

Empire's Verticality: The Af/Pak Frontier, Visual Culture, and Racialization from Above

KEITH P FELDMAN

UC Berkeley, US

With the growing use of armed drones by the US homeland security state, the nexus of race, space, and visibility has developed a vector of verticality, what I call 'racialization from above', to supplement the long history of racialization on the ground, both in the United States and abroad. Taking the killing of Osama Bin Laden as a point of departure, this article considers how racialization from above transmutes the temporality of warfare through notions of pre-emption and endurance, recalibrates Orientalist imagined geography through recast concepts of proximity, and fixates on the capacity for 'precision targeting' along the borders of US imperial cartography. While doing so reveals how the raciality of the war on terror is produced through visual technologies, the article concludes by speculating briefly on how a counter-archive might enable us to see otherwise.

KEYWORDS comparative racialization, visibility, settler colonial violence, drone wars, US homeland security state, Afghanistan, Pakistan

From the original watch-tower through the anchored balloon to the reconnaissance aircraft and remote-sensing satellites, one and the same function has been indefinitely repeated, the eye's function being the function of a weapon.

— Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: Logistics of Perception*

Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared!

— Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

First of all, we often call the problem Af/Pak, as in Afghanistan Pakistan. This is 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.

— Richard Holbrooke, March 2008

Geronimo E-KIA.

— US Navy SEAL communiqué from Abbottabad, Pakistan to White House Situation Room to confirm the death of Osama Bin Laden, May 1, 2011

How should we think of the relationship between the borders of the United States as nation-state and the borders of United States as ‘homeland’? How do these borders become defined and where are they extended? How do they draw on and innovate processes of racialization, and what forms do such processes take? These types of questions remain pressing, especially given the advancement, in the name of ‘homeland security’, of a cartography of open-ended counterinsurgency in West and Central Asia, a cartography whose remains, as the ‘Geronimo’ codename for the mission to kill Osama Bin Laden attests, are the residues of a late-nineteenth century settler colonial violence resuscitated in a contemporary project of extraterritorial jurisdiction. The mission initiated by Bill Clinton in the late 1990s and intensified under the war on terror to apprehend Bin Laden, that racialized non-state actor *par excellence*, has culminated in a targeted killing on the homeland’s globalized frontier, a zone that prominent US diplomat Richard Holbrooke called the ‘ill-defined’ border between Pakistan, a supposed US ally in the war on terror, and Afghanistan, where US empire has been advancing a halting mix of counterinsurgency and ‘nation-building’. Recall George W. Bush’s pronouncement at the dawn of the Afghanistan invasion in 2001: ‘We’re steady, clear-eyed, and patient, but pretty soon we’ll have to start displaying scalps’ (quoted in Singh, 2006: 71). Almost 10 years later, there is Geronimo, enemy, killed in action.

How should we come to see this late-modern resuscitation of frontier violence, a move whose own reiterative logic is strewn across a history of US imperial warfare’s double-voiced linkage of ‘secure’ national borders and their persistent eclipse (Silliman, 2008)? On display in Bin Laden’s assassination have not been images of a mutilated body extricated from the ambiguous ‘Af/Pak’ frontier, that key site for the performance of Holbrooke’s singular ‘theater of war’. There are no ‘spider holes’ or grainy cell-phone images of death by hanging, à la Saddam Hussein after the US invasion of Iraq. Instead, in the immediate aftermath of Bin Laden’s killing, we are invited to view the widely-circulated photograph of a crowded White House Situation Room, with Barack Obama surrounded by a dozen prominent figures in his administration. They gaze at an off-camera screen whose video content we learn was supplied by feeds from both the Central Intelligence Agency’s RQ-170 ‘Sentinel’ unmanned aerial vehicle hovering several miles above the Abbottabad, Pakistan compound where Bin Laden was located and killed, and the cameras mounted on the helmets of the Navy SEAL Team 6 operatives penetrating the compound’s fortifications (see Figure 1).

In an image variously described in the blogosphere as ‘mesmerizing’ and ‘captivating’, the target of imperial retribution remains just outside the visual field, even as its presence haunts our reading. We are drawn to witness the witnessing of Bin Laden’s assassination, with its spectral performance registered in the attempt to represent the imperial state’s right to extraterritorial killing.

In this way, the Situation Room photograph frames sovereign power through the absent presence of late modern warfare’s, and indeed the homeland security state’s, constitutive frontier violence, one whose geography abruptly extended from the ‘ill-defined’ space of the Durand Line to a zone ‘deep’ in one of Pakistan’s urban regions. While this highly-mediated scene captures something new about the present — an innovation I elaborate below — the photograph likewise allows us to see how the



FIGURE 1 Pete Souza, 'Situation Room', May 1, 2011.

production of ambiguous national borders and their modes of racialization are hardly novel. Such forced ambiguity punctuates histories of US imperial sovereignty, whose contours routinely exceed the fiction of a stably-bounded nation-state. Indeed, they were drawn with typical blur in the late-nineteenth US policy to apprehend the Chiricahua Apache Geronimo inside Mexico through what historian Daniel S. Margolies (2011) calls 'elastic approaches to issues of extraterritorial jurisdiction'.

