Death by Double-Tap

(Undoing) Racial Logics in the Age of Drone Warfare

Ronak K. Kapadia

It is not just a more exhaustive reckoning with the past and present of imperialist violence that is needed but, more specifically, a non-juridical reckoning. For this, our starting point should be neither the law nor any desire for a “progressive” appropriation of the law, but the mounting dead for whom the law was either a useless means of defense or an accomplice to their murder.
—Randall Williams, The Divided World

No issue today so disturbingly illustrates the contemporary U.S. homeland security state’s wretched relation to race and imperialism than the rise of its drone strikes and “extrajudicial targeted killings” in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and beyond. The accelerated deployment of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, in U.S. military campaigns of the so-called post-War on Terror era provides an important opportunity to reflect on shifting strategies, practices, and technologies of the U.S. homeland security state as well as their effects on contemporary political and legal life. What are drones, and why does their expanded application concern scholars and activists of race, war, and empire? How does the so-called unmanned future of warfare give rise to new ways of thinking about race and racialization—in both the distant, unseen battlefields of U.S. empire abroad and the hidden-in-plain-sight theaters of undeclared war closer to home? In this chapter, I identify how contemporary drone attacks in the “Af-Pak”
borderlands region worked to destroy communal bonds among Afghan and Pakistani civilians and to what effect. I further ask how the global circulation of these weapons, and the broader aerial counterinsurgencies that they symbolize, not only sow the seeds for resentment across the “Muslim world” but also create the conditions for new communities of resistance, solidarity, and transnational affiliation in their wake.¹

By foregrounding these questions, this chapter offers both a primer on the gendered racial logics of contemporary drone violence and an intervention into the emergent “drone talk” in Western cultural criticism. To date, the drone discourse has been unwilling or unable to reckon sufficiently with the gendered and racialized figure of the Muslim and its multiple rehearsals, which, as Sohail Daulatzai rightly observes, “haunts the geographic and imaginative spaces of American empire.”² Our criticism of drone wars is impoverished without sufficient account for the livelihoods and experiences of those rendered most precarious by this mode of violence. As I will show, a more direct engagement with the racialized figure of the Muslim, one of the primary sites for the development of late modern tactics of killing and surveillance, advances a more complex portrait of the carceral, anti-Black, and colonial dimensions of the U.S. homeland security state.³

The increasing popularity of armed drones in U.S. counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts forces us to reckon with the uneven global distribution of life chances, risks, and rewards in the age of security and permanent war. A wide array of critics of late modern warfare have focused on the technoscientific dimensions of drone strikes. For instance, theorists have drawn attention to the implications of how these surveillance technologies produce “God-like vision” with video feeds from aerial platforms and how killing from a distance transforms the relation between the bomber and his targets.⁴ Others have noted the historical
legacies of modern airpower and visual surveillance across the twentieth century or honed in on the ethical questions raised by the contemporary civilian and commercial adoption of drones. What is most clear from a review of this growing literature is that the drone commentary has evolved as quickly as the technology itself. In lieu of an exhaustive summary of these findings, I choose to distill some recent insights in the following section to make visible (so as to better challenge) contemporary global circuits of U.S. imperial violence. But my chief concern in this chapter is less that the empire has new toys and more how unique aspects of these militarized technologies have transformed racialized social relations on the ground for those rendered most precarious by the buzzing beat of drones in the so-called lawless frontiers of U.S. warfare.

