll on tribal civilian life. The micro and macro level effects, which will be discussed later in this article, are a direct result of the conceptualisation of "militant" and its lack of distinction from "civilian."

As the U.S. has expanded and escalated its drone programme into other places such as Yemen and Somalia, consequently shifting global attention, it is important that the experiences of and violence committed against the civilians of FATA continue to be scrutinised. While the exercise of such imperialist air power is not limited to Pakistan's tribal areas, the civilian experience can be used to illuminate broader patterns of exploitation and mechanisms for control applied to new target populations. The institutionalisation of, and continued reliance on, drones, in and outside the Middle East, as a means to enforce American influence, sets a dangerous precedent for the future of warfare, global order, human rights, and the continuation of colonial policing. It is therefore increasingly important that the U.S. drone programme is not solely regarded as a benign means of ensuring national security but rather a mechanism by which the nation pursues imperialist motivations and underpins its authority. Such understandings are necessary to help prevent, or at least curtail, similar future policy and practices of U.S. violence against civilian life.

Background on the U.S. Drone programme

A drone is defined by the U.S. Department of Defence as an "aircraft or balloon that does not carry a human operator and is capable of flight under remote control or autonomous programming" (2010, 252). The beginning of the U.S. drone programme can be traced back to World War I and World War II when aerial bombing was first explored and later integrated into the country's national military strategy (Chandler 2017; van Creveld 1989). However, it is important to note that the development of the U.S. drone programme was not isolated or exceptional, but rather influenced by Britain's aerial policing of its Iraq colony in the 1920s. Regarded as "a counterinsurgency mission in the truest sense," (Rundquist 2009, 7) the British Royal Air Force's policing exemplifies the way in which "air power and colonial rule went hand in hand" (Neocleous 2013, 581). As such, the U.S. drone programme is a continuation of colonialism, specifically imperial air power, through the use of more modern technology.

Faced with a revolt in 1920, the British empire demonstrated its resilience and "superiority" by using air power to crush the rising dissent taking place in Iraq (Todd 2006). Expressing the merit of aerial policing, Commander Peck noted in 1928 that "none is so admirably suited to warfare against wild men and in wild countries, as the aircraft" (Shaw and Akhter 2014, 217). Providing a new way to assert colonial authority in a covert manner, this type of policing allowed Britain to elude queries regarding Iraq's territorial sovereignty.

Less conspicuous than troops yet still violent, this method effectively rendered Iraq a colony without the official label. In this way, punishment alongside constant surveillance, two key aspects of the U.S. drone programme, became the norm for the local population (Satia 2014).

From crushing resistance, to killing, to surveillance, to disrupting normal life, drones have upheld the various dimensions that constituted colonial aerial policing (Blakeley 2018; Neocleous 2013). As Munro argues, "the occupation of airspace entailed by drones arguably represents a continuum of the fabrication of colonial order" (2015, 128). Thus, the experiences of the British empire in Iraq and the development of the U.S. drone programme are strikingly but unsurprisingly similar, with the latter revolutionising violent "civilising" practices (Blakeley 2018; Satia 2008, 2014).

Throughout the Cold War era, drone technology was increasingly invested in and refined, pushing its development forward. Unmanned drones were crucial in gathering intelligence from behind the Iron Curtain and for avoiding the possibility of a pilot being shot down by the Soviets. Some of the most noteworthy products of the Cold War era's technology were the Tagboard, Lightning Bug, and Aquiline drones, which revolutionised both the weapons market and U.S. counterinsurgency. Consequently, the process of intelligence gathering transformed from a more human-dependent process, to being technologically based (Kindervater 2016). However, it was during the Vietnam War that drones gained even more attention and dominance (Gregory 2011). Employed in roughly 3,000 missions, drones proved their utility in a hostile environment (Comptroller General of the United States 1981). Similar to Britain's aerial imperial strategy in Iraq decades prior, the U.S. used Operation Phoenix and its military technology, specifically drones, to not only execute the Vietcong's leadership but also to terrorise the Vietnamese population (Blakeley 2018).

Not until the attacks of 9/11 when U.S. aerial control was infringed upon to such a great extent, had any political administration taken such an unparalleled interest in drones (Fuller 2015; Kaplan 2006). Successfully armed with Hellfire missiles, drones evolved into a killing machine, as the concept of lethal surveillance materialised (Kindervater 2016). Accompanied by sophisticated and cutting-edge technology, the kill chain, which is the process beginning with the target's identification and ending with that target's execution, was reduced to less than five minutes (Callam 2010). For decades – dating back to World War II – the kill chain had lasted between days and weeks, death becoming even more unexceptional as killing became even more rapid (Gregory 2011). While generating the geopolitical conditions for Washington to wage a permanent war, the distinction between "us" and "them" was solidified (Denike 2015; Shaw 2013). Arguably the most consequential development by the Bush administration regarding the nation's drone programme was the deviation from personality strikes, which occur once the target of the drone strike has been officially identified. Instead, came the dominance of signature strikes, where individuals remained unidentified, eliminated based on suspicious behaviours or coded patterns of life. The popularity of the signature strike and its ability to digitally generate a larger pool of potential targets secured its longevity as a U.S. military strategy amongst succeeding government administrations (Shaw 2016; Wilcox 2017).

