VOLUME 20 ISSUE 2

The International Journal of

Literary Humanities

Literary Activism against Drones

Aesthetics of Clarity, Confusion, and Empathy in Mohsin Hamid's Fiction

QURRATULAEN LIAQAT AND AMRA RAZA

COMMON GROUND

THEHUMANITIES.COM

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LITERARY HUMANITIES
https://thehumanities.com
ISSN: 2327-7912 (Print)
ISSN: 2327-8676 (Online)
https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7912/CGP (Journal)

First published by Common Ground Research Networks in 2022
University of Illinois Research Park
60 Hazelwood Drive
Champaign, IL 61820 USA
https://cgnetworks.org

The International Journal of Literary Humanities
is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.

Common Ground Research Networks, a member of Crossref

PEER REVIEW
Articles published in *The International Journal of Literary Humanities* are peer reviewed using a two-way anonymous peer review model. Reviewers are active participants of the New Directions in the Humanities Research Network or a thematically related Research Network. The publisher, editors, reviewers, and authors all agree upon the following standards of expected ethical behavior, which are based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Codes of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines. More information can be found at: https://thehumanities.com/journals/model.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION
The International Journal of Literary Humanities
publishes biannually (June, December).
To find out more about the submission process, please visit https://thehumanities.com/journals/call-for-papers.

ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING
For a full list of databases in which this journal is indexed, please visit https://thehumanities.com/journals/collection.

RESEARCH NETWORK MEMBERSHIP
Authors in *The International Journal of Literary Humanities* are members of the New Directions in the Humanities Research Network or a thematically related Research Network. Members receive access to journal content. To find out more, please visit https://thehumanities.com/about/become-a-member.

SUBSCRIPTIONS
The International Journal of Literary Humanities
is available in electronic and print formats. Subscribe to gain access to content from the current year and the entire backlist. Contact us at cgscholar.com/cg_support.

ORDERING
Single articles and issues are available from the journal bookstore at https://cgscholar.com/bookstore.

HYBRID OPEN ACCESS
The International Journal of Literary Humanities
is Hybrid Open Access, meaning authors can choose to make their articles open access. This allows their work to reach an even wider audience, broadening the dissemination of their research. To find out more, please visit https://thehumanities.com/journals/hybrid-open-access.

DISCLAIMER
The authors, editors, and publisher will not accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may have been made in this publication. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Literary Activism against Drones: Aesthetics of Clarity, Confusion, and Empathy in Mohsin Hamid's Fiction

Qurratulaen Liaqat,[1] Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Pakistan
Amra Raza, University of the Punjab, Pakistan

Abstract: The analysis of "drone fiction" from the perspective of Literary Activism yields valuable insights into the configuration of this newly emerging genre and constitutes a unique theoretical paradigm to interpret the motif of the "drone." Drawing on insights from Literary Activism theoretical approaches, the exploration describes how Mohsin Hamid's fiction prompts critically informed analysis about the political aesthetics of drone fiction. It also demonstrates that imaginative accounts of dronized societies by Hamid are potential sites to study two main core aesthetics of clarity and confusion often associated with the poetics of Literary Activism. Moreover, this study posits that Hamid also employs the "aesthetics of empathy" to accentuate the political and affective resonance of his drone texts. Thus, drone subjectivity emerges as a posthuman inhuman machine, racist predator, panoptic eye, imperialist mass murderer, a proponent of psychological suffering, and perpetrator of the violation of human rights. The drone in Hamid's fiction has been used as a trope for literary activism, which represents multiple unjust and unfair tendencies in global politics at this historical juncture. Hence, Hamid's drone fiction acts as an aesthetic conduit to engage in protest against drone technology and provides new perspectives on its repercussions and implications for non-Western societies.

Keywords: Drone Fiction, Empathy, Literary Activism, Political Aesthetics, Clarity, Confusion, Hamid

Introduction

Mohsin Hamid's fiction is a unique site to explore the agency of drones because it provides a politically informed and aesthetically innovative standpoint on the ramifications of the use of drone technology in non-Western human societies. In Hamid's fiction, a drone keeps watch over a funeral (*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* 2013), and the funeral services of a drone are also performed (*Exit West* 2017). These two significant passages mark a very crucial initiation to the discussion on the possible aesthetic and political implications of drones in Hamid's fiction. In *How to Get Filthy Rich (FR)*, the omniscient narrator describes, "[t]he drone circles a few times, its high-powered eye unblinking, and flies observantly on" (Hamid 2017, 175). Here, the drone is represented as an inhuman or a superhuman entity because it has the uncanny capacity to watch over human societies without blinking. This unblinking stare evokes a frightening image of a preternatural and relentless surveillance imposed on human communities. In *Exit West (EW)*, Hamid narrates:

> One night one of the tiny drones that kept a watch on their district, part of a swarm, and not larger than a hummingbird, crashed into the transparent plastic flap … and Saeed gathered its motionless iridescent body and showed it to Nadia, and she smiled and said that they ought to give it a burial, and they dug a small hole right there, in the hilly soil where it had fallen, using a spade and then covered this grave again, pressed in flat and Nadia asked if Saeed was planning on offering a prayer for the departed automaton, and he laughed and said maybe he would. (2017, 205)

[1] Corresponding Author: Qurratulaen Liaqat, English Department, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Ferozepur Road, Lahore 54600, Punjab, Pakistan. email: qurratulaen@gmail.com; qurratulaen@fccollege.edu.pk

The International Journal of Literary Humanities
Volume 20, Issue 2, 2022, https://thehumanities.com

ISSN: 2327-7912 (Print), ISSN: 2327-8676 (Online)
https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7912/CGP/v20i02/151-163 (Article)

Taken together, both these funerals have one thing in common—a drone's presence. Various literary critics have interpreted these two scenes in multiple ways. Here, the analysis will demonstrate that these two scenes suggest that drones should be banned because of their incessant encroachment on public and private lives of extra-European communities. It is evident in these two instances that it is the realistic depiction of the communities who are constantly living under drone surveillance—mostly migrants and people of color. But what makes it confusing to interpret is the connection of drones with funerals.

