"Pick up a weapon and you're a combatant, it's how that works." Neo-Orientalist Narratives in the US Drone Programme

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Abstract

The promise of the United States' precision warfare was to reduce casualties and mission costs while increasing efficiency. However, gradually more failed drone strikes, and civilian casualties are reported hinting at a significant issue at the core of precision warfare. Drone warfare is a highly asymmetrical type of warfare in terms of power and agency. The drone operators are given near-hegemonic power in interpreting and constructing reality on the ground. Therefore, this thesis aims to understand the process of knowledge production behind drone warfare that allows for failures and civilian casualties. In particular, this thesis considers the influence of institutional culture, language, and the "native informers" as sources of legitimacy for the US military's drone warfare.

This thesis relies on interpretative discourse analysis to examine the process of knowledge production. To understand the drone strike failures this research looks at conversations of drone operators, post-strike assessments of civilian casualties, reports from non-governmental organisations, as well as investigative reporting on failed drone strikes. In addition, to highlight the process of legitimation this research considers statements, testimonies, articles and commentaries from "native informers." Considering these, I will argue that the "native informers" contribute to and permit an established institutional culture of the US military that allows for cultural misinterpretations which lead to fatal mistakes.

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Introduction

"One in five strikes was resulting in a civilian death, a rate that was 31 times higher than what the military claimed"[1] said Azmat Khan in an interview pointing at the fact that there is something clearly wrong with the precision warfare of the United States. The staggering number of civilian casualties and fatalities as well as the mounting discrepancy between investigative works and the official reporting hints at a more systematic failure within the US drone warfare. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the shortcomings, it is crucial to consider the military culture of the US. More specifically, it is necessary to observe the process of knowledge production that contributes to the institutional culture. The reason for focusing on knowledge production is due to the fact that drone warfare is a highly asymmetrical style of warfare with near-hegemonic power ascribed to the operator behind the drone's gaze. It allows for a fairly one-sided interpretation of the events on the ground with virtually no agency to resist for the ones under the drone's vision. In such a setting, the reality is dictated by the interpretation of the drone operator and preconceived notions, or stereotypes largely play into the construction of the Other. These interpretations are constrained by discursive practices and cognitive shortcuts that are often used by the military for efficiency. However, crucially, they build into the larger narrative of the US military-industrial complex and allow for particular orientalist representations to influence the institutional culture and cultural interpretations central to drone warfare.

At the same time, it is essential to shed light on the sources that give legitimacy and allow for this particular mode of knowledge production. Building on Hamid Dabashi[2] this thesis will also focus on the role of intellectuals in giving legitimacy to certain ideas and

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[1] Michael Barbaro et al., "The Civilian Casualties of America's Air Wars," ed. Mike Benoist, The New York Times (The New York Times, January 18, 2022), https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/18/podcasts/the-daily/airstrikes-civilian-casualty-files.html?showTranscript=1.
[2] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011).

understandings. More specifically, the function of "native informers"[3] will be under extensive scrutiny to pinpoint the influence of their contributions. It is necessary to consider their role, as a particular mode of knowledge production needs constant validation and legitimacy, which can be provided through their input. Inspecting their writings and ideas as well as the language used to convey their message, highlights how the mode of knowledge production that is prevalent within drone warfare is constantly supported by these selected "native informers" who contribute to the institutional culture of the US military.

The particular aim of this thesis after inspecting the sources of legitimacy for the US institutional culture and the more specific constraints on the drone operators is to highlight a greater more systematic issue present in drone warfare. Rather than attributing the civilian casualties to technological failures and isolated incidents, it is crucial to consider that the source of the failed drone strikes is the current mode of knowledge production prevalent in the US military. The debate on why precision warfare results in the staggering number of fatalities and discrepancies in reporting civilian casualties should focus on the greater issue of cultural misinterpretations and epistemic violence.

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[3] Dabashi refers to the intellectuals that are native to the regions where the US engages in military operations and contribute to the knowledge production of the US as "native informers" or on some occasions "comprador intellectuals." Throughout the thesis, this particular phrase is in quotation marks.

Literature review

The discussion on the developments in remote warfare (RW) has been focusing primarily on the "unmanned" aspect of the most recent combat vehicles. As the revolution in military affairs (RMA) is gaining more traction and getting gradually more scrutinised, various hazardous aspects of the new types of combat vehicles and strategies come to light. A highly influential innovation comes with the increasingly more utilised artificial intelligence (AI) in military tasks, often replacing human roles. The following section will start with a more general overview of the current discussions surrounding remote warfare such as the implications of AI on ethics, legality, and gender norms, before engaging more in depth with the epistemic power behind this type of warfare.

An immediate, reasonably grounded, suspicion comes when the ethical implications of increased AI usage are examined. Especially, considering the input of AI in the "kill chain"[4] as well as the intelligence gathering, reconnaissance, surveillance and the subsequent data analysis and evaluation. In his research, Michael C. Horowitz[5] looked at the ethical implications of relying on lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) and their potential danger in the future. A crucial point mentioned by Horowitz is sacrificing operational speed and efficiency for any kind of human control. In addition, as Peter Asaro argued,[6] there are also reasons to believe that LAWS do not satisfy many legal requirements set for combat defined by international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL). As the military relies more on the autonomous aspect of weapons, ethical issues arise when considering attributing responsibility for failures, response proportionality, or looking at

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[4] A military term often used to explain the structure and the stages of an attack.
[5] Michael C. Horowitz, "When Speed Kills: Autonomous Weapon Systems, Deterrence, and Stability," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42 (August 22, 2019): 764-788, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1621174.
[6] Peter Asaro, "On Banning Autonomous Weapon Systems: Human Rights, Automation, and the Dehumanization of Lethal Decision-Making," *International Review of the Red Cross* 94, no. 886 (2012): 687-709, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1816383112000768.

distinctions between combatants and civilians. As Horowitz outlined there is tremendous danger in leaving autonomous weapons systems unregulated, especially considering ethical implications and possible human rights violations.[7] Based on this, Asaro concluded that the way technology is used, and wars are conducted has a significant effect on the moral progress of humanity, which should not be sacrificed for speed and efficiency.

Considering semi-autonomous weapon systems and drone pilot operated UAVs, the discussion focuses more on the role and the input of the pilots. Since semi-autonomous weapon systems, where human control is still present, are much more prevalent, there is greater research into the developments of this type of warfare. As Asaro highlighted, before relying on autonomous systems the algorithms must be programmed and through these algorithms, there is still a lot of human bias that is subliminally present.[8] Much of the literature focused on these developments from a more gendered aspect since the algorithmic shortcomings often highlighted an existing gender bias in the military but also within the intelligence community. Especially the perception of RW and the actors related to this type of warfare became more scrutinised. The masculine understanding of combat and bravery is highlighted in multiple performances in the military[9]. The presence of risk, proximity to danger and heroic deeds all reveal a more institutionalised understanding of the very particular gendered views and perceptions of combat as well as soldiers. An interesting perhaps "intrusion" in the debate on RW is how unmanned aerial vehicles UAVs or drones are positioned within this debate.

A historical overview of RW by Jean-Baptiste Vilmer[10] revealed how precarious the debate around remoteness in warfare is. Initially, it was associated with a risk-averse, cowardly

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[7] Horowitz, *When Speed Kills.*
[8] Asaro, *On Banning Autonomous Weapon Systems.*
[9] Cristina Masters, "Bodies of Technology," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7, no. 1 (2005): 112-132, https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674042000324718.
[10] Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, "Not so Remote Drone Warfare," *International Politics*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00338-9.

behaviour, clearly going against the mainstream perception of combat. The proximity to danger and the risk of putting oneself physically in danger was the necessary requirement. However, with advanced technology utilised in RW, drone strikes have begun to change the surrounding narrative on the proximity to danger. While the impact of the UAVs on the perception of combat did not change underlying concepts about the military, it shifted how the efficiency of military operations is measured. Crucially, precision, stealth and covert operations were not perceived as cowardly and defying masculinity but as the gradual inevitable superiority of military technology utilised in combat.

