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Predatory War, Drones and Torture: Remapping *The Body in Pain*

Abstract

Elaine Scarry argues in *The Body in Pain* that war is a vast and reciprocal swearing on the body, with corporeality key not only to its brutal prosecution but also to the eventual ending of the political ‘crisis of substantiation’ that war entails. However, her work has not been extensively explored with reference to significant transformations in the embodied experiences of contemporary warfare. This paper thus analyses a particular articulation of late modern warfare that I term predatory war, whose current signature motif is the drone strike, through the lens of Scarry’s work. Here, the associated modes of embodiment are radically non-reciprocal, the woundscapes of conflict are profoundly asymmetric, and the affective mediation of bodily injury does not substantiate any ending to the conflict. As such, I argue that the ontology and phenomenology of predatory war increasingly resembles what Scarry identifies as the underlying structure of torture.

Keywords

War, torture, body, pain, Scarry, drone, predatory war

Introduction

This paper explores how Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* (1985) may help illuminate an understanding of the rapidly changing character of contemporary war. Scarry’s work develops an analysis of the structure of war, including war’s ending, that is particularly attentive to issues of bodily injury and pain. However, the explanatory value of her work has not been extensively explored with reference to significant developments in contemporary warfare, transformations that have radically reshaped the nature of injuring and significantly redrawn the contours of whose particular bodies are in pain. As such, this paper will proceed as follows. I initially explore Scarry’s key arguments on war and torture in *The Body in Pain*, highlighting some of the limit points of her original thesis, as well as identifying further questions on the nature and ending of war that her work provokes. The paper then explores a

detailed case study of a particular form of contemporary warfare whose current signature motif is the drone strike and which I here name predatory war. What woundscapes, embodied subjectivities and sensory phenomenologies are being ushered in with predatory war? I examine this question through the lens of Scarry's work and its specific analytic orientation to embodied experience, exploring how this may sharpen an understanding of this emergent modality of political violence. I explore the embodied experiences of both drone operators and those subject to predatory war's intense necropolitical assault. The paper concludes by exploring the issue of predatory war's ending and by pointing to some of the opportunities that renewed engagement with Scarry's work may offer for the further analysis of contemporary transformations in war and political violence.

Bodies in Pain and the Changing Character of War

For Scarry, war is a political contest where ultimately 'what is at issue is each side's right to its own issues' (p.88). Crucially, and whilst often denied in the abstract and disembodied ways that war is thought and talked about in many military, strategic and media discourses, it is death, injury and pain that are manifestly at the heart of this contest over political reality. Bodily injuring, Scarry argues, is 'the obsessive content of war' (p.67). This is partly because it is bodily injuring alone, as opposed to other potential surrogate idioms of conflict resolution, that carries the power of its own enforcement. However, Scarry argues that the reason for bodily injuring being the distinctive idiom for the political contestation of war, the very specific 'other means' by which war becomes a continuation of policy (Clausewitz 1976: 87), is not only down to the opponent becoming out-injured to the point where they can no longer put up any more resistance whatsoever.¹ Rather, bodily injuring has a crucial secondary function in the political contest of war. This is that the very production of brutally wounded bodies provides a radical material base that can be enlisted into ending the reality contest and the political 'crisis of substantiation' which war entails.

Here Scarry builds upon her initial analysis in *The Body in Pain* of torture, whose primary feature is understood to be the infliction of pain rather than the extraction of information. The ultimate purpose of torture is to annihilate or 'unmake' the victim's sensate world through such extreme pain, and to concomitantly assert the undeniable nature of the regime's power. Extreme pain has very particular affective attributes – an overwhelming intensity, a totalizing nature, the lack of an objective referent, a sense of undeniable reality: 'For the

person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that “having pain” may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to “have certainty” (p.4). In the torture scene, such attributes become appropriated to lend certitude and facticity to the political fictions of the torturing regime:

For the duration of this obscene and pathetic drama, it is not the pain but the regime that is incontestably real, not the pain but the regime that is total, not the pain but the regime that is able to eclipse all else, not the pain but the regime that is able to dissolve the world ... this kind of power claims pain's attributes as its own and disclaims the pain itself (p.56-57)

Scarry thus argues that what is ultimately staged in torture, through the sheer materiality of the body in pain, is a sense of the incontestable reality of the torturing regime's power. Furthermore, she argues that a related process of political mattering also occurs in war, where bodily injury also assumes a ‘frightening power of substantiation’ (p.126) and functions as a reality-confirming force in the warring situation where there is a crisis of substantiation and political realities are otherwise profoundly contested. Death, injuring and bodily pain are thus the basis of the contest *and* the initial source of substantiation of the winning issue, indeed of the very idea of winning itself:

War is a huge structure for the derealization of cultural constructs and, simultaneously, for their eventual reconstitution ... [it is] the suspension of the reality of constructs ... and simultaneously, the mining of the ultimate source of substantiation ... the making available of the precious ore of confirmation, the interior content of human bodies, lungs, arteries, blood, brains, the motherlode that will eventually be reconnected to the winning issue, to which it will lend its radical substance, its compelling, heartsickening reality, until more benign forms of substantiation come into being (p.137)