Accordingly, the transition from the Bush to Obama administration is characterised by a policy change from "torture and extraordinary rendition" to "industrial-scale extrajudicial execution" (Woods 2012, 1). In the first two years of Obama's term alone, he

authorised four times as many strikes as Bush did in the entirety of his time in office, escalating the number of targeted killings at an unprecedented rate (Bergen and Tiedemann 2011). The U.S. drone programme and its accompanying violence became even more systematic upon the consolidation of a disposition matrix, in which various kill lists from American intelligence agencies were compiled into one singular database (Shaw 2013). Largely unescapable, this matrix not only augments the ability of technology to execute, but also intertwines drones with systems of information, military power, human targets, and geopolitical zones. Having reconstructed and redefined international structures and relations, the day-to-day lives of those on the ground have been bound to the military complex (Pugliese 2015). The conduct of state violence through these various developments not only centralised state power, but also granted the U.S. powers by which to determine which groups of individuals amongst those of a foreign population, in this case FATA, should be put to death (Shaw 2013; Shaw and Akhter 2014).

Federally administered tribal areas

Frequently referred to as "Pakistan's lawless frontier," (Johnston and Sarbahi 2016, 204) FATA is an approximately twenty-seven thousand square kilometre region located in the country's northwest. A predominately Pashtun region neighbouring Afghanistan, FATA is comprised of seven agencies: the Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, North Waziristan, Orakzai, and South Waziristan (FATA 2020a). While a detailed account of FATA's history is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to briefly include the area's colonial past in order to better comprehend its current geopolitical and legal status, as well the experiences of its civilian residents under the U.S. drone programme.

Throughout the nineteenth century, FATA was an imperial battleground for the British empire, playing a key role in protecting the nation's influence over India while acting as a buffer in warding off Russian expansionism. The British exerted their control over the region through the Frontier Crimes Regulations, legislation that was used as a mechanism for managing the native population and for suppressing dissent (FATA 2020a). Upon national independence in 1947, Pakistan retained the colonial-era regulations. As a result, FATA remained outside of the government's jurisdiction and was declared an area of exception from courts and Parliament (Shaw and Akhter 2012, 2014). Consequently, FATA's unique status has been exploited by the U.S. to exempt the population from conventional rules of war, to prey on its lack of constitutional protections, and hence to inflict mass violence on the region and its residents (Baggiarini 2015).

FATA became entangled in the War on Terror following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, during which many Al-Qaeda and Taliban members crossed the border and found refuge in Pakistan's mountainous tribal areas. The autonomous nature of the region aided the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in carving out a "state-within-a-state," establishing a sphere of influence outside of Pakistan's central government (Bachmann 2013; Williams 2010). From 2002 to 2004, drones were employed to surveille the region and terrorist activities within it. In 2004, the U.S. launched its first strike in Pakistan, killing Nek Muhammad, a Taliban commander who recently had declared public support for Al-Qaeda (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). Following Muhammad's death, FATA

became the epicentre of U.S. drone strikes (Shaw 2013). The Bush administration took it upon itself to cease notifying or gaining the permission of the Pakistani government before a strike. While defending the decision by noting the instances in which targeted individuals had been tipped off, it also highlights the insignificance of Pakistani sovereignty compared to American aerial power that persisted for many years (Williams 2010). According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, there has been a minimum total of 430 strikes since 2004 (2021).

However, it is important to note that independent verification and accurate civilian casualty reports of these drone operations are nearly impossible to obtain. Researchers, journalists, non-FATA residents, and nongovernmental organisations which do attempt to authenticate such statistics are either banned from entering the region or their access is severely restricted. The few who are allowed to enter and collect data are monitored closely by the Pakistani military, making any accurate information on the civilian versus militant death toll incredibly difficult to evaluate (Amnesty International 2013; Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). With little means of defence against drones, FATA and its residents, terrorist and civilian alike, have been subjected to what is considered the "most extensive targeted assassination campaign since the Vietnam War" (Williams 2009, 1).

Civilian or militant?

Throughout his time in office, President Obama defended the nation's drone programme and reaffirmed to the American public that "actually, drones have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties ... and before any strike is taken, there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured" (2016, 1). However, it is important to note that his argument is based on the administration categorising "all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants [or militants] ... unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent" (Becker and Shane 2012, 1). These ambiguous guidelines for defining a militant, and thus the means in which civilian deaths are recorded, are problematic on multiple fronts.

First, the definition of a militant neglects to differentiate between high-value and low-level targets, an important distinction as the latter, with no real means, poses little threat to U.S. national security. Second, the utilisation of two categories, civilian or militant, underpins a general misconception that every militant is a legitimate target that can be put to death (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). Lastly, the claimed success and significance of the U.S. drone programme as a counterterrorism strategy are based on a drone's ability to target and kill militants. By including civilian deaths as those of militants, the drone programme uses its broad criteria for an acceptable target to inflate the programme's perceived success rate. Thus, the U.S. aggrandises the success of its drone programme by including the killing of innocent people, more specifically "military-age males" (MAM), who had no ties to terrorist groups (Shaw 2013, 2016). Referred to as MAM for short, humans are reduced to acronyms (Pugliese 2015, 2020). As Baggiarini raises, "how can a dead person prove his innocence? For the many labeled as militants when they are killed, it's difficult to verify if they really were active members" (2015, 139). It is only after death that a victim may retroactively be classified as a civilian casualty (Pugliese 2015). As admitted by

a senior intelligence official, "they count the corpses and they're not really sure who they are" (Becker and Shane 2012, 1). Embodying the conduct of empire, the U.S. kills first and decides – on occasion – to discover whether those targeted were innocents after (Pugliese 2015, 2020).

