



INTRODUCTION

2022 has been marked by an intensification in gendered surveillance. The new contours of this surveillance regime have become starkly apparent in the United States, where politicians have recently introduced more than 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, many of them targeting transgender people. One of the most intrusive is a Texas bill that would criminalize parents attempting to obtain gender-affirming care for their transgender children; the bill urges educators, healthcare workers, and other welfare officers to report these parents so that they might be investigated for child abuse (Dey 2022). Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court is on the verge of overturning the legal precedent that ensures women the right to abortion, even as more and more states have sought to deny abortion at earlier and earlier stages of pregnancy. Such restrictions are enabled by new surveillance technologies and markets: the data firm SafeGraph, for example, is already selling information about the movements of people who visit Planned Parenthood (Cox 2022). As Zeynep Tufekci (2022) points out, this form of surveillance will likely intensify as abortion is further criminalized. Even if menstruating people delete their period-tracking apps, as reproductive justice activists are currently urging, other data collection algorithms are still watching: such algorithms can guess from changes in people's consumption habits that they have become pregnant, and data

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corporations can in turn alert police when those individuals do not give birth. Despite these draconian domestic developments, many supporters of the US security state both bemoan the end of a US-bestowed feminist “freedom” in Afghanistan and find solace in heroic tales of Afghan women and girls liberated by surveillance technologies. For example, 2021 news stories (Rose, Hanson) credit both a British “AI expert” and an American “mother of 11” with “rescuing” the celebrated all-girl robotics team, the Afghan Dreamers, even as the Dreamers contest at least the latter story.

Understanding these multiple unfolding crises and how they are narrated, as well as the celebratory tales of surveillance that accompany some of them, requires attention to the specific, shifting ways gender is imagined and policed, as well as to how surveillance itself is often a gendered practice. This urgent work of explicitly reformulating how we understand the relationship between gender and surveillance was begun by Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet in their 2015 edited volume, *Feminist Surveillance Studies*. In the introduction to that volume, Dubrofsky and Magnet recall attending an academic roundtable on surveillance technologies and noticing a distinct absence of feminist analysis. For the authors, this experience illuminated the need for a feminist intervention in the field. Dubrofsky and Magnet note that the term *surveillance* “is used to identify a systematic and focused manner of observing” (2015: 2). They pair this definition with David Lyon’s description of surveillance as “any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purpose of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered” (2015: 2). Their work lays the groundwork for us to see, however, how such understandings of surveillance are incomplete without a consideration of how such processes of observation and data collection are entangled with gendered power relations.

This issue furthers the agenda proposed by Dubrofsky and Magnet’s volume: that of putting critical feminist concerns at the center of surveillance studies. As US empire studies scholars, we have noticed how scholars of surveillance often reiterate without commenting on the gendered logics that structure so many

surveillance practices, particularly drone surveillance and warfare¹. Some critiques of drone warfare, for example, reproduce army-ranger psychologist Dave Grossman's chart imagining the greatest "resistance to killing" to be at "sexual range," without considering how grossly this chart misrepresents the statistical reality when it comes to the killing of women. To be sure, some scholars do skillfully trouble assumptions regarding "the spatialization of distant warfare" (Kaplan 2017: 167) and the affects that attend it, but for many the gendered logics of drone warfare persist unquestioned. In other ways too, scholars who study drone warfare reproduce the gendered logics that make it possible in the first place. For example in applauding rather than analyzing the assumptions of the #NotABugSplat activist art installation, scholars fail to question the idea that an enormous image of a young girl, spread over the landscape of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan in order to be visible to a drone operator, will automatically raise a different set of ethical questions and compel "decisions that will save innocent lives" (JR 2014). A similar gendered logic operates in the invocation by critics of drone warfare of the wedding as the consummate space of innocence where a drone attack would merit automatic outrage. For example, a drone strike on a wedding procession in rural Yemen in 2013 prompted both the anti-war organization, CODEPINK, to stage a wedding in front of the White House to protest the US deployment of drones, and photographer Tomas van Houtryve to capture aerial images of a wedding in Philadelphia for his series, "Blue Sky Days." This emphasis on the self-evident innocence of children and weddings may be effective in highlighting the brutal imprecision of drone strikes, but it also reiterates the family values that are so often weaponized by the United States to justify its wars, while making it difficult to muster similar outrage at every summary assassination of "terror suspects," many of whose names are not even known to their killers. Scholars may chuckle over the gendered rhetoric associated with the "unmanned" aircraft,

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1. We would like to acknowledge Natalia Cecire (University of Sussex) for her crucial role in formulating a critical account of these gendered logics alongside us in a series of conference panels in 2018 and 2020.

but they are often reluctant to bring substantive feminist analysis into the frame.