To illustrate this point, I focus on the controversial “double-tap” phenomenon, in which drone operators repeatedly strike a targeted terrain in quick succession, leading to a variety of dis-ordering and dehumanizing effects on the ground. The double-tap phenomenon forces an ethical quandary in which one must decide between one’s own life and the life of others in the decision to aid the wounded and to honor the dead, producing a kind of institutionalization of callousness as constitutive to drone strikes in the region. In this chapter, I illuminate how contemporary aerial warfare innovates new modes of racialization that attempt to manipulate, conflate, and destroy communal bonds among its targets, thereby further stripping away our sense of responsibility and our way of knowing each other and ourselves in times of war. And yet, even as the double-tap of drone warfare disorganizes and makes impossible previously existing forms of affective belonging, I contend that it also produces the conditions for the possibility of new affective connections and intimacies across time and space. To that end, I close with a consideration of the prospects of transnational and multiracial coalition building in the drone age and the mandate to challenge the official narratives and ethical common sense of
Washington about the conduct of global surveillance and warfare. In sum, this chapter asks how activists and scholars can expose the greater “dronification of state violence” to further make visible the systemic continuities of imperial violence between the global War on Terror and the domestic carceral state.\(^8\)

**Visualizing the Imagined Geographies of U.S. Empire**

Drones are suddenly everywhere. Like many imperial technologies perfected in the colonial laboratories of empire, these unmanned flying objects have come home to roost.\(^9\) Drones have been adopted in a variety of everyday settings beyond the U.S. military, from commercial aerial surveillance, filmmaking, sports, and photography to domestic policing, oil, gas, and mineral exploration, disaster relief, and scientific research.\(^10\) Its zeitgeist is confirmed further by news that corporate giants like Amazon, Apple, and Facebook have all made plans to roll out drones into future offerings of goods and services.\(^11\) Yet I am less concerned here with the mundane violence of consumer capital or the techno-fetish of the drone itself and more with the spectacular modes of violence that armed drones make possible as they become the centerpiece to a broader U.S. military strategy in the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa.\(^12\)

Drone weapon technologies represent the growing trend and preferred tool for U.S. military and security planners in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Pakistan.\(^13\) Whereas some UAVs are controlled remotely from locations thousands of miles away from their bombing sites (including air-conditioned command centers for global surveillance in rural areas of Colorado and Nevada), other UAVs fly reconnaissance missions without human direction at all, preprogrammed instead with flight plans and complex automation systems. Yet all drones are invested in the “power to make the faraway intimate.”\(^14\) Since at least 2004, the CIA and the U.S.
Air Force have carried out an illegal “targeted killing” program in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where people in the frontiers of violence deemed “enemies of the state” are murdered without charge or trial. The executive branch has claimed the unchecked authority to classify citizens and others on what it euphemistically terms a “disposition matrix,” a secret capture/kill database of suspected terrorists and enemy combatants developed by the Obama administration “based on secret determinations, based on secret evidence, that individuals meet a secret definition of the enemy.”¹⁵ The most widely publicized example of this form of covert military innovation is the General Atomics MQ-1 Predator drone. First conceived in the early 1990s and in flight since 1995, the Predator has been deployed by the U.S. Air Force and the CIA in combat missions over Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia, Serbia, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. The Predator drone was first deployed as part of the newly branded “global War on Terror” in late 2001 from bases in Pakistan and Uzbekistan, designed for hitting so-called high-profile targets, including “terrorist leaders” in Afghanistan. As a vital symbol for the U.S. revolution in military affairs (RMA), the Predator has come to represent the military’s technocratic aspiration for an automated, self-perpetuating future of calculated warfare in the twenty-first century.¹⁶

The CIA’s use of these highly publicized, if officially covert drone attacks and aerial surveillance campaigns has sparked immense debate among defense experts and critics alike.¹⁷ Their emergence raises questions about the ethics of civilian casualties, sovereignty and border disputes, and conventional and unconventional approaches to the waging of war.¹⁸ Mainstream critics question the accuracy of drone targeting, the legality of these extrajudicial assassinations (including President Obama’s targeted killings of U.S. citizens abroad), and the greater “collateral damage” of these bombings more generally, which are widely condemned as grave breaches of international laws of war like the Geneva Conventions.¹⁹ Publicized news accounts
have exposed the U.S.-led covert drone attacks in remote areas of northwest Pakistan since as early as 2004. The Pakistani drone strikes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Waziristan are particularly troubling given that the Pakistani government serves, at least ostensibly, as a willing partner and ally of the United States in its counterterrorism agenda, a fragile alliance that appears to be dissolving of late. This fractured security consensus is not unlike the fate of Pakistan’s own territorial integrity as the United States continues to bomb various targets along its border with Afghanistan without officially declaring war.