Additionally, the intermingling of militants in civilian everyday life is largely unavoidable (Shaw 2013). However, from Washington's perspective, "you are a terrorist if you are in a zone where there are terrorists," essentially pursued and killed based on "guilt by association" (Zulaika 2014, 173). The U.S. policy of signature strikes, in which unidentified males are targeted, is founded on prejudiced and racial profiling. Instead of distinguishing between potential militants and innocent civilians, the U.S. homogenises an entire population based on their existence in the same region (Espinoza 2018). Consequently, the residents of FATA are facing a powerful and engrained system of race-thinking in which "guilt-by-association" is indiscriminately determined by what part of town they reside in, what mosque they pray at, whom they talk to at the market, or how their last name is spelled (Roach and Trotter 2005). The escalation of signature strikes in FATA produced a more extensive pool of Pakistanis who would be arbitrarily targeted and executed by U.S. drones, "racial profiling gone global" (Baggiarini 2015, 173). With profiling nowhere near selective (Chamayou 2015), its operation on such a large scale is far from inconsequential. Crossing borders and international air space, the lens through which the West views the Orient is transposed, rendering foreign populations intrinsically suspicious.

Once cultural norms, such as holding a jirga or carrying a gun, were now grounds to kill, bringing death even closer to FATA civilians (Center for Civilians in Conflict 2010; Shaw 2013). As observed by a resident of North Waziristan: "anyone who grows a beard and has a gun and drives a car – people think he might be a Taliban fighter . . . But over here every man carries a gun so you cannot tell who is Taliban and who is just a local in his village" (Amnesty International 2013, 28). This difficulty or unwillingness to differentiate between innocents and militants is acknowledged by the Pentagon's Defence Science Board noting that "enemy combatants look like everyone else; enemy vehicles look like civilian vehicles; enemy equipment and materials look like civilian equipment and materials" (Gregory 2011, 200). While referring to the lenient conditions required to execute signature strikes, a State Department official jokes that "when the CIA sees three guys doing jumping jacks, the agency thinks it's a terrorist training camp" (Becker and Shane 2012, 1). Constituting what Feldman (2011) explains as "racialisation from above", the line between civilian and militant is progressively blurred. Providing an additional vantage point in which to racialise bodies, technologies, including drones, extend imperial power structures while also maintaining the perception that those below, in this case Muslims, are suspect. From a group prayer representing nefarious intent to repositioning a vehicle signifying a flanking manoeuvre, FATA residents are predetermined to be dangerous (Wilcox 2017). In essence, the "construction of certain bodies as threatening is thus less a matter of what is known about them than a desire to make bodies into what we already know they must be" (21).

The necropolitical logic on which drones operate, that distinguishes between civilian and militant, is also dangerously vague (Allinson 2015). Determining "who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe 2003, 27), the drone programme enables American power to command death over FATA. The U.S. is not

only empowered to kill those it sees fit, but its prejudiced approach assumes an entire segment of the population illegitimate (Allinson 2015; Butler 2004). In this way, those residing in FATA "are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe 2003, 40). For the drone programme to determine the life or death of those categorised as "military-age males," the U.S. relies on an Orientalist system of knowledge, in which a Middle Eastern male is constructed as an enemy (Allinson 2015). The U.S.' classification of a militant is not objective, but rather imbedded in and shaped by racial profiling, political power, and prejudicial assumptions (Espinoza 2018). Thus, the U.S. drone programme has reduced FATA residents to an expendable, subhuman category.

Such attitudes are bolstered by the pervasiveness of Orientalist discourse in the West which propagates the belief that Middle Eastern males are "uncivilised terrorists" (Said 2003), furthering the dehumanisation of Pakistan's population and consequently rationalising the U.S.' imperialist drone programme. Orientalism and its racially charged stereotypes are a fundamental component of imperial activity and the structures it upholds. Maintaining a hierarchical relationship, the actions of the "superior" ruler onto its "inferior" subjects are legitimised. Having been heavily influenced by British colonialism of Iraq in the 1920s, the U.S. drone programme has mirrored similar false and dehumanising narratives. Referred to as "ignorant", "ill-disciplined" and "savage" by the Air Ministry, the "other" population thus necessitated British aerial bombings and intervention (Afxentiou 2018). An exception to conventional warfare, the violent tendencies which Iraqi culture and faith were seen to possess acted as justification for Royal Air Force officers to deprive them of Western ideals pertaining to human rights and justice (Afxentiou 2018; Satia 2006). These views, rooted in colonial-era logic, embody the same contemporary, derogatory language and attitudes which underpin the U.S. drone programme in FATA. With their lives reduced to "bugsplat," "prairie dogs," "rats slithering through the slums," "barbarians" and "mice being snagged by hawks circling above" (Baggiarini 2015, 138), the U.S. reinforces its predatory behaviour, using racism as "the main ideological weapon of imperialistic politics" (Arendt 1985, 160).

In a similar way, the significance of the military distinction between combatant and civilian for FATA, as in Iraq, has been largely made redundant. As the head of the British administration in Iraq shared, "the term civilian population has a very different meaning in Iraq from what it has in Europe . . . the whole of its male population are potential fighters" (Satia 2006, 38). Furthermore, women and children were viewed as "negligible" given that, as a British commander describes, "[sheikhs] . . . do not seem to resent . . . that [they] are accidentally killed by bombs" (Satia 2014, 10). Within Western discourse, the Middle East is portrayed to essentially have no civilians, a representation which carries its legacy from the 1920s into today (Satia 2014), as those on the ground are relegated the status of potential terrorists (Barrinha and Da Mota 2017). Both Pugliese (2015) and Wilcox (2015b) argue that the concept of a civilian category – outlined by international law and designed to protect men, women, and children alike – has been suspended by the U.S. drone programme and the matrix that drives it. Through designating them as lesser, the U.S. asserts control over FATA, the region's people an object for American domination. With drones operating in the defence of white American life (Baggiarini 2015), FATA residents have subsequently been debased to "just another form of animal life" (Mbembe

2003, 24). Far from objective, the inherently prejudiced and arbitrary manner in which the U.S. drone programme distinguishes between a militant and civilian reinforces the position of American power by delegitimising the lives of those in FATA.