The subsequent revolutions in military affairs (RMA) contributed to an understanding that precision and cost-effective efficiency are highly desirable ways of conducting military operations. Importantly, the advancements contributed to an understanding of technological superiority as preferable to military technology that is reliant on human input. The technological developments brought certain cold subjective understanding projected as immune to the same shortcomings which arise from human failure. The weaknesses of the human body that allowed for a crack in the perfect heroic masculine of the soldiers get transcended through the technological developments which allow the elimination of these shortcomings. The bodies of soldiers are fragile, and technology is vastly superior to their mistakes. Drones or AI-driven military technology strives to eliminate not just the vulnerability of the human body but the shortcomings of its emotional intelligence that could lead to hesitation in crucial moments.[11]

Essentially, the "unmanned" part meant that since failure is minimized through subjective artificial intelligence, it should be superior to weapons that could be possibly influenced by human emotions. While this particular point is criticised often as the reason why

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[11] Masters, *Bodies of Technology.*

drone strikes fail, Vilmer argued that "drones do not have an 'agentic capacity' because they do not decide (choose and engage their targets),"[12] hinting at greater human input, which rather than placing the discussion into a technological-subjectivity realm, highlights the very crucial part of how artificial intelligence is built and programmed and how biases and prejudices are transmitted onto the assumed objectivity of drones.

The supposed objectivity that is attributed to the drone's gaze is contested by Grayson & Mawdsley in their analysis[13] of scopic regimes and knowledge production behind drone warfare. Crucially, they argued that "ways of seeing" are created by the viewing subject, through the drones, creating reality through an interpretation of what is being seen.

> "An awareness of the scopic regimes of modernity not only serves as a reminder that all seeing is mediated. It also suggests the importance of taking visual analysis in IR beyond a fixation on representation towards a concern with how the viewing subject is being produced and/or assumed within the visual field in order to establish truth claims and 'politically correct modes of seeing'."[14]

They reflect on the positionality of the drone operator and the subjective interpretations of the observation. They argue that the objectivity that is attributed to the technological replacement of emotions cannot be pure since the drone feed and the visual data are analysed by drone operators who are part of the decision making in drone strikes. Their evaluation and interpretation of the events recorded by the drone cannot be purely objective and replaced by technology as they contribute to what is being seen. Grayson & Mawdsley added that "...central to the production of drone warfare are the asymmetries among who controls what is seen, how it is experienced, and by whom it is experienced."[15]

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[12] Vilmer, *Not so Remote Drone Warfare*, 2.
[13] Kyle Grayson and Jocelyn Mawdsley, "Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations: Seeing World Politics through the Drone," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 2 (2018): 431-457, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066118781955.
[14] Grayson and Mawdsley, *Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations*, 438.
[15] Grayson and Mawdsley, *Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations*, 432.

The epistemic power given to the drone operators is vast, considering their interpretation and analysis of the events on the ground amount to what is understood as reality. Vilmer opposes that the sole interpretation of the drone operator would have such an overwhelming influence adding that in the "kill chain" there are many more military personnel involved. Due to this, he argued, "[w]hen drone crews are called upon to provide close air support to ground troops, their sensory geography expands because they become immersed not only in video feeds but also in a stream of radio communications and online messaging with ground troops."[16] However, as Jamie Allinson's analysis[17] of the 2010 incident in Uruzgan in Afghanistan highlighted in her article *Necropolitics of Drones*, the involvement of more military personnel in verifying information may well lead to confirming existing biases and validating suspicions based on preconceived notions. While this often-analysed incident reveals certain existing orientalist bias in the discourse surrounding drone strikes it highlights a much greater institutionalised bias existing in the US military's culture.

An in-depth analysis of the discourse used in drone warfare by Sarah Shoker[18] reveals embedded preconceived notions that are reconstructed through established frameworks of interpreting and vocabulary for describing the visual images. A crucial point to mention are the recurring phrases that are utilised to capture and reduce what the visual images are representing. Similar to the conclusion of Carol Cohn[19] on the analysis of defence intellectuals the discursive power is crucial in producing knowledge and interpreting information. As Shoker put it, "[t]he data analysis process is not value neutral. The *military-age male* functioned as a code that instructed individuals where to look when conducting these operations. Not only did

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[16] Vilmer, *Not so Remote Drone Warfare*, 6.
[17] Jamie Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 113-127, https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12086.
[18] Sarah Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021).
[19] Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 687-718, https://doi.org/10.1086/494362.

individuals routinely bring their social values to the technical pipeline, but these social values were institutionally sanctioned and historically embedded."[20] Essentially, her analysis solidifies the influence of discourse and existing vocabularies to create an asymmetrical power relation between the drone operator and the people underneath the drone's gaze.

These specific phrases such as the *military-age male* are not simply representing an object but, as Cohn put it, a much more dominant and pervasive "mode of thought."[21] In addition, Jamie Allison notes that this mode of thought can project into what is being seen.[22] The process of knowledge production and interpretation thus allows for subjective understanding and reproduces preconceived notions that build into the larger military culture and mode of thought of the US military. Shoker builds on this by stating that this mode of thought transpires through discursive practices into the foreign policy of the US.[23] Similarly, Janet McIntosh highlighted[24] how recruits get exposed to the discursive practices and gradually start relying on them.

This highlighted the ultimate power asymmetry on the two ends of drone warfare. The epistemic power to analyse and to a certain extent define reality on the ground gives overwhelming, near-hegemonic force to the drone operating crew. Considering the institutionalised military culture and vocabulary incorporating the drone operating crew it reinforces these elements and discursive practices stemming from the vocabulary through the analysis of the drone feed and the subsequent strikes. Wilcox described the power relations of the drone crew and the one's under the gaze as: "The seeing eye is the privileged means of

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[20] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare,* 16.

[21] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 716.

[22] Allinson, *The Necropolitics of Drones.*

[23] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare*, 61.

[24] Janet McIntosh, "Language and the Military: Necropolitical Legitimation, Embodied Semiotics, and Ineffable Suffering," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50, no. 1 (2021): 241-258, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110258. As well as;
Janet McIntosh, "'Because It's Easier to Kill That Way': Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics," *Language in Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2021): 583-603, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404521000324.

representing the object of knowledge, creating in this performative process a knowing subject and a body as the object of that knowledge."[25] Considering the drone operator's position, she described the hegemonic power as "[t]he vision of the airplane, satellite, and drone is a vantage point of absolute power; it is similar to the disembodied vision of the medical gaze into the body, producing bodies and territories as intelligible and knowable from the outside, and ultimately, making these objects manipulable."[26] Crucially, this form of the omnipotence of the drone operators allows for observing, interpreting, and defining the events on the ground. As Shoker highlighted, drone strikes represent an operation that requires enormous inequalities in resources and military capabilities.[27] This limits the utility of drone warfare, and in addition, it narrows the scope of countries where the US military can rely on drones. Thus, drone oversight and strikes can be used in spaces which are deemed "unstable" and "ungovernable."[28] The limited scope of operations and the specific areas of deployment highlight that drone warfare requires the power asymmetry that is found across the Middle East and some countries in South Asia.

These necessary power asymmetries and one-sided representation of the population under the drone's gaze reconstructs a setting where orientalist and neo-orientalist knowledge is produced through the drones. As Shoker builds on the argument of Wilcox, drone warfare legitimizes violence through "gendered and racialized"[29] assumptions about who is a threat. Crucially, as Khaled Al-Kassimi pointed out[30] these neo-orientalist modes of representation that corresponded with the long-institutionalised mode of thought in the military allowed for

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[25] Lauren B. Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence Theorizing Embodied Subjects in International Relations* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 144-145.
[26] Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence,* 145.
[27] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare.*
[28] Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence,* 156.
[29] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare,* 137.
[30] Khaled Al-Kassimi, "A 'New Middle East' Following 9/11 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011?—(Neo)-Orientalist Imaginaries Rejuvenate the (Temporal) Inclusive Exclusion Character of Jus Gentium," *Laws* 10, no. 2 (2021): 29, https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10020029.

the stereotypes and preconceived Orientalist notions to be part of US foreign policy. Shoker, building on Muller claimed that "drones should be thought of as a component in a socio-material order or a network where technological infrastructure meets human subjectivity to produce a bureaucracy that allocates death."[31] Thus, drone operators function in an environment that allows for decisions of ultimate epistemic and physical violence.

