Imagining Death and the Body: British security narratives and the Muslim Other

Stacey Gutkowski
ESRC Post-doctoral Research Fellow
University of Sussex

Abstract. In Euro-American constructions of the 'wars on terror' Islam has played a prominent role in securing a constellation of secularist and Orientalist binaries. Additionally, secular notions of the body have played an important role in facilitating the inscription of liberal politics on Afghan and Iraqi bodies. This paper uses British political narratives about the bodies of 'suicide' bombers and amputee soldiers to explore the impact of the secular *habitus* on the 'war on terror'.

Keywords: body, Self/Other, liberal subjectivity, Afghanistan, Iraq

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Introduction

The so-called 'wars on terror' are riddled with instances where narratives of global power are inscribed upon human bodies – strong bodies, broken bodies, politically-inconvenient bodies.[1] There is a long history in which 'Western' politics has been inscribed violently on the racialised bodies of the Other. However, in the context of the 'war on terror' – where Islam plays such a prominent role in securing a constellation of Orientalist binaries – the shift from Christian to secular notions of the body plays an important role in facilitating the inscription of liberal politics on Afghan and Iraqi bodies.[2] Given these political implications, my interest is in the grounding of the body in nature and the 'lived' aspect of bodily experience, as much as human bodies as socially-constructed artifacts.

The human body is also a particularly interesting site-moment for illuminating the wider, structuring impact of Euro-American secularity on the 'wars on terror'.[3] In particular I want to suggest that the imperial body projects of the 'wars on terror' provide us with important insights into the operation of a subtle and often unarticulated Euro-American secular sensibility on these wars of the 'colonial present'.[4]

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[1] I understand the 'wars on terror' as a construct broadly understood in the US and Europe as including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and global counter-terrorism efforts against Al Qaeda-inspired groups. The British government officially stopped using the phrase 'war on terror' in 2007 and the Obama administration has largely moved away from it as well.

[2] Following Asad, but borrowing phrasing from Hirschkind, I understand the secular 'as a concept that articulates a constellation of institutions, ideas, and affective orientations that constitute an important dimension of what we call modernity and its defining forms of knowledge and practice—both religious and non-religious'. I understand the secular as conceptually prior to secularism as a political doctrine. Following Russell McCutcheon I understand 'religion' as discrete activity separate from culture and politics to be a recent invention of the modern West. Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: the Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[3] By 'Euro-American imaginary' I mean a set of attitudes and orientations associated with Europe and the former British Anglophone colonies. This does not mean these are geographically confined to these spaces. Nor does it mean there are not significant differences among these.

[4] Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004)

Feminist scholars have argued powerfully that there are deep connections between bodies, emotions, unarticulated knowledge and political power.[5] Following this insight, my focus on the body offers an important corrective to a tendency within International Relations. This is a tendency to privilege secular political traditions over the often unarticulated, embodied and collectively performed sensibilities of the secular as *habitus*.[6] The secular habitus functions as a form of productive power in global politics, including in security relations. This focus can also shed light on how the fetishization of the 'Islamic' suicide bomber body has been used to elide the issue of civilian deaths. Additionally, this focus on 'Islamic' bombers as irrational and immoral has been used to elide the biopolitics behind catastrophic physical injury to 'Western' soldiers asked to carry out the 'wars on terror'. I draw on examples from the British case – in particular constructs of the bodies of 'suicide' bombers and soldiers who have lost limbs – to explore this point

Talal Asad has suggested that the secular is best pursued indirectly, as we (Euro-American) moderns are too embedded in it to observe its impact on our lives. Taking his work on pain and torture as inspiration, this paper explores the implications of the secular for the body politics (including the biopolitics) of the 'war on terror'. The relationship between religion and the human body provides an interesting way into these matters. The body is implicated in a range of religious practices, regarding food, authority, sexual relations, nakedness, pleasure, pain, medicine and healing.[7] It is also associated with non-rational knowing. Following Merleau-Ponty's insights on corporeal phenomenology, the body orients towards the idea that wars are about sensibilities, aesthetic *distinctions*, emotions, and half-conscious musings.[8] For the 'war on terror' the secular shapes these in important ways.

The human body in a secular age

To what extent can we speak of modern, secular conceptions of the human body? The uneven, interrupted and incomplete shift towards European modernity has manifested itself across a series of scales, including that of the body.[9] Hirschkind's recent essay *Is there a secular body?* goes some way to pointing out a 'secular sensorium', as he puts it, as a discernable part of modernization. Drawing on Asad's work on torture and pain and Connelly, as well as Ong's work on the de-sensualization of knowledge and Elias' work on the 'civilizing' process, Hirschkind suggests that the Kantian distinction between the will and the passions has secular overtones. This is because the passions are associated, in Kant's

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[5] This is a large literature. See, for example, Alison Adam (2002). 'Gender/Body/Machine'. *Ratio* 15 (4):354–375.

[6] On secular political traditions as a form of productive power in global politics see Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'The Political Authority of Secularism in International Relations.'
European Journal of International Relations 10:2 (2004). Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). I use Bourdieu's conception of the habitus. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structures, *Habitus*, Practices' in *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[7] Sarah Coakley, 'Introduction: religion and the body' in Sarah Coakley, *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 8.

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2002).

[9] This shift is not complete, teleological or necessary. It is marked by a series of ruptures and *resorggiomentos*, and varies in different contexts, across Europe and in the Anglophone colonies.

account, with superstitious/religious sects. Hirschkind does not quite arrive at an account of the 'secular body'. He does, however, flag up both secular sensibility and the body as an area that has been under-theorized in accounts of the secular.[10]

In the modern, Euro-American secular conception, the body is endowed with three key features: infinite perfectibility, 'universality' and the tension between its dignity and invisibility as a vessel for the liberal subject. This is a marked difference from conceptions of the body found within the medieval Christian worldview. The secular body is in many ways far less important now than it was in medieval Christian views (and still is in many modern Christian and Muslim views). In the medieval European worldview the body was deeply important, as the vehicle for the soul's repentance for sin. Human effort to achieve salvation was directed through the repetition of acts aimed at achieving absolution of sin. Such practices ranged from prayer to more extreme and destructive examples such as a practice among some female penitents of refusing food and subsisting only on the Eucharist.[11]

In the modern view while the body provides a vehicle for the will or personality, it is also beholden to those. As feminist philosopher Mary Midgley puts it, the Enlightenment view of the 'I' is of 'an isolated will, guided by an intelligence, arbitrarily connected to a rather unsatisfactory array of feelings, and lodged, by chance, in an equally unsatisfactory human body'.[12] Midgley suggests that while the late modern age has largely seen off questions of mind-body dualism, primary interest in the body remains above the neck.[13]

Christian conceptions of sin as either something with which the human is endowed at birth or which the individual encounters by virtue of being human have gradually disappeared from the European worldview.[14] In the modern period, these have shifted to a sense that there are only man-made material limits. Any others are merely failures of imagination, collective or individual. In the modern, secular view, though social, political and economic structures may curtail an individual's freedom, there is no larger, cosmic, epistemological or ontological restriction (i.e. the will of an all-powerful, all-seeing God). The sense that the world can and should be improved through human will is radically different from Christian and Muslim understandings that evil can never be permanently eliminated.[15]

The removal of sin and the ontological primacy of the gods from the physics of human action have been accompanied by a further normative imperative. In the modern

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[10] Charles Hirsckind, *Is there a secular body?*, The Immanent Frame: secularism, religion and the public sphere. http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/11/15/secular-body/, last accessed 16 December 2010. William E. Connolly, *Why I am not a secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* Norbert Elias, *Civilizing Process.* Edmund Jephcott (trans) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Presumably Hirschkind is referring to literary historian Walter J. Ong's body of work on the move from orality to literacy in Western culture.

[11] Jo Nash, 'Mutant Spiritualities in a Secular Age: The 'Fasting Body' and the Hunger for Pure Immanence', *Journal of Religion and Health.* 45(3), 2006.

[12] Mary Midgley, 'The soul's successors: philosophy and the body' in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 56

[13] Midgley, 'The soul's successors', 67.