The burial of the drone in *EW* is an especially challenging event to interpret. However, if studied in the light of what critics have already argued about the presence of a drone at a funeral in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia (FR)*, this scene provides valuable hints to interpret the significance of the trope of drone in Hamid's drone oeuvre. Angelia Poon (2017) makes a very apt observation about the presence of a drone at a funeral in *FR*:

> In this moment, Hamid signals the death of older moralities and verities, replaced by advanced if similarly pitiless entities. If in an older dispensation, one railed against fate or God for being indifferent, here, the characters are subject to an implacable eye representing possibly and variously the faceless nation-state, a military–industrial system, and a globalized world united as so many streams of information and so much data to be collected. (146)

This interpretation by Poon not only proffers a valuable lens to study Hamid's depiction of drones in his other texts but especially provides useful hints to comprehend the funeral scene in *EW*. Drawing insights from this statement by Poon (2017), this study argues that if a drone's presence at a funeral signifies the death of older values and the burial of older morality in FR, then the funeral of a drone in *EW* implies the need to put drone technology to rest for a more equitable and humanitarian society.

This drone burial in *EW* has prompted various interpretations. For instance, Chambers (2019) believes that the burial gives a human quality to the drone; she argues: "Through a simulacrum of death rites, Saeed and Nadia try to bring its posthuman form into the fold of the human" (Chambers 2019, 222). While Naydan (2019) argues that the burial signifies burying of all hope to escape from the violence caused by drones, he asserts:

> They perhaps put to rest not only the humanized bits of digital-age machinery of war, but also the notion that escape from a vast if not ubiquitous network of violence exists as a possibility in the twenty-first century. (439)

Thus, both critics agree that, in this scene, a drone's existence is being humanized and accepted as a fact of contemporary urban life. However, this study proposes that if human burial in the presence of drone surveillance suggests the end of a moral and ethical code of conduct, the burial of the drone itself in *EW* may imply the need to put an end to the use of the drone because "burying" signifies "dispos[ing] off" something (Merriam-Webster) and bidding a final farewell to something in etymological terms. Therefore, the burial of a drone in *EW* suggests the disposal of the drone technology for a more egalitarian and equitable world; hence, a trope for literary activism against drones.

"Burying" is a tradition in many world religions (Mark 2009). There is a "liturgical and narrative symbolism inherent in funerals. Funerals are the ultimate in final stories" (Davis 2008, 406). Human beings perform burials because they want the souls of the departed to rest in peace and never return in torment. In this sense, the text hints at the necessity to put an end to the drone era so that not only drone warfare but also human beings can rest in peace. Hamid suggests laying the technology of drones to rest for a drone-free society. The burial of the drone symbolically advocates that we need to bury the use of drones, or, in simpler words, ban them. Furthermore,

the word "burial" has always been associated with the notion of burying the hatchet, which signifies settling a disagreement and reconciliation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). So, here another interpretation may be that the burial represents the fact that if we put an end to the use of drones, many twenty-first century conflicts and issues can be laid to rest. This incident prompts valuable interpretation, which accentuates the political resonance of activism needed against drone use in the contemporary world.

Literature Review

Based on the insights drawn from these two scenes in Hamid's fiction, this article contends that not only these two instances but, in fact, all the three drone-texts written by Hamid—*Terminator: Attack of the Drone* (2011), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), and *Exit West* (2017)—have "a political sub-text" (Sadaf 2018, 116) and implicitly aim to "effect political and social change" (Baker 2016, 6) and are therefore suitable for the application of the theoretical paradigm of Literary Activism. Geoffrey Baker (2016) argues that Literary Activism is "the attempt explicitly to urge or implicitly to effect, within literary texts, tangible political or social change" (5). The application of Literary Activism paradigm extrapolates the "political aesthetics" of a text. Two types of aesthetics are incorporated in a text to unfold the sociopolitical contexts: aesthetics of clarity and aesthetics of confusion. Aesthetics of clarity refer to the realistic depiction of a phenomenon in a text, and aesthetics of confusion imply "both the denotative meaning approaching bewilderment and the etymological traces of a melding-together, a fusion" (Baker 2016, 5). In other words, it can be summarized that political aesthetics of a text are inherently associated with the notion of literary activism manifested through the structural elements of clarity and confusion present in a narrative. We argue in this article that Hamid's drone fiction introduces another intervention to the political aesthetics of Literary Activism, which is the aesthetics of empathy. The term "political" has multiple connotations in the aesthetics of a text and is an adjective that refers to "whatever impacts the social body, the polis … all that concerns man as a human being, and not just his private affairs" (Baker 2016, 15). Furthermore, we construe that Aesthetics of empathy are inherently woven into the theoretical paradigm of Literary Activism because the already present precepts suggest that:

> Both the proponents of the aesthetic of clarity and those of the aesthetic of confusion share this conception of the political, because the goal of both is a changed reader and a changed polis … their shared sense of literature's ability to produce effects that can be politically transformative is a core element of both political aesthetics. (17)

Drone fiction also aims at filling up the "empathy gap" (Cole qtd. in Zhang 2013, n.p.) for drone victims, which will in turn bring about a political transformation. This genre assumes that the contemporary world lacks the required compassion for drone victims. Therefore, it aims to tap into the affective impact of a text on the prospective reader and to sensitize readers to the misery of drone victims in order to shock them out of "dissociation" (Butchard 2015). Thus, in addition to the aesthetics of clarity and confusion, Hamid's drone fiction also demonstrates the aesthetics of empathy inherently associated with the stylistics of drone fiction.

