LIFE IN THE AGE OF DRONE WARFARE

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THE CONTAINMENT ZONE

MADIHA TAHIR

WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN the frontier in British India had been “swallowed up in the interior,” explained George Nathaniel Curzon, the former British Viceroy of India (1898–1905) during a lecture on frontiers in 1907. Speaking of the British Indian Frontier, Curzon explained that “the title has passed, with the geographical fact which it represents, to the new North-West Frontier Province.” In present-day Pakistan, that province has now been renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), but the designation of “frontier” still lingers on its outer edges across a narrow territory along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, formally known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Since 2004, this territory has been the site of the most sustained American bombing by armed drones.

Hardly self-evident ontological facts, the frontier and its other, the sovereign nation-state, are co-constructed. If borders are cartographic lines dividing sovereign states, frontiers are zones with depth, ambiguously marked spaces that ebb and flow with the political tides. Borders imply the consonance of nation, state, and territory as a permanent artifact; frontiers are subject to flexible, experimental governance, even extinguishment, as Curzon suggests. At the turn of the twentieth century, this “imaginative geography” resulted in a policy of imperial frontier policing that exposed the targeted populations to particular forms of confinement, bombardment, and physical force as it aimed, alternately, to deter and to persuade subjects in order to maintain control. Beginning in 1915, the aircraft became part of the apparatus of what would be called “air control” or “air policing” in the British Indian Frontier, with independent air raids deployed in 1917. The first sustained bombing campaign in Waziristan and the North-West Frontier began in 1919 in a bid to quell rebellion, and it was part of a broader development of the use of aircraft to police not only the North-West Frontier but also Somaliland, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Yemen, Egypt, and elsewhere.

To rationalize the bombing of villages and towns as an effective, even humane, method of control, air policing drew upon racialized cultural justifications. Today, the official discourse on drone bombardment is usually shorn of explicitly racist tropes. Yet the idea that certain territories are somehow peculiar, inscrutable, and essentially lawless continues to circulate in the popular milieu, allowing President Barack Obama to claim special sanction for the actions of American troops because, as he puts it, “a sole reliance on law enforcement in territories that have no functioning police or security services—and indeed have no functioning law”—does not offer a “moral safe harbor.” Thus, it may not be so much that war is transforming into policing (aided by the drone) as it is that U.S. empire now returns to frontiers with a logic of violence that has historically been deemed appropriate for such territory. Indeed, the master code of the “war on terror” is not law but culture, embodied in the oft-repeated refrain that “they hate our way of life.”

This is evident in Pakistan where drones bomb entirely within FATA, a territory that is administered through colonial-era regulations grounded in essentialist notions of preserving “native” custom. In other words, drone bombing is intrinsically tied to techniques of governance on the ground. These techniques format, enable, and shape drone bombardment by organizing and arranging the spatial order. While much academic work has usefully interrogated the construction of targets, the development of the notion of collateral damage, the visual regimes of drone bombardment, the algorithmic rationality of strikes, and other related issues, it has had less to say about how governance on the ground contributes to the apparatus of drone bombardment. Yet, without a particular arrangement on the ground, the drone apparatus cannot function as it does.

In what follows, I map the spatialization of FATA by the Pakistani security state. To produce the Tribal Areas as available for overwhelming force requires considerable effort on the ground. I begin by sketching the spatial and administrative organization of FATA, then turn to some of the forms of violence to which it gives rise. I conclude by proposing a reconceptualization of the spatial order of the Tribal Areas.
The Spatial Order

In the years leading up to independence, British rule oscillated across a range of border policies in the North-West Frontier as it attempted to establish a buffer zone between British India and Afghanistan to its west while quelling rebellions in that territory and extending indirect rule. The latter proceeded through colonial governance that claimed to leave cultural practices intact even as it hollowed out local customs and institutions and operationalized them as tactics of rule. In the frontier, this included the development of a system of monetary allowances, bribes, and collective fines on tribes; the identification of local leaders or maliks who could be tied to imperial rule through payments; the transformation of a collective local practice of the jirga into an administrative institution; and, finally, the establishment of militias and native security forces drawn from the tribes themselves. Political officers prided themselves on their cultural knowledge and connections with the tribes. Yet, when this knowledge failed them, the consequences could be harsh for the Tribal Areas. When the Afghan king, Amanullah Khan, invaded in 1919, the native militia system constructed by the British fell apart with many of the recruits joining the Afghan regulars. The British army moved into Waziristan, and successive rebellions were suppressed with increasing use of air bombing campaigns. Although imperial officers generally explained the uprisings as the religious fanaticism of the tribes, the agitations were often driven by more worldly concerns. In 1922, the editors of the newspaper Al-Mujahid decried how the land had been “cut to pieces” by roads, military posts, and camps, suggesting that a mobilizing concern centered on the threat of enclosure. By 1939 Major General Charles Gwynn, a British officer who penned the manual Imperial Policing, could write of the North-West Frontier:

