

Drones and Necropolitics; A Critical Discourse Analysis of Barack Obama's Selected Speeches

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Abstract

The drone war can be seen as major outcome of 9/11 incident for the purpose of seeking out the terrorists who are thought to have found a safe haven in Pakistan. USA considers it necessary to wage war on enemies for its national security which is threatened by terrorists who are assumed to be resided in the Northwest area of Pakistan. The president Barack Obama mentioned that drone attack is *lawful* as it is aimed to kill the terrorists groups, however this *lawful* is never defined. It is still not known that who are the terrorists? From 2004 till now, thousands of innocent people has been killed, executed and exiled on the name of the terrorists. Using the framework of Van Dijk's Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis and Mbembe's Necropolitics, this paper argues that drone attacks though projecting itself to be concerned with the purpose of banishing terrorists, are constructing and deploying the discourse that situates the people of Waziristan as criminal subject. The discourse promoted by the USA is essential in understanding the ways in which the particular kind of subjectivities are being shaped through representing them as terrorists.

Keywords: Drones and Necropolitics, Barack Obama, Speeches

Introduction

Since 9/11, the world has entered in to the new era of warfare. The US government made it necessary to wage war against terror in order to fight the emerging threats. This led to the emergence of drone attack on Waziristan. Since 2004, USA is striking drones on Waziristan indicating that it is targeting specific group of people. The president Barack Obama mentioned that drone attack is lawful as it is aimed to kill the terrorists groups, however this lawful is never defined. It is still not known that who are the terrorists? From 2004 till now, thousands of innocent people has been killed, executed and exiled on the name of the terrorists.

The study conducted by Amnesty International highlights the strategy of counter-terrorism initiated by US. This research report refers to drone strike as unlawful killing (2013, p.8). The researcher has explored the exploiting nature of USA government and concluded that *US policy and practice on targeted killings and drones are not only of concern in their own right:*

they also set a dangerous precedent that other states may seek to exploit to avoid responsibility for their own unlawful killing (2013, p.56).

The above mentioned research has referred to the drones strike as unlawful killing, however this research will be focusing that how this unlawful killing has been justified by US through the establishment of certain rationales. This will be done through the analysis of Obama's speeches in which he admits drone strikes in Waziristan.

Problem statement

The discourse analysis of Obama's speech shows that drone attacks though projecting it to be concerned with purpose of banishing terrorists, are constructing and deploying the discourse that situates the people of Waziristan as criminal subject. The speeches delivered by Obama are essential in understanding the ways in which the particular kind of subjectivities are being shaped through representing them as terrorists.

Research objectives

- To investigate the discourses promoted by Obama.
- To unmask the policy of drone attack as an ideological agenda.
- To explore the ways through which the people of Waziristan have made the subject to the power of USA.

Research questions

- How the discourse promoted by Obama is criminalizing the people of Waziristan?
- How the policy of drone attacks have been justified by Obama in his speeches?
- What are the ways through which people of Waziristan are made subject to the power of USA?

Significance of the study

This research will add into the new emerging discourses about writing back to the empire in this new imperialist era. It will be significant in understanding the underlying agendas of the Western imperialist ideology underlying their activities regarding the war on terror in the region of Waziristan.

Moreover, this paper will be adding something new in the field of Post colonialism. It will accomplish this by arguing against the Western intervention into Pakistani affairs. It will also add to the field of International Relation as it will be exploring the underlying policies of the West.

Theoretical framework

The research under consideration has followed the qualitative mode of inquiry. The analysis revolves around a close textual analysis of the selected narrative, seeking to address three main questions. The first research question requires an investigation of the way whereby the people of Waziristan have been criminalized by the discourse promoted by USA. The second question aims at unmasking the policy of drone as an ideological agenda. The third question requires an understanding through which the people of Waziristan have made the subject to the power of USA. In order to analyse the problem under discussion, the analysis centers on the two speeches delivered by Obama on the policy of drone attack. Using the framework of

Van Dijk's *Discourse analysis as an ideological analysis* and Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, this paper sets out to investigate some of the statement made by Barack Obama.

According to Dijk, there are certain levels and properties of discourse through which the ideologies may be expressed and conveyed more systematically (Dijk, 1999, p. 22). These levels include, surface structure, syntax, lexicon, local semantics, global semantics, semantic structure, rhetoric, pragmatics, and dialogical interaction. Our text and talk is ideologically controlled at these levels.

Discourse analysis thus employs interdisciplinary technique of text analysis to see how ideology operates through the text of the discourse that can be used for the assertion of power. Power is produced, exercised and reproduced through discourses. This idea of power and ideology has always been central to much critical debates. Discourses are the form of social practices that constitute other hegemonic practices such as the exercise of power, domination, prejudices and so forth.