By aesthetics of empathy, we mean an emerging poetics that aims at appealing to the emotions of the prospective readers. It takes into account a creative writer's use of literary techniques, narrative forms, and diction that are specifically aimed at arousing the emotions of sympathy and compassion for victimized communities or individuals. By appealing to human compassion, it intends to socially and politically transform the individual readers and societies. In general terms, "empathy" means to feel for or "to experience the thoughts and feelings of another" (Hammond and Jim 2014, 1). It refers to "the ability to put oneself into the position of some other person, animal, or object, and imagine the sensation of being in that situation … visualizing the world from another's vantage point" (Pinker 2011, 860). There is an inevitable connection between literature and empathy. "Just as literature has

been central to studies of empathy, in many ways empathy has been integral to literary studies" (Hammond and Kim 2014, 10). The interconnected field of empathy and literature considers how literary works "present empathetic experiences and how they promote, provoke or prevent it" (Hammond and Kim 2014, 1). Of all the literary genres, novels provide more room for empathizing as Suzanne Keen (2007) asserts that the "very fictionality of novels predisposes readers to empathize with characters…[and] fictional world provides safe zones" for empathizing (1). Empathy in literary works has also been identified as a tool for feminist activism (Moraga 1980; Russo 2001; Jaen 2014). This study illustrates that carefully selected diction, literary techniques, and narrative forms have been exploited by Hamid to provoke empathy for drone victims and promote an emotionally charged sociopolitical change. Hence, literary activism against the drone has been perpetuated in Hamid's fiction through the three-pronged aesthetics of clarity, confusion, and empathy.

Keeping in mind the richness of the theoretical paradigm of Literary Activism and its political resonance, this theory provides a unique perspective to study the trope of the "drone" in Hamid's fiction. Carefully selected narrative strategies, literary techniques, and character delineation configure the discursive trajectory of antidrone discourse, which suggests a need to bring a change in current political stances on drones.

Drone technology has proliferated excessively in the twenty-first century. In fact, its inadvertent warfare use by the USA in non-Western communities has manifested itself as an episteme that unpacks the political ontology of the current milieu. "Drone fiction" has evolved in direct correlation with unethical use of drones against human communities. This subgenre usually configures the imaginative accounts of the lives of drone operators and drone victims and "attempt[s] to represent critically the ontological and political, and therefore also aesthetic, novelties generated by our drone era" (Hensley 2018, 230). In other words, this mode of fiction demonstrates not only political but also physical, emotional, psychological, environmental, ethical, social, racial, and cultural ramifications of drone technology.

By employing narrative strategies and certain literary techniques, drone texts aim to transform the readers and prompt them to empathize with the drone operators and drone victims. In fact, the primary purpose of drone fiction is to bring the reader out of "dissociation" (Butchard 2015) and fill up the "empathy gap" (Cole qtd. in Zhang 2013, n.p.). In this sense, drone fiction aims at bringing a change; therefore, it might be termed as a form of literary activism that depicts a message of "peace activism" (Cosgrove 2008, 238). Thus, the element of literary activism is inherent in drone fiction because it intends to teach empathy and bring about a social and political change.

Within the few studies available on drone fiction, the majority are conducted according to the precepts of Cultural Studies or subjectivity theories (Hensley 2018; Smethurst and Craps 2018). Hence, there is a niche to study drone fiction through the lens of Literary Activism because both aim at accentuating the sociohistorical and political resonance of a literary text. This article demonstrates that the Literary Activism theoretical approach enables the formation of contextually and historically situated hypotheses about the political aesthetics of a drone text. This process, in fact, leads to a better critical appreciation of a non-Western drone text in contemporary dronized sociohistorical contexts.

Many creative works have been written about the increasing enmeshment of drones in contemporary society such as *The Drone Eats with Me* (2015), by a Palestinian author, Atef Abu Saif, and the depiction of a female drone pilot in the play *Grounded* (2013), by George Brant. Pakistani fiction is also replete with references to drones because Pakistan has been one of the countries most badly affected by the American drone strikes (Ahmed 2013). The figure of the drone has saturated Pakistani Anglophone fiction to the extent that it can be termed a recurrent trope in the Pakistani fiction that aims at evoking empathy in the hearts of the readers and making them realize that there is a need to transform unchecked drone policies and violence perpetrated by them. The drones are used as motifs and tropes in Nadeem Aslam's novels *The Golden Legend* (2017) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). Uzma Aslam Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin* (2012), also portrays drones as a nuisance for non-Western human communities.

But what makes Hamid's fiction more suitable for studying the essence of Pakistani drone fiction is its recurrence in his fiction. He has a unique imaginative and innovative ability to simultaneously capture the political agency of drones in contemporary non-Western societies and convey the necessity to rethink global laws and policies dealing with drone technology use. Mohsin Hamid has written extensively both fiction and nonfiction for staging a protest against drones. He has been actively engaged in writing against drones in his creative nonfiction (Hamid 2014). Meanwhile, he also initiates literary activism through his fictional texts. His short story *Terminator: Attack of the Drone* (2011) and two novels *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and *Exit West* (2017) depict drones as sinister, omnipresent, and all-seeing technological devices. Hamid's narratives are significant nodes of "drone fiction" that may yield rich potential for studying the interplay between the political aesthetics of clarity, confusion, and empathy. Hamid has been active in writing against drones since 2008, but critical attention to his drone fiction is scant. There are only two studies that briefly reflect on the role of drones in Hamid's fiction (Chambers 2019; Poon 2017). This article will be the first attempt of its kind to especially focus on the aesthetics of drones in Hamid's selected texts.