Since the policy of maintaining a permanent garrison in the area, and of constructing roads through it, has been adopted, operations, whatever their scale, have acquired essentially a policing character. For although the administrative frontier has not been extended to include Waziristan, we exercise a more direct measure of control than formerly with machinery for maintaining order in normal times, the Army and Air Force giving assistance only on special occasions. Broadly speaking, political control is exercised through the tribal headmen, paid, in addition to other allowances, to maintain irregular forces of their own for which arms are supplied by us. These “Khassadars” are responsible for the safety of the roads and for keeping the turbulent elements of the tribes in order. But the political Resident has also under his own authority a force of levies commanded by British officers—the Tochi and South Waziristan Scouts recruited from border tribes—who to all intents and purposes are a military police.

The system that Gwynn describes was largely maintained after independence. Even though Pakistan withdrew its forces in 1947, it reacted to uprisings in the area much as the British had. When the formidable anticlonial rebel Mirza Ali Khan, better known as the Faqir of Ipi, who had led several campaigns against the British, attacked outposts in Datta Khel, North Waziristan, and raised a demand for an independent state for ethnic Pashtuns, the Pakistan Air Force bombed the lashkar.

The FATA is today organized into seven units known as “agencies,” two of which—North Waziristan and South Waziristan—have been the site of the heaviest drone bombardment. Additionally, there are six “frontier regions,” areas that provide a buffer between the Tribal Areas and what are called the “settled areas” of Pakistan, namely the country’s four provinces. This slim band of territory running along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is a space for experimental governance, instrumentalized for the security state’s various aims, sometimes in concert with the United States. During the Cold War, it became a staging ground for raising the mujahideen for interventions into Kashmir and Afghanistan, the latter a critical site for the American effort against the Soviet Union. The Pakistan military’s “strategic depth” policy in Afghanistan continues to necessitate the use of FATA as a securitized zone through and on which overwhelming violence can be enacted. All of this has meant that the Tribal Areas are administered through strategic forms of regulated enclosures enabled by draconian legislation, a configuration of security forces, and, when necessary, temporal and spatial closure—a system that, paradoxically, reproduces itself by claiming to preserve the autonomy of the tribes. According to the government: “The tribes regulate their own affairs in accordance with customary rules and unwritten codes, characterized by collective responsibility for the actions of individual tribemen [sic] and territorial responsibility for the area under their control. The government functions through local-level tribal intermediaries i.e. Maliks (representatives of the tribes) and Lungi-holders (representatives of sub-tribes or clans), who are influential members of their respective clan.
or tribe." Governance, in other words, proceeds under the sign of “culture.” It is a system enabled by the incorporation of FATA into Pakistan through the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR). Under the FCR, a federally appointed political agent governs each agency, wielding extraordinary executive, administrative, and judicial power with no substantive accountability. The FCR allow for collective punishment of entire families or even tribes on mere suspicion, as well as arbitrary detention, economic blockades, destruction of property, and even imprisonment of children. Adult franchise was extended to the Tribal Areas in 1996, and political parties have only been allowed to function since the last general elections in 2013. Even though FATA is (now) represented in Pakistan’s Senate and National Assembly, its representatives are in the strange position of being part of a parliament whose laws and directives do not apply to their region.

Governmental reason, underwritten by essentialist notions of custom, also organizes the spatial order. The FATA is not only divided from the settled districts; it is also internally fragmented, broken up by topographies of law that are usually characterized as “protected” and “unprotected” areas, although, in practice, the borders of these zones are ambiguous. In protected areas, with the locus of authority moving outward from public works, roads, offices, and government installations, the FCR vests the political agent with judicial powers in criminal and civil cases. Expanding out from unprotected areas, the levers of influence shift from direct administration by the Pakistan Army (PA) to exerting economic or political pressure on local maliks and other locals for effect. It is a system that arranges space through the logic of cultural autonomy—the government says it only minimally interferes—but one whose final consequence in times of conflict is not the preservation of custom beyond the reach of governance but containment. In fact, several levels of security forces, from the sporadic lashkars raised to fight insurgents or settle disputes to more formal organizations, structure space and circulation in FATA.

In addition to the lashkars, the khassadars mentioned by Gwynn continue to function at the most local level. An untrained force, sometimes called the “tribal police,” they were first raised by the British to assist maliks in maintaining roads and thwarting those that proved too troublesome to their authority. The khassadars are now tasked with providing safe passage through their territory and serve under the PA. They are drawn from the tribes on a quota system that determines how many khassadars may be selected from each tribe depending on the tribe’s size and influence. These appointments are the right of the malik who pays them. The malik, in turn, receives money from the government based on the amount of territory his tribe controls. As such, the khassadari system is oriented toward the malik and maintaining tribalized arrangements through which they are appointed. Khassadars are low paid, and the situation has disintegrated with bribes being exchanged for appointments and little oversight.