The *longue durée* of the modern colonial world system itself evidences how the geographic homology of nation-state borders promised by the Treaty of Westphalia have stubbornly refused to remain still. Instead, they have been constituted through the persistent reproduction, constellation, and contestation of borders in manifestly unstable relation to one another, an instability indexed by the infusion of the Euro-American juridical order by the 'externalized' violence of the colony and the 'internalized' circumscription of political life under transatlantic slavery and indigenous genocide (Mbembe, 2003; Mignolo, 2000; Sexton, 2010). Analyses premised on this insight are obliged to track carefully histories of imperial sovereignty's 'shifting categories and moving parts whose designated borders at any one time were not necessarily the force fields in which they operated' (Stoler, 2006: 138).

The contemporary US homeland security state has elaborated and capitalized on this instability through practices of 'ubiquitous bordering' at a variety of local, regional, and transnational scales that persistently rub against the Westphalian system (Graham, 2010: 132). In doing so, it propagates zones of differentiated inclusion and exclusion that comprise the geographic warp and weft of globalized warfare. Amy Kaplan suggests the ideological function of the term 'homeland security' itself is meant to legitimate these practices by suturing the intra-national contraction of

proper spaces and subjects of the political with the transnational expansion of US imperial sovereignty (2003: 87). For Allen Feldman, the borders of the homeland no longer function solely as barriers between nationally-defined zones, but operate instead as ‘a flexible spatial pathogenesis that shifts around the globe and can move from the exteriority of the transnational frontier into the core of the securocratic state’ (Feldman, 2004: 336). ‘In this heteronymous organization of territorial rights and claims,’ argues Achille Mbembe, ‘it makes little sense to insist on distinctions between “internal” and “external” political realms, separated by clearly demarcated boundaries’ (2003: 31–32).

This transmutation and persistent eclipse of national borders by the contemporary US homeland security state has at least two key effects. Felicitously captured in the classic phrase ‘papers, please. . .’, the ubiquity of borders generates forms of verification meant to stabilize, make legible, and manage the ineluctable plurality of a population. In doing so, they incite the truth-telling desired by the nation-state of increasingly inscrutable — and increasingly surveilled — subjects of power in sites both beyond and beneath the horizon of the national. At the same time, the extension of bordering processes outside the geography of the nation-state creates flexible biopolitical zones capable of traversing the globe, in which certain subjects — whose apogee in this case are the human figures in the [US Government] Situation Room photograph, the operators of the unmanned aerial system, the members of Navy SEAL Team 6, and, if the photograph retains its structure of address, those interpellated into its frame — are invited to occupy categories of life and wield power over the lives of others, while others are banished from sociality to the point of death. I submit that this latter figure, of life-in-death, constitutes the kernel of the raciality of the war on terror. While its genealogy emerges out of forms of settler colonial violence that hails indigenous genocide, manifest destiny, and other products of US imperial sovereignty, at its back is what Jared Sexton calls the ‘structure of gratuitous violence in which a body is rendered as flesh to be accumulated and exchanged’ — that is, the reproduction of the structure of racial slavery (2010: 38). Junaid Rana calls this the ‘fungibility of comparative racialization’, which moves swiftly in these socio-spatial processes of exchange, from the criminal to the illegal alien to the security threat to the terrorist (2011: 50–57).

Considering the production of the figure of life-in-death and its fungibility thus becomes a way to theorize the mutual constitution and effects of national and imperial race-making. While the nascent field of border studies has emphasized (though not exclusively) questions of national borders and the transnational space of US/Mexico, and American Studies has followed the interchange between North American and intercontinental imperial projects, I aim to understand how the ‘domestic’ borders of the US nation-state are transmuted by conceptions of the globalized homeland. I track how the reproduction of biopolitical ‘frontiers’ reenacts older imperial patterns that also remain connected to ‘domestic’ histories and policies of racialization that legitimate the production of targets understood through rubrics of threat, fear, and terror. I take up technologies of visibility in particular in order to contend with one of the more dramatic spectacles of the post-9/11 era: the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Building on recent scholarship in critical human geography (Elden, 2009; Graham, 2010; Gregory, 2004; Weizman, 2007), critical race theory (Goldberg, 2008; Lipsitz, 2011), and visual culture studies (Chow, 2006; Kaplan, 2011), I show how the fungibility of comparative racialization operates through a 'dynamic sociospatial process' that traverses local, national, and imperial geographies (Pulido, 2000: 13). This traffic across geographic scales has developed a vector of verticality, what I call *racialization from above*, which supplements the long history of *racialization on the ground*, whose contours have been well-documented, particularly around US/Mexico. But racialization from above accomplishes what racialization on the ground has been ill-equipped to achieve: it has contorted the temporality of warfare through notions of pre-emption and endurance, recalibrated Orientalist imagined geography through far more porous concepts of proximity that challenge received notions of state territoriality and national borders, and fixated on the mystique of 'precision targeting' in highly ambiguous structures of race and space (Kaplan, 2006). In this way, racialization from above arrays visual technologies along a vertical vector in order to supplement imperial sovereignty's practices of ubiquitous bordering on the ground. By beginning to chart this vertical vector, I consider how the war on terror's 'logistics of perception' link the sight of imperial visioning with the raciality of the war on terror, before concluding with a glimpse at a counter-archive that asks us to see these processes otherwise (Virilio, 1989).