[14] On these two Christian conceptions of sin – Catholic and Protestant respectively – see Donald Taylor, 'Theological thoughts about evil' in David Parkin (ed), *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

[15] Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, 92

view, because human life, its biological environment and social structures can be infinitely improved they *should* be. This resonates as an adaptation of notions of striving found in medieval Christianity. However, Euro-American attitudes towards the human body in late modernity are also constituted by tension between liberal imperatives of human perfectibility and the seeming inevitability of human suffering. There is ample evidence in the modern imaginary to support this – for example, organ transplants and technology to determine brain death.[16] The moments in which medicine prevails produce narratives – for example of near-death experience – which reconstitute this tension. The phenomenology of pain both supports post-Enlightenment notions of universality (in the body) and calls into question the teleological notion of infinite intellectual masterly of human experience. Even as technological advances of Western medicine seem to radically prolong life and reduce agony, the spectre of old age and the inevitability of death undermine liberalism's sacred imperative towards life.[17]

The modern, secular conception of the body as perfectible is entwined with the rise of the modern state. In Foucault's account, the rise of the modern state as a means of political organisation in Europe was accompanied by new, highly meticulous and detailed techniques of population control through the exercise of state power on the human body. Foucault traced the features of modern, liberal governmentality to practices of the European Church between the second and eighteenth century, to the transfer of the myth of an all-loving, all-powerful, all-seeing institutional Church to the modern state.[18] A 'new micro-physics of power', new in its scale, economy and modality of control, was exerted across a range of sites, including the military (which we will return to in a moment), schools, workshops and hospitals. In particular, state power was exercised through the control of bodies and knowledge about bodies. Notably, this joining of the notion of pacifying populations to Descartes' notion of the analyzable body drew upon Christianity. In particular it marked a re-working of ascetic practice and the theological conception of the relationship between the infinitesimal and the minute, i.e. that no detail is too small for God's attention.[19]

Liberal governmentality as it developed was, among many other things, a secularizing process, designed to secularize the human body. In other words, liberal biopolitics is underwritten in important ways by the shift to the secular. This has important implications for wars such as the 'war on terror' where the religious identity of the Other is fore grounded. Additionally, liberal governmentality is a process of demarcation between 'normal' bodies (i.e. 'able' bodies, male bodies, 'sane' bodies and so on) and abnormal bodies.[20] It should not therefore surprise us that Muslim bodies should be marked as abnormal by liberal states, and in need of governance.

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[16] See Margaret Lock, *Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
[17] See Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, especially the chapters on agency and pain and on torture.
[18] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory and Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977–1978*, trans. into English by Graham Burchell (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 171.
[19] Foucault, *Security, Territory and Population,* 137-140
[20] See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the age of reason,* 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2006) and *A History of Sexuality,* volumes I and II (London: Vintage, 1980). On disability I found helpful Paterson and Hughes, 'Disability Studies and Phenomenology: the carnal politics of everyday life', Disability & Society, 14(5), 597 — 610, 1999.

Danger, security and the body in a human-centred age

The body plays a starring role in modern, secular notions of danger. Modern life is full of efforts by the state to secure the body against danger – healthcare, sanitation, product liability, immigration, medical testing – as well as to place the body in danger –euthanasia, the death penalty. Douglas has demonstrated that a society's understandings of risk and danger are culturally-embedded and -mediated.[21] Adopting this insight, I want to suggest that many governments – including those of the US and UK – have borrowed from a shared cultural palette, to interpret security threats from Al Qaeda and, to a lesser extent, the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. This cultural palette – including a human-centred worldview – arose during a particular set of historical changes in Europe between the 17th and 20th centuries.

In particular, the shift to the modern worldview between the 17th and 20th centuries in this cycle of European history entailed a shift to a godless ontology and human-centred epistemology. This shift is not complete, teleological or necessary. However, it has brought about a range of ideas and embodied practices (*habitus*), for example about scientific enquiry, social connections, power, time, space, life and death, many of which were appropriated by liberal politics with the rise of the nation-state. Through liberal politics these secular notions have shaped a range of global practices in late modernity, including trade and – my particular concern – war.

Charles Taylor has observed that there are important connections between security, self and secularity in a historical moment in which the possibility of a self-referential, self-sustaining humanism became widely available as a modality of thought. By 'humanism' Taylor means specifically 'a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing'.[22] Taylor's concern is specifically with religion and secularity, in particular with what he calls 'secularity 3', in which the gods are no longer deemed necessary to ensure human flourishing. Taylor explores how, in his words, 'something other than God could become the necessary objective pole of moral or spiritual aspiration, of "fullness"'.[23] This account of 'humanism' has a different set of concerns than those of the post-structuralist, Marxist and post-Marxist conversations about humanism, antihumanism, posthumanism and transhumanism, conversations which have turned recently to Western soldier bodies.[24]

This widespread possibility of humanism – secularity 3 – has brought about an increasing sense of security through the notion of a 'buffered self'. Taylor talks about the buffered self as 'a thick emotional boundary between us and the cosmos', so that things outside the human need not 'get to me'. 'This self,' Taylor says, 'can see itself as invulnerable,

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[21] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Conceptions of Pollution and Taboo* (Kegan and Paul: Routledge, 1966).
[22] Taylor, *A Secular Age,*
[23] Taylor, *A Secular Age*,
[24] See, for example, the workshop held at the University of Manchester in September 2010 on 'the construction and reconstruction of soldiers *as human beings*, and the dense symbolic economy that now surrounds the humanity of Western soldiers'.

as master of the meaning of things for it'.[25] Taylor differentiates the modern buffered self, from the 'porous' self of the 'earlier enchanted world'. For Taylor, this buffered self – the modern, liberal subject – is possible only after the death of gods. The buffered self is no longer 'vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind'; humans are free to create their own cosmic order.[26] The buffered self is a necessary response, Taylor posits, to the entrance of radical uncertainty into the human imaginary through the rise of the monotheisms. In the pre-Axial age, war and peace are limited and ritualized; sacrifices were offered to appease the gods. In the post-Axial age, where war is the result of evil, both war and peace are limitless and more rationalized. [27]

Of course these phantoms and phantasmagorical spaces of the 'earlier enchanted world' did not disappear from the European worldview – they were merely shifted into the space of this world. Most obviously, the gods were shifted to the spaces beyond the psycho-political borders of Europe, where projects of empire would attempt to exorcise *jinns* and demons much as they had been banished from Europe. We will return to this point in a moment.

In the modern Euro-American imaginary, security threats are men with guns, not angry gods wielding plagues.[28] Hence, faith in human capacity to achieve existential security, a faith driving the liberal worldview, is made possible by a shift away from Christian ontology. For example, the very modern notion of 'security threats' points to eschatological difference between the modern secular and medieval Christian worldview (though this is still held by some). Men with guns will not destroy the human race in the blink of an eye, contra the whims of angry gods.

Still, the notion that the self is more secure in modernity has been fundamentally problematised by the nagging persistence of violence, including the 'organised' violence of modern warfare. This is a particular conundrum for the formerly Christian European imaginary. The shift to New Testament Christianity – from conceptions of the fickle Greco-Roman gods, to a vengeful, omnipotent Old Testament God, to the idea of all-loving omnipotence – made possible ideas of the universe as merciful and sympathetic to human calamity. Human evil and natural calamity are thus irresolvably dissonant within a modern worldview that expects humans to make their way in a universe sympathetic to or at least compatible with the human condition. Religious worldviews – at least the monotheisms – may be, Taylor points out, 'more comfortable with the powers of wild destruction'.[29]

The advent of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear technology, has problematised modern imaginings of the end of all human bodies. Unlike Christian and Muslim notions of Judgment, the modern worldview contains no notion of eventual bodily redemption. The human-centred sense of security is thus at the same time deeply secure and fundamentally precarious. The gods neither destroy life nor save us from ourselves. That is

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[25] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (616)
[26] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 300-1
[27] Taylor attributes this shift from movement from a pre-Axial to a post-Axial age but I think he's imprecise here. I think this is better described as a shift to modernity.
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[29] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 647.

not to say this paradox is fundamentally embedded in late modernity. Weber's prediction has undergone systematic refutation. Far from being disenchanted, global, national and local securities have been repeatedly threatened over the past half-century by those – and I include George W. Bush here – for whom the gods are alive and well.[30]

In the Enlightenment view, bodily security is ambiguous. On one hand, the human body secures the self against metaphorical violence and is the vessel of the liberal subject. The body provides the liberal subject with the material conditions (brain, larynx) through which to manifest its political desires. It also provides a visible shortcut for distinguishing between subjects. In this way, the body *secures* the individual, thinking, liberal subject.