Levies are also drawn from among tribes, and, unlike khassadars, who must have their own weapons, levies are provided arms by the government. They also serve under the political agent who appoints and pays them. Their duties overlap with those of the khassadars, and they are also underpaid and undertrained.

A paramilitary force, the Frontier Constabulary draws its officers from the police while its ranks come from the Tribal Areas as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one of the provinces neighboring FATA. Historically entrusted with preventing tribal raids into settled areas, it regulates movement between the Tribal Areas and the settled districts through a network of posts and checkpoints. The Constabulary also lists among its duties the protection of government installations, development projects, and senior personnel, providing security for multinational corporations and for trade on the Karakoram Highway. As conflicts have flared in various parts of the country, the Constabulary has added new policing zones and recruits from them: it now boasts seventeen areas of jurisdiction across Pakistan. In the country’s capital, for instance, its “pivotal function,” according to its website, is to “provide security to foreigners, diplomats, embassies, consulates, ambassadors and other installations as well to provide security to VIPs in ICT (Islamabad Capital Territory).”

If the Constabulary polices a border internal to Pakistan, each of the agencies is also subject to a paramilitary force that polices the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Led by officers from the Pakistan Army, the Frontier Corps (FC) polices the Durand line while also serving as the supreme force responsible for law and order in FATA. Although under the command of the Ministry of Interior, the FC is led by the Inspector General, a post that is generally filled by a major general; most of the recruits are drawn from FATA and ethnically Pashtun regions. During the 1970s and 1980s, the FC assisted in training the mujahideen. Since 9/11, it has increasingly been deployed in operations, and the United States has committed money and American trainers to equip and train this force, because—as part of the return to culture as an instrument in counterinsurgencies—the local and cultural knowledge of
Pashtun recruits is viewed as an asset. The Pakistan military, however, also regards the FC contemptuously, with one military analyst writing that the officers see the militiamen "dressed in shahwar and garmeez (traditional loose shirt and baggy pants worn by civilians) and chaplis (local sandals) and ... dismiss them as a rabble."

Taken together, these security forces all have their historical roots in colonial policing whose operative rationality was the maintenance of a buffer zone between the British Raj and Afghanistan. They also illustrate the intimacy of securitization. In addition to the Frontier Constabulary, whose numbers are not readily available, there were roughly 80,000 Frontier Corps troops, largely drawn from FATA and KP, with reportedly 55,000 of them in its Khyber Pakhtunkhwa division by 2008. Additionally, there are currently 18,420 khasadars and 18,106 levies in FATA who also come from the Tribal Areas. In other words, an astonishing percentage of FATA's residents—a population of 3.18 million according to the last census conducted in 1998—draw salaries or benefits from the security regime of the Pakistani state. Many in FATA consider the military as an outside force—its officers rotating through the Tribal Areas often have to rely on local Pashto translators, which locates them as outsiders—but these security forces are held in comparatively better regard. The FC, for example, has historically been better received in FATA than in Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province by landmass, where the FC's largely Pashtun troops also operate to suppress an ongoing ethnoreligious Baloch rebellion. The collaboration of the federal government and maliks in a (albeit unequal) governmental apparatus in which their authority and control is co-constitutive has resulted in a studied inability to structure other economic opportunities for FATA residents that are independent of state-malik authority. Consequently, securitization remains a viable labor market.

On the Road

Rather than sheer "lawlessness," then, FATA is immersed in a security economy in which the splintering of law across multiple, overlapping lines of jurisdiction also creates opportunities for illicit bribes, payoffs, and violence. Truckers who transport goods for NATO from Karachi through FATA and into Afghanistan mapped this economy for me during an interview at a truck stop in Khyber Agency en route to the Torkham border crossing:

My name is Mohammad Umar. I loaded it for Bagram, three days before Ramzan. The charge for it was 1 lakh rupees. I've only 6,000 rupees left. From Peshawar to Kabul, the whole world demands money [bribes] from us. Every check post in Pakistan takes money from us. Then, the Afghan at the border takes money. Then in Jalalabad, he takes money. Then in Kabul, he takes money. And, of course, the truck has costs. Come with me right now. Come in the truck. You'll see how they treat us:

"Get out of the truck asshole! Give us money!" He'll say, "Give me 500 rupees!"

I'll say, "I don't have it. Just take 200."

"Asshole! Give me 500!"

Then what would you say? See for yourself. And, you'll say, "Just give him the money."

They break your windshield with their Kalashnikov. They hit the vehicle. They damage it. That'll cost 5,000 rupees. So, 500 rupees is better than that, isn't it? What else can we do? We're obligated. They take money from everyone.