Mbembe argues that sovereignty is not just an exercise of power on single individual but rather it's an exercise of power upon entire population. His theorization about the Necropolitics is crucial in comprehending the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population (Mbembe, 2003, p.14). For Mbembe, sovereignty consists of the will and the capacity to kill in order to live. (p. 18). In this way, the existence of the other sometime is perceived as a threat to those who are in power position. Thus, their elimination has become a necessary task, about which Mbembe contends that killing become precisely targeted (p. 29).

Literature review

Literature review provides a detailed critical survey of the available literature on this topic area. After meticulously reviewing all the available literature, it provides the detailed critical framework upon which the analysis is built. This chapter charts the transition from discourse analysis to ideology analysis and provides an overview of the theories about power and ideology.

Discourse analysis is not just a theory but it is a method through which certain kinds of discourses can be evaluated. In this way, the notion of power and ideology often accompany the concept of discourse. Laclau and Mouffe's theory of Discourse outlines a familiar question about structuralists' nature of the discourse. They highlight the fact that discourse is always exclusionary in a way that it is established through the principle of *closure* (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 28). It attempts to fix the meaning through the constitution of the *nodal point*, which holds the privileged position and the other signifiers generate their meanings from this nodal point (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 26). This positioning of the nodal point signifies that discourses are always created in relation to what it excludes basically. This is done through articulation. Articulations are the ways through which discourses are structured, transformed, challenged and reproduced (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 30). This representation of the discourse leads to the concept of hegemony (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.36). For Laclau and Mouffe, discourses become hegemonic when they begin to structure the social practices through the tool of the objectivity. Thus, the objectivity stands an ideological apparatus in the theory of Laclau and Mouffe (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 37).

Borrowing the same stance from Laclau and Mouffe, Fairclough has also maintained the role

of ideology in the promotion of the discourse. He presented the three dimensional model consists on social practice, discursive practice and text. In this three dimensional model, he maps out three separate form of analysis; linguistic, social and textual. The purpose of this model is to provide the analytic framework for discourse analysis. For him, discourse analysis aims to systematically explore often opaque relationship of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideological shaped by relations of power and struggle over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationship between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (p. 135). Thus the power operates through the proliferation of discourses to create its ideological hegemony over the common mass (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 74).

Fairclough, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize the role of discourse in the perpetuation of the ideologies. All of these theorists outline the common argument that structural analysis of the discourse leads to the discovery of the ideological debates. This precise hypothesis is further illustrated by Van Dijk in his theory of Critical Discourse Analysis.

In his theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk argues that analyzing and studying different spoken and written discourses reveal the underlying embedded ideology in the structure of these discourses. For him, CDA offers us to the different mode of perspective of theorizing, analysis and application (Dijk, 2001, p. 352). In this way, it has a larger implication in the field of political discourses. Van Dijk perceives the theory of discourse analysis as an ideology analysis. In the article Discourse analysis as Ideology Analysis, Dijk has brought to the light the most significant debate surrounding the perpetuation of ideologies through the tool of different discourses. Dijk's ideas are crucial in exploring the ways through which different ideologies function. According to him, ideologies are conveyed through in a proper context as he puts it; their (ideologies) reproduction is often embedded in organizational and constitutional contexts (Dijk, 1999, p.17). It means that ideologies are promoted through discourses in the proper context. For instance racist ideologies will be seen in the racist discourses, similarly feminist ideology may seem to be prevalent in the feminist talk and debates.

Dijk ideas are developed through the connection of three variables, society, discourse and social cognition. For this, he has utilized the theories of model proposed by Johnson Laird, Van Dijk and Kintsch, theory of ideology by Eagleton, Larrain and Thompson, and theory of social cognition outlined by Fiske, Taylor, Levine and Teasley.

Theory of Models concern with mental representations of events, actions, or situations people are engaged in, or which they read about (Dijk, 1999, p. 19). This theory advocates the belief that there is a strong connection between individual and society. Thus the individual in a society is often interpellated in a way in which he continues to act according to the prevailed social ideologies. Certain disciplinary models are designed by the society, which controls the people day to day activities.

Theory of social cognition allows us to notice that how particular ideologies are structured in the social fabrics. As debated before that individual is interpellated by certain ideologies and he being, unaware of them takes indirect influence from these ideologies. This theory explores that how certain ideologies create the form of false consciousness which helps in

perpetuation and promotion of these ideologies. Thus, this theory invites us to consider the ways that create the false ideals through which ideologies function.