Because of these omissions, we find it necessary to bring together the methods and theories of feminist surveillance studies with the insights of the many gender and sexuality studies scholars who have studied war and US empire, and particularly the US-led war on terrorism. Speaking at a roundtable convened at the 2021 American Studies Association conference entitled, “The Global War at 20,” Jasbir Puar recalled that “in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 there was...a liberal consensus around the war on terror including liberal feminist second-wave white feminists.” For Puar, this martial enthusiasm underscored the urgent need to “dismantle the orientalism of gender studies which was absolutely organized around ‘unveiling’ as one of the key tropes for women’s oppression.” In the years following 9/11, many gender and sexuality studies scholars heeded this call, demonstrating how shifting gender norms and forms of belonging and exclusion have accompanied and bolstered the war on terrorism. Lila Abu-Lughod’s early warnings about yet another mission to save Muslim women and Puar’s account of how Muslim/terrorist men are queered just as a certain kind of homosexuality is brought into the fold of US national respectability are persuasive and groundbreaking accounts of the early years of the war. Later work by Inderpal Grewal on the gendered figures of the “security mom” and “security feminist,” Mimi Thi Nguyen on the beautification of Afghan women as an imperative of US empire, Laleh Khalili on the coupled security advisors and generals who constituted the cerebral-yet-jaunty public face of the early war on terrorism, and Erica Edwards on the incorporation of Black women such as Condoleezza Rice into the US security apparatus also convincingly puts gender at the center of the various strategies, rationalizations, and figurations of post-9/11 US empire. Our own work builds on these foundations, exploring the continuities between domestic/humanitarian drones and martial ones (Schnepf) and considering how the figure of the agential, educated Muslim girl has been mobilized for counterinsurgency (Geidel).

The pieces in this issue similarly bring surveillance studies into conversation with this work on the war on terror’s gendered

rationales and strategies, illuminating the racialized masculinities of war-on-terror architects, the female gendering of the new security state, and the utility of “lyric opacity” in disrupting humanist rhetorics that have been insufficient in their challenges to drone warfare. Emily Raymundo’s contribution identifies and elaborates the figure of the “monster minority” in the age of the war on terrorism. The monster minority, embodied by torture-policy architect John Yoo, is an exemplary model minority, a grateful beneficiary of the US system who is able to accumulate power and prestige by exerting violence over other others (in this case, alleged terrorists). However, in exchange for the power and prestige he accumulates, he is made to represent the violence of the entire system; Raymundo observes that while George W. Bush’s reputation has been rehabilitated despite his responsibility for large-scale killing, dispossession, and torture, Yoo remains monstrous in media and popular accounts. The figure of the monster minority, Raymundo argues, “indexes the... ways in which racialized, heterosexual masculinity is both subject to and an agent of racialized power.” In her analysis of Yoo’s torture memos, Raymundo characterizes the relation between the monster-minority figure and the terrorist on whose body he describes inflicting pain as a relation of differential and shifting surveillance, arguing that “the more the terrorist is made visible as a body, the *less* visible the monster minority’s body becomes.” At the same time, Raymundo argues, “the monster minority’s body can never fully disappear, nor can his humanity ever be fully realized”—the system turns, she argues, on this near-assimilation of the monster minority, his capacity for surveillance but also his inability to evade surveillance himself.

Patricia Stuelke’s essay, “Feminist Conspiracies, Security Aunties, and Other Surveillance State Fictions,” observes that while a misogynistic vision of a feminized and feminist state surveillance articulated by some on the radical left assumes the now-familiar idiom of conspiracy theory, aspects of this observation nonetheless accord with contemporary gendered imperialist practices that rely on the security work of relentless surveillance carried out by women and girls. Drawing on the fantastic worlds envisioned in recent speculative novels by Gish Jen and Jeff Vandermeer, Stuelke finds that “the feminized figurations of state surveil-