On the other hand, the body is always at risk of physical violence. The body poses the single largest security problem for the liberal subject: the death of the body signals the death of the liberal subject. Though Christian notions of the continuity of the self after death resonate in late modern European notions of survival in the memory of others, bodily death is to be avoided at all costs. The liberal drive to secure life thus manifests itself in a series of paradoxes, including the imperative of liberal war, 'killing to make life live'.[31]

As a political ideology, liberalism is fuelled by the epistemological possibilities and limitations of a secular, human-centric worldview. For example, the eclipse of the medieval Great Chain of Being and the modern possibility of radical human freedom has brought with it notions of radical responsibility for Self and (certain) others. For those on the losing end of human responsibility, hope that the gods might intervene is unavailable in the modern view. The idea that science, science technology will make possible an end to human suffering has brought advances. However, though the ravages of the bubonic plague in 14th century Europe have not been repeated, natural and human-caused calamity remain. Again, a godless ontology shifts the possibility of 'humanitarian' intervention from powerful gods to humans.

To summarise the argument so far, Euro-American liberalism gradually developed several tenets about the human body in light of this shift from the medieval Christian to the modern, secular European worldview. First, in the modern, liberal view, human bodies are infinitely perfectible, through human will. Second, the human body secures the liberal political subject by providing the liberal subject with the material conditions through which to manifest its political desires. Third, the human body is deemed a 'universal' entity – except, as the next section will indicate, when those bodies belong to non-Europeans.

Bodies at war: European modernity and imperial body projects

[30] Of course, not all those who articulate their politics through a religio-political idiom believe in a higher power. For a comparative perspective on those who do see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
[31] See Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live.* (London: Routledge, 2009).

The shift towards the sense of that the modern European self should be infinitely secure (as opposed to subject to the whims of the universe) had radical implications for the non-European world. It allowed Europeans to imagine themselves as geopolitically invincible. In the context of bloody imperial conquest, non-European bodies stood in the way of the resource extraction and spread of capitalism. These bodies were re-imagined as short hand for intellectual or moral deficiency, and secure through an image of the 'carnivalesque and grotesque'.[32] A range of imperial practices aimed to subjugate the non-European body into the liberal-capitalist global order, a self-reinforcing procession of knowledge/power.[33]

Some of these imperial practices focused particularly on the 'civilizing' of 'superstitious' religious practices. For example, part of the British imperial project in India was the codification of a series of diverse Hindu devotional practices into something that more closely resembled Christianity, a 'proper' religion. This accompanied a range of legal and political measures designed to codify Hindus and Muslims into governable groups.[34] These measures helped to secure their colonial overlords from uprisings and, more broadly, Britain within the global order. However, as alterity is always intertwined with subjectivity, this body politics reveals much about European self-conceptions.[35] Anxieties about the transition from a Christian to secular political modality in Europe, as well as long-standing fears of Jewish Otherness, were worked out upon non-European bodies, imagined as cultural, economic and security threats. In the context of the 'war on terror' – where 'Islam' has been privileged in 'Western' imaginings – the religion of the Other has once again been reactivated as an imperial site.

These imperial body projects have had significant implications for the politics of European and American warfare, into the 'colonial present'.[36] Where non-European bodies threaten European bodies they are attacked, literally or figuratively. One of the byproducts of the modern, secular conception of the body as securing the liberal subject is the normative notion that some bodies are more worthy of being secured than others. This rests on a reformulation of older, more insidious ideas: namely that within the 'hierarchy of civilizations', some (i.e. white Europeans) are more rational, more capable of civilization and hence more deserving of political subjectivity and bodily security than (brown and black non-European) others.

Modern war discourse has been marked by the disappearance of enemy bodies.[37] Not all bodies at war are created equal. Some are more expendable. Expendable enemy bodies are

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[32] See Keith Sandiford, 'Envisioning the colonial body: the fair, the carnivalesque and grotesque', in An Economy of Colour: visual culture and the Atlantic world, 1660-1830', ed Geoff Quilly and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2003).

[33] See for example James H. Mills and Satadru Sen (eds), *Confronting the Body: the politics of physicality in colonial and postcolonial India* (London: Anthem Press, 2003).

[34] See Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj.* The New Cambridge History of India. Vol. 3 part 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[35] On the intertwining of alterity and subjectivity, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible.*

[36] Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004)

[37] Hugh Gusterson, *People of the Bomb: portraits of America's nuclear complex.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the making and unmaking of the world.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Jennifer Milliken and David Sylvan, 'Soft Bodies, Hard Targets and Chic Theories: US Bombing Policy in Indochina', *Millennium,* 1996, 25.

re-described, metaphorized and euphemized.[38] While enemy bodies have always been more expendable than one's own soldiers – it takes on a different tenor in the human-centred, modern age. For example, during the Gulf War of 1991 no estimate was made of Iraqi dead, soldiers or civilians.[39] This has been a reoccurring theme in the recent Iraq and Afghanistan war. Like the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, reliance on heavy airstrikes makes body counting challenging – bodies are literally obliterated, erased from the air. However reasons for the silence are much broader.

Similarly, in late modern warfare, technology has been increasingly used to transcend the soldier body for strategic advantage.[40] For example, during the Gulf War, American pilots were given amphetamines to suppress their body rhythms so they could bomb around the clock.[41] Rather than as a vessel or a problem the body becomes obsolete or accelerated.

What is secular about these conceptions? In the Old Testament God and Man are discernable because one has a woundable body. God's power acts on the body through wounding (childbirth, leprosy, plague massacre), but God can also take suffering away. The act of wounding also re-enacts the creation – Man can be made again and again through wounding. In the New Testament, the body no longer marks the distinction between Man and God.[42] In the Euro-American secular vision human life does not contain the New Testament *possibility* of life beyond death or the Old Testament *possibility* of wealth, safety and God's blessing through the offered sacrifice of Isaac.[43] However, like the Aztecs whose gods demanded the ecstatic, drug-induced, public sacrifice of their slaves,[44] the liberal state demands bodies.

Body politics and Britain's 'wars on terror', 2001-2011

Modern, human-centred notions of bodily security have implications for bodies at war, both civilian and soldier bodies. The remainder of the paper will explore the 'body politics' of the 'war on terror', with a particular focus on binaries created in the Euro-American imaginary between the secular, human-centred worldview and 'Islam'. Two 'body politics' site-moments – the 'suicide' bomber and the catastrophically injured soldier – are explored. They suggest that Otherizing processes are not always straight-forward. For the sake of grounding the theoretical argument, examples drawn primarily from the British experience will be used.

The United Kingdom is a robust example of a country in the midst of a secular age. Its emergence into the current secular age has happened gradually, over the course of centuries, propelled by three primary dynamics. The first has been the need to seek political accommodation among groups to secure the modern state since the late 17th century. This is evident in the English Civil War, union between England and Scotland, the colonization of

[38] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 80
[39] Gusterson, *People of the Bomb,* 73
[40] See Chris Hables Gray, 'Posthuman Soldiers in Postmodern War' *Body and Society,*
[41] Gusteron, *People of the Bomb,* 72
[42] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 183-4.
[43] King James Bible, Genesis, 22: 1-18
[44] Inga Clendinnan, *Aztecs: an interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

and attempted union with Ireland, the gradual granting of full civil rights to Catholics, non-Conformists, Jews, and, later, other minority groups after Empire. The second is the industrialization and accompanying urbanization, which precipitated the current decline in participation in organized religion in the late nineteenth century.[45] The third is the diffusion of the Scottish Enlightenment invention of Natural (rational) Religion to the bourgeois imaginary through democratization and political liberalism.

Roughly speaking, British political settlements around religion occupy a similar 'middle ground'. On one hand, the UK lacks the strict separation of religion from political life as in the US and French system. The Church of England is established, bishops sit in the House of Lords, faith schools receive state funding, the Queen of England is both head of state and head of Church, and Britain's Christian heritage is apparent in military ritual.[46] On the other hand, British political life is widely regarded as 'liberal' and pluralist, with 'faith communities' treated like interest groups. Though Scottish Enlightenment notions of 'rational religion' persist in political discussion of 'ethics', explicit religious discourse is uncommon in political life.[47] While public discourse is largely non-exclusive – due likely to its internal diversity, post Empire – the exclusive voices of Richard Dawkins and others aimed specifically at Muslims, became louder 2005-8.[48]

The British cultural milieu is also revealing. At the dawn of the twenty first century, secularity, or small 'h' humanism as Taylor puts it, is a widely available, socially acceptable possibility in the UK. Though statistics vary, they indicate that those identifying as strongly or weakly non-religious – atheist, agnostic, large 'h' Humanist, those simply disinterested or on the fence make up potentially as much as 65.5%.[49] In Britain the softer forms of non-religion tend to prevail, with 'secular Christians', 'nominal Christians', 'cultural' or 'ethnic' Christians, 'liminal nones' or those exhibiting 'fuzzy fidelity' making up a significant proportion of these.[50]

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[45] I do not mean to imply that this current period of secularization has been straight forward or teleological.