Two vectors of racialization

What is particularly 'racial' about the contemporary US homeland security state? According to cultural theorist Jodi Melamed, the process of racialization

converts the effects of differential value-making processes into categories of difference that make it possible to order, analyze, describe, and evaluate what emerges out of force relations as the permissible content of other domains of US modernity (e.g. law, politics, economy). (forthcoming)

The paradigmatic motor for this process of conversion may remain the color-line theorized by W. E. B. Du Bois at an earlier moment of imperial terror's link with anti-blackness (Kramer, 2006). However, the mid-twentieth century break with formal white supremacy and the absorption of a nominal antiracism by the neoliberal state has given way to forms of race-making that exceed Du Bois' mapping (Melamed, 2006; Winant, 2001). That the raciality of the war on terror — its capacity to produce a fungible constellation of figures exposed to the everyday violence of life-in-death — no longer adheres to white supremacist rubrics of the color-line is among the so-called 'post-racial' era's signal achievements. The moment when the effects of racism are no longer addressed by the state as structurally unequal distributions of human value and valuelessness, and instead are seen as operating solely through the market logic of individual 'preference' and 'choice' is simultaneously the moment when the raciality of the war on terror becomes inscribed in the homeland security state's governing legal, military, and policing apparatus, and infuses its visual logics (Goldberg, 2008).

In this contemporary regime, racialization's spatial vectors illuminate and police the state's ambiguous borders in order to expose categories of embodied difference

to an interpretive grid of ‘threat’. One vector of this process has been reproduced in horizontally-defined sociospatial relationships, what I call *racialization on the ground*. Through processes of inclusion, seclusion, exclusion, and extermination, the dialectic that racializes space and spatializes race generates ‘territorializations and regionalizations . . . of life’s possibilities’ (Goldberg, 2008: 30; Lipsitz, 2011). George W. Bush succinctly put it this way, in what has become the ‘commonsensical’ imagined geography for the war on terror: ‘we are taking the fight to these terrorists with our military in Afghanistan and Iraq and beyond so we do not have to face them in the streets of our own cities.’ Bush’s geography links frontier expansion (the ‘beyond’ in excess of state sovereignty) to an imperial defense of internalized space, tidily activating a recognizable genealogy of US racialization on the ground. Histories of indigenous violence, for instance, have narrated a persistent telos that expands the boundaries of ‘civilization’ westward (Drinnon, 1980; Slotkin, 1973). The imperial construction of US national borders has drawn routinely on the legacy of the War of 1848 (Sadowski-Smith, 2008; Streeby, 2002). Flourishing walls, barriers, fences, and other assorted passage-points dramatize a form of territorial sovereignty increasingly on the wane (Brown, 2010). And the ‘carceral continuum’ that structures US regimes of confinement transfers bodies from the space of the slave plantation through cartographies of Jim Crow and the urban ghetto to the largest and most racially-stratified prison system in human history (Alexander, 2010; Gilmore, 2007; Wacquant, 2002).

Likewise, empire’s imagined geographies fold geographic distance into Orientalist hierarchies of human value (Gregory, 2004; Said, 1979). Recent scholarship in cultural geography has extended this insight to map the racialized logistics of perception that prepare soldiers for counterinsurgency deployments ‘on the ground’ of targeted cities resolutely not, or not quite, ‘our own’ (Gregory, 2008). What Mahmood Mamdani has usefully termed ‘culture talk’ supplements the waning of white supremacy with instrumentalized ‘cultural’ content deployed at checkpoints and border-crossings to submit ‘cultural’ difference to an interpretive grid of threat (Mamdani, 2004; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 21). This ‘culturalization’ of counterinsurgency’s day-to-day and face-to-face encounters narrows the contours of observable human action into categories of threat infused with Orientalist frameworks (Davis, 2010).