Ideology however, itself is a complicated phenomenon, it is not just a set of ideas but a form of the social apparatus which control the people of the society. Dijk argues that ideologies are the social formation which promote the interest of the particular group. He justifies his argument by providing us the detailed explanation of the discourse analysis under the lens of his proposed framework.

According to Dijk, there are certain levels and properties of discourse through which the ideologies may be expressed and conveyed more systematically (Dijk, 1999, p. 22). These levels include, surface structure, syntax, lexicon, local semantics, global semantics, semantic structure, rhetoric, pragmatics, and dialogical interaction. Our text and talk is ideologically controlled at these levels.

Discourse analysis thus employs interdisciplinary technique of text analysis to see how ideology operates through the text of the discourse that can be used for the assertion of power. Power is produced, exercised and reproduced through discourses. This idea of power and ideology has always been central to much critical debates. Discourses are the form of social practices that constitute other hegemonic practices such as the exercise of power, domination, prejudices and so forth.

Michel Foucault articulates the same stance in his article "The Repressive Hypothesis". He outlines the facts that it is the phenomenon of power that serve to incite discourses (p. 301). The proliferation of discourses is itself a form of power. He has elaborated this notion in his article "Subject and Power". In which he highlights that how the subject is constructed by the use of power and how this power is further justified through the establishment of certain rationales. He argues that institution of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a la of truth on him which he must recognize and which other recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects (Foucault, 1982).

Foucault's study has focused on the form of power which subjugates and makes subjects to the institutional control (Foucault, 1982). Mbembe extends this perspective and he argues that sovereignty is not just an exercise of power on single individual but rather it's an exercise of power upon entire population. His theorization about the Necropolitics is crucial in comprehending the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population (Mbembe, 2003, p.14). For Mbembe, sovereignty consists of the will and the capacity to kill in order to live. (p. 18). In this way, the existence of the other sometime is perceived as a threat to those who are in power position. Thus, their elimination has become a necessary task, about which Mbembe contends that killing become precisely targeted (p. 29).

In the present research, the researcher tries to locate the Necropolitical agenda employed by US in the form of drone attack. It will be accomplished through the tool of the discourse analysis of Obama's speech upon the policy of drone attack.

Design Plan

Introduction

The drone war can be seen as major outcome of 9/11 incident for the purpose of seeking out

the terrorists who are thought to have found a safe haven in Pakistan. USA considers it necessary to wage war on enemies for its national security which is threatened by terrorists who are assumed to be resided in the Northwest area of Pakistan. This assumption has led American government to introduce the policy of targeting killing, which lead to the creation of certain kinds of subjectivities on the name of terrorist. This research will be particularly focusing on the perspective of discourse employed by USA that assigns the roles and the identities to the people of Waziristan.

Delimitation of the study

The research paradigm of the present study has been delimited in accordance with the nature of objectives required to be achieved. The content for the analysis has been delimited to the two speeches delivered by President Barack Obama on 31 January, 2012 and 23 May, 2013, which are entitled as *Barack Obama admits US drone strikes on Pakistan* and *Obama's speech on drone policy*. This study will specially spotlight those statements which are directly related to the theme of my study. The developed theoretical framework has been delimited to two theories; one is the theory of Discourse Analysis as an Ideology Analysis proposed by Van Dijk and another is Necropolitics hypothesized by Achille Mbembe.

Procedure of analysis

The present study is based on the qualitative form of research and employs the technique of content analysis of the two speeches. All the available literature is meticulously reviewed and the theoretical framework has been formulated. Van Dijk's theory of *Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis* and the Mbembe's notion of *Necropolitics* serves the basis of the present study. Obama's speeches are the primary sources of data collection. Along with this work, Foucault's notion of *Power and Subject* has also been reviewed and incorporated.

Analysis

This chapter offers in depth analysis of two speeches delivered by Obama on the policy of counterterrorism; first one is on 31 January 2012 and second one is on 23 march 2013, in the light of the theories proposed by Van Dijk and Achille Mbembe. This analysis is essential in understanding the ways in which the particular kind of subjectivities are being shaped through representing them as terrorists.

The notion that is central to the critique of both of the critics is the notion of the underlying ideological agenda behind any text and talk. Van Dijk digs it out from the physical structure of text and Mbembe on the other hand seems to be preoccupied with the idea that how certain ideological agendas are always justified through its own created narration. Barack Obama speech is analyzed under the lens of these two theory. It will explore that how his political doctrine is manifested under his argument about the policy of counterterrorism.