[46] Britain's Christian heritage is particularly apparent among the armed forces, through the attachment of Christian pastors (padres) to each regiment, that the majority of soldiers request Christian funerals, the officers' curriculum on Just War, and Remembrance Day services, though this is changing. Since 2003, the army has been making gradual efforts towards promoting a more 'liberal' and pluralist outlook, by introducing chaplains from minority faith backgrounds, orienting the ethics curriculum towards 'liberal values' and emphasising Britain's 'liberal' identity in its *Values and Standards* documents.

[47] See also Stacey Gutkowski, 'Security and the secular: British policymakers and radical Islamism', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* (forthcoming, October 2011).

[48] For example, Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006). For a potent example of Islamophobic discourse see Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan,* (London: Encounter Books, 2006).

[49] Pascal Siegers. 'A Multiple Group Latent Class Analysis of Religious Orientations in Europe', in *Cross-Cultural Analysis: Methods and Applications*, ed. Eldad Davidov, Peter Schmidt, and Jaak Billiet. (New York: Routledge, 2010). Park et al. put the figure around 40%. Alison Park, et al., eds. *British Social Attitudes: The 26th Report.* London: Sage Publications.

[50] For an overview of the literature on this see David Voas and Abby Day, 'Recognizing Secular Christians: toward an unexcluded middle in the literature on religion', 2010, The Association of Religion Data Archives, http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/voas.asp.UK Census statistics from 2001 put the Christian population at approximately 70%. The wording of the census question has been widely criticized as imprecise. This 70% likely accounts for 'fuzzies'/nominals as well as practicing Christians.

In the British case, the fuzzy, secular cultural milieu is evident in low numbers attending religious services, a mainstream art and literary culture which has little to say about religion, and social mannerisms where it is considered impolite to discuss religion for fear of offending someone. While, many believe that religion 'make[s] children well-behaved, strangers helpful and shop keepers honest', they are also 'casual and unconcerned' about their own believing and belonging.[51] A November 2005 poll indicated that nearly 50% of Britons feel they 'know little or nothing about what it would be like to be a Christian'.[52] Still, British ethical consensus is underpinned by the cultural echo of Christianity, via Scottish Enlightenment notions of Natural Religion. For example, 75% of respondents to a BBC poll indicated that Britain should retain its 'Christian values', including 44% of those who self-identified as having no faith.[53] Interestingly, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs polled expressed a preference for traditional Christian values over wholly secular ones. [54]

Secular sensibilities are not confined to cultural Christians in the UK; many non-Christians uphold and practice the public space as secular. However, members of minority religions are more likely to express a religious identity and to engage in some religious practices, with the figure rising significantly for South Asian Muslims.[55] That 77% of those polled indicated little or no understanding of 'what it would be like to be a Muslim' goes some way to explaining the plausibility of 'Islam'/'Britain' binaries.[56] This is summarized by the comment of one self-described atheist MP 'the disconcerting, jagged aspect of Islam for British society is the disproportionate number of Muslims that take it seriously'.[57] The difficulty is not *just* terrorism or radical brands of political Islamism.

What bearing has this cultural milieu had on British pursuit of the 'war on terror'? Interviews with 48 senior politicians, civil servants, military officers and NGOs, academics, and religious leaders in the government's confidence, analysis of parliamentary debates, broadsheet news coverage and policy documents suggest that the upper echelons of the British government and military operated within a worldview, and produce a *habitus*, that was human-centred and politically secular.[58] This is subtle, often masked by declarations that British policy or policymakers are 'liberal'. Since 2001, this orientation has reinforced and made possible the British government's construction of a constellation of knowledge categories related to 'Islam'. These categories originated in the colonial experience but have

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[51] I have found Voas and Day's insights on the more subtle aspects of the British religious *habitus* enlightening, particularly David Voas and Abby Day, 'Secularity in Great Britain.' In *Secularism and Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives* , edited by BA Kosmin and A Keysar, 95-110. Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, 2007.

[52] ICM Research on behalf of the BBC (4-6 November 2005) 'Faith Survey', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bs/hi/dfs/14_11_05_bbc_faith.pdf, last accessed 26 August 2009.

[53] Staff writers (14 November 2005) "BBC Poll Shows Changes in Faith and Secularism across the UK", Ekklesia, http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_051114faith.shtml, last accessed 9 August 2009.

[54] BBC News, 'Public favour religious values,' http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7906595.stm, last accessed 24 February 2011.

[55] Richard Berthoud, Tariq Modood, et. al, 'Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage (the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities),' (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997).

[56] ICM Research on behalf of the BBC (4-6 November 2005) 'Faith Survey', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bs/hi/dfs/14_11_05_bbc_faith.pdf, last accessed 26 August 2009.

[57] Anonymous MP, interview with author, October 2008.

[58] The bulk of these interviews were conducted 2008-9, under the centre-left New Labour government.

since been adapted and rendered more subtle, porous and paradoxical by the postcolonial experience, particularly with British Muslims in the metropole.[59] Harnessed to neoliberal state imperatives and British geostrategic ambitions, this orientation has produced a series of (albeit porous) binaries between the constellation 'Islam' and the constellation 'Britain'.

These ambivalences have made it difficult for British policymakers to reach firm conclusions about Islamist actors. I have explored British security policy towards the Islamist militia *Jaish al-Mehdi* in Basra and the Prevent strand of British counter-terrorism strategy in depth, but my research suggests the phenomenon is pervasive. This produced a series of internal paradoxes within British security logic during the past decade. For example, they thought radical Islamists presented a greater physical threat than material circumstances might otherwise indicate but – at the same time – suspected that radicals are too irrational and incoherent to be politically threatening. They also considered 'moderate' Muslims benign and non-political but at the same time potentially easily radicalised. These internal contradictions prompted both policy restraint and aggression, distortion and some accidental accuracy.[60]

Such matters were partially evident in explicit discourse but much was implied in context. Such ambivalences and contradictions – in policy and in discourse – cannot be explained purely by power politics, but by attention to their sources in culture.[61] The body is a useful conceptual tool to move us beyond explicit language.

The dangerous Muslim Other: Human bodies as bombs

In the limited imaginative space that is the 'global war on terror', the figure of the 'suicide' bomber has achieved epistemological supremacy over other 'enemy fighters'. In the 'Western' construction, the annihilation of one's own body in order to commit homicide is privileged, whereas the notion of 'martyrdom' in an Islamic context involves the use of the human body on behalf of the collective.[62] The 'suicide bomber' body is, in Butler's terms, performed as apolitical, uniquely homicidal, and therefore worthy of blinkered fixation.[63] The visibility of 'suicide' bomber has allowed Afghan and Iraqi civilian bodies ('casualties') to be erased as politically problematic. The injuries of Afghans have been narrated in two contexts: where ISAF medics are saving the lives of civilians injured by insurgents or where medics are tending to insurgents.[64] The politics behind this – the massive Afghan casualties caused by NATO aerial bombing or the fact that the insurgents are being saved not out of mercy but for interrogation – has been silent. However, representative, 'erased' enemy bodies have a tendency to surface from time to time. Photographs of the corpse of Baha

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[59] Stacey Gutkowski, *Religious Violence, Secularism and the British Security Imaginary, 2001-2009*, University of Cambridge, PhD thesis, 2010 (unpublished), especially Chapter 2 on colonial genealogy.
[60] Gutkowski, *Religious Violence.*
[61] Douglas, *Purity and Danger.*
[62] K.M. Fierke, 'Agents of death: the structural logic of suicide terrorism and martyrdom', *International Theory,* 1(1), 2009, 155-84.
[63] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 1999).
[64] Ministry of Defence, Defence News, 'British military medics save girls injured by IED', 8 January 2010.