Under contemporary regimes of homeland security, racialization on the ground has been supplemented by a differentially-embodied vertical vector of racialization, what I call *racialization from above*. This ‘politics of verticality’ leaves behind the strategic outposts of the border crossing, the fence, the check point, the guard tower, the high ground, and the hilltop as it heads skyward (Weizman, 2007). A particularly prominent technology of racialization from above has been condensed in the assemblage of aerial surveillance, policing, and state-sanctioned killing known as the unmanned aircraft system (UAS). By fusing visibility, pre-emption, and a disregard for territorial sovereignty, unmanned aerial systems have become among the most popular technologies of the homeland security state. While more than 40 countries have developed UAS capacities in the past hundred years, the last decade has seen massive growth in these machines of death-dealing, with scholars and policy-makers predicting widespread expansion in the years ahead. Under the auspices of security, they have been deployed across police, surveillance, and military theaters. While the ‘screening’ of warfare is intimately linked to technological developments in what

James Der Derian calls the ‘military–industrial–media–entertainment network’, assuming that unmanned aerial systems leave either the human or territory behind when they head skyward misses the centrality of visual perception so important to racialization from above (Der Derian, 2001). As Derek Gregory has recently explicated, a network of over 180 people are involved in any single mission, including ‘pilots’, ‘sensor’ operators, mission controllers, senior commanders, intelligence officers, military lawyers, data analysts, and image technicians — as well as those military personnel ‘in theater’ (in press). Many of these actors train their gaze on a collage of video screens whose content is generated by infrared and daylight color TV cameras, satellite mappings, and laser rangefinders. This ‘human element’, the military emphasizes, ‘is at the core of the overall system’ (*Eyes of the Army*, 2010: 9).

As with all racial geographies, the temporal trails quietly alongside the spatial. Boundaries between civilization and barbarism, whiteness and non-whiteness, human and inhuman, are buttressed by asynchronous and even extra-temporal (out of time) temporalities whose past-tense grammar limns the elsewhere of racialized difference. Racial naturalism and racial historicism are the most notable forms here, differentiating populations based upon a highly-constructed framing of a past-tense relation to present political, cultural, and ontological norms (Goldberg, 2002). US empire’s liberal ideologies — of the ‘white man’s burden’ at the turn of the twentieth century, the ‘development’ and ‘modernization’ projects at mid-century, the color-blind arguments at century’s end, and the human rights strains in the war on terror — all hinge on such notions of history’s waiting room and its varied racialized exclusions (McAlister, 2001; Mills, 1997; Murphy, 2010; Singh, 2006). Under the homeland security state, however, the waiting room has become infiltrated by threat and risk. To address this, racialization from above weaves permanently temporary observation into permanently temporary warfare, with ‘endurance’ its organizing chronos (Weizman, 2007). A future anterior grammar of pre-emption provides the temporal frame for the raciality of the war on terror, whose substantial differentiation from earlier forms of colonial warfare — where accumulation by dispossession was accomplished through extraterritorial conquest and settlement from without — brings to bear geographic ambiguities made sensible only through preventing what ‘will have been’ (Goldberg, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Pease, 2009). The war on terror seizes on that which appears as imminent, as probable, as possible. While questions of territorial sovereignty animate the predictable rhythm of oscillating troop deployments and withdrawals, they remain irresolvable when the horizon of war-making is always-already marked by an open-ended and indefinite futurity.

Visualizing the ‘human element’

How is this vertical vector of racialization produced and perceived? Data on the increasing proliferation of UAS begins to address this question. In 2010, for instance, the US Army published *Eyes of the Army*, a document premised on the widely-held idea that ‘the global security environment is more ambiguous and unpredictable than in the past’. ‘Future operations [of UAS]’, we are foretold, ‘will likely span the spectrum of conflict from peacekeeping operations to counterinsurgency to major combat’

(*Eyes of the Army*, 2010: 19). This premise underwrote the exponential growth of UAS in the last decade. Prior to 2001, the Department of Defense inventoried approximately 50 drones; as of October 2009, DoD counted more than 6800 in its arsenal, with appropriations for UAS procurement, research, testing, and evaluation above \$20 billion in recent years. About 6200 of these were small systems (handheld, carried in backpacks, launched by catapult, etc.), while almost 500, including the popular Predator and Reaper systems, required significant training, maintenance, and technology to operate. UAS growth has happened with such alacrity that, according to a Government Accountability Office report, training time for operators was being greatly reduced; the DoD was running out of ground space to maintain and store the vehicles; and the regulation by the Federal Aviation Administration of national airspace presented obstacles for where training missions could be run. Since airspace above missions in Afghanistan and Iraq has been less regulated, trainings are increasingly completed ‘in theater’ (US Government Accountability Office, 2010).