Discussion

An analysis of political aesthetics of Hamid's fiction demonstrates that it is not always easy to split the aesthetics of clarity, confusion, and empathy in his works because his narratives illustrate interplay between all these epistemological standpoints. His works employ the aesthetics of clarity and empathy through realistic depictions of the dronized communities. However, the aesthetics of confusion have been incorporated by using metaphors, symbols, and narrative strategies. Baker (2016) asserts that late-twentieth-century literary activisms are "often rehearsals of the tension between clarity and confusion" (22). This trend continues in the twenty-first-century Pakistani Anglophone drone fiction as well. Interplay between the elements of clarity, confusion, and empathy is evident in Hamid's portrayal of drones as well. One instance of political aesthetics of drones in Hamid's narratives has already been discussed at the beginning of the article and will be further discussed in relation to his short story "Terminator: Attack of the Drone" (2011) and two novels *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and *Exit West* (2017) in the upcoming discussion.

Hamid's short story *Terminator: Attack of Drones* (*TAD*) complicates the divisions between the aesthetics of clarity and confusion. This text aesthetically captures the political ramifications of drone technology in two ways: through its title and its narrative structure. This dystopian story chronicles the drone hunt of two young boys in an unidentified place that has been decimated by ongoing drone strikes. They have awareness of drones as an inhuman mechanical entity—an alien or a mechanical robot out there to hunt them and their community. The word "terminator" in the title insinuates the aesthetics of confusion because of its denotative meaning and the way it has been melded together to explicate the characteristics of a drone. In simple dictionary terms a "terminator" is someone who terminates or puts an end to something, but its denotative meaning complicates and enriches the implications of this word for the literary activism inherent in a drone text. Critics argue that the word "Terminator" in the title of this story is "an obvious allusion to a popular American franchise of post-apocalyptic science fiction movies in which humans are at war with murderous robots" (Perfect 2019, 3) and a subtle hint that drones like the science fiction movie *Terminator* (1984) are a product of the American world. The reference to "Attack of Drones" realistically states the phenomenon of drone target strikes on certain underprivileged communities, but the word "Terminator," used as an analogy for the drone, extrapolates the complexity of the possible interpretations. The signifiers "drone" and terminator have been etymologically melded together to impinge on the aesthetics of confusion. Here, Hamid employs the aesthetics of confusion to both baffle the audience and hint subtly at the brutality inherent in the drone warfare; because the analogy of "terminator" has been used for a drone to suggest the inhumanity and insensitivity of a machine. It is a creative mystification of the drone where drone

technology has been compared with a mechanical killer. The reader may wonder about the possible connection between terminator and drones. But it is the symbolic use of the word "terminator" that has been used to imply the combination of human (drone pilots) and technology (drone machinery) to brutally murder human beings. Secondly, because the movie *Terminator* is an American production, the drone's association with the word terminator suggests its inherent association with the USA. In other words, "Terminator" has been used as a complex metaphor to unpack the mechanical and ruthless nature of a drone. Hence, the interplay between the two aesthetics of clarity and confusion have been skillfully employed in the title of this story to impinge on technological ruthlessness that a drone entails.

The dystopian narrative strategy in this short story has been employed to combine the aesthetics of clarity, confusion, and empathy. It combines reality and fiction to portray "a post- apocalyptic future" (Perfect 2019, 3) where the remaining human "survivors are terrorized by drones" (Perfect 2019, 3), which evokes empathy for the drone victims. A "dystopia," by definition, is "an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, and fearful lives" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The text implies the narrative strategy of dystopian fiction to invoke a nightmarish, hellish vision (Rohatyn 1989; Gottlieb 2001) of a future that is imminent (Claeys 2017; Sargent 1994, 2010) and is aimed at criticizing (Sargent 1994, 9) contemporary dronized society. The narrative unpacks one possible dimension of the many "fearful futures where chaos and ruin prevail" (Claeys 2017, 5). The choice of dystopian narrative strategy complicates the possible interpretations for the literary activism inherent in the story. Baker (2016) asserts that in "an aesthetic of confusion, then, political potential resides not at the level of content but at the level of form, for it is the form itself that asks questions of and troubles any logical content of a work" (19). The choice of dystopian form ambiguously hints at the gruesome ramifications of incessant drone technology for human societies and makes this text fall under the category of "technological dystopia" (Horan 2018, 2; Claeys 2017, 5). The story can simultaneously be read as a realistic portrayal of communities living under the tyranny of drones and also portrays a frightening possibility of what the inadvertent drone usage can do to human societies. It amplifies the appeal of literary activism against drones and provides a logical argument in favor of banning drone technology. Therefore, the dystopian narrative structure of this text explicates literary activism against drone technology by integrating realistic and imaginative implications of drone technology and predicates the negative cost of drone proliferation if it is not placed under check. Thus, the complex and elusive dystopian narrative structure of *TAD* depicts an exaggeratedly horrifying futuristic vision of the human world that can simultaneously be read as a realistic depiction, a dystopian future in which human beings are victimized.

The language of *TAD* also demonstrates the aesthetics of clarity and confusion to comment on the politics of racism and neo-imperialism inherent in the use of drones. Many social scientists have already examined the implicit and explicitly racial, oriental, and neo-imperial elements permeated in drone technology's programming and usage (Espinoza 2018; Pugliese 2013; Allinson 2015; Ahmed 2013; Chamayou 2015; Roger and Hill 2014). The literary depictions of drone warfare also indicate that drone technology implies "cultural genocide" (Azeem 2019, 105) and a means to inflict "transnational violence" (Azeem 2019, 101). Hamid's story also unravels the implicit discrimination in the use of drone technology through the aesthetics of confusion. The main protagonist in *TAD* narrates the story in an African American accent, "Ma doesn't hear it. She's asleep, snorin' like an old brown bear after a dogfight" (Hamid 2011, *The Guardian*). The use of an accent different, instead of simple American or British English, deliberately creates confusion for the audience. This choice of African American dialect configures aesthetics of confusion in Hamid's drone fiction. The instant reaction of a reader might be that if this short story narrates the situation of a community located somewhere in mountains in a Third World country (most probably Afghanistan or Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA], Pakistan), then why are they speaking in an African American accent. This choice of the linguistic dialectic has also confused the critics. They assert that this story is either a postapocalyptic "future being imagined…one in which children in the U.S. are being terrorized and murdered by drones" (Perfect 2019, 3) or "a window into the Punjabi imagination" to highlight