Mousa, a Basrawi hotel worker who died of asphyxiation in the custody of British soldiers in 2003, recently made front page news.[65]

'Martyrdom' attacks were first imagined in the Euro-American imaginary through Palestinian operations in Israel. However the tactic has been re-imagined as a knowledge category over the past decade, in light of Al Qaeda attacks on US and European civilians. Most importantly, 'suicide' bombing has been re-imagined as a 'cultural' and 'religious' act, rather than a political one. As such, 'suicide' bombing has been articulated in much Euro-American discourse of the past decade as the primary evidence securing a range of Orientalist binaries. In this move from politics to culture, the human body has become partially elevated in the discourse. It has become fetishized as an object of horror: 'Horrifically, the most obvious sign of a suicide attack is the bomber's head which is shot into the air at the moment of death'.[66] However, paradoxically, the body of the 'suicide' bomber is also erased in Euro-American discourse, similar to other enemy bodies in war. It is erased through a Euro-American discourse which has fixed on what 'motivates' Al Qaeda-inspired 'suicide' bombers.[67] The bomber is then imagined and performed as a disembodied will. This depoliticizing emphasis on the 'mind' of the bomber mirrors Western constructions of religion as a matter of faith or belief, rather than practice or identity.[68]

'Martyrdom' – through the annihilation of the body – is a military act of extreme political resistance, evident in its use outside Islamist politics, by the Tamil Tigers and Lebanese communists. There are no attitudes towards the body within the Islamic milieu that would support the notion that Muslims are somehow 'more inclined' towards the tactic. With the exception of Sufism and some esoteric Shi'ism, there is generally a lack of negative feeling about the body in most Islamic thought.[69] The body is deeply relevant to spirituality, seen in the rituals of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.[70] Additionally, images of bodily integrity are important in modern Islamic martyrology, including for 'suicide' bombers. By the 16th century early Islamic ideas of the body of the Prophet as incorruptible had become associated with martyrdom. The body of the martyr is said to emit a sweet smell and not to decompose, and there are images of the body after death, smiling in paradise and helping Islamic fighters.[71] Rustomji has pointed out that Islamic eschatology emphasizes the materiality of an 'after*world*', in contrast to the Christian 'after*life*'.[72] These bodily images would seem a part of the emphasis on materiality.

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[65] Richard Norton-Taylor, 'British General 'horrified' by Baha Mousa injuries', *The Guardian.* 17 May 2010.
[66] Kevin Toolis, 'The grim signs that say suicide bomb', *The Times (London),* 9 July 2005.
[67] See for example Christoph Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon: A modern history of suicide bombing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), Diego Gambetta, *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: the allure of suicide terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[68] On the Western emphasis on 'faith', see Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious' in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* edited by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1998).
[69] Though attitudes towards the female body are highly ambivalent. Valerie J. Hoffman, 'Islamic Perspectives on the Human Body: legal, social and spiritual considerations', in *Embodiment, Morality and Medicine*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret A. Farley (AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995)
[70] Hoffman, 'Islamic Perspectives on the Human Body', 37-41.
[71] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[72] Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Recent Euro-American interest in this enchantment of the Muslim body – particularly evident in fixation on the virgins featuring in recent Islamist martyrology – is an important site-moment of Othering. Within the European milieu, early Christian martyrology indicated connections between bodily death and political sacrifice. Though these writings privileged the theological implications of the act, they were not inattentive to its significance as a religio-political act. Christian martyrs were portrayed as witness to the ultimate sovereignty of their God over idolatrous Roman rule.[73] However, in the modern, secular, and teleological European imaginary, bodies are entirely disenchanted. Though the material body is exalted, the body is acted on by state power. It is not powerful in its own right (via the gods). By contrast, in the medieval period, holy bodies were deeply powerful. The bodies of saints were imagined surrounded by 'fields of force from which emanated miracles or the work of demons'.[74] Bodily 'enchantment' in radical Islamist martyrology has thus been taken as proof of backwardness and permission to unleash hell.

What secures the discourse of 'suicide' bombing in the liberal, Euro-American imaginary is – unsurprisingly – a discourse of life. Mellor and Schiller have pointed out that late modernity has involved the 'sequestration of death' due to, among other things, the 'shrinking scope for the sacred'.[75] Murray argues that 'suicide' bombing is problematic for the liberal political order because it is an instance of 'thanatopolitics'. The act invokes a 'politics of death' 'resistant to biopolitical power and the Western conception of rationality which underpins it'.[76] Asad points out that the 'suicide' bomber violates the liberal state's ability to regulate killing – for example, the US makes sure death row prisoners do not commit suicide.[77] The 'suicide' bomber also unsettles the biopolitical state's notion of soldier bodies. Via bodily regulation – by state and international law – soldier bodies are made visible by uniform-wearing and the regulation of where and when they can be present. The 'suicide' bomber violates these terms.

However, Asad points out that 'our' discomfort with 'suicide' bombing has as much to do with liberal biopolitics as with the shift to secular humanism. We moderns, he suggests, are horrified to discover that humans are limited by death and that the only meaning to life may be death. In Asad's argument, this radical uncertainty is juxtaposed with the cultural echo of the Christian worldview. This worldview posits, through the figure of Jesus Christ, the possibility of loving, divinely-sanctioned, bodily self-sacrifice as redemption for sinful humanity.[78] As long as this cultural echo remains – Asad seems to suggest – so does the possibility of political despair. The 'suicide' bomber – who also regards the act as 'self-sacrifice' – reminds us of this.

Turning to the British case, the evolution of a conceptual connection between Islam and the 'suicide' bomb, occurred more gradually than one might imagine, given the

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[73] See Everett Ferguson, 'Early Christian martyrdom and civil disobedience', *Journal of Early Christian Studies,* 1(1), 1993, particularly p. 79-81

[74] Bynum, 'Why all the fuss about the body?', 23.

[75] Phillip A. Mellor and Chris Schilling, 'Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of Death', *Sociology*, 27(3), 1993.

[76] Stuart Murray, 'Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life', *Polygraph* 18, 2006, 195.

[77] Asad, *On Suicide bombing,* 86.

[78] Asad's contention that the crucifixion is the 'most famous suicide in Judeo-Christian history' strikes me as a misreading. *On Suicide Bombing,* 84.

rapid adoption of discourse and narrative from the Bush government in the aftermath of 9/11. A possible suicide attack on British interests was considered seriously from mid-2002 onwards. This was in response to intelligence pointing to an attack on British targets in the Mediterranean.[79] Prior to this period, the overwhelming majority of broadsheet coverage of 'suicide' attacks had focused on the Palestinian struggle. While condemned, the Palestinian operations were largely portrayed as political, as an act of resistance.[80]

However, in the shadow of the Iraq war, connections crept into British metropolitan discourse between 'suicide' bombing and Islam.[81] Saddam Hussein's eleventh hour threat to deploy 'suicide' bombers throughout the UK and the US, in February 2003, caused a stir, leading the British intelligence services to begin surveillance of Iraqi exiles. (This was particularly ironic given that the exiles – largely Shi'a, unlike Saddam – had been courted by the Blair government in the run up to the invasion.) This logical leap was required to represent Saddam's gesture as an even partially-credible threat. The link between Islam and suicide bombing in the shadows of the Iraq invasion might be explained vis a vis Blair's efforts to sell an unpopular war by linking the Ba'athist regime to Al Qaeda. The link becomes stronger after the attacks on London in July 2005.

Government and metropolitan discourse surrounding Palestinian 'suicide' attacks on Israeli civilians portrayed it as intellectually comprehensible – a form of political resistance – if morally problematic. However, through the new connection of Islam to 'suicide' bombing, the notion of political resistance was largely eclipsed by that of fanaticism. This was secured by a discourse of incomprehension. For example, in an emotive outburst to the House of Commons, the former Home Secretary declared:

> I do not understand the motives of those who commit suicide and blow up other people. I do not understand the motives of religious teachers and leaders and others who are not prepared to do that themselves, so instead send young men and women as suicide bombers to do their work for them…I do not understand those who have no negotiating position and no demands other than the total capitulation of our democratic way of life and values…How can we understand those who take innocent lives not to free themselves from the shackles of some sort of post-colonialism, but to destroy the modernity and the society that they literally hate?[82]

The binary between the 'suicide' bomber and 'us' was further secured through the concept of cultural dissonance. For example, one Muslim civil society representative close to government circles noted, 'it's very difficult [for policymakers] to relate to because of the

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[79] Richard Norton-Taylor, Giles Tremlett and Julian Borger, 'MI6 hunts terror plot network: Al-Qaeda cell planned Gibralter attacks', *The Guardian,* 12 June 2002 and Michael Evans, 'Suicide bomb threat to British targets in Cyprus', *The Times,* 13 June 2002.

[80] Author review of UK broadsheet coverage (via Lexis-Nexis), 11 September 2001 – 25 January 2011, search term 'suicide bomb'. An exception in the right-leaning *Daily Telegraph* emphasized the re-invigoration of Islamic martyrology by Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin: Nasra Hassan, 'An Arsenal of believers', *The Daily Telegraph,* 9 December 2001.