Bodily injury thus initially substantiates the winning issue, investing it with a sense of undeniable reality, until such time as a post-conflict institutional framework can be established to further make it real. Nonetheless, a detailed theory of the precise mechanism of this process of trans-substantiation, ‘the process of transfer that makes it possible for the incontestable reality of the body to now become an attribute of an issue that at that moment

has no independent reality of its own' (p.124-5), remains elusive.² Indeed, beyond the delimited idea of direct sensory experience or embodied encounter, Scarry's work does not provide a specific theory of the broad affective mediation of bodily pain and injury for the ending of war, nor a consideration of how such a regime of transubstantiative meaning-making might potentially depend upon, and vary with, particular types and levels of injury to specific bodies in war. It is important to note that Scarry develops her analysis of the underlying logic of war primarily from consideration of a Clausewitzian ideal type of collective inter-state conflict. War here follows the structure of the duel writ large, a vast and reciprocal *swearing on the combatant's body*, best exemplified in the battlefields of early modern Europe or the American Civil War.

The explanatory value of this analysis has thus not been extensively explored with reference to significant developments in twentieth and twenty-first century warfighting, including those wars characterised by significant injury to civilians, or where the blurring or placing under erasure of that particular status is a noteworthy feature of warfare itself (Kinsella 2015). For example, an increasing reliance on 'risk-transfer' strategies in Western warfighting over the past three decades (Shaw 2005), including the use of proxy forces and greater airpower, has meant that the risk of injury and death has often been decisively transferred away from the body of the Western soldier and is increasingly borne by civilians in areas subject to bombing. The emergence of such risk-transfer warfare has also reflexively shaped insurgent and oppositional strategies leading to the 'return of the body of the patriot, the martyr and the sacrificial victim into the spectre of mass violence' (Appadurai 2006: 12). The overall affective force of such strategies and violations will clearly be modulated through the wider circuits of public mediation with which they are designed to resonate and through which their affects will be distributed, felt and experienced. Most recently, much highly labour-intensive counterinsurgency and counterterror warfare has also increasingly been replaced by systematic rolling programmes of special forces operations and drone strikes across extended global battlespaces.

This highly selective account of the constantly changing character of war is clearly not intended to be comprehensive, but is simply designed to draw attention to the fact that such developments may potentially complicate Scarry's original thesis as the associated breadth and nature of bodily injuring in war is itself continually reshaped. Much contemporary conflict has moved very far away from the type of reciprocal state-centric battlefield wars,

with an associated genre of primarily combatant injury, that Scarry's analysis is based upon. Rather the contemporary moment is increasingly characterized by forms of radically asymmetric violence that attempt to bypass war as a duel entirely, with continuous injurious activity enabled by the transformation of military regimes of sensation and knowledge generation, the instantiation of mobile and mutable strategies of predation and zones of violent exception, and a consequently highly significant redrawing of the maps and contours of bodies in pain, a development which I refer to here using the shorthand 'predatory war', a term I nonetheless wish to keep in suspension. The following case study thus attempts to explore how Scarry's work may help illuminate this particular moment. Given her recognition of the vital importance of thinking about the body in the analysis of war and political violence, my analysis will focus upon exploring the specific woundscapes, embodied experiences and sensory phenomenologies that are being ushered in with predatory war, and how they are currently being made to matter.

Predatory War

Political violence is no longer between states with roughly symmetrical capacities to injure each other; violence no longer occurs on a battlefield between masses of uniformed combatants; and those involved no longer seem morally innocent. The drone is both a symbol and a part of the dynamic destruction of what had been a stable imaginative structure. It captures all of these changes: the engagement occurs in a normalized time and space, the enemy is not a state, the target is not innocent, and there is no reciprocity of risk. We can call this situation 'war', but it is no longer clear exactly what that means. (Kahn 2013: 199)

As Kahn notes, the drone strike has become the signature motif of a particular contemporary mode of political violence and it is primarily these rolling programmes of targeted killing conducted under the sign of counter-terrorism by the United States JSOC and CIA across territories including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia that will be the focus of the case study of predatory war discussed here. A detailed genealogy of the drone is beyond the scope of this particular essay (see *inter alia* Chamayou 2015, Gregory 2013, Shaw 2016). Nonetheless, its emergence represents a particular articulation of several longstanding trends and visions in warfare, and indeed the extension of logics of colonial policing and population control through airpower (Neocleous 2014).

Kindervarter (2016) argues that a combined hunter-killer capacity has long been an ambition of Western militaries, tracing the historical emergence of the drone through various attempts to both extend the scope and power of Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and to collapse them with targeted killing to form a single process of 'lethal surveillance' with rapid and dynamic targeting capabilities and a compressed 'kill-chain'. For Chamayou, since 9/11, 'a single decade has seen the establishment of an unconventional form of state violence that combines the disparate characteristics of warfare and policing without really corresponding to either, finding conceptual and practical unity in the notion of a militarised manhunt' (2015: 32).