A second trucker, Rahil Afridi, joined the conversation, relating how he had been beaten earlier that day for failing to pay a bribe. "You can't force them to back off. He has more power. He wears a uniform. He's a government man. You can't say anything."

Both Umar and Afridi reveal how the securitized circulation of people and goods exposes them to risk, humiliation, harm, and abuse, that is, to precarity. Through the bureaucratic and spatial order of the administrative apparatus, the security forces, and the fragmentation of territory along protected and unprotected zones—the former of which, crucially, extend in and around roads—authorities regulate, curtail, block, shape, filter, and interrupt movement. Roads have been integral to this logic of control. Indeed, in neighboring Afghanistan, the United States has put significant effort into constructing roads. In his book The Accidental Guerrilla (2009), David Kilcullen says about roads:

Once the road is through and paved, it is much harder to place IEDs [improvised explosive devices] under the tarmac surface or on the concrete verge, and IEDs are easier to detect if emplaced. The road provides an alternative works project to prevent people joining the
Taliban, the improved ease of movement makes business easier and transportation faster and cheaper, and thus spurs economic growth, and the graded black-top road allows friendly troops to move much more easily and quickly than before, along the valley floor, helping secure population centers and drive the enemy up into the hills where they are separated from the population—allowing us to target them more easily and with less risk of collateral damage, and allowing political, intelligence, aid, governance, education and development work to proceed with less risk.37

Although Kilcullen admits that the road is not a panacea, the range of projects in which it is inserted is illuminating. For Kilcullen, it is a technology of commerce and of securitization (quickly moving troops to “secure” population centers), that is, of movement and its arrest. It is a strangely contradictory geographic imagination that assumes a tidy, welcome cohabitation between the imperial army and the local population (as if military traffic were just like any other) and enables the total conflation between the literal road and the metaphorical and teleological “road” to success. Yet a visualization based on WikiLeaks data from 2004 to 2009 shows that the highest frequency of incidents occurred around the Kabul–Kandahar highway reconstructed by the United States.38 Built to demonstrate the American commitment to Afghanistan’s reconstruction, the highway also connects the two largest U.S. bases at Kandahar and Bagram and several smaller ones in between.39

In the Tribal Areas, too, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has funded roads in concert with the Pakistani government. During the inauguration of a sixty-five-mile stretch of road in South Waziristan in June 2012, USAID’s acting director, Karen Freeman, once again echoed the dual use of the road. “We believe our joint efforts will bring commerce, jobs, trade, and long-term security to this important region in Pakistan.”40 However, the U.S. agency under whose auspices roads have been built in critical locations in FATA is the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), and it has a narrower agenda: the securitization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border through surveillance technologies, the construction of outposts and roads “to expand the presence of security forces” into hitherto inaccessible areas, and, finally, providing equipment to some of the forces.41 With this bureaucratic and spatial organization, authorities can regulate movement and even enact closure through moveable barriers—checkpoints, blockades, roadblocks—that can be quickly erected to enforce curfews or interrupt movement. It is an apparatus that organizes spatial experience into one of anxiety, risk, and precarity.

During interviews I conducted in 2011 and 2012, one interviewee related to me how he had almost been killed for failing to note that a military convoy was passing: “You have to stop one hundred yards from an army convoy. But, when we were crossing one turn, I didn’t see them. They pointed guns at me.” A second said: “This child gave the passing army convoy some sherbet. That day was hot. A blast happened just a short while after. The child was still nearby. They killed him. They killed the child who gave them sherbet.” A third described: “There were Tablighis nearly as an army convoy was passing. There was a road blast, and there were children nearby tending to the sheep. They opened fire and killed the children and took their bodies. This happened in Fr. Bakkha Khel.” A fourth recounted: “Sometimes people don’t know. Two brothers were coming back from Bannu... The army motioned at them. They [the brothers] didn’t know what the army wanted. They went toward them and were shot. They [the soldiers] didn’t give them [the brothers] time.”

The legal veracity of these anecdotes is less critical than the fact that they are utterly common and myriad, circulating as rumor, cautionary tale, or depiction of the casual ruthlessness of the security forces, particularly the military. These narratives form a low-level hum that rarely rises to the level of event. The bodies of FATA residents are thus marked, alternately, through displays of physical force and through “suspended violence,” the latter of which produces anxiety, even fear, through the insinuation of physical force rather than its actual application.43 It is not, therefore, sheer absence of law but a situation in which residents of the Tribal Areas must remain alert to the multiple, fluid jurisdictions that, as Lindsay Bremner puts it, “regulate the body in motion.”44 The flexible and mobile arrangements of time and space require one to be able to discern when to slow down, to stop, or to get off the road.