“Af-Pak,” as the rugged borderlands region between Afghanistan and Pakistan has come to be known within U.S. foreign policy circles, refers to a racialized state of exception. First coined by the late Richard Holbrooke, Obama’s special adviser on the region, the neologism symbolizes “not just an effort to save eight syllables. It is an attempt to indicate and imprint in our DNA the fact that there is one theater of war, straddling an ill-defined border, the Durand Line.” Holbrooke’s vision of a single battlefield of military operations to disrupt the transnational presence of al-Qaeda speaks volumes about the imagined geographies of U.S. empire. This ever-expanding map violates national sovereignty and international humanitarian law on a variety of fronts while simultaneously building on and advancing older legacies of European colonialism and racism that predate the U.S. encounter with the region altogether. “Af-Pak” today symbolizes the “lawless frontier” of lethal experimentation, a topography where, as Ian Shaw and Majed Akhter rightly observe, “uneven geo-legalities of war, state, and exception make drone warfare a reality in certain places and not others.”

The fact that certain geopolitical terrain is considered more hospitable to drone targeting than other sites begs an important question: why have drones become so popular now in the first place? While the technology has been in the works for decades, conventional explanations
suggest that drone strikes were seen as an antidote to the messiness of Bush-era detention, rendition, and interrogation practices, spectacles widely conjured by the names of disparate carceral sites like Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram, and other still secret centers of detention and misery around the globe. Military planners believed it to be easier to outright target and kill suspected terrorists than to detain and interrogate them. And yet, while some defense experts favor the use of drones for “surgical strikes” in this manner, others would still opt for the more expensive, labor- and time-intensive counterinsurgency operations seen in the Iraq and Afghanistan ground wars of the 2000s—where U.S. and allied combat forces “embed” within civilian populations in an effort to target their enemies. This so-called kinder and gentler mode of affective governance involves accessing sociocultural knowledge of the local occupied populace in an effort to shape “hearts and minds.” To date, the first seventeen years of the global War on Terror has reflected an ad hoc, flexible assemblage of biopolitical military strategies under both the Bush and Obama administrations, ranging primarily from rendition, indefinite detention, torture, and domestic surveillance in the Bush years to Obama’s steadfast “imperial commitment to cyberwar, digital surveillance, and a global ‘targeted killing’ (that is, assassination) program using both Special Forces and drones.” These tactics, as we have already witnessed, are not transforming for the better under current presidential leadership.

Finally, it is important to observe that the aerial view of the drone is particularly central to the “scopic mastery” desired by the United States as part of its RMA. The RMA is a blanket term to describe important transformations in the fantasies and trajectories of post–Cold War military sciences, which were increasingly aimed at advancing a high-tech, low-personnel vision of warfare after the fall of the Soviet Union. Drones became essential to this recalibrated vision since military and security planners imagined that they could provide a way of fighting perceived
insurgencies without public scrutiny. The goals and outcomes of this “unseen war,” however,
were dubious at best. According to visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff, the objective is to
“maintain a permanent state of crisis, rather than achieving a phantasmatic victory. In the game
context in which war is now visualized, the point is less to win than to keep playing, permanently
moving to the next level in the ultimate massively multiplayer environment.”

Drone wars perfectly encapsulate this video game context of endless warfare with its “massively
multiplayer” visualizations. The drone is further imagined in the terms of Derek Gregory as “an
assemblage of force,” because it combines “knowing (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance),
sighting (targeting in movement and in the moment), and eliminating (‘putting warheads on
foreheads’).”