Drone operators are in a position of power that allows for defining reality and for the subjective notions and larger institutionalised orientalist framework to remain and be reproduced because there is no space for resistance or contestation. The drones perpetuate a one-sided interaction through their very design of an omnipresent and omnipotent weapon that acts on the analysis of recorded visual imagery. A parallel can be drawn here, about the power to interpret and produce knowledge of the US media that was argued by Edward Said[32] in *Covering Islam*. Just as the military revolves around a certain institutionalised culture, it can also be found in the media coverage and the frameworks that are deployed to interpret different cultures. As Said argued, because of their positionality, these frameworks and interpretative lenses appear objective or even value neutral.[33] However, as he returns to one of his main points, the historic role of a global military superpower of the United States induces the process of cognition and knowledge production. The relationality becomes more apparent as the immensely asymmetric power dynamics are considered. The countries that are under drone surveillance are not simply observed and monitored but also constantly interpreted and constructed. The power lies in the process of constructing a vision and a framework from a

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[31] Martin Müller, "Assemblages and Actor-Networks: Rethinking Socio-Material Power, Politics and Space," *Geography Compass* 9, no. 1 (2015): 27-41, https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12192. In Sarah Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021) 156.

[32] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam* (New York, New York: Random House, 1997).

[33] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam* (New York, New York: Random House, 1997), 47-49.

position which allows determining reality without contestation or repercussions for misinterpreting.

Putting the discussion on knowledge production and drones into a wider Orient-Occident power relation perspective Marina Espinoza[34] argued, that through the inferior representation of the Orient, the West constructs an image of a region that is primarily portrayed as tribal and regressive. Essentially, recalling Said's criticism in *Orientalism*[35], the historical power asymmetry that allowed for colonialism and the imperialist knowledge production that provided the conditions for colonialist imaginaries comes back through the *modus operandi* of drone warfare. As Espinoza put it "[d]rone vision must be considered not as neutral, but as part of a long history of imperial looking that divides the world into those who are rightful subjects and those who are mere objects of the coloniser's gaze."[36] The established one-sidedness of the interaction on the battlefield reflects on the information and the knowledge that is represented by the very designs of the drones and in a larger context the foreign policy that accounts for their deployment.

As gradually more failed drone strikes are uncovered or information pointing at civilian casualties is leaked the question arises as to what is behind the increasing number of these misfirings. When we shed light on the increasingly exposed failures of drone strikes it is crucial to examine the institutional culture to which drone operators are exposed and address the circumstances of the failures. Especially since in a precision warfare composition, there is no room for error or mistakes, precisely because most of the space that is observed is defined and interpreted through the drone operators. At the same time, there is no real interaction between the drone and the observed objects, which would allow for resistance or greater cultural

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[34] Marina Espinoza, "State Terrorism: Orientalism and the Drone Programme," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 376-393, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1456725.

[35] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

[36] Espinoza, *State Terrorism: Orientalism and the Drone Programme*, 380.

understanding. The importance of highlighting the mode of thought influencing the institutional culture of the US military and its *methods* through drone strikes becomes more pronounced when addressing the increasing numbers of failed strikes.

Drone warfare has been subjected to increasing academic scrutiny over the past years. Most of the research has been focused on its dubious legality, infringements of sovereign territory, the efficiency of the surgically precise strikes or the very notion of such overwhelming power. More recently, as data from the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* shows[37], drone strike failures have been coming to light which triggered more research into the way the US military conceals certain truths and facts about the drone strikes. This led to the discoveries presented by Allinson about Giorgio Agamben's sovereign power and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics as leading the drone warfare's ideological sphere.[38] Their assumptions highlight how drone warfare is conducted with a special focus on power relations. However, crucially, a rather scarcely researched area is the military culture's influence on knowledge production and its specific implications in the theatre of war.

Carol Cohn's work on the particular culture of defence intellectuals highlighted the prevailing mode of thought that influenced their perception, articulation and visualisation, and even specific ways of fascination for particular weapons. A crucial takeaway from her work is the power of discourse and the institutional culture over identities and modes of operating. In her experience, the way matters are discussed reinforces the institutional culture of the military and limits the scope of the debate. Conforming to the language that is used gives "a sense of what I would call cognitive mastery"[39] and a feeling of control. However, being constrained by

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[37] Jack Serle and Jessica Purkiss, "Drone Wars: The Full Data," The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (en-GB) (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (en-GB), January 1, 2017), https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017 -01-01/drone-wars-the-full-data.

[38] In Jamie Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 113-127, https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12086. The author refers to both Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998). As well as, Joseph-Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2019).

[39] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 704.

the language that is used also creates a narrow understanding and perception of the topics. As Cohn put it, the "technostrategic language"[40] gives certain abstraction from the brutality and reality of combat while at the same time it creates a cognitive bubble to which only individuals that conform to the same language can belong. Similarly, the drone operators and drone strikes conform to their exclusive linguistic circles which often employ euphemisms for tragic accidents and fatal mistakes, while reinforcing an institutionally embedded framework for comprehending the events of the drone feed. Comparably to Cohn's analysis of defence intellectuals it is also giving certain abstraction and ease to the weight of these military operations.

Central to the assumptions of this research is the question of why drone strikes fail? In order to give a more nuanced understanding, it is necessary to consider the institutional culture to which drone operators and the drone crew are exposed. More importantly, scrutiny of this culture needs to consider the effect of these exclusive vocabularies feeding into a larger institutionalised cognition of the military. At the same time shedding light on the sources that contribute to knowledge production and cognition is crucial to paint a holistic picture of the influencing factors on the military culture. Once the sources and the language contributing to the established practices of knowledge production are located, their influence on the drone strikes and the surrounding environment can be scrutinised further. Crucially, what this research will suggest is that observing the institutional culture of the US military, the exclusive language that is used by drone operators and defence intellectuals as well as the sources contributing to this culture can offer an explanation for the surge in drone strike failures.

While the theoretical foundation for the existing institutional culture and the supporting language are briefly drawn up, a crucial part of the research is considering the contributing

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[40] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 690.

sources to the established knowledge production. Going back to Edward Said's take on the influential role of the intellectuals in exile, Hamid Dabashi disagreed with a purely positive and hopeful view on their role as pointed out in his book *Brown Skin, White Masks[41]*. In this book, he criticises the intellectuals that immigrated to the United States and contribute to the imperial nature of US foreign policy. Essentially, his critique is aimed at those intellectuals that emigrated from the Middle East or South Asia into the US and contributed either through think-tanks or political and advisory roles to a fairly narrow and stereotypical understanding of their region. Dabashi argued that the US imperial machine of knowledge production utilised these individuals as "native informants" or "comprador intellectuals."[42] The critique addresses that solely by their "native" status their claims override and replace the need for particular social and cultural expertise. Most importantly, as Dabashi argued, their claims and reports are chosen to follow the dominant line of knowledge production and add a layer of validity through their "native status."[43]

There is a particular target audience whose understanding of US identity relies heavily on the exceptional status which is reinforced through the writings of "native informers". Essentially, as Dabashi claims, the comprador intellectuals produce knowledge about their region that fits the narrative of the US government adding the label of "native" to the claims and reinforcing existing epistemic frameworks. Crucially, within the framework of capitalism, he compares the knowledge produced by these individuals to a commodity that can be bought or sold, reproduced instantly, and most importantly framed to fit particular needs. As Dabashi put it, "[t]he service that the native informers provide to the imperialist project is just another disposable commodity in that cycle, like a roll of toilet paper–use it, discard it, and leave."[44]

[41] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011).
[42] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011), 36.
[43] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011), 12.
[44] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011), 37.

Building on Dabashi's analysis of the contribution of native informants to the knowledge production of the US military-industrial complex, this thesis will aim to highlight a crucial source of this self-reinforcing mechanism, exposing its effects on drone warfare. The contribution of the selected informants reproduces epistemic frameworks that predetermine how other cultures are perceived. These frameworks are a significant part of the institutional culture, which allow for orientalist interpretations to influence cognitive processes in drone warfare and lead to a menacing interpretation of other cultures. The final aim of this thesis is to highlight the significance of these biased operations and the fatal mistakes they contribute to.

Analytical framework

Towards the end of the Cold War, more generalised assumptions about military operations became prevalent. As Alastair Iain Johnston summarised it[45], the justifications for predominant military strategies were attributed to blanket assumptions through particular strategic cultures that influenced the *modus operandi* of militaries. Essentially, different military strategies were explained through the fact that different countries have distinct strategic cultures. Various generations of scholars of strategic culture highlighted vastly different aspects as primarily influential. In Johnston's overview, the first generation had a rather narrow deterministic view of strategic culture. The second generation argued for a more instrumental use of the strategic culture. Finally, the third generation highlighted the structural-materialistic influence on strategic culture. Crucially, when observing the symbols within strategic cultures, Johnston builds on Ernest Bormann's "rhetorical communities" as foundational for creating an "us" and negating a "them."[46] This plain duality of an "in-group" built in relation to an enemy relies on particular recognisable symbols that strengthen the cohesion while also drawing a clear distinction between the "other." The most powerful way to utilise symbols is through language. "The more the language of a group's strategic discourse creates distance between the values of the in-group and those of the 'other,' that is, the more the adversary is dehumanized, the more legitimate are any and all actions, particularly coercive ones, directed at the adversary."[47]

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[45] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32-64, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539119.
[46] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32-64, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539119. Quoted from Linda L. Putnam, Michael E. Pacanowsky, "Symbolic Convergence: Organizational Communication and Culture," in the following chapter Ernest G. Bormann, *Communication and Organizations, an Interpretive Approach* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1983), 100-106.
[47] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32-64, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539119, 58-59.