Securitized zones near check posts or blockades enable suspended violence in the name of deterring spectacular, physical violence by insurgent groups. Check posts refer, here, to more fortified permanent structures while checkpoints tend to be semi-permanent or temporary structures. The barrel of a gun peering out from a sandbagged checkpoint or from a heavily fortified check post, the sudden establishment of a curfew, and the passing of a military convoy all suggest the threat of physical force.45 Nor are these
merely side effects of securitized circulation. As Gwynn explained in *Imperial Policing*, the “moral effect” depended on the visual insinuation of threat by foregrounding lethal weapons:

The sight of cold steel has a calming effect, and the steady advance of a line of bayonets has often sufficed to disperse a mob without resort to firing.46

It is sometimes advocated that troops called out in aid of the civil power should be specially armed with non-lethal weapons, such as batons. . . But the arguments against such a course are generally very strong. The moral effect of the appearance of troops depends largely on the fact that they carry lethal weapons. It is a warning to spectators that it is time to get away and it awakens the more moderate element to the seriousness of the situation.47

While the “moral effect” of suspended violence is clear when faced with the muzzle of a gun, it does not rise to the level of nameable event for editors in Islamabad, New York, and London. The rules of publicity demand the unexpected—that which “does not happen here.” The very repetition and permanence of the architectures of suspended violence, paradoxically, enable the near total erasure of daily violence as that which always happens here. Even when security forces do deploy physical force, it too can be erased, as the inevitable consequence of the “lawlessness” of FATA.

**Containment Zones and Filter Points**

Indeed, lawlessness conceptualizes the spatial order of FATA as one in which islands of heavily fortified barracks and check posts are anchors in a sea of chaotic disorder.48 For pro-war proponents, lawlessness provides a neat justification for deploying force by the state in order to establish “law and order.” Yet, in FATA, it is unclear what reasserting the law means. As explained above, the legal regime in the Tribal Areas is the FCR, which exposes people to collective punishment, arbitrary detention, and corporal punishment. That is the law. The federal government’s attempts to reform the FCR in 2011 met strong resistance from the Pakistani military. Only after the military was given sweeping powers of arrest and detention in “conflict zones” under the Actions in Aid of Civil Power (AACPR) law passed that year was the government able to install some changes in the FCR.49 The AACPR rendered these reforms, such as minimal safeguards against arbitrary detention, meaningless. Mansur Khan Mehsud, who hails from South Waziristan and is the research director of the Islamabad-based FATA Research Center, summed up the situation tartly: “We are free to kill each other if we like as long as we don’t do anything to the government.”50

*Free to kill each other as long as we don’t do anything to the government* encapsulates the culturalist governmental logic that organizes space into protected and unprotected areas, an imagination that maps the territory as government-held zones beyond which lies inscrutable terrain that oscillates between tribal autonomy and its double, lawlessness. The task of governance, then, is to distinguish between the exercise of proper circulation (culture/autonomy) and improper circulation (militancy/lawlessness). Indeed, functionaries of the Pakistani security regime explain their incursions and operations as temporary procedures to halt the slide from custom into lawlessness. The military commander who led the latest operation in Waziristan, Major General Zafarullah Khan Khattak, observed: “Whether it is rethink of the FCR [the Frontier Crimes Regulation that rules the Federally Administered Tribal Areas], or economic solutions, or good governance, we must understand what rules these people. The local code of Cholwashi [locals protecting their own land honourably] has to be brought back. What’s always worked must work again. And for those who don’t follow the local custom . . . We must kill them. We must fight them to the death.”51 The game of recognition, as Khattak reveals, always moves beyond drawing distinctions to establishing the very terms of what is proper culture and what is repugnant.52 It is in this context that the security state spatializes the politics of recognition in FATA by engineering space into *containment zones* and *filter points*.

Containment zones are areas of temporal and spatial closure through curfews, shoot-on-sight policies, and checkpoints. They are also internally differentiated. So, while it remains possible for resident and nonresident Pakistani citizens to circulate through parts of Khyber Agency, other areas are under curfew (Bara, for example). North Waziristan, meanwhile, has remained entirely under continuous closure—nonresidents of Waziristan are not allowed in—and those who live there are subject to curfews. These zones are often difficult for ground forces that face attacks from insurgents; the government’s political agents cannot traverse them with ease. That, however, does not mean that the area is beyond the state’s reach. The cultural logic through which FATA’s spatial order is organized as “autonomous” can be mobilized
quickly to foreground the force inherent in the system and materialize it as containment zones. With curfews and checkpoints, a particular zone can be demarcated as troubled space and contained not only laterally across the surface but also vertically. Containment zones are generally subject to the heaviest aerial bombardment, whether by the Pakistan Air Force or American drones. Residents may also face mass expulsion on short notice. At times, a warning and a deadline is given after which security forces will strafe the neighborhood either by air or from mounted guns at a nearby towering check post. Containment zones are often established following an attack on security forces that, in turn, erect a curfew and display force through various means, including helicopter gunships that may patrol the airspace or fire.