Micro-level effects

Physical trauma

Civilians not immediately killed by U.S. drone strikes are left physically wounded; there are estimated to be between 1,162 and 1,749 injuries since 2004 (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism 2021). The blast of the strike alone is able to crush one's internal organs and leave skin so burned that "you can't tell cattle from human" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 94). Additional injuries include deafness, blindness, head trauma, shrapnel wounds, disfigurement, loss of limbs, and limb amputations (Center for Civilians in Conflict 2010). One such case is that of Mamana Bibi, a 68-year-old grandmother of the Ghundi Kala village, who was killed in 2012 by a drone while in the garden. Nabeela, Bibi's eight-year-old granddaughter, recalls how:

> The explosion was very close . . . We found her mutilated body a short time afterwards . . . It had been thrown quite a long distance away by the blast and it was in pieces. We collected as many different parts from the field and wrapped them in a cloth. (Amnesty International 2013, 19).

Bibi's grandchildren all sustained shrapnel injuries with varying severity. The youngest victim, three-year-old Safdar who had been on the roof at the time, fractured numerous bones which continue to cause health complications. There is no official explanation for the strike that killed Mamana Bibi and injured an additional nine others, eight of whom were children. Investigations found the only people in the vicinity at the time of the drone strike were Bibi's grandchildren – not militants (Amnesty International 2013).

To make matters more difficult, there is a lack of proper medical infrastructure, training, and facilities in the FATA region to care for and perform surgeries on injured victims. Drone strike victims are frequently sent to Peshawar to receive appropriate treatment, a trip which can take between hours and days depending on the roads, curfews, and security, a perilous situation for those in critical condition (Amnesty International 2013; Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). As Shakeeb, a Darai Nishtar resident, notes "there is no hospital in this area" and often someone "dies on the way before reaching the nearest hospital" (Amnesty International 2013, 41).

Additionally, the U.S.' engagement in double tap strikes has deterred both civilians and emergency services from assisting the injured (Woods 2013). A double tap strike involves the deployment of follow up strikes aimed at those who attempt to help the victims of the initial strike (Williams 2013). Noor Behram, a journalist born in North Waziristan, describes that "[w]hat America has tried to do is attack the rescue teams . . . only three or four willing people who know that if they go, they are going to die, only they go in" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 75). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's bulletin:

> Terrorists may use secondary explosive devices to kill and injure emergency personnel responding to an initial attack . . . Such terror devices are generally detonated less than one hour after initial attack, targeting first responders as well as the general population. (Greenwald 2012, 1).

Thus, by the Bureau's own guidelines, these double tap drone strikes make the U.S. complicit in an act of terrorism, its strategy specifically designed to invoke fear and cause further harm (Espinoza 2018). Seen as justifiable when sanctioned by state power onto the "other," a double tap is considered an act of terrorism when the situation is reversed. This double standard serves to crystallise how the lives of FATA civilians are regarded as less valuable than their American counterparts.

One of the many accounts of double tap strikes is the case of the Zowi Sidgi village which was hit in July 2012 while a group of labourers had gathered to share a meal (Amnesty International 2013). Ahsan, a village resident, describes "a very horrible scene. Body parts were scattered everywhere. Bodies without heads and bodies without hands or legs. Everyone in the hut was cut to pieces" (18). Those willing to sift through the rubble in search of survivors were met with an additional series of U.S. missiles. In total, 18 individuals were killed and another 22 were left injured, including an eight-year-old girl. All those interviewed attested that those killed were honest villagers who had not participated in any militant activity (Amnesty International 2013).

What is demonstrated by these events is that the U.S. has replaced an identified site with a physical body as the ideal point of violence – regardless of whether it is a militant (Gregory 2014; Shaw and Akhter 2014). This transition is underwritten by a regime of biopolitical power that has rendered life as the target (Shaw 2013; Wall and Monahan 2011). Whether killed or injured, the body itself has become the target, with drones "tak[ing] life as both its object and its objective" (Foucault 1990, 254). Through drones, the U.S. acquires what Puar (2017) terms the "right to maim," debilitating certain bodies for the purposes of social control. A status of its own existing between life and death, often informed by Orientalist and racialised logic, debilitation becomes an additional means by which authority can be imposed over particular groups. In essence, the U.S. drone programme has become a biopolitical method of warfare designed to safeguard its own population at the expense of the "other" – civilian and militant alike (Espinoza 2018). Effectively choosing "between worthy and unworthy life" (Su Rasmussen 2011, 40), drones, as a tool to manage populations and extend American power, are granted sovereignty in determining who gets to live.

This biopolitical power finds its justification and ideological foundation in racism, creating "a break into the domain of life that is under power's control" (Foucault 2003, 254). Racism facilitates the relationship between the "expendable," in this case FATA civilians, and the "worthy," in this case American life in the name of the War on Terror. For the U.S. drone programme and its underlying logic, it is only through the exclusion and sacrifice of FATA civilians that American lives will be protected and saved (Denike 2015). The only crime of Mamana Bibi, Bibi's grandchildren, and Zowi Sidgi's male labourers was that they were part of a population viewed by the U.S. as disposable. Being used as a means to legitimate domination over and violence towards another, the power of the U.S. is further reinforced by its colonial history of modernity and technological progress. By highlighting the technically sophisticated and judicious targeting abilities of its drone programme, the U.S. evokes an image of being virtuous and humane (Espinoza 2018; Shaw 2005). Perpetuating the dichotomy between the "civilised" West and "uncivilised" Orient, drones uphold racialised hierarchies that enable the auditing, maiming, and killing of the "other." Thus, the U.S. wields the ultimate form of imperial control over FATA: that of life and death.