[81] Author review of UK broadsheet coverage (via Lexis-Nexis), 1 February 2003 – 1 December 2003, search term 'suicide bomb'.

[82] David Blunkett, Home Secretary (former), Statement to the House of Commons, 25 February 2004, *Parliamentary Debates,* Commons, vol. 418 (2003-4), column 302.

absence of that cultural upbringing'.[83] On this basis, distinctions were drawn between Al Qaeda-inspired attacks and the British experience with the IRA: for example, '[i]ntellectually, our opponents in Northern Ireland were symmetric to us. In Iraq they are intellectually asymmetric to us'.[84] Comparing the IRA tactic of using soap flakes to create a napalm effect to Al Qaeda suicide bombing, another officer remarked, '[the IRA] were brutal people, I don't have sympathy with them…but they were relatively, not moral, but benign.[85] (The IRA has apparently been moved up the hierarchy of whiteness in British security discourse.[86])

The partial eclipse of resistance by fanaticism is noteworthy. This is one of the most significant differences between US and British political discourse about the 'war on terror'. Britain's status as secular (and therefore superior) is secured by a security discourse of stoic rationalism and its emphasis on the intellect. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan put it in 1955, 'We are a very empirical people. We try to deal with facts as we see them. Nothing is permanent in the world'. While pervasive, it is a trope: as Unwin pointed out '[t]he British [government] are emotionally and ideologically committed to the belief that they are unemotional and strangers to ideology. They have the same conviction as the fat man who thinks that he is thin or the pretty girl who is convinced she is plain'.[87] In an intriguing historical parallel, in late antiquity Roman Stoicism (as an imperial ideology and moral philosophy) ran parallel to the embrace of pain in early Christian martyrology.[88]

Interestingly, in the British discourse, suicide bombers and other radicals with the intent to kill were repeatedly associated with a 'false' or 'misguided' interpretation of Islam. In British discourse, this trope of rationalism and stoicism is vital to the construction of binaries between the Self and the hysterical, superstitious Muslim 'suicide' bomber. The association of the bomber with irrationality is made possible both by Freud's depiction of religion as a 'universal, obsessional neurosis' and nineteenth century British depictions of anti-imperial revolt as an instance of insanity among the 'natives'.[89]

Absent from the British – and indeed Euro-American – discourse is any acknowledgement that humans do not know everything. For all we know, Allah may indeed be alive, well and angry. Chakrabaty has argued that supernatural agency is a problem for modern European historiography which dismisses the postcolonial as 'superstitious'. This is a difficulty for both judgmental and sympathetic accounts, as both involve separation of the

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[83] Muslim NGO representative (former), interview with author, August 2008.
[84] A senior officer in the British Army, currently serving, correspondence with author, September 2008. See also Andrew Dismore, Labour MP for Hendon, Statement to the House of Commons, 25 February 2004, *Parliamentary Debates,* Commons, vol. 418 (2003-4), col. 329.
[85] Retired Major General, British Army, interview with author, July 2008.
[86] On Ireland's 'blackness' see Richard Ned Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: the influence of stereotypes on colonial policy* (Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976).
[87] Peter Unwin, *Hearts, Minds and Interests: Britain's Place in the World* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 1998). Cited on Mangold, *Success and Failure in British Foreign Policy*. 1
[88] See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* 86.
[89] On Freud see James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 39-40. On British depictions of insanity and the 1952-60 Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya see Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*, Borderlines (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996). 113

analyst from the subject.[90] Taking the example of Ranajit Guha's account of the 1855 Santal Rebellion – orchestrated at the behest of the Santal God Thakur – Chakrabaty suggests that there is no third voice which could assimilate Guha's account and that of the Santals. Rather we need to 'stay with the gap' 'that signals irreducible plurality in our own experiences'.[91] However, in the Euro-American imaginary, there has been little inclination to 'stay with the gap'. As previously noted, 'religion' and 'superstition' have been grounds for a range of imperial, civilizing projects, 'war on terror' included.

By fetishizing 'Islam', liberal, secular discourse separates 'martyrdom' from its political and strategic context. For example, that 'suicide is forbidden by the Qur'an' – as indeed it is – has become vital to a shift in Euro-American understanding of the phenomenon as religio-cultural (and a bit irrational), rather than political and strategic.[92] In this Euro-American iteration, the 'suicide' bomber lacks political subjectivity. However, in the jihadist mindset the bomber claims political subjectivity by force, through a religio-political idiom in which non-human forces are taken as a given.

British understanding of the 'religion' of the Other as suspect introduces ambiguity into the knowledge category 'suicide bomber'. One hand, the 'suicide' bomber highlights the dark side of liberal, humanism: the will to act on individualized (and de-politicized) motives, out of superstition, 'madness' or misunderstanding. On the other hand, this 'suicide' act destabilizes the idea that human forces are the only ones in play. The bomber need not hear a voice in a dream in order to catalyze a religio-political idiom in resistance to oppression.

Shahids construct their self-immolation (and homicide) as a collective, political act to destabilize the current geopolitical order and vindicate injustice. The construction of the 'suicide' bomber as beholden to a 'distorted version of Islam' has both secured the idea of Al Qaeda-inspired 'suicide' bombing as the act of one superstitious man. However, the act is also conceived as at threat to 'secularism as the guiding force under which international relations are conducted'.[93] The construct is ambiguous. Can one man's superstition threaten global order? However, the association is used, unconsciously, to justify a range of British actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The problematic liberal subject: catastrophically injured soldier bodies

Though Muslim, Al Qaeda-inspired 'suicide' bombers have been imagined as the biggest threat to the secular, liberal, biopolitical global order, catastrophically injured soldier

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[90] Dipesh Chakrabaty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007) 269.
[91] Charkrabaty, *Provincializing Europe,* 133-7
[92] For example, Dr Tahir al-Qudri's 'fatwa against terrorism and suicide bombing' has received significant interest from the UK and US governments. See the website of Minhaj al-Quran International for coverage of the launch: http://www.minhaj.org/english/tid/9959/Historical-Launching-of-Fatwa-Against-Terrerism-leading-Islamic-authority-launches-fatwa-against-terrorism-and-denounces-suicide-bombers-as-disbelievers-Anti-terror-Fatwa-launched.htm, last accessed 27 January 2011.
[93] Denis MacShane, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Statement to the House of Commons, 23 October 2002, *Parliamentary Debates,* Commons (Westminster Hall), vol. 391, col. 90WH.

bodies are similarly disruptive. These bodies tell politically and ethically problematic stories about the 'war on terror'.

The issue of catastrophic injury is particularly salient in the Euro-American security imaginary at the moment, given the increasing use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) during the past two years of the Afghan campaign. For NATO partners, IEDs are appreciably different from the weapons and tactics seen in recent memory. IEDs are considered unique not only because of their capacity to surprise but because of their effect on human flesh. An American trauma surgeon stationed in Iraq noted,

> 'it's just hard to explain the amount of destruction with an IED…imagine shards of metal going everywhere.… Add the percussion from the blast. Then put someone inside a Bradley fighting vehicle and add fire to it and burning flesh. A person inhales and [suffers] inhalation injury.… They didn't have that in Vietnam, not all that together.'

IEDs were deployed in Iraq and in Afghanistan prior to 2009. However, since then the number of catastrophic, life-changing injury has spiked. Between 2009 and 2010, the conflict in Afghanistan generated 50 single, 42 double and 12 triple amputees among British personnel.[94] The number of amputations from IEDs in 2010 was over five times that in 2009.[95] Since 2001 there have been 209 'severe' injuries of British service personnel: amputation, loss of use of a limb or loss of sight.[96] Though the deaths of 350 personnel in Afghanistan and nearly 179 in Iraq have been enumerated and memorialized by the British government, such injuries are not publicly enumerated by the Ministry of Defence.[97] However, with medical innovation ever-evolving, it may be that in the near future more profoundly disabled soldiers live than those that die.