the "primitiveness" of people living in FATA, Pakistan, and being reduced to a "cipher" (MacDonald 2011, *Reuters*). But, in fact, Hamid may have displaced the African American vernacular in order to unite underprivileged communities of South Asia and America to amplify the marginalization and victimization of certain communities through drones on the basis of their race, color, and nationality. Baker also observes that "political aesthetics attempt to undermine ideas of stable, separate subjectivity in the name of a more fundamental communal or ethical relation…breaking-down of distinctions, separations" (Baker 2016, 5). In this sense, this use of the African American enunciation of English language in this story is symptomatic of intrinsic racism, imperialism, and orientalism in the drone use. Hamid is making a political statement here with this short story, namely, that non-Western communities are being hunted by machines, which is unacceptable in any pre/postapocalyptic world inhabited by any nation or race. The combination of spatiotemporal location of FATA and African American dialectic of English place configure drone as a symbol of racist gaze and imperial violence. Moreover, his choice of a ghastly dystopian setting (irrevocably devastated by drones) compels global policy makers to rethink and reevaluate their drone policies that may prove a terrible threat to human security in both the First World and the Third World.

Another strand of logical reasoning against drone technology that Hamid employs in *FR* is a drone's indomitable capacity to violate an individual's civilian and political rights. Moreover, he hints at the capitalistic agendas behind its unprecedented increase in urban settings. This text narrates the story of an anonymous protagonist's journey from rags to riches who earns money through every means fair or foul. The story is "a satire on the globalised dream of consumer-driven economic development" (Anthony 2013, *The Guardian*). Drones have been presented as secretive agents of the modern nation-state that are keeping a watch on civilians and also offer a lucrative business opportunity that has become an important component of the global political economy. The text implies the "unwanted intrusive" (Smethurst and Craps 2018, 8) nature of drones in the daily lives of people and calls for "political action" (Smethurst and Craps 2018, 8) against this violation of the privacy rights of an individual. The text never explicitly calls for political action; however, it aims to raise awareness about this new commodity that is being used by national and international state agencies to keep an eye on civilians. In *FR*, there is a reference to:

> an experimented unmanned aerial vehicle…small and limited range. Its chief advantages are its low cost, allowing it to be procured in large numbers, and its comparative quietness, permitting it to function unobtrusively. There are high hopes for its success in the export market, in particular among police forces and cash-strapped armies engaged in urban operations. (Hamid 2013, 174)

The drone is thus an economically lucrative and marketable commodity that can be sold to law enforcement agencies such as the police and military personnel of the Third World. Here, the author uses an aesthetic of clarity, which, according to Baker (2016), depicts society and history "as they really are" and "generates a literature from which change arises" (13–14). Since the theme of the novel is "getting filthy rich" in the real world through any legitimate or illegitimate means, drones have been implicated in the text as a way to achieve this end. The text manifests the aesthetics of clarity by illustrating the real-time violation of an individual's privacy rights, which have been seriously compromised in contemporary dronized societies. By implying the aesthetics of clarity, the text highlights moral and ethical concerns about making money at the expense of sacrificing the privacy of civilians. Angelia Poon (2017) further asserts:

> Hamid uses the device of an unmanned aerial vehicle or drone to *emphasize the pervasive reach of surveillance technology* and *the ubiquity of state power*. The drone may be understood as *a novelistic chronotope* characterizing the everyday time of an urban modernity that puts a premium on information for a variety of purposes including national security. (145, emphasis added)

The implication expressed here is the violation of basic privacy rights of human beings in communities at the cost of global capitalist aims dependent on drone technology. The focus seems to be on the expansive possibilities of human surveillance through technology manipulated by the state and neo-imperial powers. Poon's observation highlights that Hamid has been successful in exposing the ease with which drone surveillance by the state has been integrated into our everyday lives—governing and watching the choices we make and maintaining power over the masses. In this book, "the self is just a tiny node within a vast constellation of networks" (Chambers 2019, 218), and human beings have a "shared insignificance and dehumanized" (Poon 2017, 146) subjectivity. By exploiting the aesthetics of clarity in this text, the realistic portrayal of the ramifications of drones for individuals construes them as intrusive observers and a symbol of state-level post-postcolonial forms of colonization in countries such as Pakistan. The text clearly informs its readers about the repercussions of drone surveillance for an individual and prompts its audience to take a stance against proliferation of drones.

Hamid's drone fiction employs aesthetics of empathy by reemphasizing the humanity of drone victims. The use of emotionally evocative language and restatement of the facts and figures related to the human cost of drone strikes has the capacity to shock the reader out of their indifference. He reasserts human subjectivities under drone attacks and posthuman alterities of drones, which is an inherent characteristic of drone fiction. In his short story, *Terminator: Attack of Drones* (*TAD*), from the very beginning, the text highlights the "human essence" of its characters in comparison with the technological presence of drones. The main protagonist of *TAD* narrates, "There ain't many of us left. Humans I mean" (Hamid 2011, *The Guardian*). In this sentence, Hamid wants to magnify the humanity of the drone victims. The juxtaposition of the words "human" and "machine" here amplifies the humanity of the narrators. It is a dystopian world that is dominated by hunting machines where predatory technology is in abundance and human beings are scarce. The writer had to clarify that by "us" the protagonist means "humans"—neither machines nor any other species. This reassertion and re-explanation is evocative of the humanity of the people living under drones in relation to the overwhelming mechanical presence of drones. Drones appear as machinic others of the human beings in this text and remind the readers that drone victims are essentially human and should not be exposed to the inhuman agency of drones. The story reiterates the classical argument of Michael Walzer (2016) against drone warfare, namely, that drone warfare is "totally mechanized and impersonal kind of warfare…require[s] us to think about what was once only science fiction: a war of machines to which human beings are entirely superfluous" (20). The narrative implies that the inherent inhumanity of drones can make the human species extinct if drone technology is used without any check and balance. The humanity of the drone victims has also been magnified by the way the child protagonist of the story narrates the funeral of his father who was killed by a drone:

> Pa's gone. The machines got him. I didn't see it happen but my uncle came back for me. Took me to see Pa getting' buried in the ground. There wasn't anythin' of Pa I could see that let me know it was Pa. (Hamid 2011)

The foregoing lines emphasize the ruthlessness of the destruction wrought by drone violence. Because there are no remains of the dead body, the emotional identification is displaced in such a death of his father. It also highlights the humanity of a person killed by a drone. The man who was turned into dust was someone's father, a human, whose son could not see enough of him at his funeral. He wants his readers to reconsider the humanity of drone victims and sympathize with them and their families. Hence, a drone here signifies a ruthless murderer that kills brutally and disfigures its human victims beyond recognition. The text sets us thinking about what would happen if such a treacherous murderer is on the loose in our societies. The most probable response is that any society in the world would definitely take immediate steps to capture and imprison this kind of ruthless person with homicidal tendencies, but why have inadvertent mechanical murderers such as drones been allowed to go on killing sprees in non-Western societies?

The graphic depiction of drone casualties also adds to all element of pathos to Hamid's drone fiction. The biopolitical and necropolitical agency of drone technology (Allinson 2015; Wilcox 2017) has reduced human beings down to the status of illegitimate life (Butler 2004). But Hamid reminds his audience that human beings who are massacred by drone strikes are not insignificant lives. They are also not just facts, figures, and statistics but flesh and blood human beings who are being hunted by drones. He is breaking out the "numbing realm of numbers and news reports" (Moraine 2013). The main protagonist of *TAD* tells the readers. "When the machines get you there ain't much left. Just gristle mixed with rocks, covered in dust" (Hamid 2011, *The Guardian*). Human casualties of drones could not even receive a decent burial because there is nothing left of a human when a drone hits him. Here, "raw emotive language" (Smethurst and Craps 2019, 4) has been used for employing the aesthetics of empathy and jolting the masses out of their "dissociation" (Butchard 2015). This excerpt has "a poetological component" (Motyl and Arghavan 2018, 137) that reflects on "the role of art in the face of large-scale death" and human suffering (Motyl and Arghavan 2018, 137). The text is filling up the "empathy gap" by informing the audiences how horribly a drone turns a human being into dust and grizzle. It prompts the audience to reflect on how ruthless and brutal it is to expose a human body to a drone. Moreover, the narrative is "giving voice to underprivileged communities [to] stand against inequality, violence and promote globally more active and responsible communities" (King 2015). It is not only advocating that the masses let go of the "dissociation" (Butchard 2015) but also asking them to empathize with these human figures who are mercilessly killed by drones, thus calling for action to be taken against such inhuman use of technology.

Hamid also appeals to the readers' emotions by describing the mental strain caused by incessant drone surveillance and target strikes. Many drone critics have highlighted the psychological implications of drone surveillance on victimized communities (Cavallero, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012; Gibson 2012; Saif 2015; Salama 2015; Chamayou 2015; Walzer 2016). Chambers (2019) also asserts in her chapter on Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* (2017) that "the sensorial and the affective are profoundly affected by post-human technologies" (221) such as drones. Hamid draws readers' sympathy for drone victims by tapping into the impact of drones on the sensorial and affective. The narrator of *TAD* says, "You can't see 'em at night. Sometimes you can't see 'em in the day neither. But you hear 'em all the time, huntin'…."A killin' sound. Quiet but getting' louder" (Hamid 2011, *The Guardian*). This passage employs dramatic aural imagery to emphasize the horror that incessant and invisible drone surveillance evokes. Hamid exploits the potential of literature to "'read' our way out of poverty and aggressive military intervention … [and] develop an activism based on reading and empathy" (Cosgrove 2008, 233). Many studies have argued that drone victims feel as if they are "under air attack" (Roger and Hill 2014, 83), "constant and severe fear, anxiety, and stress" (Cavallero, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 55) and "evoke insecurity and exploitation" (Grewal 2017, 362) and makes them feel "psychologically disturbed" (Cavallero, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 2012, 86). Moreover, the text raises a voice against long-term psychological hazards for the communities living under drone threats. The main protagonist of *TAD* narrates: "But my sisters still said if those machines come they surely kill everythin'. They said you'd better run when you hear those machines comin'" (Hamid 2011, *The Guardian*). Here, Hamid employs the aesthetics of empathy and clarity by representing a realistic frightening environment. Drone surveillance has negative impacts on the human sensorial and auditory domain. He intends to motivate the global community to take some action for liberating human communities from this kind of incessant suffering caused by drone surveillance and attacks.