Looking at the surface structure of the script of the speech, it can be interpreted as an explicit manifestation of Obama's special strategy. The transcripts of both of his speeches are entitled as; *Obama's speech on Drone Policy* (Gerdau, 2013) and *Barack Obama admits US drone strike on Pakistan* (The Telegraph, 2012). These two titles clearly indicate that US president Barack Obama is in favor of the drone strike but at the same way it invite the readers to consider the reason behind it. Van Dijk spots on the precise point, when he argues that meaning of the text

may not explicitly express or encode prejudice or social inequality, surface structure may let transpire such hidden meanings anyway (Dijk, 1999, p. 23).

Syntax of the speech is ideologically monitored by the politics of *us* vs. *them*. Van Dijk points out that *negative properties attributed to the out groups [...] the same is true for the positive action of us* (Dijk, 1999, p.24). Obama's Words seem to justify this hypotheses. His speech of 23 May 2013 begins by saying that *we are as Americans and served as our compass through every type of change* (Gerdau, 2013). It emphasizing the positivity of the American. He goes on saying that *we must help countries modernize economies, upgrade education, and encourage entrepreneurship — because American leadership has always been elevated by our ability to connect with people's hopes, and not simply their fears* (Gerdau, 2013). Here again, Obama gives an argument that centered on the finest attributes of America. He does so by presenting the negative depiction of the Pakistan. First he features out that it is necessary to eliminate the threat of Al-Qaeda, then all of the sudden, he point out that *Al-Qaeda and its affiliates try to gain the foothold [...] in tribal regions* (Gerdau, 2013). It is noticeable to observe what he mentions in another speech that *on al-Qaeda operatives in places where the capacities of that military in that country may not be able to get them [...] so, obviously, a lot of these strikes have been in the FATA, and going after al-Qaeda suspects who are up in very tough terrain along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan* (The Telegraph, 2012). His decision about residing the Al-Qaeda in the region of Waziristan, Pakistan needs to be considered. Foucault states that, *power implies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is the form of power which makes individuals subjects* (Foucault, 1982, p.781). This theory offers us the precise framework to examine the ways through which the people of Waziristan have been labeled as terrorists by USA.

After the incident of 9/11 all Muslims are turned out to be the terrorists and enemies about whom Bush said that they are constantly in war with their enemies. Striking drone attack can be taken as an immense example of this war through which government of USA is exercising its power over the unidentifiable enemies through the rationale of banishing terrorists. This confirms the view of Foucault as he puts it, the relationship between rationalization and excesses of political power is evident. Thus terrorism serves as a powerful invention that legitimizes continuous political projects. Something about which Mbembe argues, *killing [of innocent people] becomes precisely targeted* (Mbembe, 2003, p.29). Which basically means that sovereignty is exercised through the legitimacy from the authority of its own narrative. Sovereignty becomes a matter of seizing the geographical area and exercising control over the people of that area. This is explicitly visible in the statement of Barack Obama while defending the drone strikes in Pakistan, he said that the *drones targeting the people who are on a list of active terrorists* (The Telegraph, 2012). Putting Mbembe's statement, *Sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposal and who is not* (Mbembe, 2003, p.27), it would be safe to argue that the action taken by USA administration has become justified through the set of political truths which functions as a disguise to their political agenda.

This set of political truths is all over evident from the speech of Obama. Through the choice of words certain political ideologies are operated. It invites the critique of Van Dijk, as he

quoted, *the lexicon of military and political discourse may also distinguish between the peaceful nature of our weapons or the military operation and the catastrophic and cruel nature of theirs* (qtd. in Dijk, 1999, p.26). In the same way, president Obama mentions that their actions are *effective and legal*, because *they are at war with Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and their associated forces* (Gerdau, 2013). The rationale behind the striking drones is removing the Al-Qaeda. The word Al-Qaeda has been made the problematic lexicon, which serves the function of euphemism. It is still not known nor indicated in his whole speech that who are the Al-Qaeda agents? Why they are necessarily belongs to the area of Waziristan? In this case, the people are Waziristan are the subject to the power of US through the tool of drones. Something about which Mbembe formulates that *infrastructural warfare [...] is used to police the air and to kill from overhead, the armed bulldozer is used on the ground as a weapon of war and intimidation* (Mbembe, 2003, 29). Foucault's notion of "*objectivizing the subject*" is relevant here. According to Foucault, the process of dividing human into categories is basically the form of objectification. In the same way US embarked on his mission to banish the terrorists, who are still not known to them. To put it into in another way, US has objectified all the people as terrorists who deserved to be killed and in that way, people of Waziristan has made the subject to the power of USA. When asked from the US republican senator Lindsay Graham about the drone attack, he added unapologetically that, "*sometime you hit innocent people and I hate that we are at war, and we have taken out some very senior members of Al-Qaeda*". He said this without mentioning the name of those members. This invites us to critique the policy of the military operation initiated by USA, which gives the *freedom to the military commanders to use their discretion as to when and whom to shoot*, as argued by Mbembe (2003, 30). This illustrates the fact that *sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule* rather power can be exercised *anytime in any manner*. In that way, the people targeted in Waziristan are not to be seen as human beings but rather criminals who need to be *killed* for the cause of national and international security.