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lance, alongside the state's superficial incorporation of notions of women's empowerment and agency, seem to foreclose particular visions of social transformation and political life." While Jen's novel explores how technologized, feminized, care work could pave the way for the commons, it ultimately can't find its way to "an anticapitalist antiwork imaginary" for its characters. Vandermeer's novel, meanwhile, begins by centering Inderpal Grewal's figure of the security mom then borrows from the genre of noir to undo and reimagine entrenched investments in security. Keegan Cook Finberg's contribution, "'What activism can learn from poetry': Lyric Opacity and Drone Warfare in Solmaz Sharif's *LOOK*," also looks to literature as its object of study, situating Sharif's 2016 collection in the context of US drone operations and the militarization of language. For Finberg, *LOOK* imaginatively uncouples standardized military terminology from epistemologies of militarized surveillance that produce the targetable human. This uncoupling challenges thinking that would seek to humanize the targets of drone strikes through appeals to enhanced visibility—a humanitarian turn to the visible that critics have identified as appealing to a logic of "recognition." Instead of working toward recognition, Finberg shows how Sharif uses the language of lyric as a pedagogical resource to develop ways of seeing that offer alternatives to drone vision *and* the charge to be recognizable inherent in much humanitarian anti-drone art and activism. Finberg terms these alternate ways of seeing "resistance-looking": this is looking that dwells on the many ways opacity may be produced. In *LOOK*, we find models of this poetic opacity in the dictionary definitions and euphemisms that obfuscate meaning and create abstraction, in the infrastructures of domestic surveillance that reveal a multi-generational history of US imperial violence rather than family secrets, in the targeting technologies that confuse species, and in the pockets of daily life that remain out of view.

Together these pieces exemplify how engagement with gender and sexuality studies' scholars' analyses of the war on terrorism can broaden our understandings of the relationship between surveillance and the practices of US empire. These essays also make the case that an interdisciplinary approach to literature and culture—one modeled by American Studies scholars such

as Amy Kaplan (2002)—has much to contribute to the project of a feminist surveillance studies. While scholars including Andrea Brady (2017) and more recently Tyne Daile Sumner (2021) have addressed the politics of visual surveillance through poetic forms, too often when literary texts do receive notice from those with an interest in the study of cultures of surveillance, attention is reserved for the genres of science fiction or speculative fiction. In addition to this too-narrow generic focus, readers untrained in methodologies particular to the study of literature tend to categorize texts as either “utopian” or “dystopian” and read them extractively for lessons we might take from the fictional scenarios they put forth. We find this instrumentalist approach to literature and culture too reductive, and advocate instead for the use of methods that are attuned to the formal, generic, and cultural complexities of literary texts.

By insisting upon an interdisciplinary frame for feminist surveillance studies that includes literary studies, film studies, cultural studies, empire studies, and black feminist scholarly traditions, our issue makes two further interventions in the field. First, much of the existing work in feminist surveillance studies focuses on the state’s historic and ongoing role as the alleged savior of women through carceral practices, regulating sex work and alleged sex trafficking, and policing or prosecuting family violence in already overpoliced communities. While some of our contributions do similar work, most clearly Kiara Sample’s consideration of the history of police and FBI surveillance of radical black women, many of them branch away from or even interrogate this approach, as Stuelke’s essay does when it points to the easy conflation of feminism and the carceral/surveillance state by misogynist leftist figures like Julian Assange. If carceral feminism (Bernstein 2010) remains a crucial analytical frame for feminist surveillance studies, the contributions here suggest that sites of gendered surveillance are not always carceral, nor, it should be said, are they always feminist.

Second, our issue seeks to acknowledge and build from the premise that feminist scholarship has for some time been interrogating the problem of surveillance’s relationship to gendered life. Black feminist scholarship in particular has centrally theorized how

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surveillance societies have produced regimes of hypervisibility and invisibility that function as forms of gendered and racial policing. In a chapter of *Dark Matters* entitled “Notes on Surveillance Studies,” Simone Browne turns to Patricia Hill Collins’s 1990 theorization of racializing surveillance in the context of the post-slavery South and the black women who labored in this world as domestic servants. Collins notes that, under segregation, black women were subject to two forms of control that operated on distinctly different scales: while segregation established control at the level of the population, “eras[ing] individuality by making black people seemingly interchangeable” (2015: 57), surveillance often worked at the level of the body, “highlight[ing] individuality by making the individual hypervisible and on display” (57, Collins cited in Browne). As a tool of white supremacist regimes, such surveillance abets the subordination of black women through a singling out, assessing, atomizing, examining, and exhibiting. Indeed, bell hooks notes the history of this hypervisibilization at work in nineteenth-century representations of black women for white audiences who “are not to look at her as a whole human being. They are to notice only certain parts” (1992: 62). While surveillance often targets groups and seeks to manage populations, the concept of ‘hypervisibility’ recognizes techniques of individuating surveillance as a form of social control that depends on and further entrenches already existing inequalities.