On one level, such programmes of militarized manhunting thus represent a process of the individuation of warfare. As Gregory (2013) and Chamayou (2015) note, the locus of warfare has here become defined by the individual presence of the enemy-prey that is to be hunted, identified, followed and executed. The targeted killing of those deemed a threat is also crucially a quasi-juridical process, dependent upon a form of interpretative lawfare that enables violence through 'legal interpretations that harness inherent ambiguities regarding principles like imminence, proportionality, combatant status, named targeting and last resort in the contemporary security environment' (Grayson 2012: 122). The battlespace thus becomes transformed both spatially and normatively with the potential for violence extended and the laws of war and permissible killing applied beyond the constraints of the traditional battlefield. For Gregory, such changes ultimately mean that 'the target is contracted to the individual human body even as the field of military violence expands to encompass the globe' (2014: 14).

However, alongside lethal surveillance that proceeds ostensibly by targeting particular named individuals - so-called 'personality strikes' - one aspect of predatory war that deserves attention is the procedure for the anticipatory selection, the performative citation, of further targets - so-called 'signature strikes' - who may never be known or identified, but rather emerge on the basis of activity rather than identity from a 'vast and continually evolving database, known as the disposition matrix' (Miller 2012). This archive amasses information not just on certain individuals but from across the entire population in a battlespace, blanket surveillance and targeted killing going hand-in-hand. As Shaw notes, 'in order to individualise, the security state must first totalise' (2016a: 25).

The disposition matrix draws on multiple sensors and sources in the generation of its open-ended kill lists, principally the many billions of elements of metadata that the NSA routinely harvests daily alongside further signals intelligence collected from drones acting as virtual base-towers, as well as human intelligence from agents and informants, and surveillance imagery from drone feeds (Gregory 2016, Weber 2016). From the combinatoric manipulation of these various anonymous and 'dividualised' traces of communication, geolocation and activity, an archive of overall 'patterns of life' can be derived (indicating bodily movements and rhythms in space and time, gatherings of bodies, networks of speech and chatter, durational intensities of social connectivity etc). The interrogation of this multi-dimensional data topography is then conducted via algorithmic inquiry, including forms of social network analysis, time series analysis and rhythmanalysis, with the hermeneutic goal of identifying patterns of suspicion and anomalies linked to particular networked nodes and 'bodies out of place' (Wilcox 2015). Via 'cross-sensor cueing' (Chatterjee and Stork 2017), emergent targets may also become subject to further granular and more intense visual surveillance, including full-motion video feeds which are watched by drone personnel and ultimately inform the triggering of strikes. As Nordin and Oberg note, one of the dangers of such a process of producing targets is that it is theoretically endless, 'there will always be more targets than it is possible to destroy' (2015: 401). Indeed, Paul Pillar, former director of the CIA's counterterrorism center has stated that 'We are looking at something that is potentially infinite' (cited in Miller 2012). For Jaffer relatedly, the institutional danger is that, once established, 'the legal and bureaucratic infrastructure required to sustain this practice ... will demand a [further] targeted-killing campaign' (2016: 7).

As Curtis (2016) notes, while drones may be celebrated by some as a precise and ethical form of weaponry with the ability to kill specific individuals, the whole drone apparatus of sensors, databases, algorithms and cameras actually targets the entire social environment of the population being surveilled, the 'life of the populace described as pre-insurgent' (p.7). Curtis draws upon Sloterdijk's (2009) analysis of gas warfare as a specific example of 'war by explication', that is an attack directed not against the body of the enemy per se, but against the general physical milieu that is necessary to sustain 'life-in-an-environment' (2009: 108). Such an attack *renders explicit* an otherwise implicit background condition of existence, in the particular case of gas warfare the need for breathable space, targeting it to create an 'unliveable milieu' (2009: 16). Curtis argues that the drone apparatus similarly attempts to explicate and target the entire *social* lifeworld of myriad sayings and doings in order to reveal

the patterns or even predispositions, the latent habitus, of enmity: ‘The implicit aspects of the social that the drone apparatus targets are that a person speaks and acts, moves and comes together with others ... drones make this being-with explicit and problematic, if not dangerous and lethal. Like the air in our physical environment, speaking and acting together is the medium of our social environment, and yet it is this that the drone apparatus attacks’ (2016: 10). It is thus crucial to explore not just the technical details of how the drone assemblage targets but additionally how it is thought and felt to be targeting by all those subject to its necropolitical assault, and any associated wider transformations of the social that are thus instituted by predatory war.

Embodied Experiences of Predatory War

Scarry’s work alerts us to the crucial importance of thinking about embodied experience for the analysis of war and political violence. Indeed, it may be particularly apposite to attempt to supplement thinking about predatory war using her work, for a focus upon embodiment may help to take us away from the trap of thinking in technologically determinist or technofetishistic terms about drones. In particular, the very notion of precision targeted killing may misrepresent and legitimate more widespread and systematic violences inflicted upon all those living under drones, who are already some of the most vulnerable and defenceless populations on earth (Gregory 2016). However, critical analysis of drone strikes to date has been overwhelmingly dominated by debates around their accuracy, efficacy and legality. Tahir (2013) argues that, ‘the language of international law is the only frame through which to think and speak about drone attacks’. And as Tom Gregory (2015: 197) notes, this ‘emphasis on international law distracts attention away from the horrors of war by masking the pain and suffering that is caused in favor of technical debates about the application of particular legal codes. We need to turn our attention back to the embodied experiences of those affected.’