Bara, a tehsil or subdistrict in Khyber Agency, illustrates one version of the containment zone. After it became a stronghold for Mangal Bagh and his organization Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI), security forces enacted curfews and regulated movement at checkpoints. Within the containment zone, however, Bagh even took up policing duties through his own militia. It was not until the LeI had begun to threaten the takeover of the Khyber Pass, the main road that carries NATO supplies, that security forces began to articulate Bagh as a threat. The group’s kidnapping in June 2008 of sixteen Christians in Peshawar, the capital city of Khyber Province, further stoked fears that the frontier would spill over into settled areas. These twin threats led to Operation Sirat-e-Mustaqeem (Righteous Path). The short twelve-day operation was mainly aimed at forcing insurgents away from Peshawar and the pass. Security forces have maintained the containment zone. In 2013, when Bara had already been subjected to a curfew for forty months long, security forces killed eighteen people in their homes near Dogra Check Post in Khyber Agency. The killings followed an attack on a nearby check post that had killed seven soldiers a day earlier. In an unusual move, the families protested, taking the bodies of the dead to the Governor’s House in Peshawar. The protest was baton-charged and forcibly broken up. The Frontier Corps, meanwhile, released a statement blaming LeI militants wearing FC uniforms. Because the territory vacillates between autonomy and lawlessness in the securitized imagination, it is always suspicious: it is never clear whether the “tribesman” will turn out to be an insurgent or the militant will turn out to be a militant literally wearing camouflage; hence, enclosure applies to the entire multitude.

The containment zone harbors an intensification of suspended violence and physical force. If biopolitics takes the population as its object over which the sovereign’s power operates to “make live and let die,” its escalation in the containment zone takes on a qualitatively different tenor. Here, the regulation of bodies is not aimed at disciplining citizens but containing the multitude of categories—tribesmen, insurgents, women, and children—and, at the extreme, “inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the ‘massacre.’” Between May 2008 and late 2011, the Pakistan Air Force had already dropped 10,600 bombs in the region. As of this writing, Zarb-e-Azb and now Khyber-1, the ongoing operations in FATA that have resulted in the expulsion and displacement of nearly one million people and an untold number of deaths, are only the latest examples of the consequences of the logic of containment.

This architecture is critical to the operation of American drones. With the exception of two attacks, which happened in territory abutting the Tribal Areas, armed drones also function within containment zones. In fact, the military mediates between the organization of territorial containment zones and their vertical extension into flight boxes, formally known as “Restricted Operating Zones,” demarcated for the use of American drones. A 2008 diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks reveals that Admiral Mike Mullen, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, requested approval for a third zone over FATA from General Ashfaq Kayani. By 2010 the United States was also pressuring the Pakistani military to allow armed drones to operate over Quetta, the capital of Balochistan. Pakistani officials refused these requests even though the army is itself facing an ethnopolitanist insurgency there.

Containment zones necessitate filter points, sites that regulate movement in and out of the area. At check posts or checkpoints, security forces may conduct “checking” of vehicles, people, and their identity documents. Although explained as instrumental to arresting the movement of insurgents, these filter points also serve as mechanisms that reinforce the unequal powers relationship between the people crossing the filter point and the security forces manning it. These focuses use a range of techniques, from petty annoyances to humiliation to prolonged wait times. Here’s how one person described to me the process of passing through these sites in 2013:

There are various check posts primarily being controlled by the Pakistan Army in Waziristan. One has to show his/her identity documents including the National Identity Card before crossing the check post. Security personnel register names of all the passengers going to Waziristan. At
Bakka Khel, which is an entry point into North Waziristan from district Bannu, the driver of a vehicle carrying passengers has to collect their ID cards and show them to a concerned Pakistan Army official at the check post. The driver is also required to provide a total number of passengers to the security official. When the vehicle reaches Khajuri Check Post, the other security official deployed there will check by counting the number of passengers if the number is correct. If someone is missing, then the driver has to explain where he dropped him/her. There are numerous cases where drivers have been badly beaten up by the security personnel for carrying an extra person.

Sometimes, it takes hours at check posts to get security clearance due to the long queue of vehicles. It becomes very problematic when someone is carrying a patient.

There are specific times when one can go to or leave Waziristan: at 6:00 a.m. in the morning till 6:00 p.m. in the evening. No one can travel at night.

During curfews, no one is allowed to move on the main roads. If someone violates that, they would be shot and killed on the spot.

There are even cases where the local tribesmen were tortured by being physically beaten up by security personnel for failing to communicate properly in Urdu. Thousands of local tribesmen cannot speak Urdu. And, at check posts, the government has deployed army personnel who cannot understand or speak Pashto.  