Analysing strategic culture reveals how militaries engage in a particular production of an enemy Other. Crucially, as Johnston highlighted it, this process relies to a great degree on discursive practices.[48] Looking at the knowledge production through strategic culture sheds a light on how the militaries engage in producing an enemy and subsequently attributing threatening features to the Other. Analysing institutional culture highlights the norms, beliefs, and habits of the military personnel involved and showcases how a particular narrative can get institutionalised. Hence, looking at strategic culture and more specifically the discourse highlights the mode of knowledge production in the military, which offers an explanation for the frequent failures in the drone strikes.

There is immense power behind knowledge production and legitimating the process of knowledge production. As Maha Hilal argued in her recent book reflecting on the discourse of the US through the War on Terror, "[t]he normalization of certain forms of discourse can also play a powerful role in reproducing inequality."[49] Therefore, as previously indicated it is crucial to inspect the institutional culture and language but just as much the sources that legitimate the whole process of knowledge production. Perhaps it is the abstraction of the language reinforced by the institutional culture that allows for the distance in which temporary claims about culture can take the shape of permanent and prevailing knowledge.

The following research will aim to uncover how the institutional culture, language and "native informers" contribute to a process of one-sided knowledge production that allows for a drone program which operates on a biopolitical/necropolitical nexus legitimizing fatal mistakes. In order to analyse this process, this research will rely on interpretative discourse analysis. The documents that will be reviewed are policy briefs and statements of the selected

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[48] Johnston, *Thinking about Strategic Culture*.

[49] Maha Hilal, *Innocent until Proven Muslim: Islamophobia, the War on Terror, and the Muslim Experience since 9/11* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Broadleaf Books, an imprint of 1517 Media, 2021), 186.

"native informers", notorious cases of drone strike failures and their documentation as well as the US military's explanation, and finally documented reports of investigative journalists on the drone strikes. The reason for considering a wider variety of documents and sources is explained by the extreme difficulty to obtain documentation relating to drone strikes. Given the high level of secrecy and confidentiality, it is impossible to rely solely on primary sources from the US military. In addition, the material that is publicly available or obtained by previous investigative work is often redacted or vaguely formulated when it comes to drone strike analysis. At the same time, considering a wider variety of sources is beneficial to get a more holistic picture of the military culture and the contributing factors.

The aim of analysing and interpreting the discourse within the US military is to highlight the effect of these selected factors in contributing to a more assertive military culture. Rather than pinpointing the exact causes for drone strike failures and singling out solitary contributing factors to the military culture, this research aims to uncover some specifically selected factors and their particular contributing effect to the military culture. The reason for analysing the language is that it uncovers power asymmetries and epistemic violence through pronouncing reality. The words can also highlight how suspicions can melt into threats, and the absence of interaction shows that there is no means to resist this process. Analysing the discourse and the narrative of the hegemonic power uncovers the assumptions of one side while highlighting the silence of the missing interaction. Thus, what remains lost in silence is the possibility of understanding.

In the fog of war – Asymmetry:

And only when words fall silent,

We become truly vulnerable.

Observing a wilful demonstration of power.

Silence is the purest form of violence.[50]

(Drones perpetuate silence.)

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[50] This is a poem titled "Asymmetry" which I wrote on power dynamics and the impact of silence inspired by Lisa Halliday and Hannah Arendt at a time I was contemplating how intertwined silence and violence can be.

Chapter 1: "Pick up a weapon and you're a combatant, it's how that works."

1.1 Institutional culture and the language used by the US Military

When Carol Cohn was analysing the institutional culture of the defence analysts, she highlighted that their habits and norms were often formed through a very particular "technostrategic" language.[51] This language, pervaded with acronyms, creates a highly exclusive atmosphere inviting only those that are able to converse through these abstract terms and phrases. What is observable through the analysis of Cohn is that for those defence analysts that are exposed to this linguistic bubble, it provides certain comfort and "cognitive mastery" that empower a feeling of ownership and superiority within the discussion.[52] It allows for a distance from the most terrifying events and transforms the debate into a more pleasurable or as Cohn put it "exciting" activity.[53] In this instance, it can be seen that the language acts as an enabler. The abstraction and feeling of ownership mean that the constant use of the technostrategic language reinforces the idea of "cognitive mastery." The more these topics are discussed, in Cohn's instance nuclear warfare, but a parallel could be easily drawn with drone warfare, the more they are subdued and conform to the technostrategic language.

In the words of Alastair Finlan, "new language and historical points of references are introduced to provide identification anchors around which people are encouraged to congregate. Working in military circles is akin to living in a foreign country, requiring mastery of a new language and understanding of local ways of doing things."[54] Thus, it becomes more visible that the institutional culture in the military is influenced by the technostrategic language

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[51] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 690.
[52] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 704.
[53] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 695.
[54] Alastair Finlan, *Contemporary Military Culture and Strategic Studies: US and UK Armed Forces in the 21st Century* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2015), 12.

and it serves to further a fairly narrow mode of thought. It is crucial to mention that the narrowness comes from what the language can tolerate and what it can cover within its boundaries. Crucially, the distance and the abstraction that is offered by the military lingo have consciously been utilised in historical instances as pointed out by Janet McIntosh.[55] While gendered and hypersexualised[56] language has been used in various instances of the military as highlighted before, McIntosh's focus was on the derogatory terms that have a dehumanising effect. As she put it, "[i]t can involve hypersimplifying a person's complexity and/or negatively essentializing them, reducing each token of a dehumanized type to some putative deep defining quality, while rendering each token exchangeable."[57] Her analysis highlighted how deeply engrained the power of military lingo is in the culture of the US military, and how it can act as an enabler for a particular way of cognition. The reason language is so primary is since the way information is interpreted is through the analysts and the drone operators who are also exposed to this dominant military culture and act within its boundaries.

Highlighting the importance of language as co-constitutive of the military culture is a necessary step before focusing more narrowly on the discourse analysis. The following section will look at particular cases of drone strike failures and analyse the surrounding debate in order to pinpoint the linguistic limitations that premeditate a particular mode of thought. Crucially, as the significance of the discourse has been established, this section will consider how the

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[55] Janet McIntosh, "Language and the Military: Necropolitical Legitimation, Embodied Semiotics, and Ineffable Suffering," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50, no. 1 (2021): 241-258, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110258. As well as, Janet McIntosh, "'Because It's Easier to Kill That Way': Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics," *Language in Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2021): 583-603, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404521000324.
and 2. Language and the Military: Necropolitical Legitimation, Embodied Semiotics, and Ineffable Suffering
[56] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 694.
[57] Janet McIntosh, "'Because It's Easier to Kill That Way': Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics," *Language in Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2021), https://doi.org/10.1017/s00474045210 00324, 585.

language and military culture, laid out before, contribute to a more assertive application of drone strikes.

1.2 How can precision warfare fail?

As many proponents of drone warfare argue, there is great utility in remotely operated precision strikes that are able to hit targets with a high degree of accuracy, they are also more cost-effective, and the proximity to the danger is virtually non-existent.[58] The initial reasoning behind drone warfare was to avoid exposing military troops to dangerous operations in highly volatile areas and thus also reduce mission costs. However, as the physical presence of soldiers was replaced with an omnipresent, and given the unequal power asymmetries also omnipotent drones, intelligence gathering became ever so important. Drone warfare relies on constant surveillance and reconnaissance of the targets, supposedly to map out their behaviour and habits and in high profile cases also the ideal moment to strike with the least collateral damage. While constant surveillance produces an immense amount of data, drone warfare is built on the premise of analysing a vast amount of intelligence to ensure the precision, stealth, and efficiency of this type of warfare.