What forms of embodied subjectivities and sensory phenomenologies are ushered in then with predatory war? While testimony, reportage and scholarship is still piecemeal and uneven, lacking in particular a well-developed anthropology of the heterogeneous lived experiences of those living under drones, experiences that will inevitably be embedded within a wider matrix of multiple violences and felt insecurities (Bashir and Crews 2012), a number of themes have begun to emerge from analysis of the lifeworlds of both drone personnel and

those who are subject to the ‘dronification of state violence’ (Shaw and Akhter 2014). Such work is beginning to flesh out the particularly disjunctive modes of embodiment of those enrolled in predatory war, the bypassing of particular modes of intersubjectivity and intercorporeality associated with conventional war, the radically contrasting scales and types of wounds suffered, and the distinct ways in which such injuries and pains may be being experienced and made meaningful. In other words, it is beginning to map out the contrapuntal ‘woundscapes’ of predatory war.³

The lifeworld of the drone operator, working shifts at e.g. Creech Air Force Base in the Nevada desert, is one characterised by schizoid daily shifts and de/compressions between mundane ‘peacetime’ living and a very particular sense of being at work and war (Asaro 2013). This latter wartime ‘somatic mode of attention’ (Csordas 1993) is one characterised predominantly by periods of intense concentration and immersion in silent and monotonous visual surveillance feeds, tracing patterns of life before strikes as well as assessing their lethal aftermaths. While physically distant, drone personnel may thus feel perceptually close and indeed intimately involved with the lives, and deaths, of those that they are tasked to survey in detail and follow for days or weeks at a time. However, as Gregory (2016) notes, ‘intimacy’ here is something of a conceit, with surveillance being thoroughly invasive and entirely one-way.

Nonetheless, the effects of this particular military ‘psychotechnology’ (Kittler 1999) complicate analyses that assume the straightforward emotional and moral distancing of remote killing. From a strategic point of view, the historical affordances of destruction at a distance have not just been in overcoming the physical risks to, and the limitations of, the combatant’s body in the delivery of force. They also lie in the psychological avoidance of combatants potentially experiencing unruly emotions, proto-empathic identifications with the proximate and vulnerable other, and the arousal of deep-seated inhibitions to killing in face-to-face combat (Grossman 1996).⁴ Killing-at-a-distance thus represents a way of denying, in Levinas’ (1969) terms, the ethical demand of an encounter with the presence or Face of the other.⁵ The ability for combatants to kill whilst increasingly physically remote, which has been progressively enhanced via developments in weaponry from firearms and artillery to aerial bombing and now drones, has thus crucially also been concomitant with their increasing detachment from the other’s moral universe. As such, artillerymen and pilots have consistently reported to be less affected by the psychological agonies and guilt of killing than

frontline combatants (Grossman 1996). However, this particular distance-enabled atrophy of the moral imagination is itself ruptured for drone personnel by the distinctive conjoining of extreme physical distance with intense, if unidirectional, watching in predatory war. While many psychosocial mechanisms of moral disengagement and indifference - such as euphemistic language, objectification, diffuse responsabilization - occur in the overall perpetration of drone strikes (Bandura 2017), and the visual feeds watched by drone personnel are themselves often ghostly and pointillist rather than distinct, the potential for drone personnel to experience ambivalence, projection, guilt and haunting is nonetheless heightened by this peculiarly invasive voyeurism and ruinous following unto death of the lives of others.

Indeed, testimonies from former drone operators and sensors have specifically attested to how particular images of the surveilled and killed return to haunt them as traumatically recurring visual memories, 'like a small video, embedded in your head, forever on repeat, causing psychological pain and suffering that most people will hopefully never experience' (Linebaugh 2013). This is former drone operator Brandon Bryant: 'I felt like I was haunted by a legion of the dead ... I was in so much pain I was ready to eat a bullet myself' (cited in Chatterjee 2015). Further, while results are still somewhat inconsistent, and the conclusions drawn by military-funded studies tend to emphasise occupational stress and burnout rather than clinical distress, a number of recent analyses have suggested higher presentation rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms in drone operators than in normal active-duty pilots, even approaching the rates of returnees from frontline combat duties in Iraq and Afghanistan (Bumiller 2011, Zucchini 2012). As Pinchevski (2015) and Chamayou (2015) note, the potential distress for drone personnel caused by their close-up witnessing and lingering over the death and pain of distant others is exacerbated by their own active participation in the genesis of that pain, arguably making their own trauma closer, clinically speaking, to MacNair's (2002) proposal of Perpetrator Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS) in combat veterans.

While it is clearly important to recognize all the various dimensions of suffering involved in predatory war, and further to complicate any simplistic narratives of its disembodied prosecution (Edney-Browne 2017), this is not to suggest that there is any equivalence, moral or otherwise, in the overall wounds of predatory war, as will be discussed further below. Indeed, in a wider discussion of how changing clinical conceptions of trauma in recent

decades include an emerging acceptance that trauma may be screen-mediated as well as directly experienced, Pinchevski (2015) cautions that such a cultural shift towards consideration of the plight of the observer of remote pain may work on occasion to occlude the very conditions under which such ‘images’ may come to assume their traumatic impacts in the first place.⁶ In terms of the non-visual sensory phenomenology of predatory war, it is also important to note here that the drone operator currently hears nothing from that which is rendered on screen, aural communication and familiarity existing only with other analysts, or with associated troops on the ground if operating in support mode, and important social and emotional intimacies established along related lines (Gregory 2013, Hussain 2013).