The pieces in the second part of this issue elucidate forms of unequally distributed visibility. In doing so, they affirm what Browne has described as “the absolute necessity of intersectionality as an interpretive framework and methodology in the study of surveillance” (2017:1). Specifically, they address how gendered and racialized forms of surveillance that produce the hypervisibility of black women work in conjunction with processes that ensure their persistent invisibilization. Moreover, as we see in the essays by Sample and Mohammed, oftentimes what goes by the name of “surveillance” entails no collection or processing of data whatsoever. In such instances, surveillance reveals itself as an alibi for intimidation. Turning to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s monitoring of a prominent communist figure as a blend of disinterested neglect and personal intimidation, the traffic in black

women's hypervisibility and their erasure through the Kardashian project of "postfeminist entrepreneurial terror," and the proliferating sites of scrutiny encountered while moving through and living in the United States, these essays consider how surveillance produces both hypervisibility and invisibility.

In "Seeing Shadows: FBI Surveillance of Louise Thompson Patterson," Kiara Sample shows how gender and sexuality shape surveillance techniques. In the early 1940s, the FBI began compiling a file on Louise Thompson Patterson, a prominent, active figure in the International Worker's Order (IWO), and later the Treasurer of the Illinois Peoples Conference for Legislative Action. Despite Patterson's own political history of leadership and activism, Sample analyzes state documents to show how the FBI's treatment of Patterson as a person of interest shifted when the Bureau learned of her marriage to a prominent Communist Party figure. Sample argues that the FBI's surveillance strategies betray a gender bias: women were not seen as significant political agents engaged in Black communist activism in their own right. Rather, Patterson's FBI file betrays how the Bureau regarded married women in particular as valuable conduits for information instead. Patterson's file is interesting for its omissions. For instance, it contains no transcripts of her many speeches or accounts of her political beliefs. At the same time, it shows that the FBI singled Patterson out—"tracking her movement, watching her home, and interviewing her directly"—not to collect information but to suppress and control her political activities through physical intimidation.

The midcentury US security state, which rendered invisible the radicalism of women like Patterson, stands in stark contrast to neoliberal postfeminist regimes characterized by their imperative to hypervisibility. Heena Hussain's article considers this ideal of hypervisibility by tracing the rise and influence of the Kardashian family, particularly focusing on the array of health and wellness products they now market. Hussain contends that through constant self-surveillance, the Kardashian sisters have constructed a compelling vision of postfeminist beautification and health despite the dubious health benefits of the products they endorse; the sisters "bare all" to audiences in order to convince them that products like Collagen Moon Milk and Sugarbear Hair vitamins will

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give consumers access to the exclusive worlds the Kardashians inhabit. Part of this self-surveillance, Hussain contends, consists of playing with signifiers of blackness (or what is commonly termed blackfishing) and even playing with forms of surveillance of blackness such as police surveillance and harassment. Building on earlier scholarly work that characterizes some of the Kardashians as not-quite-white and thus exoticized by the media because of their Armenian heritage, Hussain argues that the Kardashians have recently secured a more stable whiteness through both their entrepreneurial success and their blackfishing experiments.

Hussain articulates how social and streaming media enables self-orchestrated visibility that draws on forms associated with the surveillance of racialized female bodies. In her autoethnographic piece found in this issue's *Varia* section, Rabiatu B. Mohammed addresses racialized and gendered hypervisibility as well as its attendant insecurities by tracking it through the contiguous practices of state surveillance and securitized citizenship she experiences moving across and within US borders as a self-described "hyper-visible Black hijabi in the US/Mexico border region." Experimenting with the metaphor of the human body's protective antibody response, Mohammed recasts herself as the alien subject to expulsion from the (national) body that regards her as a national security threat. Through a blending of narrative and critical prose, Mohammed catalogues the various forms of racialized, gendered surveillance she encounters at sites managed by state agencies including airports, US embassies, and US Border Patrol interior checkpoints in New Mexico, as well as the everyday sites of the street, the store, the university campus, and the classroom.

"What are the implications of thinking about concerns related to surveillance specifically as critical feminist concerns using a feminist praxis? What new objects might this theoretical and methodological focus bring into view?" asked Dubrofsky and Magnet in 2015 (3). As the monitoring and management of physiological rhythms, gender nonconformity, and refugee movements makes plain, the renewed intensification of gendered surveillance at state, national, and international levels has made readily apparent that we find ourselves with no shortage of 'new objects' already well in view, already requiring a critical feminist

analysis. Despite a preponderance of theoretical approaches and critical methodologies finely attuned to feminist analysis across disciplines, there remains a tendency in surveillance studies scholarship to sideline such analysis—or to turn to feminist approaches only when working on topics pertaining explicitly to gender or even femininity in particular. In this issue, we hope to underscore that insofar as surveillance practices are always informed by histories of oppression and always productive of new inequalities, critical feminist concerns are always central to the study of surveillance.

REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

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