Scholars of visual culture have further pointed out that the process of racialization
specifically operates through the visual targeting of suspected al-Qaeda affiliates. These
authors explore the gulf between what the drone operator sees and how she makes sense of what
or who is actually on the ground. The subjective dissonance of drone targeting underscores a
larger philosophical debate about the relationship between modern visuality, knowledge, and
warfare. Theorists have argued that visual and conceptual frames have contributed to the
manufacture and obliteration of populations as objects of knowledge and targets of war. From
these critical studies, we learn that perspectival vision is in fact constitutive to the logic of
surveillance and the materiality of war. As the eye became the privileged organ of knowledge
and authority, the power to see became equated with the power to know and to dominate. Across
the twentieth century, we see this enduring alliance between vision and war. As military fields
increasingly became reconfigured as fields of visual perception, preparations for war were
increasingly indistinguishable from preparations for making a film. As Rey Chow adds, “war
would mean the production of maximal visibility and illumination for the purpose of maximal destruction.” We might conceive of the global War on Terror, then, not only as a struggle over “oil, water, and the resources of globalization but [also quite centrally over the] control of the global image and data worlds.” Thus, rather than the invisible, stealth, precision-targeting that U.S. security planners imagine, these military operations instead have produced devastating destabilizations in the region and insecurities for diverse populations brought together conceptually and violently in the “cross hairs” of drone strikes. In the discussion that follows, I turn to an underreported aspect of drone weaponry to illuminate why drones are crucial for theorizing U.S. state violence anew.

**Double-Tap and the Disorganization of Collective Social Life**

Whereas numerous critics have focused on how the covert drone war heralds the forefront of technological innovation in the U.S. military, my primary concern in the remainder of this essay is to explore how the racial logics of drones work by disaggregating targeted Muslim populations besieged by bombs. I see this practice itself as a novel mode of racialization, which is a term scholars use to describe the process of abstraction that hierarchically ascribes social value to bodies based on intersectional forms of racial difference. Recently, lawyers and human rights activists have shed light on a particular practice of U.S. drone attacks that illuminates how war disorganizes and destroys communal bonds, namely, the “double-tap” phenomenon. A double-tap strike refers to when a Predator or Reaper drone targets a terrain multiple times with “hellfire” missiles in quick succession. There have been cases reported in northern Waziristan in late 2012, for example, where missiles of an unmanned drone slammed into a house, reducing it to shards. When villagers rushed to the scene minutes later to aid the injured, they were attacked
again by another round of fire, with an even greater number of civilian casualties in the process.\textsuperscript{35} Human rights lawyers have speculated that the double-tap phenomenon is less a military strategy and more a result of the “less-than-pinpoint-accurate technological capacity of the missiles.”\textsuperscript{36}