A variety of geographic sites are yoked together through the deployment of deadly drones, each with their own rubrics of proximity. Given that drones traverse space at speeds slower than other aerial materiel, they are launched by operators in close range to targets from facilities ‘in theater’. Once takeoff has been achieved, control is ceded to operators based in the United States, who are then responsible for directing navigation, targeting, and killing technologies. Video feeds and communication technologies link these operators to CENTCOM’s Combined Air and Space Operations Center in Qatar and Langley Air Force Base in Virginia (Gregory, in press). Over one dozen Army installations in the US carry out UAS missions, with a coordinating center at Fort Rucker, Alabama. In December 2010, these squadrons logged their millionth hour piloting drones above Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2012, the Army plans to train over 2000 operators, maintenance experts, and squadron leaders. US Air Force systems are even more substantial, with squadrons managed at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico and Creech Air Force Base in Southern Nevada, which was designated a ‘center for excellence’ to coordinate concepts, training, tactics, and procedural solutions across all branches of the military. Tonopah Test Range Airport in Nevada services the RQ-170 Sentinels. Air National Guard squadrons fly Predators and Reapers out of Texas, North Dakota, California, and Arizona. Fort Huachaca in Arizona also supports reconnaissance along the US–Mexico border and, increasingly, in the Mexican interior. Drone activity here complements other enforcement measures on the ground, such as the build-up of law enforcement officers, the erection of fences and walls, including virtual fencing, and the implementation of various means of surveillance at border crossings. In this way, drones ‘secure borders’ against a constructed simultaneity of drug and arms trafficking, ‘illegal’ labor migration, and terrorism. In September 2010, as a complement to these DoD ‘domestic’ operations, the Department of Homeland Security announced it had deployed UAS to patrol the Southwest border as well, ‘from the El Centro Sector in California all the way to the Gulf of Mexico in Texas’. DHS also received FAA clearance to run UAS surveillance from the Lake-of-the-Woods region of Minnesota to Spokane, Washington in order to patrol the US border with Canada.

The DHS program was initiated in 2004 using the popular Hunter and Hermes drone systems. The Hunter was produced jointly by the US firm Northrop Grumman

and Israel Aircraft Industries, or IAI, one of the primary UAS producers in Israel. Elbit Systems, the largest private security company in Israel, builds the Hermes, which is also among the most popular UAS packages for Britain's Ministry of Defence. (Elbit provided a suite of surveillance technologies at the US–Mexico border that had been developed in conjunction with the Israeli wall snaking through the West Bank.) Battle-tested in the invasions of Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2009, the Hermes routinely runs surveillance over the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Since 2001, this dense transfer of technologies of militarized perception between the US homeland security state and an Israeli occupation regime that blurs internal and external borders has been routed routinely through state, military, and cultural production, even as it builds on a larger genealogy linking the Israeli state to the raciality of US imperial formation (Graham, 2010; Gregory, 2004; McAlister, 2001). In this way, the motility of the US war on terror's geography brings the Israeli 'security threat', the 'illegal', and the 'terrorist' into its ambit.

The most widely discussed and debated, and least transparent, UAS program is run by the US Central Intelligence Agency. Initially developed as a reconnaissance-gathering operation, in 2002 the Bush Administration authorized the weaponized use of Predators, first pursuing 'high-level targets' in Sana'a, Yemen. Operators are based in Langley, Virginia and, until May 2011, were launching and recovering aircraft out of the Shamsi Air Field in the Southwest Pakistan province of Balochistan. In the wake of the Bin Laden assassination, under pressure from the Pakistani regime, these more localized outposts were moved to the Afghan side of the Durand Line, though missions are still routinely conducted in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas of North and South Waziristan. This 'frontier zone' is a key imagined geography for the neologism 'Af/Pak', revealing precisely the homeland security state's investment in enacting and legitimating violence on sovereignty's ambiguous borders. The New America Foundation, which documents drone attacks in Pakistan, enumerated 192 deadly strikes from the time Obama was inaugurated in January 2009 until Bin Laden's assassination at the beginning of May 2011, a major advance on the Bush administration, who launched 44.

Not only are these geographies of warfare contorting any simple distinction between 'domestic homefront' and 'foreign battlefield' or national borders and zones of US geopolitical influence in Asia, but concepts of sovereignty within the territorial borders of the US have become highly ambiguous. As recent legal scholars have argued, the spatio-temporal distinctions between civilian and combatant within the US are becoming increasingly blurred. 'Even if they are sitting in Langley,' writes Gary Solis, 'the CIA pilots are civilians violating the requirement of distinction, a core concept of armed conflict' (2010). Further, who maintains and regulates the US national airspace, and how, has become increasingly contested, with one commentator describing the national airspace as nothing less than 'an aeronautical Wild West' (Vacek, 2010: 675). By the end of 2010, the Federal Aviation Administration counted approximately 50 US companies, universities, and government agencies engaged in designing and producing more than 150 types of UAS. The FAA is tasked with certifying individual applications for use of UAS in the national airspace through granting a Certificate of Waiver or Authorization (COA) to public entities like local and state law enforcement, the Federal security apparatus, and research institutions like universities. At the end of 2010, there were 273 active COAs, with application and