EW gives another angle of drone-related human rights violation by fusing the aesthetics of empathy and clarity. This novel is about the realistic global refugee crisis. The text portrays migrants from different parts of the world who are trying to enter the West, where they are under constant surveillance of drones. *EW* is "not just 'about' refugees but it also constitutes a reflection on how they and their journeys are represented and mediated by actually-existing technologies" (Perfect 2019, 187) because drones "loom large" (Chambers 2019) in this novel. The text invites the readers to envision

the pitiable living conditions of refugees who live under drones. Both of the refugee protagonists of the novel, Nadia and Saeed, live under London's "drone-crossed sky" (Hamid 2017, 88) full of "flying robots" (Hamid 2017, 88) instead of birds. The narrative relates that these frightening drones overhead suggest "an unstoppable efficiency, an inhuman power, and evoked the kind of dread that a small mammal feels before a predator of an altogether different order, like a rodent before a snake" (Hamid 2017, 151). The simile emphasizes not only fear but also the violence of the encounter. The image of the ruthless hunter and the hunted is insinuated. The hunter is cast in the image of the biblical "snake" whose interference resulted in man's fall from paradise. The simile also emphasizes the inequality of strength, stealth, and size in rodents and snakes. The motif of "being hunted" has been used to amplify the sheer insignificance and security threats that the presence of drones evokes in its "human" victims. Drones emerge as predators in *EW* to invoke feelings of sympathy and compassion for the inhuman hunt of refugees under drone surveillance and prompt the reader to think about the violation of refugee rights rampant in our overly dronized global society. Hamid's drone fiction insinuates the atmosphere of a panopticon—a large all-seeing prison-house by employing the aesthetics of clarity, confusion, and empathy. In fact, unnamed cities in all the selected texts by Hamid are dronized panopticons where innocent human beings are being kept under constant scrutiny as if they are prisoners, captives, detainees, hostages, and captives. Thus, by employing the realistic depiction of drone surveillance, these narratives indicate that innocent human communities should not be treated like criminals and must be liberated from this all-seeing eye's perpetual surveillance.

Conclusion

In short, this argues that Hamid's fiction configures drone as a trope for Literary Activism against this kind of incisive and brutal warfare technology. This discussion demonstrates that interplay between the aesthetics of clarity, confusion, and empathy accentuates the literary activism against unchecked use of drone technology. Hamid's narratives also give valuable insights into the psychological hazards and traumas of drone victims. His texts humanize the drone casualties, hint at the infringement of human privacy rights in the drone era, and provide logical reasoning for banning the inadvertent use of drones against human societies. Moreover, the selected narratives imply that the incessant use of drone warfare and surveillance is a threat to already vulnerable groups such as refugees, minors, and people of color. Hamid transforms the motif of drones into a powerful symbol of human rights violation rampant in contemporary global politics by employing the dystopian narrative form, minor's narrative voice, African American accent, symbols, metaphors, and analogies. By doing so, he raises awareness in masses about the unjust use of drones against extra-European human societies. He pleads in favor of banning drones or at least placing a check and balance on its use by imperial powers and state agencies.

Hence, this article demonstrates that political engagement of Mohsin Hamid's drone fiction with the ethics and aesthetics of Literary Activism yields valuable insights for interpretation of the motif of drone as an agent in the contemporary sociohistorical context. Through the relevant examples of narrative strategies, linguistic and paralinguistic features, genre choice, symbols, motifs, and themes from Hamid's fiction, this article contends that the theoretical paradigms of Literary Activism theory proffer a suitable methodology to understand a non-Western drone text's aesthetics and sociopolitical impacts. This theoretical paradigm is valuable to conduct a hermeneutic textual analysis of the motif of the drone in non-Western literary texts. Especially, extra-European fiction studies could benefit from analyzing the multiple ways in which a drone text's aesthetic dimension is often inextricably linked to empathetic, ethical, and political implications.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, Akbar. 2013. *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Allinson, Jamie. 2015. "The Necropolitics of Drones." *International Political Sociology* 9:113–127. https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12086.

Anthony, Andrew. 2013. "How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia by Mohsin Hamid—Review." *Guardian*, April 21, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/21/filthy-rich-mohsin-hamid-review.

Aslam, Nadeem. 2008. *The Wasted Vigil*. London: Faber & Faber.

Aslam, Nadeem. 2017. *The Golden Legend*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House India.

Azeem, Waqar M. 2019. "Drones, State of Exception and Truck Art." In *Literary and Non-Literary Responses towards Post 9/11*, edited by Nukhbah Langah, 99–113. New York: Routledge.

Baker, Geoffrey A. 2016. *The Aesthetics of Clarity and Confusion: Literature and Engagement Since Nietzsche and the Naturalists*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brant, George. 2013. *Grounded (Oberon Modern Plays).* London: Oberon Books.

Butchard, Dorothy. 2015. "Drones and Dissociation in Contemporary Fiction." *Alluvium* 4 (2). https://doi.org/10.7766/alluvium.v4.2.02.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

Cavallero, J., S. Sonnenberg, and S. Knuckey. 2012. "Living under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan." Stanford, CA: International Human Rights and Conflict Resolutions Clinic (Stanford Law School); New York: Global Justice Clinic (NYU School of Law). https://law.stanford.edu/publications/living-under-drones-death-injury-and-trauma-to-civilians-from-us-drone-practices-in-pakistan/.

Chamayou, Gregoire. 2015. *Drone Theory*. London: Penguin UK.

Chambers, Claire. 2019. *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Claeys, Gregory. 2017. *Dystopia: A Natural History: A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions*. London: Oxford University Press.

Cosgrove, Shady E. 2008. "Reading for Peace? Literature as Activism an Investigation into New Literary Ethics and the Novel." Activating Human Rights and Peace 2008 Conference, Centre for Peace and Social Justice, Southern Cross University.

Davis, Christine S. 2008. "A Funeral Liturgy: Death Rituals as Symbolic Communication." *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 13 (5): 406–421. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020802171391.

Espinoza, Marina. 2018. "State Terrorism: Orientalism and the Drone Programme." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11 (2): 376–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1456725.

Gibson, Jennifer. 2012. "Living with Death by Drone." *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 2012. https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-xpm-2012-oct-04-la-oe-gibson-drones-civilians-20121004-story.html.