Predatory War and the Unmaking of the World

By contrast, for those populations living under drones, predatory war is experienced primarily as a form of pervasive sensory terrorism, its effects widespread, unpredictable and seemingly arbitrary rather than its targeting felt to be discriminating and precise as the dominant narrative of a surgically precise tool maintains. The following account draws upon various testimonies to the experience of living under drones (Amnesty 2013, Human Rights Watch 2013), but in particular from the Stanford/NYU *Living Under Drones* study (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg and Knuckey 2012, hereafter LUD) which was based upon interviews with 69 residents of Waziristan, the vast majority male, whose communities were subject to prolonged lethal surveillance (any names repeated below are anonymized).

The sound of drones functions directly as a form of ‘thanatosonic’ (Daughtry 2015) paranoia, inducing widespread feelings of predation, anxiety and ontological insecurity that at any given moment death might be instantaneously dealt from above. This is an immersive sonic and affective experience of unavoidable dread and helplessness, distinct from other wartime sounds such as the air raid siren that may trigger flight for shelter, or even the whistle of approaching shellfire, where skilled directional acoustemology may enable the possibility, however slight, of increasing one’s knowledge of the attack and hence chances of survival. One interviewee described the reaction to the sound of the drones as “a wave of terror” coming over the community (LUD p.81). Many others testified to the way that the sonic presence of drones penetrates and disrupts the physical space and emotional security of the home, like being “in a room with a bee buzzing inside”, so that it becomes impossible to sleep or rest properly: “I can’t sleep at night because . . . I hear them making that sound, that

noise. The drones are all over my brain, I can't sleep. When I hear the drones making that drone sound, I just turn on the light and sit there looking at the light" (LUD p.84).

The unpredictability of attacks, and incomprehension as to why people were targeted, was a common theme in respondents' accounts. One interviewee stated, "God knows whether they'll strike us again or not. But they're always surveying us, they're always over us, and you never know when they're going to strike" (LUD p.95). A sense of uncontrollability and helplessness to minimize exposure to drone strikes compounded this psychological distress: "We are scared. We are worried. The worst thing is that we cannot find a way to do anything about it. We feel helpless" (LUD p.96). Pakistani psychiatrists who have treated Waziri patients suggest that this pervasive worry about future trauma is emblematic of 'anticipatory anxiety' commonly seen in other conflict zones, with patients suffering from emotional breakdowns and the inability to stop crying (LUD p.81). They detail the widespread use of anti-anxiety medication, anti-depressants and tranquilizers by those living under drones, and associated symptoms of hypervigilance and loss of concentration, phobia of loud noises, and even vomiting at the sound of drones. Ahmed Jan summarized the pervasive impact of predatory war as follows: "Before the drone attacks, it was as if everyone was young. After the drone attacks, it is as if everyone is ill. Every person is afraid of the drones. It is a continuous tension, a feeling of continuous uneasiness" (LUD p.96).

These feelings of constant fear, incomprehension and becoming-prey led to an undermining of the normal routines of everyday living, the sense of a stable interaction order, and community trust. People's actual patterns of life were transformed and their willingness to engage in a wide variety of day-to-day activities diminished due to concerns over how such actions might be interpreted. Social gatherings, educational and economic opportunities, cultural and religious practices, and traditional community decision-making and dispute resolution assemblies known as *Jirgas* were all affected. One interviewee testified that, "If I am walking in the market, I have this fear that maybe the person walking next to me is going to be a target of the drone. If I'm shopping, I'm really careful and scared" (LUD p.112). It was not just large public gatherings that were affected. Another respondent testified that, "after the drones, people can't go and talk with or sit with anybody at any time. And so they face great difficulty carrying on their business and their families" (LUD p.96). Many said that they were afraid to congregate in groups or receive guests in their home. Umar Ashraf testified that, "more than two can't sit together outside because they are scared they might be

struck by drones” (LUD p.96). Such pervasive uncertainty was also the breeding ground for rumours and myths that further undermined community trust – for example, that certain people were planting chips on others that attracted the drones (LUD p.113). The atmosphere was thus one of ubiquitous threat and torturous uncertainty, where everyday social interactions were felt to be newly precarious as they might potentially attract the drones, and where there was an absence of any clear idea of what to do and how to act in order to be safe.