The "scopic regimes" as Grayson and Mawdsley referred to them, rely on the "management and control of space" from the drone's overarching perspective.[59] Essentially, to make sense of all the information that is gathered and understand developments on the ground the military has to apply cognitive shortcuts to capture the events and define them with relative speed. The drone's gaze allows for observing targets and events for a great length of time which provides crucial pieces of information, but without analysts engaging to filter down and

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[58] Mike Fowler, "The Strategy of Drone Warfare," *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 4 (2014): 108-119, https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.7.4.8.
[59] Grayson and Mawdsley, *Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations*, 440.

scrutinise the data, it is often without context. The drone operators and analysts engage in, what Lila Lee-Morrison called "production of meaning."[60]

The unmanned aerial vehicles created immense power asymmetries, especially considering how much intelligence gathering relies on human interpretation of the ground events. Lee-Morrison described the power imbalance of drone warfare as follows: "Drone warfare splits contemporary conflicts between those who contend with reality through the filter of a reproduction and those who are targeted and having to contend with the physical realities on the ground."[61] It puts the drone operators and their target in a different realm even on the battlefield. Ultimately, the reality is defined by the perception and interpretation of the drone operator. This ability to produce meaning sheds a light on the importance of the institutional culture and more crucially the linguistic limitations of the technostrategic military lingo. Not only are the ground developments perceived and interpreted by the drone operators, but their meanings are produced within a narrow premeditating linguistic framework that is also reinforced by a looming institutional culture.

While the positionality and the power of the drone operators are gradually put into more context, it is crucial to argue the connection between their power, their linguistic limitations and the failed drone strikes. It is necessary to mention that information about the US drone warfare and its results are highly confidential and operate in unparalleled secrecy, which makes analysing failures immensely difficult. However, as more investigative work is done into checking the reporting of the US military and CIA, and more documents get leaked by whistle-blowers about drone warfare there is a greater chance to analyse the discourse surrounding the

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[60] Tore Kristensen et al., "Drone Warfare : Visual Primacy as a Weapon," in *Trans Visuality : The Cultural Dimension of Visuality Vol. 2 : Visual Organizations* , vol. 2 (Liverpool, United Kingdom: Liverpool University Press. , 2015), 201-214.

[61] Tore Kristensen et al., "Drone Warfare : Visual Primacy as a Weapon," in *Trans Visuality : The Cultural Dimension of Visuality Vol. 2 : Visual Organizations* , vol. 2 (Liverpool, United Kingdom: Liverpool University Press. , 2015), 202-203.

failed drone strikes. While the documentation is still fairly limited, there is a lot of recurring analysis over the same documents, allowing for a thorough examination.

The title of this chapter is a quote from the Mission Intelligence Coordinator (MIC) of an operation where a strike coordinated was with a drone and with a military helicopter in Uruzgan, Afghanistan. The strike is notorious for its high number of civilian casualties between 15 and 23 depending on whether one relies on the US or local sources. While this strike happened approximately a decade ago, and it was frequently analysed[62], it is crucial to mention. As Lee-Morrison argued, this failed drone strike is significant due to the fact that hours of conversation between the drone crew, the military helicopter crew, sensor operator, ground troops and other military personnel involved were leaked and exposed how crucial the way of communicating is. The instance offers a glance into the language, norms, habits and deeper institutionalised aspects of the US military culture.

As the case of the discussion between the various military fractions involved in the strike shows, the language acts as an enabler for stereotypes or assumptions. As both Allinson and Lee-Morris' analysis of the strike highlighted, from the initial moment the drone crew started following the targets and analysing their conduct, there was an element of suspicion overshadowing all subsequent events. As Allinson pointed out, from the beginning the movement of the group under observation was referred to as "tactical" giving certain abstraction as to what exactly that means but having a nefarious undertone.[63] As the radio feed goes on, the suspicion mounts through the mutual confirmation of the assumptions between

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[62] In this section it is crucial to mention that this strike has been a foundational part of analysing drone warfare over the years, thus, it has to be mentioned, however it has been thoroughly analysed previously as well. My analysis will rely on: Jamie Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 113-127, https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12086. And Tore Kristensen et al., "Drone Warfare : Visual Primacy as a Weapon," in *Trans Visuality : The Cultural Dimension of Visuality Vol. 2 : Visual Organizations* , vol. 2 (Liverpool, United Kingdom: Liverpool University Press. , 2015), 201-214. As well as, Lauren Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War: Gender, Race, and the Posthuman in Drone Warfare," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 1 (2016): 11-28, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616657947.
[63] Allinson, *The Necropolitics of Drones*, 121.

various crews. A crucial linguistic limitation is highlighted when the group that was observed seems to have children with them but the underlying suspicion counters this by delegating them as "adolescents."[64] Essentially, categorising them as within an age category that already attributes the suspicion to them. While the discussion goes on and the children are referred to as "teenagers" the notorious line comes in when the MIC states: "Pick up a weapon and you're a combatant, it's how that works."[65] As Shoker argued,[66] there is a category that already entails the suspicion of being an insurgent or being capable of committing violence. The US military refers to this category as the *military-age-male* (MAM), creating a broad group to classify and justify the preconceived suspicion through a narrow linguistic tier. Rather than challenging the initial suspicion through major outliers, such as the presence of children, the "mode of thought" as described by Cohn,[67] allows for a limited understanding of the situation.

As previously argued, the military-age-male category is a prime example of the narrow premeditating linguistic framework that in its normative intention aims to distinguish civilians and combatants[68] but ascribed a threatening attribute to the targets. As seen in the analysis of Allinson's and Lee-Morris but also throughout the drone feed, the fact that the targets were categorised as MAMs contributed to the suspicion that there are weapons present. The overzealous search for the weapons to prove that the monitored targets are in fact combatants resulted in instances where the drone operators reinforced and confirmed each other's suspicions. The first instance where this is observable was when the drone pilot attempts to

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[64] Timothy McHale, "Memorandum for Commander, United States Forces-Afghanistan/ International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan -Executive Summary for AR 15-6 Investigation, 21 February 2012 CIVCAS Incident in Uruzgan Province," Cryptome, February 21, 2012, https://cryptome.org/2012/03/creech-savagery.pdf. And, "Transcripts of U.S. Drone Attack," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times), accessed March 20, 2022, http://documents.latimes.com/transcript-of-drone-attack/.

[65] "Transcripts of U.S. Drone Attack," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times), accessed March 20, 2022, http://documents.latimes.com/transcript-of-drone-attack/.

[66] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare.*

[67] Cohn, *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*, 716.

[68] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare,* 137.

identify weapons and states: "I was hoping we could make a rifle out, never mind."[69] As the targets were crossing a river the MIC stated: "I hope they get out and dry off and show us all their weapons."[70] Later on, followed by: "They probably mostly left their weapons in the vehicles"[71] when a positive weapon identification was lacking. The repeated search for a weapon sort of spiralled throughout the communication and as the drone operators have this immense power, many otherwise ordinary objects were treated as potential weapons. This highlights how the drone operators' perception overshadows reality, as it seems already predetermined.[72]

A more recent notorious strike occurred following the decision of the President of the United States to withdraw from Afghanistan following the 20-year war. On August 29, 2021, the US military conducted an operation targeting a suspected ISIS terrorist after monitoring the target, and reportedly also intercepting the communications, a missile was launched. Crucially, the military deemed the suspect an "imminent threat" and added that after the strike "significant secondary explosions"[73] indicated "reasonable suspicion" of explosives. A New York Times investigation revealed that "… over the course of the day, as they're watching this sedan, they begin to suspect it's carrying out a mission for ISIS. And then in the afternoon, they see the sedan go into a compound and men load heavy packages into this car, which they think could be explosives."[74] The investigation later revealed that camera footage from the house that was

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[69] "Transcripts of U.S. Drone Attack," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times), accessed March 20, 2022, http://documents.latimes.com/transcript-of-drone-attack/.

[70] "Transcripts of U.S. Drone Attack," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times), accessed March 20, 2022, http://documents.latimes.com/transcript-of-drone-attack/.

[71] "Transcripts of U.S. Drone Attack," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times), accessed March 20, 2022, http://documents.latimes.com/transcript-of-drone-attack/.

[72] Lauren Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War: Gender, Race, and the Posthuman in Drone Warfare," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 1 (2016): 11-28, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616657947.

[73] Michael Barbaro et al., "A 'Righteous Strike'," ed. Mike Benoist, The New York Times (The New York Times, September 21, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/21/podcasts/the-daily/drone-strike-afghanistan-zemari-ahmadi.html?showTranscript=1.