As this account demonstrates, the filter point is a system that reproduces the precise power relations between the security state and the people of FATA. In physically beating and torturing people who do not speak Urdu, the military engages in what has been a foundational disciplinary project for constructing the Pakistani nation. Language politics, or, rather, language as politics, have been a crucial site for concealing a modern Pakistani national identity. The blows to the body link speech, violence, and subjectivity along three interrelated axes. They physically imprint the person being beaten as lacking the qualities proper to a Pakistani citizen. They mark the beaten subject as a “tribesman,” that is, one who does not speak the language—literal and figurative—of the Pakistani citizen; he retains his mother tongue and in so doing is marked by “culture.” Finally, the physical force applied to the body of the tribesman sacralizes that other body, the one not beaten, that of the proper Pakistani citizen. Indeed, customary laws like the FCR, wherever constructed by colonial authorities, have historically been characterized by corporal punishment. One belongs to a forcibly mute geography of violence, the other to a communicative world of rights. Control is a matter of aural politics here as much as geographic control, or, rather, the geographic imagination of the security state is tied to a particular politics of aurality: the state draws a distinction between that which constitutes speech and that which is noise.

The description also illustrates the monopoly over time by the security apparatus. Filter points mediate and transform the relationship between space and time. People wait for hours. Journeys that are short as a measurement of linear units of distance become far longer as a measurement of a unit of time. Embodied distance is radically out of joint from representational distance on standard satellite images, maps, and other cartographic representations. Filter points thus elongate embodied distance, stretching it out until the Tribal Areas that circulate are “remote,” “isolated,” “distant,” “faraway,” and so on, as if these were natural features of the landscape rather than a mediated relationship into which an immense amount of labor, violence, and money has been poured. The time-space compression of modern drone warfare necessitates this simultaneous distanciation. By obstructing, blocking, curfewing, and regulating through filter points, the security state re-presents containment zones as the remote, inscrutable (because inaccessible) frontier. Yet public opinion in support of state violence is also fortified by the suggested nearness of conflict zones. When the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) held the district of Swat in 2009, for instance, domestic and international media repeatedly highlighted that the area was “only sixty miles” from the capital. The war on terror exploits the same double movement across a grander geographic scale. The threat that the frontiers might spill over at any moment is what calls out for their containment and even extinguishment, but it is a threat that can only be staged in the near total erasure of the structuring techniques that greatly produce the “chaos” of the frontier.

Postscript

How the colonial logic of frontier policing refracts, transforms, and organizes itself in a postindependence era is essential to understanding how imperial power appropriates and operates in the present. The turn toward
reading empire as deterritorialized has generated interesting insight but has also, sometimes, overshadowed how localized techniques of governance attach to the imperial assemblage and how they structure the drone dispositif.

By itself, the juridical institutionalization of FATA as exceptional is not a sufficient explanation for the operation of drones in that region. The juridical status also requires labor on the ground, that is, tactics and strategies that arrange space as a containment zone. In that regard, FATA bears resemblance to several other sites, including aspects of the Occupied Palestinian Territories as well as the historical situation of reserves in apartheid South Africa—which were also rationalized as “self-governing” zones for tribalized natives. But, as Mahmood Mamdani has shown, when colonial reason applied a “politically enforced ethnic pluralism,” it also cultivated political subjectivities as “tribal,” “native,” or “citizen.” In other words, power subjectivizes and, in so doing, formulates the terrain on which political struggles are fought—even in the postindependence era.

Reading the spatial order of FATA as a “space of exception” obscures this productive axis of power in the Tribal Areas. Giorgio Agamben’s eminently influential thesis mapping the metaphysics of the sovereign’s power at its horizon cloaks necessary questions about how the legacies of indirect rule are now tied to a politics of cultural recognition that is fertile grounds for forms of agency, consent, and resistance in FATA.

Notes
There are more people than I am able to name who assisted me with this chapter by providing interviews, answering questions, and reading drafts. I am deeply indebted to my interlocutors who work, live, and endure in Pakistan’s conflict zones. Without their cooperation and facilitation, my research would not be possible. I would especially like to thank Peter Lagherwis, Darryl Li, and Saadia Toor for engaging with my work, reading successive versions, and offering thoughtful comments. Usama Khilji and Ihsanullah Tipu Mehsud provided generous assistance of many varieties and allowed me to pester them with questions, for which I am very grateful. The views expressed here, as well as any mistakes, are entirely my own.