The “double-tap” phenomenon is alarming for a number of reasons. First, it reveals that the notion of a “surgical strike” is anything but precise. Drone proponents argue vociferously that the “bureaucratic, rational, even scientific nature of targeted killings replaces individual thought with machinic certainty.”\textsuperscript{37} The notion of a cleaner, gentler, more effective and bureaucratic form of war, which has been crucial to the public debate on drones, has been widely repudiated by numerous human rights reports and journalist accounts. An important 2012 report by legal experts at Stanford University and New York University (NYU), for instance, found that only one in fifty victims of “surgical strikes” in Pakistan were known militants.\textsuperscript{38} The U.S. military makes ambitious claims about the so-called endurance, proximity, and precision of drone operations, but we must recognize now that in twenty-first-century asymmetric warfare, the line between civilians and militants, or what the U.S. government calls “affiliates,” has been blurred to the point of oblivion.\textsuperscript{39} These enemy targets are instead racialized in relation to algorithmic calculations of imminent threat to the U.S. homeland, a bureaucratic process that targets “patterns of life” and signals the emergence of a new mode of race war.\textsuperscript{40} In Sepoy Mutiny’s estimation, “there is no clarity in determining who anyone may be and what their purported sin may be.”\textsuperscript{41} What is clear, though, is that drone killings produce untold consequences and devastation on local communities in the borderlands of Af-Pak and other militarized sites across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Second, these reports reveal that double-tap strikes have created a chilling effect on
survivors of drone-targeted terrain because they dissuade civilians from rescuing the injured or coming to aid the dead. They have also stopped emergency humanitarian workers from providing crucial and urgent relief. One organization in northern Waziristan, for example, has instituted a six-hour mandatory delay.\textsuperscript{42} Human rights reports detail countless examples of innocent civilians killed or injured when trying to rush to the aid of those injured and maimed. We should pause here to reflect on how the double-tap phenomenon freezes the basic functioning and organization of collective social life in regions targeted by drones, a mode of collective paralysis that has devastating and long-lasting effects. Legal experts have noted the impact on education, on health care, on community gatherings, and on cultural and religious practices related to burials and funerals in northern Waziristan. “Because drone strikes have targeted funerals and spaces where families have gathered to offer condolences to the deceased, they have inhibited the ability of families to hold dignified burials.”\textsuperscript{43} Key aspects of the burial process are furthermore impossible because bodies are so badly burned or torn apart as to be unidentifiable. We might speculate on the barbaric logic at work here among U.S. military planners—the civilizational ideology that those targeted by drones need not mourn their dead. This is an apt reminder that a crucial part of the logic of contemporary U.S. warfare is the racial dehumanization of its victims.

An even more troubling development related to the ongoing and ever-present fear of congregating has been the regional breakdown of the jirga system, “a community-based conflict resolution process that is fundamental to Pashtun society.”\textsuperscript{44} The Stanford and NYU report notes that the jirga is a crucial element of Pashtun legal and political life, as it provides “opportunities for community input, conflict resolution, and egalitarian decision-making. Hampering its functions could have serious implications for the communal order, especially in an area already devastated by death and destruction.”\textsuperscript{45} The targeting of community practices like the jirga,
community prayer in mosques, mourning at funerals, and wedding celebrations spells isolation for those whose lives are already rendered precarious by drone targeting. The interruption of collective ceremonies, rituals, and kinship ties is but one of many unseen, stultifying, and routinized effects of drone wars. This is part of my larger argument about the disorganizing and disaggregating effects of U.S. global counterinsurgencies and the opportunities for new communities of affiliation and transnational resistance that can respond to these practices of racial dehumanization and disorder.

Third, double-tap drone strikes have caused, perhaps predictably, a range of mental health outcomes for survivors and civilian populations. Reports testify to the experiences of posttraumatic stress disorder, stigmatization, anticipatory anxiety, and “diffuse and chronic” fear common in conflict zones, where “the buzz of a distant propeller is a constant reminder of imminent death.” In the words of one interviewee, “God knows whether they’ll strike us again or not. But they’re always surveying us, they’re always over us, and you never know when they’re going to strike and attack.” In her short documentary feature Wounds of Waziristan, journalist and scholar Madiha Tahir further details this sense of powerlessness produced by the indeterminacy of the drone: “Because drones are at a certain remove, there is a sense of uncertainty, a sense that you can’t control this. Whether it’s true or not, people feel that with militants there is some degree of control. You can negotiate. There is some cause and effect. But there is no cause and effect with drones. It’s an acute kind of trauma that is not limited to the actual attack.” The lack of cause and effect produces its own perverse calculus to encode the debilitating racial logics of drone warfare and its right to kill and to maim civilian subjects.