Psychological harm

Those who operate drones and the FATA civilians forced to live under them have a strikingly different experience of war. From air-conditioned trailers, the process of killing for drone operators is similar to playing a videogame, detached from the remote targets who are hunted and killed. In stark contrast, the lives of those who exist under drones can be characterised by dread, surveillance, and mass violence (Gregory 2014; Mayer 2009; Wilcox 2015a, 2015b). Demonstrating the drone's capability to deter future terrorist activity, al-Zarqawi writes to bin Laden that "our presence is apparent and our movement is out in the open. Eyes are everywhere" (Al-Zarqawi 2004, 1). However, the consequence of this capability is not contained, as drones also subject innocent civilians to the same terror that is intended for terrorists. While it is easier to quantitatively measure casualties and visible injuries, the pervasiveness of psychological harm on an individual level is as important. Drones have inflicted such extreme feelings of fear that insomnia, nightmares, nervous breakdowns, PTSD, irritability, manic behaviour, and anticipatory anxiety have become common throughout the FATA community (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). For civilians, FATA has become a "hell on earth" as the "buzz of a distant propeller is a constant reminder of imminent death" (Rohde 2012, 1). Haroon Quddoos (anonymised), a taxi driver who has survived two drone strikes, testifies that he and his fellow civilians are:

> always thinking that it is either going to attack our homes or whatever we do . . . No matter what we are doing, that fear is always inculcated in us. Because whether we are driving a car, or we are working on a farm, or we are sitting home playing cards – we are always thinking the drone will strike us. (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 82).

In spite of the considerable presence of psychological distress amongst FATA civilians, stigmatisation surrounding mental health frequently causes psychological pain to be expressed instead as physical symptoms. Medical professionals have documented cases in which patients experience fainting, body aches, vomiting, respiratory issues, and headaches, all with no explainable physiological basis. Civilian suffering is further exacerbated by the small number of mental health professionals and treatment options available within the FATA region (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). With few sufficient options, residents have resorted to troubling methods to cope including people being "tied in their houses because of their mental state" or "just locked in a room . . . just like you lock people in prison" (87–88). Furthermore, the conditions of day-to-day life place the fate of the younger generations in a precarious position. Sulayman Afraz (anonymised), a Pakistani mental health professional, communicates how:

> The biggest concern I have is that when the children grow up, the kinds of images they will have with them, it is going to have a lot of consequences. You can imagine the impact it has on personality development . . . it causes permanent scarring and damage. (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 87).

An illustrative example is that of Mamana Bibi's granddaughter, Nabeela, who reveals that she "wasn't scared of drones before, but now when they fly overhead I wonder, will I be next?" (Amnesty International 2013, 7). The concerns shared by ordinary civilians and medical professionals alike are not far-fetched but a poignant reality.

The psychological trauma felt within FATA – by civilians and militants alike – is not a new or unique phenomenon but rather a reproduction of colonial experiences. Throughout history, empires have actively utilised air power not solely as a means to cause physical pain but also to create mental torment. The objective was to use the fear of the unknown to create feelings of helplessness and to drive the subjected populations into obedience. By making their presence above known to civilians, colonial powers gave the impression that those below were being surveilled in a constant, Panoptical manner (Afxentiou 2018; Satia 2014). This same tactic has become a key feature of the U.S. drone programme, with drones serving as both a "technique of gathering information" and "a doleful reminder to people on the ground of the omnipresence of imperial power" (Afxentiou 2018, 314). Given the unpredictability of a strike, those living under drones remain in a state of fear not knowing when or if they will be targeted (Emery and Brunstetter 2015; Wilcox 2015b). As such, drones have become a tangible way in which the U.S. exerts its control, extends state violence, and coerces populations.

The psychological manipulation enabled by the pervasiveness of U.S. drones emulates that exercised by the Royal Air Force through its aerial bombings against Iraq in the 1920s. Described by Afxentiou (2018), the strategy of Britain's bombings was predicated on the notion that physical violence would negatively impact the psychological state of the Iraqis, with the force's intention being to overpower those residing on the ground. Beyond the actual aerial bombings, the Air Ministry revealed that terror was inflicted purely through Britain's aerial presence which "from the ground every inhabitant of a native village [was] under the impression that … all their movements [were] being watched and reported" (314). The perpetuation of psychological trauma, particularly through surveillance, is thus an intentional means by which the U.S. exercises and preserves its power. It becomes evident that the extensive level of fear and control wielded by the U.S. government through the deployment of drones over the FATA population is reminiscent of colonial aerial occupation. Through the drone's seemingly ever-present gaze and its ability to determine life and death (Chamayou 2015), the U.S. has used its technologically advanced air power to force FATA civilians into submission and to underpin American primacy. Therefore, "the violence of drones is of course not just material. It is also symbolic since the threat of immanent violence is maintained 24 hours a day" (Baggiarini 2015, 138).

Having been punished in such an intense and protracted manner, the U.S. drone programme and its imperial practices are a form of collective torture for victims (Levich 2012). Trauma psychiatrist Metin Basoglu argues that both collective torture and drone strikes entail "(a) prolonged exposure to (b) unpredictable and (c) uncontrollable stressors in an (d) inescapable environment leading to (e) intense fear-induced helplessness responses" (Basoglu 2012, 1). As a result, what has been nicknamed the "drone generation" is created. Raised under the watchful eye of drone operators, the association between the sky and death – a death that is supposed to be meant for militants – has become the norm (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 2017). The drone programme with its lethal surveillance has become "a psychic imprisonment within a perimeter no longer defined by bars, barriers, and walls, but by the endless circling of flying watchtowers up above" (Chamayou 2015, 45).