[74] Michael Barbaro et al., "A 'Righteous Strike'," ed. Mike Benoist, The New York Times (The New York Times, September 21, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/21/podcasts/the-daily/drone-strike-afghanistan-zemari-ahmadi.html?showTranscript=1.

targeted disproved the claims of the US military. The strike killed 10 civilians, while the primary target turned out to be working for an American company and the car was loaded with water containers. A crucial and fairly immediate parallel is the underlying suspicion surrounding the movement of the target as well as the potential to be a threat. In addition, the heavy load that was put into the truck was also labelled as potential explosives, yet again inducing a preconceived suspicion. While through the investigation it turned out that the sort of irregular and suspicious movement of the car was simply dropping off co-workers at their homes. Shortly after the strike, there was a suspicion that there might have been civilian casualties. Even before the NYT investigation disproved the claim that the target was affiliated with ISIS, in a press conference General Mark Milley acknowledge that apart from their target, other people were also killed in the strike. Despite already knowing that the strike had caused unintended deaths, Milley called it a "righteous strike."[75] The narrative that was utilised during this instance builds onto Shoker's argument where she stated that: "Because actors are socially constrained, they use language strategically in order to convince audiences that their policies are legitimate."[76]

In addition, during the investigation, the NYT also interviewed the people who were in the car earlier, who later turned out to be the colleges. Apart from the tragic loss, they have been exposed as working for a foreign entity and potentially became targets, but most importantly, as they admitted, their association with ISIS through this strike is one of the greatest menaces.[77] This yet again highlights the power asymmetry between the drone operators and the victims on the ground. Their reality was, and based on their answers, remains

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[75] "US Department of Defense," *US Department of Defense*, September 1, 2021, https://www.defense.gov/ News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2762169/secretary-of-defense-austin-and-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-of-staff-gen-mille/.
[76] Shoker, *Military-Age Males in Counterinsurgency and Drone Warfare,* pp. 48-49.
[77] Michael Barbaro et al., "A 'Righteous Strike'," ed. Mike Benoist, The New York Times (The New York Times, September 21, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/21/podcasts/the-daily/drone-strike-afghanistan-zemari-ahmadi.html?showTranscript=1.

determined by the interpretation of an omnipresent gaze. These violent epistemologies constitute absolute knowledge[78] and reconstruct lived realities on the ground. Khaled Al-Kassimi referred to this kind of knowledge production as "Imperial Lite"[79] stating that whatever means are justified and considered legitimate because it comes from the West, despite its highly destructive nature.

Another failed drone strike case on December 12, 2013, investigated by the Human Rights Watch[80] showed how a Yemeni wedding ceremony was most probably misinterpreted as a convoy of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants. Crucially, the case remains widely underreported and official documents remain unavailable, the investigative work done by the HRW points at least to the fact that the claims of the US are in contention. The reports talk about 12 killed and 15 injured while the US claimed that a high-profile terrorist was present in the convoy. HRW's investigative work could not confirm whether the terrorist from the notorious "kill list" was present during the strike. Furthermore, as it turned out "[n]early everyone in the procession was an adult male, and one Yemeni government source said many of the men carried military assault rifles."[81] However, as HRW highlighted, a tribal wedding is most of the time accompanied by celebratory gunfire, and it is common to be armed for the celebration. Coming back to the quote in the chapter title, it is significant to consider how the targets observed from the drone are interpreted and evaluated. While the official US narrative did not acknowledge this particular instance as a failure, local authorities provided a pay-out for the families who suffered the losses pointing at the fact that these were, in fact, civilian casualties.

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[78] Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence,* 160.

[79] 79 Khaled Al-Kassimi, "A 'New Middle East' Following 9/11 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011?—(Neo)-Orientalist Imaginaries Rejuvenate the (Temporal) Inclusive Exclusion Character of Jus Gentium," *Laws* 10, no. 2 (2021): p. 29, https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10020029, 3.

[80] Letta Tayler, "A Wedding That Became a Funeral: US Drone Attack on Marriage Procession in Yemen ," Human Rights Watch, November 21, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/02/19/wedding-became-funeral/us-drone-attack-marriage-procession-yemen.

[81] Tayler, *A Wedding That Became a Funeral*, 10.

A Pulitzer Prize winning investigative work by Azmat Khan called "The Civilian Casualty Files"[82] revealed the systematic shortcomings of the US drone warfare building on confidential files, documents, and reporting from the Pentagon. The database[83] with the files shows a frequently recurring target misidentification or non-credible evidence of terrorist targeting in Syria and Iraq. Crucially, the documents are from the Combined Joint Task Force of the Department of Defense assessing the credibility of civilian casualties. As data from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism[84] shows, the collateral damage and the civilian casualties are significantly underreported. The underreported cases, misidentified enemies, unconfirmed casualties and the lacking willingness to investigate failures all contribute to a distinct image of precision warfare as being highly effective. However, the civilian casualty assessments relating to drone strikes in Syria and Iraq examined by Khan, clearly point at an existing systematic problem when it comes to analysing the data and interpreting the events on the ground.

A strike that happened on January 13, 2017, in Mosul, Iraq, with 8 civilians killed had parts of a redacted transcript of a conversation between the drone crew and a controller. The transcript[85] starts with someone on the feed saying "this area is poppin", then when two "adm"s or adult males are observed with the suspicion that a third one has a weapon near him, another person on the drone feed proceeds to ask "play time?" to which he gets the "cleared hot" answer. The review of this strike showed that the three houses targeted were misidentified and the strike killed civilians. Crucially, from the language of the transcript, it can be observed that

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[82] Azmat Khan, "Hidden Pentagon Records Reveal Patterns of Failure in Deadly Airstrikes," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 18, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/12/18/us/airstrikes-pentagon-records-civilian-deaths.html.

[83] Azmat Khan et al., "The Civilian Casualty Files," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 18, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/civilian-casualty-files.html.

[84] Jack Serle and Jessica Purkiss, "Drone Wars: The Full Data," The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (en-GB) (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (en-GB), January 1, 2017), https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-01/drone-wars-the-full-data.

[85] Joseph M Martin, "Memorandum for CIVCAS Team, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve," New York Times Database, September 18, 2018, https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/rules-impeachment-trial/6338ae1036efe185/full.pdf.

fairly trivial and derogatory terms are used while engaging in the strike to analyse the situation on the ground.[86] A repeatedly occurring concern with regards to drone warfare is the effect of gamification on these types of operations. The "play time?" question clearly highlights certain distance and abstraction from the situation on the ground. Crucially after the missiles hit, the drone crew observes "squirters" or people fleeing the scene of the strike and eventually concludes that there were also children present.[87] This case highlights how the language acts as an enabler where the horrors of war are reduced through slang. As Janet McIntosh reviewed the linguistic dismantling of the recruits in the military[88], she noted that often the terms that are utilised contribute to creating a particular image of the Self and negating an Other to enable certain actions and make them more acceptable. "At the level of semantics, particular words change the lens through which actors perceive others' personhood, or lack thereof, making certain allegiances unthinkable and certain deaths thinkable."[89]

As these particular instances and wider databases outline, there is systematic underreporting and regular failures in the drone warfare conducted by the United States. Crucially, there is a lacking willingness to thoroughly investigate the failures, as these are mostly done by NGOs or investigative journalists. However, the failures that were analysed, and those present in the databases, happened due to misinterpretations, false data or the influence of preconceived notions and cultural assumptions. As these instances show, language plays an important role in the failures. Cognitive shortcuts, biases, slangs, and assumptions often determine how the situation on the ground gets interpreted and they also act as an enabler

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[86] Joseph M Martin, "Memorandum for CIVCAS Team, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve," New York Times Database, September 18, 2018, https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/rules-impeachment-trial/6338ae1036efe185/full.pdf.
[87] Azmat Khan et al., "The Civilian Casualty Files," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 18, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/civilian-casualty-files.html.
[88] Janet McIntosh, "'Because It's Easier to Kill That Way': Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics," *Language in Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2021): 583-603, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404521000324.
[89] Janet McIntosh, "Language and the Military: Necropolitical Legitimation, Embodied Semiotics, and Ineffable Suffering," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50, no. 1 (2021): 241-258, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110258, 242.

for a more assertive approach. The institutional culture is also visible in the attitudes and norms that are examined in these instances. As the data analysis relies primarily on the drone crew, the particular mode of thought and the interpretations are transmitted into the evaluation of the situations. Underlying suspicion and orientalist claims about the behaviour, culture, and norms often overshadow realities on the ground. The instances, where the drone operator conversations are available, pinpointed how the assumptions are present in the analysis of the situations. While in instances where only post-strike evaluations or official statements are available highlighted that the discourse builds into the same institutional culture. An example of this is framing situations as "righteous" despite signs of civilian casualties. As Wilcox described it, "certain bodies are materialized as always already killable in the name of 'keeping them in their place' and dislocating violence as always already elsewhere."[90]

While this section sheds light on the subjective process of knowledge production and the transmission of epistemic violence into physical violence, it still keeps certain questions unanswered. The influence of cognitive biases, cultural assumptions and one-sided interpretations highlight systematic failures within drone warfare and questions its efficiency. However, they do not give an answer for the preserved and prevalent mode of thought, sustained institutional culture, and the initial assumptions that are the sources of this mechanism of knowledge production. While the US military-industrial complex is immensely powerful, sustaining the discourse after multiple notorious failures requires sources of legitimation that build into its existing narrative. Recalling Hamid Dabashi's critique of Said's take on intellectuals in exile, when observing sources of legitimation, it is crucial to consider the role of "native informers." The following section will consider a significant source of the US military's policies and their influence on the institutional culture as well as the discourse.