Fourth and finally, the “dissuasive effect” that the double-tap pattern of strikes has on first responders raises crucial moral and legal concerns. As legal experts from Stanford and NYU
report, “not only does the practice put into question the extent to which secondary strikes comply with international humanitarian law’s basic rules of distinction, proportionality, and precautions, but it also potentially violates specific legal protections for medical and humanitarian personnel, and for the wounded. As international law experts have noted, intentional strikes on first responders may constitute war crimes.” From multiple legal and ethical perspectives, then, the double-tap of the drone exponentially intensifies experiences of misery, isolation, debility, and pain in Af-Pak and beyond.

**Conclusion: Challenging the Future of U.S. Drone Warfare**

No rational response to drone proliferation appears efficacious to date. No serious debate in Washington has yet to emerge over the past two decades about the dramatic reorganization in fiscal, political, ethical, and affective priorities brought on by the buildup of the homeland security state. Despite the grotesque failures of U.S.-led counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and beyond, we might conclude that drones are here to stay and that their presence is symptomatic of the gendered racial violence and capitalist exploitation at the heart of U.S. empire. But perhaps the absolute focus on the drone confounds the larger underlying problems of the homeland security era. This weapon is the latest in a long line of technoscientific spectacles that inure us from the unseen and unsaid of contemporary U.S. imperial violence. Af-Pak presently serves as a frontier space of lethal experimentation on Muslim bodies. But we know that the technologies perfected in the distant theaters of war will soon give rise to new modes of surveillance, targeting, and elimination closer to home. News accounts already have begun to reveal the “drone creep,” and the lines between U.S. military and police forces are blurrier than ever. As Priya Kandaswamy states succinctly, “the police and
military are two faces of the same system of global repression and racism.\textsuperscript{51} Blurred lines between militarism and policing are nothing new, of course, as students of and activists within the Black Freedom movement know all too well.\textsuperscript{52} During the Cold War, for instance, global counterinsurgency tactics were perfected not only in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East but on Black, indigenous, and racialized immigrant populations in the United States as well.\textsuperscript{53} As such, when analyzing the vastly proliferating deployment of drone weaponry, we must also look to identify unlikely alliances and new communities of struggle that have emerged in response and in contestation. Despite the seeming omnipresence and permanence of the drone, I want to hold on to the idea that the spectacularly failed counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in the age of drone warfare create the conditions of possibility for new forms of solidarity, new movements, and new communities of resistance.

It seems especially urgent to refresh our political imaginations and be experimental in our tactics and strategies of resistance to both the global War on Terror and its domestic reverberations connecting to mass incarceration and police violence in the United States. In the words of Randall Williams, we need a “non-juridical reckoning” with these global circuits of U.S. state violence.\textsuperscript{54} If affect refers to the glue that coheres social relations, the U.S. drone campaign has made various forms of affective belonging difficult or impossible to sustain through its violences, abstractions, and restrictions on the movement of bodies—not least of all through the double-tap tactics detailed earlier. At the same time, the U.S. global security state also conflates multiple groups of people into “terrorist lookalike” populations and evinces Manichean Cold War–style binaries that divide the world into those who are “with us” and those who are “against us” in the global War on Terror. This dominant map of U.S. empire, characterized by its fixity, schisms, and incoherences, has produced what Patrick Deer calls “a
strategy that partitions, separates, and compartmentalizes knowledge, offering a highly seductive, militarized grid through which to interpret the world." This grid not only creates partitions and separations when imagining peoples and geographies but also attempts to produce a coherent idea of the racialized “Muslim” figure out of disparate populations of Arabs and South Asians with divergent histories of race and class oppression in the United States. According to Junaid Rana, this process of racialization is meant to construct “a visible target of state regulation and policing for consuming publics.” The great irony of this form of enemy production is that rather than celebrate the “richness of population historically forced together by conquest,” as Randy Martin notes, U.S. empire instead treats this diversity as “a menacing entanglement from which imperial might must flee.” U.S. global counterinsurgency and security interventions are therefore not only about resource extraction or control over strategic territories but also about ways “to effect a separation from unwanted attachments and attentions—precisely what is meant by terror.”