Macro-level effects

Children's education

U.S. drone strikes and the distress they have ingrained into everyday life have had negative implications for the education of FATA children. Drones have intensified the fear surrounding school, which was already pervasive given the presence of armed groups, leading to additional disintegration of the FATA region's fragile educational infrastructure (Center for Civilians in Conflict 2010). As Shahbaz Kabir (anonymised), a FATA resident, explains "education was always a problem in Waziristan, but, after the drone attacks, it got even worse. A lot of the children had to stop going to school" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 91). The experience of Faheem Qureshi, a fourteen-year-old boy from North Waziristan, exemplifies the detrimental impact of drones on the FATA youth's education. The only survivor, following a strike on Obama's third day in office, Faheem describes that he and fellow classmates

> cannot learn things because we are always in fear of the drones hovering over us, and it really scares the small kids who go to school . . . At the time the drone struck, I had to take exams, but I couldn't take exams after that because it weakened my brain. (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 90–91).

Another story is that of Waleed Shiraz (anonymised), a Political Science major at the University of Islamabad, who was studying at home when a drone strike suddenly killed his father. Faced with financial pressure and a family to look after, Waleed shares how:

> I can't dream of going back to college. We are unemployed and our financial situation is extremely poor . . . I have two younger brothers, who are both unemployed, and I don't have a father and I am disabled . . . [My brothers] can't go to school, because I can't afford to support them . . . If the drones had not become routine and my father had not died and I hadn't lost my leg, today I would have completed my MA in Political Science . . . My education is wasted. (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 91 and 148).

The reality for FATA children is that everyday life has been interrupted, as well as made dangerous, including the pursuit of an education. As Khairullah Jan, whose brother was killed in a drone strike while heading home from college, raises "you feel death is near – so close, so why do you want to study?" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 149–150). With an unstable future and the sense of impending death, children's dedication to their studies is undermined. Embodying the struggle of many, Nadia, a ten-year-old whose mother and father were both killed in a drone strike expresses how she has "no source of income with my parents gone . . . but I want admission to school. I want an education" (Center for Civilians in Conflict 2010, 82). Furthermore, tragedies, including the 2006 U.S. strike against a religious school in the Bajaur Agency, are commonplace yet do not garner the public coverage they deserve. This strike alone left 80 civilians, 69 of whom were schoolchildren aged seven to seventeen dead. By 2011, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that more than ten drone strikes against schools had been authorised by the American government (Woods 2011). FATA children have been left with nearly no safe place, as even schools are unable to provide a refuge from drone violence.

Ironically, advocates of the U.S. drone programme and just war theory, argue that "killing the terrorist before he commits his act is not the same as killing a child before she can get to school" (David 2003, 140). However, the killing of children on their way to

school or while learning in the classroom is exactly how U.S. drones are operating. The bolstering of American power has come at the expense of innocent and unarmed children, specifically through their maiming, murder, and obstructing their right to education. Serving as a "potent unnerving symbol of unchecked American power" (Rohde 2012, 1), drones work to rank "other" bodies and declare them illegitimate regardless of age. As such, this technology builds upon imperial air policing, simultaneously applying violence in an asymmetric manner while also enforcing an order that is preferential to the dominating power (Munro 2015). Through withholding opportunities, welfare, and an education from FATA children, the U.S. attempts to render future generations docile and easier to oppress. Drones, accompanied by surveillance technology, have become an ominous force imposed upon children who should have no place in the War on Terror.

Moreover, children are far outside the necropolitical category of a military-age male which the U.S. considers acceptable to put to death (Allinson 2015). Nevertheless, the humanity of children is degraded, as they are subsequently viewed as adversaries to American authority and security. Their deaths are regarded within drone vocabulary as simply "a way of cutting the grass before it grows too long" (Barrinha and Da Mota 2017, 258). Reduced to "smaller black shadows" (Pilkington 2015, 1) on a screen, children are nicknamed "fun-sized terrorists" (Pilkington 2015, 1) by those operating the drones overhead. With their guilt being predetermined, the potentiality of children becoming militants and the threat this may pose to American power provides enough justification for their death. Thus, becoming indistinguishable from "bugsplat," the U.S. "lump[s] together women and children with wanted terrorist leaders" (Wall and Monahan 2011, 243), shattering what is in theory meant to be the civilian-militant distinction. Exemplifying the all-encompassing nature of the "Predator Empire" (Shaw 2013, 2016), the drone programme continues to normalise the subjugation and demonisation of an entire population, including children. The application of Orientalist attitudes to children makes them dispensable, enabling the U.S. to determine their future in an arbitrary and inherently racist manner that parallels the colonial experience. The hypocrisy and imperial nature of the U.S. is evident by America "claim[ing] that it wants to bring peace to the world and it wants to bring education. But look at them, what they are doing" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 133).

Social fabric

U.S. drone strikes have become a mechanism by which to divide the individual from society, simultaneously intensifying the fragmentation of FATA's social fabric and forfeiture of personal liberties. The FATA civilian community has long been entangled in the U.S. perpetuation of spy mania, which was originally intended to instigate paranoia amongst terrorists and tear apart cells from within. Taking on a more alarming form, this paranoia has manifested itself into mass suspicion both within and surrounding entire communities. This fear is largely rooted in the belief that the American government pays FATA community members and employs disguised operatives to provide potential drone targets (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). Many residents, like Najeeb Saaqib

(anonymised), believe there are "foreign intelligence agencies also working in the shape of our own people. They grow a large beard and take the same positions as our own people. They put a chip . . . and then a drone strikes those places" (100).

However, the system operating against the tribal region is much greater and sophisticated than a dependence on a physical tracking chip placed by one individual. As Pugliese (2016) argues, the National Security Agency's working relationship with the Department of Defence can be encapsulated by the motto "we track'em you wack em." Relying on a combination of metadata and mobile-tracking technology that can be attached to drones overhead, targets are decided without the use of human intelligence. Functioning within a broader security framework that has essentially "bioinformationalised life," those located below remain unidentified, having been turned into targets based on the digital data contained within their phones.