approval rates increasing exponentially in the last several years. A multi-agency task force that links the FAA to NASA, DHS, and DoD has emerged to streamline and integrate a policy for expanding accessibility to the US national airspace. This group sees UAS as the most likely kind of aerial operations to increase in the coming decade, particularly to be used by local and state law enforcement; the police departments of Houston and Miami have already begun integrating UAS into their arsenal, and a broad swath of North Dakota's airspace is being considered for UAS approval.

Understanding the outline of UAS technologies across increasingly militarized zones of US dominance returns us to the task of seizing on the centrality of vision lodged in the raciality of the war on terror. The 'way of seeing' proffered by the UAS is framing how we come to see US border-zones broadly construed. Commentators since at least Paul Virilio have linked these vertical technologies with cultures of war, though few have gauged these technologies' racializing force. As Judith Butler notes, 'there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation' (2009: 29). Nicholas Mirzoeff has linked the rule of the eye to imperial culture, with sight functioning as the paramount modern sense through which techniques of dominance have been understood. 'As sovereign, visuality envisages a top-down view of the world in which only it can see what is to be done. As governance, visuality trains and commodifies vision to acculturate to the prevailing mode of production' (Mirzoeff, 2009: 1741). Commentators since at least Paul Virilio have linked vertical technologies of visuality with cultures of war, though few have gauged these technologies' racializing force. The First Gulf War was notable for its widespread hyper-mediation of warfare, romancing the precision technologies of visual representation like the digitized map, the radar screen, and the night vision scope (Kaplan, 2006). Images from cameras appended to smart bombs, missiles, and other materiel became so much fodder for the ascendant 24-hour news cycle of cable television (Baudrillard, 1995; Sturken, 1997). In the case of UAS specifically, Gregory has argued that the 'scopic regime' produced by drones is structured by 'a military apparatus and political technology that viscerally immerses physically remote operators in combat and reinforces their sense of communion with troops on the ground' (in press). It 'renders "our" space familiar even in "their" space — which remains obdurately Other' (Gregory, in press).

Intensified as part of the raciality of the war on terror is its peculiarly 'Muslim' target. Since the time of the Spanish Inquisition, as Junaid Rana reminds us, processes of Muslim racialization have invested the visual with a heightened truth-regime meant to extract the purported core identity of its racial object through sustained visual scrutiny. The kernel of truth embodied in the 'Islamist' or 'radical fundamentalist' or 'Jihadi' has required intensified forms of seeing that collapse sartorial, physiognomic, and behavioral signifiers into a racial threat. 'Profiling the racialized Muslim,' writes Rana, 'means imagining levels of terror potential intertwined as fields of visible identity' (2011: 54). The identification of such a threat draws on the broader visual register of racialization, whose dialectical relationship was captured in Frantz Fanon's signal phrase describing race-making's colonial interpellation: 'Look, a Negro; I'm scared!' This practice of hailing, according to Fanon, deploys sight as the primary racial technology to lock a subject in place and force its ontology into a terrifying relation to white supremacy.

In this way, the consolidation of visuality's regime of truth as a sign of verification under modernity resuscitates the fantasy of 'precision' structuring the visual logic of Muslim racialization. The fungible figures of threat that give the raciality of the war on terror its coherence are exposed to the open-ended duration of targeted observation and perpetual video feeds — creating a video archive that routinely exceeds the capacity of the military to process. These fantasies of logistical precision become all the more valued in those sites like 'Af/Pak', whose long history of ambiguous sovereignty is mirrored in the drones being deployed with little recourse to any stably-defined borders of the US homeland security state. Even as Al Qaeda's deterritorialized organizational structure has propped up the legitimacy narrative necessary for an extraterritorial logic of counterinsurgency, the genealogy of North and South Waziristan's unruly relation to sovereignty proves a useful object of imperial violence. The very grounded contingencies of the region — its 'inhuman' mountainous topography and harsh weather conditions — have been easily and quite literally overcome by the eye of the unmanned aerial vehicles.