5. Khallil, Time in the Shadows, 32.

6. Omissi, Air Power and Colonial Control.
7. Omissi, Air Power and Colonial Control.
9. Obama, “Remarks by the President at the National Defense University.”
10. The state is not a singular entity anywhere. In the Pakistani context, it is significantly marked by the security apparatus. Here, I speak about the “security state” in order to foreground that situation.
11. Beattie, Imperial Frontier; Marsh, “Ramparts of Empire.”
12. Marsden and Hoşkın, Fragments of the Afghan Frontier; Haroon, Frontier of Faith. The concept of the tribe has a rich, troubled, and varied history. Sana Haroon and Robert Nichols have shown how colonial officers in the North-West Frontier compiled ethnographic manuals codifying genealogical trees and constructing the ahistorical tribal framework. However, following Haroon, the tribe is now both a category of governance and an idiom through which claims are articulated. See Haroon, Frontier of Faith, 25–26; Nichols, Settling the Frontier.
13. On the development of expertise by colonial officers, see Robert Nichols’s discussion of Captain Robert Warburton, who served as political agent in Khyber Nichols, “The Frontier Tribal Areas.”
15. Haroon, Frontier of Faith; Tripodi, Edge of Empire.
16. Haroon, Frontier of Faith, 122. The editors warned that Yaghistan (loosely translated as “land of rebels”) was in danger of being contained: “Mind that if the enemy succeeds even a little in Waziristan no other place in the frontier will be able to make any opposition to his aggressions because roads have long ago been constructed in the directions of Chakdara, Chitral and the Khyber railway, Thal, Kurram and other grand roads have been fortified and defended so that the whole of Yaghistan is in the power of the enemy” (quoted in Haroon, Frontiers of Faith, 122). Importantly, Haroon notes that the nullahs made reasonable calculations about sustaining their power, including changing their stance on roads and other infrastructure depending on whether benefits would accrue to them.
17. Gwynn, Imperial Policing, 394.
23. Ahmad, “The Laws and Justice System.”
24. Shinwari, Understanding FATA.
missionary. Tablighis are often marked by their mode of dress and appearance. On the Tablighis, see Metcalf, "Traditionalist Islamic Activism," 1.

43. Azoulay and Ophir, "The Monster's Tail."
45. Azoulay and Ophir, "The Monster's Tail."
46. Gwynn, Imperial Policing, 30.
47. Gwynn, Imperial Policing, 32.
48. The trope of lawlessness to depict the region has a long history. See Fowler, Chasing Tales.
50. Farooq, "Pakistan's FATA."
52. Povinelli, The Cunning of Recognition, 4.
53. Weizman, "Politics of Verticality."
54. This pattern is also identifiable in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where Gaza, subject to severe closure, is more heavily bombed than the West Bank. See Li, "The Gaza Strip as Laboratory."
55. On the range of tactics deployed in containment zones, see, for instance, M. T., "Waziris Mourn Their Dead"; on shoot-on-sight policies, see Express Tribune, "Bomb Blast"; on mass expulsion, see Shaheen, "30 More Terrorists Killed."
56. Zaidi, "A Profile of Mangal Bagh."
57. According to Amnesty International's Mustafa Qadari, Bara had been under a forty-month curfew by the time of the Dogra incident. See Grayson, "Peshawar Tribesmen Protest Killings at Bara."
58. Afridi, "In Memoriam."
59. Sierazi, "Tribesmen Forced to End Protest"; Aurakzai, "Burying Us Alive in Bara."
62. "PAF Conducted 5,500 Bombing Runs."
63. U.S. Embassy Cable, "Colt Mullen's Meeting"; see also C. Woods, "Pakistan 'Categorically Rejackets' Claim."
64. "The Boulevard that NATO forces use. A 2007 U.S. cable notes that "approximately 150 Coalition aircraft traverse the boulevard each day." U.S. Embassy Cable, "Pakistan."
66. On checkpoints as sites of control, see Kofte and Amir, "Between Imaginary Lines"; Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace"; and Razack, "A Hole in the Wall."
67. Personal communication with source by author, February 2015.
68. On the relationship between language and politics in Pakistan, see Toot, The State of Islam; K. Ali, "Communists in a Muslim Land"; and Tanqueed Editors, "Language and Politics."
STONERS, STONES, AND DRONES

Transnational South Asian Visuality from Above and Below

ANJALI NATH

My father’s body was scattered in pieces and he died immediately, but I was unconscious for three to four days…. I have two younger brothers who…. are home most of the day and they are very conscious of the fact that drones are hovering over them. [The presence of drones] intimidates them.

—Waleed Shiraz, quoted in International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford Law School) and Global Justice Clinic (UC School of Law), Living under Drones

Here we can think about low theory as… a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the high in high theory.

Judith (Jack) Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure

Drones in the morning, drones in the night / I’m trying to find a pretty drone to take home tonight.

—Himanshu “Heems” Suri, “Soup Boys (Pretty Drones)”

WALED SHIRAZ’S chilling testimony describes surviving a drone attack in northwest Pakistan and illuminates the human cost of drone warfare. Although varying kinds of drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVS), have been present throughout the history of modern American warfare, armed UAVs have emerged as a potent symbol of contemporary asymmetric war in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan, promoted as surgically precise alternatives to other forms of combat. After coming to office in 2009, President