This is also evident from the technique of self-representation of Obama. Obama strategy of presenting the people of Waziristan in a negative way in implicitly positing the American in a positive way, as Obama puts it about drone that *this is a targeted focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists, who are trying to go in and harm Americans, hit American facilities, American bases, and so on* (The Telegraph, 2012). Here Obama features his opinion about the people of Waziristan and assumes that the agents of Al-Qaeda who are trying to harm American belong to them. This blaming seeks the criticism of Van Dijk, as he point out that blaming the victims may also translate as biased local coherence in the semantic of text and talk (Dijk, 1999, 26). He makes it an important property of discourse semantics, which controls and defines the impression of the out group.

This unjustified blaming lead to define the people of Waziristan as criminal subjects who should be controlled for the cause of national security of America. This unjustified killing is justified through the rationale of removing terrorists. In the words of Van Dijk, the policy of America is de-topicalized in favor of the explanation of the removing Al-Qaeda agents (Dijk, 1999, p.28). This done through the rhetoric of dehumanization and marginalization of other. Positing of the term terrorist with people of FATA have reduces them to the status of the objects.

Another worth-considering aspect of Obama's speech is his strategic piece of advice that he

gives in order to justify the drone war. Van Dijk conceives this as one of hallmark of the discourse theory, for him giving advice is the way that works through domination. He puts it, *giving advice and even plain assertions both presupposes ignorance of the recipients* (Dijk, 1999, p. 30). In the same way, Obama recommended drones as the necessary measure in order to ensure the maximum security at national and international level, as he said that *to do nothing in the face of terrorist networks would invite far more civilian casualties — not just in our cities at home and our facilities abroad, but also in the very places like Sana'a and Kabul and Mogadishu where terrorists seek a foothold* (Gerdau, 2013). His suggestion presupposes the ideological based inferiorization of others that helps him situating himself in superior position and thus he stands as a spokesman for the right of others.

The overall analysis of the Obama speech justifies what has been hypothesized for this research. His speech explores the underlying ideological agenda when seeing it under the lens of Mbembe's notion of Necropolitics.

Findings and conclusion

The present research has followed the qualitative mode of analysis. It was carried out through the close content analysis of the Obama's speeches. It was sought to address three main question through the lens of the developed framework based on Van Dijk's and Achille Mbembe's contribution entitled *Discourse Analysis as an Ideology Analysis* and *Necropolitics*. The first research question required an investigation of the way whereby the people of Waziristan have been criminalized by the discourse promoted by USA. The second question aimed at unmasking the policy of drone as an ideological agenda. The third question required an understanding through which the people of Waziristan have made the subject to the power of USA.

Obama's speeches are significant in exploring the US policies regarding drone attack. The selected speeches inquired that on what ground drone attack has been legalized. Since 2004, US is striking drones on the rationale of banishing terrorists. The president Barack Obama mentioned that drone attack is *lawful* as it is aimed to kill the terrorists groups, however this *lawful* is never defined. It is still not known that who are the terrorists? These strikes has killed of a lot civilians. In that way, their policy can be inquired which seemingly aimed to kill the terrorists however by using the rationale of banishing terrorists they have criminalized the people of Waziristan. By referring them as criminal agents, different kinds of subjectivities have been constructed.

In order to explore these subjectivities which has been constructed, Obama's speeches are analyzed and investigated. It is observed that the overall narration is revolving around his strategy of drone attack, in which he justifies the drone war on the basis of certain rationales. After analyzing both of the speeches of Barack Obama, our hypothesis has been proved. Discourse analysis of Obama's speech is significant in understanding the ways through which the people of Waziristan has been constructed as criminal subjects, although it could not be proved that targeted people are criminals or not? Drone attack has become a nuclear religion for America on the basis of which America is exercising his power.

Recommendation

This research has investigated the underlying agenda of America regarding the policy of

drones. It has concluded that America is exercising its power by criminalizing the people of Waziristan through representing them as terrorists in their political discourses. Drone attack is one form through which America is achieving its imperial aims, thus it stands as a neo-colonial apparatus. What can be the other forms of neo-colonialism are still to be explored.

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