Returning to the grounds of 'Indian country'

Designating the operation to apprehend Bin Laden with the codename 'Geronimo' reveals how certain parts of the globe have been envisioned at the frontier of the US homeland. It is well worth recalling that the Apache warrior, whose name uncannily returns in the present, utilized porous borders between Arizona and Mexico to evade capture, even as the increasingly complex technologies of policing and surveillance devised by those sovereign powers and legitimized by their pursuit were extended into wider social fields, and upon whose incarceration hinged the temporal close of the Indian Wars (Margolies, 2011; Sadowski-Smith, 2008). Likewise, the colonial residues sedimented in the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan, drawn in the late 1890s to demarcate the border of British rule in the region, and where Bin Laden was presumed to reside, has generated a profound geopolitical ambiguity whose own radical porosity underwrites the legitimating logic to expand the geographical zone of US imperial violence (Gregory, 2011). That the Bin Laden operation was completed outside the Waziristan provinces and instead within a mid-sized city whose jurisdiction falls comfortably under the Pakistani state suggests that the bounds of this kind of violence have likewise remained porous. And that this city is called Abbottabad, named after its founder, British Major James Abbott in 1853, circles us back to another genealogy of imperial intervention, administration, and regulation.

Even as the practices of racialization from above have remained in shadows cast across the Durand Line, to remediate the condition of Bin Laden's own shadowy existence, the Geronimo operation involved bringing back to earth the veracity of life-in-death. Racialization from above was accomplished through a constellation of 'pattern of life' data that could construct a spectral version of Bin Laden's identity, whose corporeality evaded capture. According to media accounts, his presence in the Abbottabad compound was never completely visually verified. Rather, imaging data generated by the Sentinel drone flying several miles overhead and operated out of Langley and Shamsi Airfield suggested there was a resident whose physical size and stature was comparable to Bin Laden's. Yet given the widespread narrative of Bin

Laden's capacity to wield control over the circulation of his visibility, such 'partial' imaging was not permitted to enter the war on terror's visual archive. Something more, more real, more grounded, was required (Adelman, 2011).

A strange symmetry has obtained between the spectacularized performance of violence in the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Towers and the subsequent proliferation of staged images of bodies at war: George W. Bush's 'Mission Accomplished' tableau of May 1, 2003 off the coast of San Diego, the tearing down of the Saddam statue in Central Baghdad, the staged torture photographs at Abu Ghraib, the disheveled portraits of Saddam and Khaled Sheikh Mohammed (Kaplan, 2011). In the case of the Geronimo operation, according to news reports, the Obama administration ruled out a Hellfire missile strike because the intensity of destruction would not only destroy what was presumed to be a 'treasure trove' of intelligence about the inner workings of Al-Qaeda, but the body of Bin Laden itself would become unrecognizable as such, replaced instead by yet another screened image from the air. The rationale for deploying Navy SEAL Team 6 was to place the 'human element' in close contact with its target and capture the image of Bin Laden on camera, and therefore have the option of adding to this archive.

In this way, a different kind of 'human' encounter was required, needing a strategy of unmediated proximity whose 'rush to the intimate' could adequately respond to 9/11's wound of punctured domesticity (Gregory, 2008; Kaplan 2003). Members of Navy SEAL Team 6 wore night-vision contact lenses, 'cat vision', as well as video cameras that reportedly relayed images to the Situation Room. There was, after all, a lot to see. But unlike much of the war on terror's visual archive, the video feeds whose collage was screened in the Situation Room have to date remained unseen. Who sighted the target through guns and cameras remains obscured by a discourse of homeland security, as are the images captured by the cameras themselves. The post-mortem images of Bin Laden himself have received nominal, if highly-restricted, circulation. After a brief public disagreement inside the Obama administration, the CIA made available a portfolio of photographs to select members of Congress, who then proceeded to release statements verifying the existence of the photographs, that they unquestionably contained images of Bin Laden, and also, importantly, that such visual verification was strangely unnecessary. The ability of sovereign power to point to the existence of a visual archive, and hence its truth, without making it visibly seen reproduces the flickering dance of light and shadow that remains an effect of racialization from above.

Standing in for a 'scalp on display' is the photograph of the White House Situation Room, taken by the official White House photographer Pete Souza and published on the White House's Flickr photostream, itself lauded as an innovation in executive transparency. We come to know the death of Bin Laden through its absent presence, that just outside the frame he will have been executed. In this 'mesmerizing', 'captivating' image, we are asked to identify with the sovereign power of observation. Each gaze is focused on a singular object just outside of the frame, with the exception of Brigadier General Marshall Webb (whose eyes are glued to his laptop). This concentrated line of sight evokes the unwavering commitment to apprehend Bin Laden, a distinctive feature of the administration's war policy. The out-of-frame flat-screen monitor collaged with visual data contrasts with the blank laptop computers

positioned in front of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Necks crane from the rear of the room for an unobstructed view. Secretary Gates folds his arms across his chest, and while Vice President Joe Biden reclines slightly and watches with the calm demeanor of experience, Obama leans forward with a stare whose intensity was rarely captured in photos. Lips are tightly pursed, save Clinton's. She has covered her mouth with her hand in what could be called a look of astonishment, dismay, or at least concern. Yet when asked, Clinton says she has 'absolutely no idea' what was on screen during that particular moment; she was 'somewhat sheepishly concerned that it was my preventing one of my early spring allergic coughs. So it may have no great meaning whatsoever.' The Situation Room photograph in this way focuses solely on the bodies of the observers. It calibrates our identification with the sovereign subject for whom the execution provides legitimacy, whose variegated affective response is meant, like Clinton's remark, to be rendered meaningless, and whose violence remains obfuscated by a fiction of embodied disembodiment.