Furthermore, the widespread undermining of any sense of ontological security was particularly exacerbated as even the domestic home, traditionally a space of human flourishing and emotional refuge against the outside world, has been a focal point for attacks in Waziristan. Beyond the general violation of a sense of private sanctuary, this systematic targeting of the domestic home inflicts profound disturbances to the specific local social order. This is both because the family home has a sacred place in the Islamic faith (Grayson 2016) and in particular because it is a key site for significant *Pashtunwali* (‘way of the Pashtuns’) cultural obligations and social norms such as *melmastia*, the duty to provide hospitality to guests, and *nanawati*, that one may be granted asylum and be protected from enemies upon entering the security of a home (LUD p.36). With even the domestic home, the very space of hospitality and protection, becoming newly perilous then, the effects of ‘precision’ targeting for those on the ground have ironically encompassed a profound broadening of the sense of predation, an undermining of any sense of there being spaces where one might reliably find safety from hostility. Rather predatory war has been experienced in terms of widespread feelings of ubiquitous surveillance, of enclosure and being held hostage, and the increasing penetration, desecration and inversion of a sense of hospitality and safety everywhere and at all times. Ismail Hussain, an inhabitant of Datta Khel, which was hit by drones more than three dozen times in three years, spoke of how a number of individuals, “have lost their mental balance ... are just locked in a room. Just like you lock people in prison, they are locked in a room” (LUD p.88). Faisal bin Ali Jabair, whose brother and nephew died in a drone strike in Yemen, summarized his experience as follows: “They are experimenting on us, on our blood and on our land” (Ackerman 2016).

As Scarry notes, a radical contraction and inversion of everything that is traditionally experienced as safe and benign is the very phenomenology and methodology of torture, the unmaking of the victim’s world. As everyday sayings and doings, moving and being-with others are targeted by the drone apparatus, the entire social environment is here unmade and

weaponized to become part of a torture apparatus, ‘the appropriation of the world into the torturer’s arsenal of weapons’ (1985: 45). Even the domestic, whose ‘central, overwhelming characteristic ... [is] that its protective act is the location of the human being’s most expansive potential’ (p.40) becomes unsafe and undone for ‘the unmaking of civilization inevitably requires a return to and mutilation of the domestic, the ground of all making’ (p.45).⁷ The outcome of predatory war has thus been that entire populations lose trust in their world, ‘it is the world ... that executes’ (p.45), and in that radical negation and unmaking of the victims’ world, the power of the torturing regime is asserted. Working from a learning theory of trauma perspective, Metin Basoglu (2012) reaches a related conclusion:

“The evidence provided by the Stanford and NYU study supports the point that trauma of drone warfare, as conducted in FATA, is similar to an experience of torture in involving five distinct features: (a) prolonged exposure to (b) unpredictable and (c) uncontrollable stressors in an (d) inescapable environment leading to (e) intense fear-induced helplessness responses. Although other stressful war events (e.g. aerial bombardment) may have some of these features, few have all of them in the same pronounced fashion as drone warfare. Despite their different contexts, the overlap between these features of drone warfare and torture is so striking that it deserves attention from both moral and legal perspectives ... inflicting severe and prolonged mental suffering on people essentially trapped in an ‘inescapable shock’ situation is no less morally abhorrent than torture and, at least from a behavioral science perspective, may well amount to mass torture.”

The End of the Idea of Ending

If, as Scarry argues, the ideational crisis of substantiation that war entails is ultimately sutured through the materiality of wounded and broken bodies, it is important to consider if and how these radically disjunctive embodied experiences of predatory war, and their wider affective mediation, may potentially be constituting or prefiguring such a regime of transubstantiative meaning-making and gesturing towards an ending to the conflict. While, as noted earlier, Scarry’s work is only ever suggestive in theorizing how a widespread regime of transubstantiation may take hold and compel, I argue that it is difficult in this particular case to glimpse any intimation of a potentially concluding regime of transubstantiation taking shape, any sense that the bodily pain being produced is somehow being lent towards an

ending of predatory war. Rather, certain bodily injuries are being made to matter through their enrolment into narratives that legitimate the continuing prosecution of predatory war.

For example, recent mediation of predatory war in Western film, drama and reportage has predominantly focussed upon the domestic experiences of the drone operator (Stahl 2013, Brady 2015). Even when such cultural texts may attempt to question the broader ethics of predatory war, the narrative conduit for such exploration has primarily been the emotional difficulties and ‘moral injury’ that individual operators themselves may suffer on the basis of their participation in the infliction of pain upon others. Such a narrative framing inevitably tends to disavow analysis of any wider political context to war (Scranton 2016), making no sustained attempt to explore or contextualise this distress within the overall distribution and moral economy of violence and wider suffering in predatory war. Indeed, this attempt to locate and narrate meaning and morality predominantly via the ‘personal code’ (Shapiro 1988) of drone operators’ individual stories functions primarily in terms of the semiotics and affects of sacrifice. Whilst permitting the expression of some moral ambivalence, it nonetheless crucially attributes a sense of embodied sacrifice to a war that otherwise can appear increasingly processual and troublingly post-sacrificial (see also Baggiarini 2015). This framing thus provides for the audience a possible channelling of meaning, of affective grip, to a conflict that is inherently shadowy and otherwise lacks any recognisable cultural shape and emotional resonance. In assuming this particular form, it has significant continuity with what McSorley (2012) argues was the dominant mediated regime of sensation through which recent counterinsurgency warfare has been made palpable to wider Western audiences, which relatedly focused on the vulnerable body of the soldier, ultimately as an attempt to re-enchant a war that otherwise had come to be felt as meaningless, its war aims unclear and its morality ambiguous. Further, as Scarry notes, a highlighting of the perpetrator's difficulty in witnessing whilst doing their ‘duty’ has long been part of the structure and denial of torture: ‘it prevents the mind from ever getting to the place where it would have to make comparisons. Power is cautious. It covers itself. It bases itself in another’s pain and prevents all recognition that there is ‘another’ by looped circles that ensure its own solipsism’ (1985: 59).