I want to insist that there are unintended and potentially valuable consequences to these drone war conflations, abstractions, and estrangements for theorizing alternatives to the prevailing frames of security and warfare. The tactics of the U.S. homeland security state have inadvertently produced new alliances between groups of people who might not have previously seen themselves in allegiance with each other or who might not have understood how they were involved in overlapping struggles against imperial policing, racialized punishment, and gendered militarism at home and abroad. An alternative map of diasporic affiliation and transnational solidarity has certainly been engendered among South Asians, Muslims, and Arabs in the United States, for instance, as a result of, and despite, the racializing practices of the global War on Terror. Thinking South Asian–Muslim–Arab concurrently thus names an alternative politics of
belonging not circumscribed by the hostile categories conjured by U.S. security as it targets populations for discipline or dispersal. Thinking comparatively about new activist formations produced in and through the global War on Terror thus refuses simply to reproduce the violences of U.S. gendered racialization, where a whole set of differences is reduced to a chain of equivalences under the sign of “Islam.” Instead, our movements benefit from drawing connections between distinct but overlapping struggles. Resistance to global surveillance and the drone war provides ample illustration of how to build forms of solidarity that connect the domestic and international contexts of U.S. war making. This is especially crucial for activists and scholars interested in tracing the links between the unprecedented U.S. domestic policing and prison expansion project that disproportionately targets working-class people of color and the newly emergent global prison archipelago that is part and parcel of the U.S. global War on Terror.

Finally, we need to challenge the ethical common sense in Washington that drones will solve our national security problems and, in so doing, that we might better expose the brutalities of late modern warfare. If our political imaginations are impoverished by the perverse calculus and prevailing logics of state security in discourses of terrorism, militarism, and war, then our mission must be to challenge the ethical common sense of U.S. state violence (founded, as it is, on perverse fantasies and ideological trajectories of settler colonialism, imperialism, cis heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism). As scholar activists committed to dismantling gendered racial domination and capitalist exploitation at the heart of U.S. empire, we should give ourselves the license to be as experimental as the state in our tactics and strategies, thereby investing in new expressions of as yet unimaginable sociality and solidarity.

In closing, this chapter has asked after the effects of the drone on the social relations of
populations destroyed by U.S. imperial warfare. If the drone manipulates, conflates, and destroys communal bonds, stripping away our sense of responsibility and our way of knowing each other and ourselves in times of war, it then also produces the conditions of possibility for imagining alliances anew. We benefit from exploring this contradictory terrain created by U.S. security wars, breaking open the imperial frames of violence to develop a more expansive account of the drone, its gendered racial logics, and its targets. To do so would be to conjure the moment when, as Judith Butler says, “war stands the chance of missing its mark.”

Ronak K. Kapadia is assistant professor of gender and women's studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of Insurgent Aesthetics of the Forever War: Art and Performance after 9/11.

Notes

1 My invocation of the “Muslim world” follows anthropologist Zareena Grewal’s assertion that “rather than a foreign region, the Muslim world is a global community of Muslim locals, both majorities and minorities who belong to the places where they live and who, in their totality, exemplify the universality of Islam.” See Grewal, Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 6–7.