IEDs have gained prominence in the security imaginaries of NATO forces, despite the fact that Afghan civilian casualties have by far dominated the body count.[98] IEDs derive their power as a 'weapon of the weak' not only by physical damage to sentient flesh but through psycho-social impact. For example, though discouraged by medical personnel, it has become practice among some US units for soldiers to loosely tie tourniquets around their limbs before patrols.[99] The increased use of tourniquets, along with swifter movements to hospitals and change in operating room procedure, has been credited with saving lives. However, use of a tourniquet may also increase the chance of losing the injured limb.[100] That

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[94] Personal communication with the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen Association, January 2011.
[95] Karen McVeigh, 'British Army counts huge rise in Afghan war amputees', *The Guardian,* 30 July 2010.
[96] Personal communication with the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen Association, January 2011.
[97] BBC, 'Praise for 350th Afghan casualty Martin Bell', http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12293105, last accessed 28 January 2011. Ministry of Defence Factsheet, 'Operations in Iraq: British fatalities', http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInIraqBritishFatalities.htm, last accessed 28 January 2011. The MoD figure for Iraq includes service personnel and civilians.
[98] *The Guardian,* 'Wikileaks Afghanistan Files: every IED attack with coordinates', http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/datablog/2010/jul/26/wikileaks-afghanistan-ied-attacks, last accessed 2 February 2011.
[99] C.J. Chivers, 'In Wider War in Afghanistan, Survival Rate of Wounded Rises', *The New York Times,* 7 January 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/world/asia/08wounded.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&hp, last accessed 19 January 2011.
[100] Author correspondence with a UK-based doctor, January 2011.

IEDs have caused horrific groin injuries in addition to the loss of limbs – particularly among British soldiers whose body armour does not cover the groin – is invisible in British accounts of the Afghan war.[101] The fact that British soldiers were insufficiently equipped for the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan has been a great source of political contestation in Britain.[102]

The human-centred modern worldview makes possible the idea of a soldier-body as ultimately beholden to the liberal state (as opposed to the gods). Foucault has suggested that the soldier-body was one of the earliest sites for the working out of modern disciplinary power. The soldier became something that could be made, constructed, calculated, mastered, via the manipulation and regimentation of the soldier body, through exercise, enforcement of a strict timetable, and drilling. Comportment was to set the soldier apart; the movement of the body in relation to the weapon was to be maximally efficient. The modern soldier became more obedient as the soldier-body became more useful.[103]

As noted earlier, liberal biopolitics has secular roots, with the transformation of Church structures into the modern techniques of governmentality. The military served as an important pivot point in the modern state's borrowings from the regimented structures of monastery and convent life. The state borrowed particularly from their time-keeping and ascetic practices. Further, through the 'military dream of society', of human bodies as trained, meticulously-subordinated and docile, the modern state transformed the regime of monasteries and convents into the collective coercion of bodies (and minds) on a national scale.[104] Elaborating Foucault's point, the development of modern European militaries witnessed borrowing from the Christian milieu as well as its intense humanization and, in Weber's terms, rationalization.

As instruments of the state, solider-bodies symbolise the modern state's worldview, habitus and political objectives. They are endowed with and acted upon by state power. In this way soldier bodies symbolically produce and reproduce both the modern worldview and political settlements of their sending countries. In the European context, soldier-bodies have come to symbolize and be acted upon by secular sensibilities and political assumptions. These have come into conflict with a range of Muslim politics and sensibilities over the past decade.

For the liberal state, soldier death is ambiguous. In the liberal war imperative – 'killing to make life live' – death attaches to the enemy, rather than the soldier-as-instrument-of-the-liberal-state. However, the death of the liberal subject is not a concern for the state as it has already subsumed the soldier's political subjectivity.[105] Soldier bodies are an extension

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[101] Michael Smith, 'Scientists in scramble to devise groin protector for soldiers', *The Times (London)*, 29 November 2009.
[102] Sam Jones, 'Troops sent to Iraq without sufficient body armour, Chilcot Inquiry told: we weren't given enough time to prepare armed forces says chief Sir Jock Stirrup', The Guardian, 1 February 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/01/iraq-inquiry-body-armour, last accessed 17 January 2011.
[103] Foucault. Discipline and Punish. 139-169.
[104] Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. 169.
[105] Foucault points out that one function of the modern military regime (particularly the development of the barracks) was to protect civilians from the military – to provide control over looting, deserters and expenditure, to reassure local inhabitants and to prevent conflict with civil authorities. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 140-8.

of the biopolitical state. As instruments of state power projection, these bodies are inscribed with the global aspirations of their respective states and with the knowledge/power nexus producing and being produced by those aspirations. They are uniquely implicated in geopolitics. For all the fuss heralding the death of the soldier body in the age of the posthuman, a Palm Pilot cannot symbolize the sacred nation. States know this. The body at war or in training for war, in union with other bodies, is endowed with political potency entirely beyond the agency of the individual soldier. Soldier bodies are divested of their political subjectivity; these bodies are used to produce and reproduce the power structures of the international system. Attempts to reclaim this politically symbolic and productive power can be seen in various *refusenik* gestures.[106]

Yet, soldier death as a 'vantage point moment' can be terribly politically revealing – that the imperative of the liberal state is to serve the market not to further collective human welfare. In the human-centred, modern worldview, death is a unique vantage point, an opportunity to look back at and make sense of life. Death is not in service to the gods. Instead, individual contemplation of human existence renders death meaningful.[107] When soldiers die in service to the liberal state, that death is narrated by the state as dignified, justified and in the greater service of human freedom. Among industrial, liberal states in late modernity, incredible efforts are made to recover the bodies, in contrast to early periods in modernity where corpses were left to rot on the battlefield.[108] The idea of national sacrifice is a modern, secular interpretation of Christian notions of sacrifice. Marvin and Ingle suggest that in the Euro-American imaginary soldiers are national symbols whose bodies and rendered invisible via a secularized version of the Christian notion of a redemptive 'scapegoat'.[109]

Paradoxically, soldier bodies are both visually symbolic and easily erased. Rau has argued that it is upon death that the soldier body becomes visible. Using British examples, she suggests that the individualization of fatalities by the Ministry of Defence and, paradoxically, the valorization of heroism by charitable support groups have made this happen.[110] On one hand, for the modern state the loss or injury of the soldier-body is expected. Some bodies are considered more militarily valuable than others (i.e. senior officers, specialists). On the other hand, the dead or injured soldier body – in a body bag or a flag-covered coffin – is widely understood as symbolic of the state, as proof of the state's success or failure politically vis a vis a military campaign. Dead soldier-bodies are then displayed or hidden in accordance with the state's propaganda requirements. For example, post-Vietnam, the US has restricted images of its dead soldiers in what it calls 'human remains pouches'.[111]

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[106] Refusal by members of the Israeli Defence Forces to serve in the Palestinian territories is the most prominent current 'movement'. There are other prominent historical movements, including of US conscripts during the Vietnam War, and numerous individual gestures.
[107] Christopher Coker, *War and the Twentieth Century*
[108] Gray, *Posthuman Soldiers,* 218.
[109] Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). On the Christian notion of the scapegoat see Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
[110] Petra Rau, 'Introduction: Between Absence and Ubiquity – on the Meanings of Body-at-War', in *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010)
[111] Gusterson, *People of the Bomb,* 74.

If soldier death is politically revealing, then soldier *injury* is particularly problematic for the human-centred, biopolitical state. Injured soldiers have sacrificed something vital, but not their lives. Catastrophic soldier injury is a grey area for the liberal state, where the individual life – and body – 'counts first as a biological member of the state's population.'[112] This is exacerbated for the soldier, whose bodily integrity (and hence ability to kill efficiently) is tied to the state's global power projection. Injury leaves the soldier somewhere between the valorization that comes with (liberal) life and with death.

As with other counter-insurgency tactics used against British and US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, IEDs have tended to produce low-level but sustained casualties. Such techniques have been particularly psychologically paralyzing as they produce individualized deaths and injuries. These tactics target modern, secular, human-centred valorization of the individual body as providing security for the liberal subject. Like 'suicide' bombing, IEDs attack the liberal biopolitics.

On some, subconscious level, liberal states have attempted to fend off this attack on biopolitics, and on the secular, human-centred worldview underpinning biopolitics. British discourse has done so through the celebration of the disabled soldier liberal subject. For example, in the British public narrative amputees are most celebrated by overcoming the physical limitations of their injuries: for example, 'triple amputee makes charity parachute jump' and 'heart warming moment as triple amputee soldier takes first steps at medal parade'.[113] Though mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mBTI) and PTSD are some of the most prominent and invisible injuries of the Iraq and Afghan wars, they are raised only cautiously in political discourse. Triumph over catastrophic physical trauma is – perversely – celebrated to disguise the politics behind that trauma. Injury is thus endowed with a certain secular logic – the disabled soldier body is celebrated as vehicle of his personality and political subjectivity (not his soul). However, the reality of living with a life-altering disability tends to suggest that matters are not as settled as they seem. Arguably the liberal, secular state has not yet provided a comprehensive a dying narrative to rival religious narratives of sacrifice.