By comparison, any recognition or exploration of the embodied experiences, lives and injuries of those populations living under drones has a very minor place in such cultural discourse, mirroring the military and strategic rendering of such lifeworlds in terms of mere

traces of malign potential in ‘a high-tech regime of disappearance ... [where] the would-be terrorist is simply to be eliminated out of view of any public’ (Kahn 2013: 220), with deaths ultimately reduced to the empty signifiers of military-aged male (MAM) or enemy killed in action (EKIA)⁸. The particular disjunctive ‘partition of the sensible’ (Ranciere 2010) that is instantiated in predatory war is thus amplified through such cultural semiconductors.

There is thus no intimation here of the collective substantiation of an eventual ending of predatory war, only a continued separation of lifeworlds, injuries and deaths. The affective mediation of bodily violation is not being lent towards any sense of the resolution of a political contest, and hence is not potentially contributing to the lessening or modulation of violence away from its continuation in a processual, sustainable, and increasingly post-political mode. Indeed, continuing a trend of many recent conflicts, the very nature of the crisis of substantiation is itself increasingly opaque in predatory war. That many labour-intensive ground wars are now undertaken with a key initial war aim being the instantiation of a viable ‘exit strategy’ captures a particular confusion of means and ends, and an uncertainty as to the nature of the political contest and objectives, at the heart of much late modern war, particularly that conducted within a world-purifying imaginative structure under the nebulous sign of counterterror (Kahn 2013). It is this confusion that the emergence of predatory war itself attempts to manage, being practised as a particular risk-averse mode of managing a crisis that is nonetheless imagined as perpetual, predicated upon the containment rather than the possible resolution of an antagonism that is ultimately understood to be existential and beyond the political. As Lifton (2003) notes, “The war on terror is apocalyptic, then, exactly because it is militarized and yet amorphous, without limits of time or place, and has no clear end. It therefore enters the realm of the infinite. Implied in its approach is that every last terrorist everywhere on earth is to be hunted down until there are no more anywhere to threaten us, and in that way the world will be rid of evil.”

Predatory war thus comes with a temporal imagination of conflict that is at least generational if not infinite, and a concomitant sense that the possibility of ending has increasingly disappeared. It is not just that a particular ending to predatory war appears distant, but that the very idea of ending itself recedes as a possible horizon. If an ending to war can no longer even be imagined or defined – ‘made up’ in Scarry’s terms – it is even more unclear how it might it ever be ‘made real’, become substantiated through the materiality of corporeal injury.⁹

Conclusion: Predatory War and the Torturer's Dream

As explored in the opening section of this paper, Scarry notes that war and torture have a related underlying structure in terms of the translation and appropriation of the attributes of bodily pain and injury into political power. However, there are also clear differences in that the distribution of pain, injury and 'bodily consent' between those involved is radically asymmetric in the paradigmatic staging of a torture that is world-destroying for the tortured and serves to materialise the fiction of political power for the torturer (of course there are also differences in the way that the situations of war and torture are ultimately morally evaluated). One way to read Scarry's work then is not to emphasise war and torture as ontologically separate situations, a reading that may at times be suggested by the ideal types that she principally discusses in *The Body in Pain*¹⁰, but rather as framing events in a continuum of political violence, a continuum of the unmaking and remaking of the world, along the axis of reciprocity. Here the underlying mechanism of the transubstantiation of pain and injury into political power is consistent, but the types of injuries, embodiments and pains that are enrolled into various processes of political mattering differ.

It is also important to state that although the structure of war traditionally depends upon the mutual willingness of each side to kill and be killed, as Kahn notes 'this ethos of reciprocal sacrifice always stands in tension with the tactics of warfare. Tactically, each side seeks to transcend any effective reciprocity in the application of force' (2013: 219). Wars continually transform then, and have a tendency to become degenerate (Shaw 2005), and in so doing their moral parameters may ultimately become radically transformed. I argue that Scarry's work helps to illuminate the particular ways that war partially resembles and thus may bleed into widespread torture, although recognition of the latter situation is often effaced by the continued invocation of the former.¹¹ Writing about one longstanding dimension of how wars undergo transformation, the technological arms race between adversaries, Scarry herself notes that:

'The dream of an absolute, one-directional capacity to injure those outside one's territorial boundaries ... may begin to approach the torturer's dream of absolute nonreciprocity, the dream that one will be oneself exempt from the condition of being embodied while one's opponent will be kept in a state of radical embodiment by its awareness that it is at any moment deeply woundable' (1985: 80)

Scarry's insightful work highlights the continued need for detailed ontological and phenomenological inquiry into the nature of political violence. In this article I have initially pointed to a series of limit points and questions in her work whose elaboration may advance the analytic agenda that her work provokes. I have also noted that Scarry's work has not been extensively explored to date with reference to significant developments in contemporary warfare. Informed by Scarry's work and its analytic orientation to the phenomenology of embodied experience, I have thus attempted to explore elements of the ontology and phenomenology of a particular articulation of late modern warfare that I have here termed predatory war. To conclude, I wish to return once again to Scarry's original analysis of the structure of conventional war - a political contest that enlists reciprocal bodily injury to initially suture an associated crisis of substantiation.