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[90] Lauren Wilcox, "Drone Warfare and the Making of Bodies out of Place," *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 1 (March 2, 2015): 127-131, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2015.1005422, 130.

By considering the role of "native" intellectuals and their contributions either through political positions or advisory roles, the remaining question of sources sustaining this particular mode of knowledge production will be answered.

Chapter 2: "Bathtubs do not plot to overthrow the American way of life. The Islamists do."[91]

2.1 From Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism

Edward Said introduced Orientalism[92], a concept of the Orient as a region that exists only in relation to the Occident and the Western powers. In his overview historically the discursive power of the West determined the objective nature of the Orient based merely on observations and created an image of a rather regressive, barbaric but also mystical and romantic region. This representation was primarily possible due to the power asymmetries in the military that allowed for such a reduced and ingenuine representation. In *Post-Orientalism* Dabashi expanded upon the concept of Said and proclaimed that the Western hegemonic power that was aiming to describe the Orient on its own terms, is now in a different relationship and there is no honest incentive to understand the Middle East anymore.[93] As Al-Kassimi argued, it is crucial to consider the fluidity of orientalism and detach it from simply being a historical idea. As he put it, "[Orientalism] is rather a *moving* concept that continues to inform the genealogy of knowledge production concerned with the supposed *uncivility* of an Arab mode of *Being*."[94] Highlighting that orientalist ideas are highly adaptable and most importantly often exploited for particular political or military purposes.

The abstractness and high adaptability of the ideas as well as the narrative power of orientalism share particular attributes with the discourse surrounding the War on Terror. An

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[91] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism," Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism § (2017), 62.

[92] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

[93] Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

[94] Khaled Al-Kassimi, "A 'New Middle East' Following 9/11 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011?—(Neo)-Orientalist Imaginaries Rejuvenate the (Temporal) Inclusive Exclusion Character of Jus Gentium," *Laws* 10, no. 2 (2021): 29, https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10020029, 6.

imminent parallel can be drawn between the location of the knowledge production and the inherent power asymmetries that are present. As Maryam Khalid argued quoting Roland Bleiker "the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics'; political representations (along with other representations) are necessarily incomplete."[95] Thus, the power to define the Other and position the Self in binary oppositions also constructs both subjects but highlights how one is in a passive role while the other is in an active role. This hegemonic power denies any agency to the Other and produces a one-sided and incontestable knowledge that given its mode of construction appears objective. What the discourse on the War on Terror enabled, was to legitimate stereotypes through a massive discursive campaign reinforcing orientalist ideas and demonising an abstract yet all-encompassing Muslim Other. It justified a mode of knowledge production that was built on, what Johnston described as, binary oppositions between an "in-group" and an "out-group" in this particular instance underpinned by the "civilised-uncivilised" distinction.[96] If language acts as an enabler, the War on Terror as a discursive campaign acted as legitimation for the institutional culture in which such a way of producing knowledge is enabled and empowered.

As previously argued, the high adaptability and constant reproducibility of orientalist views account for their continuous influence. As Al-Kassimi put it, the successful reinventions of these ideas within a discourse highlight how orientalist views are still present and persistent within the hegemonic knowledge production labelling it "neo" orientalism.[97] Crucially, as shown before, the language and the institutional culture provide a fertile ground for this particular mode of thought but leave the question of the sources and their influence

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[95] Roland Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 509-533, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298010300031001, 510. Quoted in:
Maryam Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror," *Global Change, Peace &Amp; Security* 23, no. 1 (February 6, 2011): pp. 15-29, https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2011.540092, 16.
[96] Al-Kassimi, *A 'New Middle East' Following 9/11 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011?*
[97] Al-Kassimi, *A 'New Middle East' Following 9/11 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011?,* 11.

unaddressed. Hence, a critique of the process of knowledge production leading to deathly strikes must acknowledge the sources that legitimate it. As Uzma Jamil concluded in a critical analysis of the power behind discourse: "Critiquing the structures of power-knowledge that underpin this hegemonic discourse involves pointing out its contingency, how it is reinforced and perpetuated through various issues[.]"[98] Hence, the following section will examine the role of "native informants" in perpetuating neo-orientalist views and their contribution to the process of knowledge production of the US military-industrial complex.

2.2 The role of native informers

The previous sections showed how the US military's particular institutional culture and technostrategic language construct a framework for knowledge production and allow for preconceived notions and stereotypes to infiltrate it. However, as Dabashi pointed out, in order for such a mode of knowledge production to function and be sustained over a longer period of time, it needs to be constantly legitimised. The previously drawn up neo-orientalist concepts and the required power asymmetry hint at the fact that the source of legitimacy has to come from the location of the hegemonic power. In addition, it also has to address and convince the particular audience that is part of the "in-group", playing into clearly distinguishable attributes of the "out-group". "For the American Imperial project to claim global validity, it needs the support of the native informers and comprador intellectuals with varying accents to their speech, their prose, and politics."[99] As he pointed out, the overarching discourse of the US military-industrial complex needs the contribution and the validity that "native informers" can provide. The following section sets out to highlight how the limitations of cultural understanding leading to failed drone strikes through the institutional culture and

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[98] Uzma Jamil, "Reading Power: Muslims in the War on Terror Discourse," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no. 2 (January 2014): 29-42, https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.2.2.0029, 32.
[99] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011), 36.

technostrategic language are underpinned by the legitimating contribution of "native informers."

As Alastair Finlan argued in an overview of the military culture of the US and the UK "[t]he connection between the military culture and civil society are intimate,"[100] highlighting the important role and influence that intellectuals possess. As many academicians also take up roles as political advisors or policy consultants, the influence of intellectuals on knowledge production cannot be ignored. However, Hamid Dabashi examined a fairly different role of those intellectuals that are native to countries of the Middle East or South Asia but emigrated to the West. Dabashi argued that their influence is crucial in how the US perceives different cultures, and thus they bear significant responsibility.[101] However, his critique addresses those intellectuals that he calls "native informers" or "comprador intellectuals" who rather than challenging the established understanding of these different cultures and regions, build into popular narratives infiltrated with stereotypes and orientalist ideas. The positionality of these intellectuals often presupposes expertise and gives legitimacy through their "native" status. He adds that the reason they are useful for the US military-industrial complex is that selecting their contributions as representative, reinforces an established narrative and adds legitimacy to it.

In order to understand and examine the influence of the "native informers", it is crucial to examine their contributions more in-depth. The following section will consider various statements and writings from intellectuals that are mentioned or fit the description of Dabashi's "native informers". Crucially, looking at the language and the message conveyed through their contributions, highlights how legitimacy can be given through their status. "[B]y offering their

[100] Alastair Finlan, *Contemporary Military Culture and Strategic Studies: US and UK Armed Forces in the 21st Century* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2015), 143.
[101] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011).

services native informers authorize and authenticate the dominant accent – which no longer hears its own imperial accent."[102]

The title of this chapter is a quote from Ayaan Hirsi Ali's testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Hirsi Ali is a Somali born Dutch American intellectual, who became a rather controversial figure due to her views on the irreconcilability of Islam and Western democracies. Dabashi refers to her in particular when laying out the comprador intellectuals that contribute to the mode of knowledge production. It is especially precarious to analyse her critique of Islam and the role of women, in many instances stemming from a personal experience, however, to showcase Dabashi's criticism it is fundamental to look at Hirsi Ali's contribution. To avoid a misinterpretation of this critique, it is crucial to underline that, it is aimed at her particular contribution to the portrayal of Islamic culture that is utilised to give legitimacy to the military actions of the US.