Gottlieb, Erika. 2001. *Dystopian Fiction East and West—Universe of Terror and Trial*. Kingston, ON, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Grewal, Indepal. 2017. "Drone Imaginaries—The Technopolitics of Visuality." In *Postcolony and Empire*, edited by Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan, 343–366. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hamid, Mohsin. 2011. "Terminator: Attack of the Drone." *The Guardian*, November 6, 2011. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/07/short-story-mohsin-hamid.

Hamid, Mohsin. 2013. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Hamid, Mohsin. 2014. *Discontent and Its Civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York, and London*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Hamid, Mohsin. 2017. *Exit West*. New Delhi: Penguin India.

Hammond, Marie Meghan, and Sue K. Jim. 2014. *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*. New York: Routledge.

Hensley, Nathan K. 2018. "Drone Form: Mediation at the End of Empire." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 51 (2): 226–249. https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-6846084.

Horan, Thomas. 2018. *Desire and Empathy in Twentieth-Century Dystopian Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jaen, Isabel. 2014. "Empathy and Gender Activism in Early Modern Spain: Maria de Zayas's Amorous and Examplary Novels in Hamond." In *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, edited by Marie Meghan Hammond and Sue K. Jim, 189–201. New York: Routledge.

Keen, Suzanne. 2007. *Empathy and the Novel*. London: Oxford University Press.

Khan, Uzma A. 2012. *Thinner than Skin*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India.

King, Amy. 2015. "What Is Literary Activism?" *Poetry Foundation*, August 18, 2015. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2015/08/what-is-literary-activism.

MacDonald, Myra. 2011. "Capturing the Punjabi Imagination: Drones and 'the Noble Savage.'" *Punjabics*. https://punjabics.com/inner/literacyandculturalreadmore.htm.

Mark, Joshua J. 2009. "Burial." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. https://www.ancient.eu/burial/.

Merriam-Webster. n.d. "Bury." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bury.

Moraga, Cherrie. 1980. "Le Guera." In *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, 27–34. Berkley, CA: Third Woman Press.

Moraine, Sunny. 2013. "Drone Fiction: An Expansion." *Cyborgology*, March 22, 2013. https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2013/03/22/drone-fiction-an-expansion/.

Motyl, Katharina, and Mahmoud Arghavan. 2018. "Writing against Neocolonial Necropolitics: Literary Responses by Iraqi/Arab Writers to the US 'War on Terror.'" *European Journal of English Studies* 22 (2): 128–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2018.1478256.

Naydan, Liliana M. 2019. "Digital Screens and National Divides in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West." *Studies in the Novel* 51 (3): 433–451. https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2019.0048.

Perfect, Michael. 2019. "Black Holes in the Fabric of the Nation': Refugees in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West." *Journal for Cultural Research* 23 (2): 187–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2019.1665896.

Pinker, Stephan. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking.

Poon, Angelia. 2017. "Helping the Novel: Neoliberalism, Self-help, and the Narrating of the Self in Mohsin Hamid's How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 52 (1): 139–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989415583923.

Pugliese, Jospeh. 2013. *State Violence and the Execution of Law*. New York: Routledge.

Rogers, Ann, and John Hill. 2014. *Unmanned: Drone Warfare and Global Security. Between the Lines*. London: Pluto Press.

Rohatyn, Dennis. 1989. "Hell and Dystopia: A Comparison and Literary Case Study." *Utopian Studies* 2: 94–101. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20718910.

Russo, Ann. 2001. *Taking Back our Lives: A Call to Action for the Feminist Movement*. New York: Routledge.

Sadaf, Shazia. 2018. "Human Dignity, the 'War on Terror' and Post-9/11 Pakistani Fiction." *European Journal of English Studies* 22 (2): 115–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2018.1478255.

Saif, Abu Atif. 2015. *The Drone Eats with Me: Diaries from a City under Fire*. Fasila: Comma Press.

Salama, Vivian. 2015. "Death from Above: How American Drone Strikes Are Devastating Yemen." *Rolling Stone*, April 14, 2014. https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/death-from-above-how-american-drone-strikes-are-devastating-yemen-97688/.

Sargent, Layman T. 1994. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 5 (1): 1–37. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719246.

Sargent, Lyman T. 2010. *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford University Press.

Smethurst, Tobi, and Stef Craps. 2019. "Towards an Understanding of Drone Fiction." *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 1 (18). https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2018.1514759.

Walzer, Michael. 2016. "Just & Unjust Targeted Killing & Drone Warfare." *Daedalus, The American Academy of Arts & Sciences* 145 (4): 12–24. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_ a_00408.

Wilcox, Lauren. 2017. "Embodying Algorithmic War: Gender, Race, and the Posthuman in Drone Warfare." *Security Dialogue* 48 (1): 11–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616657947.

Zhang, Sarah. 2013. "Teju Cole on the 'Empathy Gap' and Tweeting Drone Strikes." *Motherjones.com*, March 6, 2013. http://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/03/teju-cole-interview-twitter-drones-small-fates.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Qurratulaen Liaqat: Assistant Professor, English Department, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Amra Raza: Professor/Director, Institute of English Studies and the Dean of Humanities, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

The International Journal of Literary Humanities is one of four thematically focused journals in the of journals that support the New Directions in the Humanities Research Network—its journals, book imprint, conference, and online community.

The International Journal of Literary Humanities analyzes and interprets literatures and literacy practices, seeking to unsettle received expressive forms and conventional interpretations. This journal explores these dimensions of the literary humanities, in a contemporary context where the role and purpose of the humanities in general, and literary humanities in particular, is frequently contested.

As well as papers of a traditional scholarly type, this journal invites presentations of literary practice—including unpublished literary pieces. These can either be short pieces included within the body of article or if longer, referenced pieces that are readily available in the public domain (for instance, via web link). Documentation of the literary practice in the article should include factors such as contextual explanation, interpretative exegeses, and audience analysis.

The International Journal of Literary Humanities is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.

ISSN 2327-7912