I argue that re-consideration of this original analysis allows a sharpened appreciation of the ways in which predatory war crucially differs from such a formulation. As discussed the nature of the particular political antagonism in predatory war is unclear, with nebulous war aims that encompass the countering of perpetual existential threat whilst eliminating any risk or vulnerability on one's own side; the associated modes of embodiment are non-reciprocal and the woundscapes and maps of pain are radically asymmetric; and the affective mediation of such bodily pain more closely resembles a regime of disappearance than of any collective transubstantiation that might prefigure an ending. Scarry notes that, 'Every weapon has two ends. In converting the other person's pain into his own power, the torturer experiences the entire occurrence from the invulnerable end of the weapon' (1985: 59). In particular, I have argued here that for those already highly vulnerable populations who additionally experience predatory war from the vulnerable end of the weapon, the phenomenology of their embodied experience is not just of targeted killing, nor just of more widespread death, injury, grief and destruction, though it is all of those. Rather it is the very unmaking of their world, an unmaking that has entered the realm of the infinite. I thus suggest that the structure of predatory 'war' without end increasingly resembles what Scarry identifies as the underlying structure of torture.

Notes

¹ Indeed, Scarry notes that the scenario of the completely decisive victory and unconditional surrender is historically very rare in war (p.104).

² Scarry offers various hints and suggestions as to how the ‘translation of open bodies into verbal issues such as freedom’ (p.96) might occur – for example, that an individual observer may themselves believe that they have directly experienced the reality of an idea through having sensorially experienced, that is directly seen or touched, the vivid reality of a hurt body with which an idea is juxtaposed (p.125); that war is uniquely and sentiently memorialized as it happens in the multiple damaged bodies of its participants who may then encounter and affect numerous others (p.114); that ‘the referential instability of the hurt body’ (p.121) means that bodies and wounds from both original sides will ultimately collectively substantiate the winning idea, and the disappearance of the losing one, as the overall cost of, e.g. union or freedom, whatever their initial referential status. However, exactly how a widespread regime of transubstantiative meaning-making might ultimately take hold remains slightly unclear.

³ Terry defines woundscapes as “territories marked by injuries to bodies that index particular moments in the wounding capacity of technologies” (2009: 203).

⁴ As numerous humanist accounts of wartime experiences emphasize, it is when corporeal or visual co-presence occurs that the boundaries of enmity and friendship may blur, and an alternative empathetic recognition of humanity, often rooted in bodily frailty and mutual vulnerability, may emerge. Embodied experience thus always risks the contingency of unforeseen shared sensory and affective experiences that may undermine the binary oppositions that war sets up (Cole 2009).

⁵ It is important to note that Levinas’ philosophical concept of the face does not directly correspond to physical countenance, but rather he states that “the way in which the Other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we name here face” (Levinas 1969: 50). Indeed, his work can be read as a reflection upon how ethics is itself underpinned by acts of mediation, a proposal that has been specifically explored with reference to textual and screen mediation (see e.g. Silverstone 2007, Pinchevski 2014).

⁶ The science of psychic injury and associated psychological rather than physical conceptions of trauma (originally Greek for ‘wound’) has, since the 19th century, developed in tandem with various shifts in technology and warfare, from ‘shell shock’ following WW1 to ‘PTSD’ post-Vietnam. Pinchevski (2015) further argues that conceptions of psychic trauma have also long assumed an

underlying ‘media logic’, from Freud’s idea of repetition compulsion to the centrality of the traumatic afterimage in contemporary PTSD conceptualization, a logic that is further elaborated in reading screen mediation itself as a potential locus of trauma.

⁷ Scarry thus notes that in much torture, ‘the world is reduced to a room or a set of rooms ... the torture room is not just the setting in which the torture occurs ... it is itself literally converted into another weapon, into an agent of pain ... the room is undone, made to participate in the annihilation of the prisoners’ (1985: p.40-41)

⁸ In the accounting of those actually killed by drone strikes, US policy until early 2013 classified all ‘military-aged male’ casualties in the vicinity of a target as being enemy combatants. Here the dead body is proof of guilt and legitimates the strike. As Scarry notes, “In its basic outlines, torture is the inversion of the trial. While the one studies evidence that may lead to punishment, the other uses punishment to generate the evidence” (1985: 41).

⁹ Holmqvist (2014: 37) relatedly argues that, “war is becoming perpetual and endless quite simply because the liberal world is unable to imagine conclusive endings to the wars it is currently fighting”.

¹⁰ Although it is important to note that Scarry herself argues that if the widespread distribution of ‘bodily consent’ for war becomes radically curtailed, e.g. in a political community that develops the ability to deploy ‘out-of-ratio’ nuclear weapons, then the resultant structure of nuclear war may also approach the structure and phenomenology of torture (1985: 151-157; see also Scarry 2014).

¹¹ Although clearly relevant, there is not scope in this essay to explore the wider re-normalization of torture that has accompanied the war on terror, a phenomenon that itself needs to be understood in terms of a continuum of racialized anxiety in the American imagination that has long understood and inscribed particular bodies as torturable (see e.g. Hajjar 2013, Richter-Montpetit 2014).

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