While this paper has been interested in arresting precisely such a fiction, what remains is training ourselves to see otherwise. In this mode, one entry point might be the specter of lynching photography in the raciality of the war on terror, with its deft concatenation of anti-blackness and colonial violence. The prolific archive of torture images produced at Abu Ghraib activated this genealogical and resolutely relational way of seeing, revealing the mutilated body's double performance for both the US military personnel and the viewers of the photographs themselves. In those photos the embodied objects and tactics of imperial violence are placed in full view, while the observing subject remains abstracted outside the frame (Butler, 2009; Puar, 2007; Razack, 2008). Rather than consign these images to the externalized logics of aberration and exception, scholars in critical prison studies remind us that such hyper-visualized scenes of captivity have as their condition of possibility the 'nonscenes' of torture that structure the everyday lives of people rounded up by the US carceral regime (Rodriguez, 2006).

A different kind of pedagogy is achieved through the remarkable visual art of Ken Gonzales-Day. As a cultural historian, Gonzales-Day assembled a large collection of photographs and postcards from scenes of lynching that became crucial evidence for his landmark research on racial technologies of violence in the western United States. In *Lynching in the West*, Gonzales-Day comprehensively documents how the 350 instances of lynching in California between 1850 and 1935, particularly of Native, Mexican, and Chinese men, were inextricably linked to the expanding borders of US sovereign power. Inspired by the groundbreaking work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the NAACP to document black lynchings, Gonzales-Day reconstructs the embodied nuance of human particularity otherwise lost in glosses of imperial culture. Their virtual erasure from national histories of racial violence in the borderlands, he argues, was enabled in part by a tacit refusal to track the workings of comparative racialization as it labored to both consolidate and persistently exceed the contours of the national (Gonzales-Day, 2006). As a visual artist, Gonzales-Day reproduced and displayed many of these images in museum installations, only now with the tortured bodies withdrawn from view, literally expunging their presence from the frame. The



FIGURE 2 Ken Gonzales-Day, *der Wild West Show*, 2006, 3.8 x 6 inches, Lightjet mounted to cardstock. *Erased Lynching* [end italics] series.

result, entitled *Erased Lynching*, foregrounds the site and scene of lynching where, in the installation space, the viewer is himself folded into the scene. Gonzales-Day calls the project ‘a conceptual gesture intended to direct the viewer’s attention, not upon the lifeless body of the lynch victim, but upon the mechanisms of lynching themselves’ (Gonzales-Day, (n.d.)). (See Figures 2 and 3.)

In a way, the stakes animating my analysis of the Situation Room photograph are to develop a perspective that can see the contemporaneity of erasure otherwise, to account for the ways mechanisms of life-in-death produced by the homeland security state have become articulated to vertical technologies of embodied disembodiment. How might we contextualize, document, and disrupt this articulation, a move performed so evocatively by Gonzales-Day vis-a-vis racialization on the ground? By the time you read this, if the scholars and the military planners and the pundits are right, the locations where unmanned aerial systems yoke visibility and life-in-death will have been contorted still further. Indeed, since I began writing this article in Spring 2011, racialization from above has expanded and envisioned the borders of the US homeland in Yemen, Libya, and Somalia. Even as many of the recent journalistic accounts of drones remain enthralled by those concepts of endurance, proximity, and precision that give form to racialization from above, *Erased Lynching* brings us back to the firmament on which such violence is appended and apprehended. It demands an accounting of the bodies that appear and disappear before our eyes at blistering speed. Perhaps in such an accounting we might grasp a momentary antidote to an archive whose tempo is complicit with the future anterior of pre-emptive war.



FIGURE 3 *The Wonder Gaze (St James Park)*, 2008, *Phantom Sightings*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 10 x 14 x 30 feet (*Erased Lynching* series is visible on far wall).

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Notes on contributor

Keith P. Feldman is an assistant professor of Comparative Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He has published in a variety of scholarly journals, including *CR: New Centennial Review*, *MELUS*, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Postmodern Culture*, *Theory and Event*, and *Antipode*. He is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Special Relationships: Israel, Palestine, and US Imperial Culture*.

Correspondence to: Keith P. Feldman, Assistant Professor, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 584 Barrows Hall, MC 2570, Berkeley, CA 94720-2570, USA. Email: kpfeldman@berkeley.edu