Given that it is not on the ground but predominately in the air that tracking takes place, FATA civilians are faced with a security apparatus much more invasive than imagined. Nonetheless, the scepticism with which FATA community members view each other and outsiders has led to the formation of an Al-Qaeda affiliated group known as Mujahideen Khorasan which has taken on the responsibility of eliminating supposed American spies (Amnesty International 2013). Quickly becoming one of the most dreaded armed groups in FATA, a Mir Ali resident attests that

> they have killed dozens of people accused of spying in North Waziristan . . . bodies are routinely seen dumped by the side of streets with written messages. They usually say something like "anybody else accused of spying will meet the same fate" . . . some car mechanics were killed by Mujahideen Khorasan after they accused them of spying for the CIA for drone strikes. (Amnesty International 2013, 33).

FATA's societal structure fractures as friends and neighbours are distrustful of each other, unsure whether the other is spying for the U.S., Taliban, or Pakistani intelligence. Furthermore, residents worry about U.S. drones being used by each other to settle local disputes or for revenge purposes (Amnesty International 2013; Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). Visitors to FATA are monitored closely, and as Sayed Majid (anonymised) remarks "we do not allow [people from other villages] in the area very freely . . . [W]e have to keep an eye on strangers especially" (100).

Historically, FATA can be described as having a solid tribal structure, with various groups coexisting (FATA 2020b). However, U.S. drone strikes have aggravated tribal divisions and regional tensions. In viewing other groups with doubt or as adversaries, FATA tribes have inadvertently aided the U.S. in the targeting of their own communities. In effect, the U.S. goal of using drones to create spy mania amongst terrorists has evolved into an alternative form of population control. The experience of David Rohde, an American journalist held captive by the Taliban, provides a valuable account of the toll on everyday life, often ending with "innocent civilians being rounded up, accused of working as American spies and then executed" (2009, 1). Drone affected areas have become a breeding ground for mistrust and tension, forcing the residents to be constantly on alert.

It is important to note that the pervasiveness of suspicion alongside the disintegration of the civilian-militant distinction and FATA's social fabric is not accidental, but rather is a methodical tactic employed by the U.S. through its drone programme. As Afxentiou

argues, "the terrorism of drones occurs by design" (2018, 316). The strategy of "divide and rule," historically tied to empires' administration of colonial territories abroad, creates a weaker society by turning segments of the population against each other. By splitting up potentially oppositional local power structures, this in turn makes domination by an outside power easier. In this case, the U.S. actively uses its drone programme as a means to isolate and destroy FATA's community while simultaneously underpinning its own primacy. Wall and Monahan (2011) and Wilcox (2017) note that U.S. drones, through technology, embody the desire for supremacy through verticality, as a means for state control and an expansion of American sovereignty. Lending itself to "violent articulations of US imperialism" (Wall and Monahan 2011, 250), drones convert human bodies into remote targets to be conquered and killed. By inflicting punishment upon FATA's entire community regardless of their affiliations to terrorism, the U.S. is able to coerce consent as well as curb possible resistance.

In evoking colonial practices, drones and the violence they wreak exploit the existing vulnerability of civilian populations, making life in many ways that much more difficult (Levich 2012). As Emery and Brunstetter argue, "the control that drones wield over the population below is tantamount to a form of occupation" (2015, 424). Viewed as belonging to a subhuman category, residents are further afflicted by Orientalist attitudes, as they struggle to remove such stereotypes, reclaim their society, and to be seen as more than collateral damage (Afxentiou 2018; Butler 2004; Espinoza 2018). The societal ramifications of U.S. drones "has led many to question whether the killing of a few hundred Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders is worth the setback in what is arguably one of the greatest battles of the War on Terror," that being "the battle for the hearts and minds of Pakistanis" (Williams 2010, 872). While yielding high death rates, the imperialist application of such a counterterrorism strategy has torn apart the FATA community from within. The attack on militants thus has become indistinguishable from the significant disruption to civilian life, for all exist within a society that is inundated by violent experiences, fear, distrust and damaging political tactics. In this way, the U.S. drone programme has operated in an opportunistic manner, morphing into a sinister force that has moved beyond the scope of fighting terrorism to subjugating a population of innocent individuals.

Cultural and everyday life

In a region with a rich heritage, U.S. drone strikes have disturbed and upset the religious, cultural, and governing practices of the FATA community. To begin, burials and funerals in accordance with Islam hold an important place in residents' lives. However, fearful that a sizeable gathering of people will be met with a drone strike, many people choose not to attend. Participation in communal funeral services acts as a shared coping mechanism and is seen as a duty, making it an integral function of FATA society (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012). Exacerbating the pain further, friends and relatives of the deceased in many cases cannot even guarantee that what they hold are the "right parts of the body and the right person" (60). Consequently, American power has denied the FATA community of the respect to properly grieve those killed by strikes, out of worry that their own deaths will follow. Low burial and funeral attendance have generated a cultural rupture and made psychological suffering on a broad scale more persistent.

The cultural life of FATA civilians has been further interrupted and adversely affected by the inability to regularly hold jirgas. Jirgas, a decision-making body consisting of male elders, are an essential part of FATA's governing system and a traditionally tribal element of the social, legal, and political sphere. Underpinned by the Pashtun values of egalitarianism, justice, and order, jirgas are a necessary forum for conflict-resolution and administration within the community (Espinoza 2018; FATA 2020b). The targeting of jirgas by the U.S. drone programme, notably the attack of 17 March 2011 which killed 42, is damaging to the societal structure within the tribal region. It was after this strike that, as Khalil Khan, son of one of the killed community leaders, explains there was a shared consensus "that we cannot gather together in large numbers and we cannot hold a jirga to solve our problems" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 98). Those killed on March 17th were congregated to settle a chrome mine dispute (Amnesty International 2013). With it being unsafe to gather in large groups, despite the innocent purpose, the inability to hold a jirga furthers the disintegration of civic life, as well as obstructing mechanisms for justice and order.