Hirsi Ali's work continuously presents an orientalist image of the countries with primarily Islamic culture by highlighting the extreme cases and focusing solely on notions of oppression. While her contributions are wrapped into seemingly progressive ideas, the core goes back to narrow representations. In her testimony to the Senate, she stated "Many Islamic charitable foundations use *zakat* (mandatory charity) funds to mix humanitarian outreach with ideological indoctrination, laying the ground for future intolerance, misogyny, and *jihad,* even if no violence is used in the short term."[103] Instances like this feed into a menacing representation of countries with Islamic cultures. When describing the effectiveness of the security measures of the United States, she also refers to Barack Obama noting that the threat of terrorism shouldn't be downplayed. Obama stated that statistically "Americans are more in

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[102] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011), 36.
[103] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism," Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism § (2017), 50.

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[102] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2011), 36.
[103] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism," Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism § (2017), 50.

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danger from their own bathtubs than from Islamist terrorists."[104] To which she offers a rebuttal stating that the real threat are the Islamists.[105] Through her views on immigration, she also builds a narrative of constant suspicion of the Muslim Other in articles such as "Swearing In the Enemy,"[106] where she highlights the background of various terrorists that were naturalized in the US. Instances like this contribute to distrust towards other cultures and narrow down the scope of perception, while also overemphasising violent attributes.

Building on this narrative Dabashi also mentioned Ibn Warraq, born in India migrated to Pakistan and eventually functioned in the UK. He possesses a similar profile fitting into Dabashi's description of a "native informant." Observing his contributions, Warraq also played a part in emphasizing the violent nature of Islam and Islamic culture, going as far as addressing the US institutions to be more proactive in combatting Islamism. Crucially, his writings also contribute to an established connection between countries with Islamic culture and the potential for violence. In a critique aimed at Obama, he also pinpointed that "the president has done is to wrap the Islamic orbit in a sweetly scented cashmere afghan (if you'll permit this ironic choice of words) that disguises the reality of the real Islam of this world."[107] This particular quote is especially significant given the phrase "real Islam." Going back to the discursive power and the Self-Other creation, there is a suggestion of a purely objective idea of what Islam is, which is often concealed but eventually menacing. In an extensive critical analysis of the Human Rights, Democracy, Islam and their compatibility, there is a section where Warraq notes that "Hence, in my view, there IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISLAM AND

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[104] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism," Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism § (2017), 62.
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[106] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Swearing In the Enemy," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 2013, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324767004578486931383069840.
[107] Ibn Warraq, "Naivety or the Failure to Face Reality.," Center for Inquiry (Center for Inquiry, January 5, 2010), https://centerforinquiry.org/blog/naivety_or_the_failure_to_face_reality/.

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM"[108] (capital letters in original). Moving beyond the historical analysis of Warraq, this statement allows us to make the assumption that any Islamic influence leads to the extreme. This instance shows a cognitive shortcut for understanding and builds into orientalist ideas that countries with primarily Islamic culture have an immediate tendency towards violence and yet again supports an underlying suspicion.

Lastly, in order to paint a holistic image of the role of "native informants," it is crucial to mention Walid Phares, a Lebanese-born American. Phares' contribution is significant due to his influential positions as a campaign adviser to Mitt Romney and Donald Trump. His regular appearances on Fox News and his political positions give him unparalleled influence and power over forming ideas about different cultures. While Phares refers most of his arguments to the core idea that terrorism should be defeated in a war against an ideology, he often refers to reductionist policies that seem to confirm existing biases. He was a vocal supporter[109] of the Trump administration's executive order that banned the entrance of certain foreign nationals to the US for 90 days, under the pretext of protecting the nation from terrorists. This legislation targeted specifically the citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen and it was referred to pejoratively as the "Muslim ban." The indiscriminate handling of the citizens as potential terrorists resulted in the dubious stance taken by the Trump administration towards these regions. When analysing terrorist threats Phares often referred to this policy as a crucial initial step in the fight against terrorism.[110] These blanket claims that reduce entire countries and nations perpetuate stereotypes and build into the discursive framework of the US, especially for a target audience where the Muslim Other is constructed

[108] Ibn Warraq, "Is Islam Compatible with Democracy and Human Rights?," Center for Inquiry, November 16, 2018, https://centerforinquiry.org/blog/is-islam-compatible-with-democracy-and-human-rights/.
[109] *Fighting the Global Terror Threat*, , *YouTube* (YouTube, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLJdr XSuFKo&t=291s.
[110] *Terrorism and the West*, *YouTube* (YouTube, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B1hKtkIfy A&t=397s.

through these claims. As Al-Kassimi put it "[r]eshaping the Arab world by perpetuating neo-Orientalist imaginaries continues to characterize a 'Western' approach imagining Arabia."[111]

These examples though not exhaustive show the influence of "native informants" and their various means of contributing to the knowledge production of the US military-industrial complex. A greater database and an analysis solely dedicated to the intellectuals is beyond the scope of this thesis. The examples outlined above highlight a process of premeditating certain orientalist imaginaries, contributing to the institutional culture and the language that is used by the military. These reductionist claims often simplify characteristics and allow for stereotypes to gain traction. This particular influence on the mode of knowledge production highlights the dangers of reducing cultures and misinterpreting realities, especially as they build into the larger institutional culture of the military. The simplified claims that are criticised throughout this thesis are found equally in the texts of the "native informers" and the conversations of the drone operators. The cultural distance thus remains perpetuated by the physical distance of the drones and the interpretation of one side remains dictating the reality of the other.

Considering the input of "native informers" highlights the sources of the institutional culture and the ideas behind the cognitive shortcuts of the technostrategic language. Crucially, the contributions of these intellectuals are not the sole influencing factor, however, they are significant as they offer legitimacy. When military operations take place in another culture, these preconceived notions are deeply engrained and have a strong effect on how different cultures are perceived. The "native" status validates all claims made by these intellectuals even if these are reduced to fit a particular political narrative. Building on Dabashi's analysis, these informants are a significant source of the US military-industrial complex. Their impact through the discourse they build into, reproduces epistemic frameworks that determine the perception

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[111] Al-Kassimi, *A 'New Middle East' Following 9/11 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011?,* 13.

of other cultures. These orientalist frameworks perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to cultural misinterpretations that lead to fatal mistakes exposed through the knowledge production behind the drone warfare.

Conclusion

Central to this thesis is the looming question of how can precision strikes fail so often? It is a startling revelation to look at the investigative work that has been done examining US drone warfare. The number of civilian casualties and fatalities is significantly underreported which points to the fact that there is a systematic problem with the way drone warfare is conducted. Rather than looking at technological failures or referring to civilian casualties as collateral damage and isolated incidents, this thesis considers an overarching issue within the US military. The current mode of knowledge production within the military allows for fairly subjective interpretations and as shown in the conversations of drone operators, there is inherent bias and suspicion present during these operations. Crucially, these stereotypes and preconceived notions are reinforced by the language that is used by drone operators, which relies on cognitive shortcuts and specific technostrategic discursive practices. Feeding into the institutional culture that premeditates a particular way of knowledge production are the "native informers." Through their native status, they often legitimise and reinforce established narratives of the US military-industrial complex and perpetuate orientalist frameworks in the process of knowledge production.

Essentially, what this thesis highlights is that the civilian casualties and fatalities prompted by the assertive application of drone strikes are caused by a broader problem with the mode of knowledge production within the US military. The different cultures are interpreted through orientalist lenses which accounts for misconceptions that result in fatal mistakes. Crucially, language acts as an enabler for subjective interpretations, and it is reinforced within the military through the institutional culture as well as legitimated from outside sources through "native informers." In drone warfare, where language is primary and the process of knowledge production is subjective, silence is fatal and the lacking agency to

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resist is deadly. "I no longer love blue skies. In fact, I now prefer grey skies. The drones do

not fly when the skies are grey."[112]

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[112] The words of Zubair Ur Rehman, a drone strike survivor. Quoted from: Lauren McCauley, "Congressional No-Show at 'Heart-Breaking' Drone Survivor Hearing," *Common Dreams*, October 29, 2013, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2013/10/29/congressional-no-show-heart-breaking-drone-survivor-hearing.

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