3 This chapter joins the growing scholarly activist effort to expose the ideological and material links between various sites of contemporary U.S. state violence. In this chapter, I place the global concept of “homeland security” in dialogue with seemingly more domestic concepts like “mass incarceration” and “police violence.” I do so to underscore the blurring between the domestic and foreign fronts in the U.S. War on Terror and to call attention to the imaginative forms of coalitional activism that
emerged in response. I use the concept of the homeland to describe a broader constellation of interests and ideologies that extend beyond the sovereign borders of the state. Following scholars like Amy Kaplan and Alex Lubin, “the homeland” refers to a transnational space that can include urban U.S. cities and distant battlefields in the global War on Terror. Similarly, “military urbanism” refers to the militarization of urban spaces. The idea explains how Western militaries and security forces have come to perceive all urban terrain as a conflict zone inhabited by lurking shadow enemies. Thus, if war, terrorism, and security are now the grammar through which collective social life is viewed and regulated across urban spaces in the United States, how do activists and scholars begin to resist and reimagine these militarized frames of war and the manifold forms of violence enacted in their name? This is the central animating question that this piece seeks to answer. On the homeland, see Amy Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Alex Lubin, “The Disappearing Frontiers of Homeland Security,” Jadaliyya, February 26, 2013. On military urbanism, see Stephen Graham, Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism (New York: Verso, 2011).


10 In August 2016, the ACLU revealed that the Baltimore Police Department has been subjecting that city to a vast and covert apparatus of aerial surveillance—one of a number of recent instances that demonstrate how the tactics and technologies of U.S. global counterinsurgency have been adopted for domestic social control. See Jay Stanley, “Baltimore Police Secretly Running Aerial Mass Surveillance Eye in the Sky,” https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-future/baltimore-police-secretly-running-aerial-mass-surveillance-eye-sky.


12 The vastly proliferating deployment of drones should be contextualized in light of debates about the renewed importance of global counterinsurgency campaigns worldwide. Aerial bombardment is by no means a new phenomenon; its history stretches across British, French, and American occupations and late colonial wars. Recent scholarship has documented that aerial counterinsurgency was in fact invented in Iraq and the Afghanistan–Pakistan borderlands by the British Royal Air Force in the 1920s. Iraq was a target again in the early 1990s under the Saddam Hussein regime, when bombing campaigns were crucial to the U.S. Persian Gulf War. See Priya Satia, Spies in Arabia; Michael Sherry, The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); and Spencer Weart, Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).


killings. On the “disposition matrix,” see Shaw, “Predator Empire.”


21 The majority of drone attacks launched in Pakistan (with their leaders’ tacit support) during both the Bush and Obama administrations have been on Pashtun villages in North and South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the Afghan border. See the work of Worldfocus, which
has produced a devastating Google map outlining U.S.-led drone attacks in Pakistan since 2004:
http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&t=h&msa=0&msid=11392370833851641006.0
0047ca42eb2374421e4&ll=33.031693,70.587158&spn=1.611824,3.295898&z=8&source=embed.

27 Nicholas Mirzoeff, Right to Look, 21.
32 Rey Chow, Age of the World Target, 30–31. This brief discussion on vision and war is drawn from my previously published work on the performance art of Wafaa Bilal in Kapadia, “Up in the Air and On the Skin.”


37 Shaw and Akhter, “Dronification of State Violence.”


40 Shaw, Predator Empire.


42 Cavallaro et al., Living under Drones, 76.

43 Ibid., 93.

44 Ibid., 98.


47 Cavallaro et al., Living under Drones, 99.

48 Alex Pasternack, “The Story of Drones, as Told by the People Who Live under Them,” Motherboard, October 25, 2013. See also Madiha R. Tahir, “Wounds of Waziristan,”
Priya Kandaswamy, “Stop Urban Shield, Stop Violence against Our Communities,” SAMAR Magazine, September 25, 2014. We see these linkages between global War on Terror tactics and the militarization of urban U.S. policing on a number of fronts that are implicated in the world of drones. First, U.S. law enforcement has greatly expanded its use of domestic drones for surveillance. Second, drone manufacturers are also considering offering police the option of arming remote-controlled aircraft with weapons like rubber bullets, Tasers, and tear gas. Third, the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol are using Predator drones along the borders with Mexico and Canada. See ACLU Fact Sheet on “United States Department of Defense's Unmanned Systems Integrated Roadmap FY 2013–2038.”


Rana, Terrifying Muslims, 93.

Ibid.


62 Butler, Frames of War, xxx.