U.S. drone strikes not only disrupt culturally significant practices to FATA but have also come to permeate various aspects of everyday life. A once vibrant collective that welcomed fellow residents, FATA civilians have become isolated. Many residents stay in their homes, avoid social gatherings and community events, and are reluctant to receive guests, acutely aware that "it's a risk to go to any place or participate in any activities" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 96). Even daily tasks such as driving a car, going to work, and shopping at the market have been deterred as a result of drones lingering in the sky (Reprieve 2013). Residents, under constant gaze from above, are cautious about where and with whom they spend their time. President of the Tribal Union of Journalists, Safdar Dawar, shares how within FATA there is a continuous

> fear that maybe the person walking next to me is going to be a target of the drone . . . If I'm standing on the road and there is a car parked next to me, I never know if that is going to be the target. Maybe they will target the car in front of me or behind me. Even in mosques, if we're praying, we're worried . . . So, wherever we are, we have this fear of drones. (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 98).

Similar to Safdar, Shakeeb, expresses how "we get especially scared in the mosque because more people are gathered there for praying" (Amnesty International 2013, 32). In a Muslim-majority region, the U.S. targeting of holy places such as a mosque is both alienating and offensive. Functioning in an antagonistic manner, the drone programme maintains Western sentiment which is hostile to and perceives Islam as inherently threatening. As asserted by Jan, a FATA resident, "we saw funerals being attacked, bakeries, mosques. It felt like the US is not leaving any part of life untouched. They had to destroy every segment of our life" (Ackerman 2016, 1). The stability of the FATA community, any semblance of normalcy in everyday life, and the survival of the region's culture have all been left vulnerable by the conduct of the U.S. drone programme.

As such, the U.S. drone programme is not a benign extension of state power, but a violent tool used to inflict fear and American dominance. An embodiment of colonial bombing in a contemporary form, the U.S. drone programme is perverted with Orientalist and racist discourse. Subsequently, the colonial-era logic of "us" versus "them," or in this case those in the sky versus those on the ground, has been imbedded into the drone

programme (Afxentiou 2018; Espinoza 2018). It becomes evident that, through terrorising various aspects of civilian life, the U.S. has used the turmoil it has generated to restrain the FATA population and coerce them into subjugation. Drones have underpinned an asymmetric relationship in which America benefits and is secured at the expense of the "other" below (Barrinha and Da Mota 2017). Assuming a "vantage point of absolute power" (Wilcox 2015a, 144–145), American authority is exercised in a violent and unilateral manner as civilian bodies are misconstrued as terrorists and marginalised. For example, the traditional jirga, in spite of its necessity and cultural importance, is made targetable as it is not relatable to or familiar within Western discourse. Instead, this type of governance is perceived by the U.S. as a threateningly large gathering of potential militants whose deaths thus become justifiable.

By the way of drones' aerial policing, the U.S. exercises its imperial power through monitoring entire populations for the purpose of identifying potential insubordinate activity (Blakeley and Raphael 2016). As a means of control, drones surveille, rank, and manage the entire FATA population while they sleep in their homes, shop at the market, drive to work, and pray at the local mosque. Thus, "drones, as a high-tech expression of pre-modern violence, enable the purity of nineteenth century imperial civilizing missions to continue" (Baggiarini 2015, 140). Endorsing a sanitised image of war, the U.S. drone programme has become mechanical and "clean," despite its necropolitical nature and the destruction of civilian bodies on the ground (Baggiarini 2015). Building upon traditional air power, drones offer more speed, better mobility, and greater vision to accompany their lethal capabilities. The physical distance between the drone operator and victims, also enabled by advanced technology, has perpetuated the colonial rationality which upholds the virtuousness of state violence against those deemed sub-human (Wall and Monahan 2011). In this way, drones possess more than a technological function weaponised against militants. They actively work to maintain, shape, and construct the relationships and practices amongst the population they target (Pugliese 2015). Up against a complex and powerful apparatus, cultural and everyday life is made unstable, with FATA civilians given little recourse to reclaim normalcy.

Conclusion

This article has provided a critical analysis of the imperial employment of the U.S. drone programme and its repercussions on the civilians of Pakistan's FATA. The U.S. drone programme's purpose goes beyond defending national security, operating as a means for the U.S. to exert regional control, extend its sphere of influence, and dominate a foreign population. This article has addressed an important area of research by shedding light on how drones, as a contemporary manifestation of imperial air power, have been weaponised by the U.S. against FATA civilians, reproducing colonial power structures.

Analysing drone civilian within the context of its entanglement with imperial legacies and alongside its associated Orientalist and racist discourse, serves to underscore the systematic violence and dehumanising racial prejudice that the current literature on this region is not acknowledging. The physical and psychological damage, the inability to access education, the fragmentation of the community structure, the dissolution of culturally significant practices, and the volatility of day-to-day life have all actively generated an interconnected web which destroys the wellbeing of FATA residents on

multiple fronts. By surveilling and executing the civilian population as they talk, shop, or pray, the U.S. is exerting imperial power and policing the region from a racially biased perspective. As the U.S. drone programme only continues to expand, it becomes even more vital that its operation is not considered a benign counterterrorism strategy but an apparatus weaponised to methodically fulfil imperialist objectives and extend American authority globally.

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Notes on contributor

Shala Cachelin is a PhD student at the University of Westminster. Her research focuses on applying a postcolonial framework to issues at the intersection of national security and human rights.

ORCID

Shala Cachelin 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0663-957X

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