Othering, the body and war

For the liberal state, wartime bodily suffering of its soldiers can flag up the political and ethical ambiguities of its war-making. Where wars are domestically unpopular, a series of binaries are required to mask this. As the increasing use of technology has rendered bodily injury and death and warfare increasingly alien in the Euro-American imaginary, more robust masking tactics are required: 'suicide' bombers are superstitious and criminally insane, triple amputees invoke a celebration of the human spirit.

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[112] Murray, 'Thanatopolitics', 198.

[113] Ministry of Defence, Defence News, 'Triple amputee makes charity parachute jump', 3 August 2010. http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/PeopleInDefence/TripleAmputeeMakesCharityParachuteJump.htm, last accessed 31 January 2011. 'Heartwarming moment as triple amputee soldier takes first steps at medal parade,' *Small World News Service*, 9 July 2010.

In the context of the wars in Iraq and particularly Afghanistan, catastrophic soldier injuries, particularly those caused by IEDs, have become linked – though a constellation of Orientalist ideas – to the brutality of 'the insurgents'. Insurgent 'barbarism' – linked to the fact that they are Muslim, South Asian, poor, less educated and non-English speaking – resonates in, for example, in a UK context which privileges its human-centred 'rationality' and political secularity and is uncomfortable with – if not down right suspicious of – non-secular and non-Christian orientations. 'Religious' Otherness plays an important role in this complex signifying chain, securing ideas of irrationality and embodiment. This 'religious' Othering – equated with superstition – is part of a complex strategy of the unrepentant biopolitical state for its role in catastrophic soldier injury.[114]

This raises a further point. Political liberalism is sustained in part by the death of the gods. That political liberalism is secular sheds light on some of its tenets. However liberalism is simultaneously sustained by its Christian resonances. This simultaneity is possible because there are important connections between the medieval and the modern worldview.[115] Liberal political discourse justifies itself by partially echoing Christian notions of mercy, salvation, sacrifice, redemption, sin and agape. Liberal political projects – such as 'international development' and 'humanitarian intervention' – are sustained by these resonances, with the markets in the ontological/political position once occupied by the Christian God. In the modern Euro-American imaginary, the Christian notion of universal human suffering-as-redemption has been secularized: humans now need not suffer.

In this discourse, all bodies are allegedly the same and deserving of protection. However, some bodies require more intervention because they exist in states in the Global South that are irresolveably, eternally corrupt, misogynist and poor. The irony is that, 'humanitarian' rhetoric aside, some bodies – notably brown and black bodies – have been required to suffer whenever liberal states have deemed them less than human.

The narrative of catastrophic injury and amputation constructs imagined geographies of Afghanistan and Britain, shifting between the scales of the body and the state, reinforcing irreconcilable binaries between the two. One Territorial Army medic noted, comparing his Afghan tour to his hospital in the Midlands, 'to get people with their limbs blown off – double amputees – you don't see that back at home. But that is what it is like here'.[116] IEDs are held up as evidence that Afghan insurgents are uniquely brutal and backwards and therefore unrecognizable as political subjects. These are underpinned by a constellation of

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[114] For example, regarding the controversy over soldier injury compensation claims in the United Kingdom, see 'MOD criticized for soldier compensation cut', 28 July 2009, http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/uk/mod%2Bcriticised%2Bfor%2Bsoldier%2Bcompensation%2Bcut/3286557.html, last accessed 2 February 2011; Matthew Taylor and Haroon Sidiqque, 'Higher payouts for British soldiers wounded on duty', 10 February 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/10/more-compensation-for-wounded-soldiers, last accessed 2 February 2011.

[115] Caroline Bynum, 'Why all the fuss about the body? A medievalists perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, 22(1), 1995, 8.

[116] Lieutenant-Colonel Duncan Phimister from the George Eliot hospital in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, quoted in Anushka Asthana, 'Special dispatch: Why teachers, nurses and lawyers go to war: Civilians are increasingly being deployed to serve alongside regular soldiers in Afghanistan. But why do ordinary Britons – firefighters, doormen, civil servants – choose to go to war? Here, reservists based in Helmand province talk openly about the grueling emotional and physical challenges faced by 'civvies' in a combat zone', *The Observer,* 31 May 2009.

Orientalist ideas, including those related to race and to the Taliban's version of fundamentalist Islam. 'Their' atavistic religion and culture – which covers women and executes citizens for minor crimes – is held up as uniquely barbaric while 'our' aerial bombardment of civilians has a rational endpoint, undertaken with regret. In this politically ambiguous discourse of rationality and penitence, secular glorification of the intellect and the cultural echo of 'rational Christian' ethics do a lot of work. As tied to political, economic and military interests they shape the global order in powerful ways.

At the same time, bodies also collapse binaries. At the time of writing, the coroner's inquest into the 2005 'suicide' attacks in London by British Muslims with ties abroad is ongoing. Bodies at war have again made the nightly news in Britain. Bodies have been an important feature in the construction of the 'war on terror' as a boundary-free, phantasmagorical space, populated by gods and phantoms. One rescue worker testified

> Towards the middle of the carriage, there seemed to be a gap in the bodies where the bomb had gone off and created a space. I remember seeing an elderly lady sitting on the right side of the carriage. She was covered in body parts and was covered in soot. She was just sitting there looking at the bodies and the carnage all around her. She just looked at me, and I could just see the whites of her eyes.[117]

Such body narratives are de-territorializing, collapsing the geographic distance between the 'foreign' warzones of the past decade and the home territory. For example, British officials also narrated their time in Iraq as confrontation with the magical unknown. As one provincial governor put it, 'there was this tremendous sense that nothing that you saw was what it seemed in Iraq…. the canvas was huge and most of us found ourselves in the middle of pretty unfamiliar terrain, both intellectually and physically…', noting that the uncertainty felt like something out of the 1950s television show 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers'.[118]

Ambiguities within the constructs of 'suicide' bomber and amputee soldier bodies indicate that these binaries are unstable. However, the phenomenology of the body-in-war fundamentally problematises binaries between Friend and Enemy. Scarry has observed that that injury in war 'empties the body of cultural content', as injuries 'look the same' on human bodies.[119] My understanding of her point here is that it is not to attempt to universalize or depoliticize the body, but to draw our attention to the 'physiological, biological and chemical grounding of the body in nature'.[120] This reminds us that while human bodies are the sites of politics, they are also the sites of emotion and the unifying human experience of suffering. For Scarry, this point – that injuries look the same regardless of if the injured body is British or Afghan – goes some small part of the way to transcending the fundamental inaccessibility of the pain of another human being.[121]

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[117] HM Government, *Coroner's Inquest into the London Bombings of 7 July 2005*, 8 December 2010, p 11. http://7julyinquests.independent.gov.uk/hearing_transcripts/08122010am.htm, last accessed 27 January 2001.
[118] Foreign and Commonwealth Office official (based in Iraq 2003-4), interview with author, August 2008.
[119] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 118.
[120] Turner, 'The body in Western society'.
[121] For Scarry, another's pain is fundamentally inaccessible: 'pain comes unshareably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed'. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 4.

In another example of geopolitical compression on a bodily scale, in the aftermath of a 'suicide' bomb, the blood and bone fragments of both the bomber and the victims intermingle to the extent that they often cannot be separated.[122] If one of the accomplishments of modernity has been the individualization of the liberal subject – derived from universalizing, biological 'fact' and also Christian notions of Eucharistic unity – then the 'suicide' bomb dramatically explodes this notion. This intermingling of bodies metaphorically calls into question attempts by (masculine) liberal modernity to deny that humans are interconnected and mutually dependent.

In conclusion

In *Carnage and Culture*, military historian Victor Davis Hanson asks why the West has been so adept at using its civilization to kill others.[123] While I find Hanson's Clash-esque premises politically disturbing, the question is suggestive. One powerful answer to this, I suggest, are the secular and 'rational Christian' notions which underpin Western security practices. This is the deadly combination underpinning liberal politics. It is potent because it gives liberal politics – including liberal ways of war – their ethical ballast. It also entrenches them in over 1,000 years of the European imaginary. IR's current focus on political secularism blinds us to the fact that there is more at work in late modern war and maintenance of the global order than Western discomfort with the violation of these by religio-political actors. Our current IR framework does so by convincing us that these are intellectual matters. The secular sensibility is potent because it lurks in the 'infrasensible register', as Connolly puts it, in our political 'structures of feeling'. By ignoring this register, we do our study of the 'war on terror' a great injustice.

[122] Murray, *Thanatopolitics*, 207.
[123] Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise to Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).