Abstract

This paper conceptualizes Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and the reconnaissance-strike complexes they are said to make possible through their deployment against supposed “terrorist” threats in the Global South, through Foucault’s concept of heterotopias. The spatiotemporal relationships that drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes constitute, I argue, are indicative of three recent shifts in the process of conceptualizing and confronting security problematics in strategic counterterrorist discourse and practice. These shifts are 1) a shift in the ontological act of Locating Threat; 2) the biopolitical process of Coding Bodies to be Killed; and 3) what I call the Neocolonial Administration of Life and Death. I trace these problems, respectively, through a) The geopolitical imperatives to which drones are said to respond; b) The logic of novel coding technologies and principles upon which threat is calculated; and c) Novel modes of cultural taxonimization of occupied peoples.

Introduction

Mark something to slaughter it, control it... - Mathias Enard, Zone.

In a 2005 study of the "logos, pathos, and ethos" of what was then still publicly referred to as the so-called “Global War on Terror,” James der Derian called for “a new semiotics for the images of the war against terror.”¹⁵ In effect, this call can be read as an injunction to interrogate and (re)conceptualize processes, phenomena, and discourses in international relations as significant indices of the kinds of truth regimes that are both presupposed and circulated by proponents of counterinsurgency/counterterrorism security strategies. Such truth regimes in the context of these ongoing strategic discourses and actions, as der Derian notes, politically legitimate and make intelligible their claims about the kinds and sources of danger and threat over and against whom liberal societies and subjects supposedly need to be secured, and indeed, in what ways such securitization needs to be enacted. More often than not, these claims tend to refer to spaces and cultures of threat located primarily in the Global South, spaces and cultures over and against whom Northern, liberal societies and subjects - the United States being the example par excellence - supposedly
need to be secured. Nowhere is this clearer than in the United States’ current deployment of drones and drone warfare over and against spaces and bodies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, and North Africa, and further in the modes of knowledge production and circulation within which such deployments are ontologically embedded. As Shazhad Bashir and Robert Crews note, “The most striking image of [military] engagement with the inhabitants of [the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region] is that of the drone aircraft, piloted from Nevada or Florida, conducting high-altitude aerial surveillance of this rugged borderland and periodically unleashing lethal fire on suspected militants below in what many commentators have understood as a contest between the sophisticated technology of the modern, civilized West and the savagery of a backward foe.”

In this regard, it is curious and troubling to note that minimal critical effort has been put toward any serious and deep reflection on drones; remarkably, chief among the fields that seemingly have a good claim to offer some insightful reflections on the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – critical international relations (IR) theory – has yet to offer many. This is particularly surprising given the steep and marked ascendance in the deployment of UAVs in the past seven years. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, one of the only public agencies tallying drone strikes and their fatalities, counts a total of 373 strikes since the inception of the program, with approximately 3595 deaths and another 1494 injuries. Today, UAVs make up almost half of the entire United States military’s air fleet, with around 10 000 manned aerial vehicles to about 7500 unmanned. The increase in the overall number of both drones and their deployments is reflected in the Department of Defense’s (DOD) FY2012 request to congress for a projected $3.9 billion budget for further development and purchase of UAVs by the military from their primary corporate manufacturers: Northrop Grumman, General Atomics, and Boeing.

Much of the literature that does directly take up the issue of drones deals with one of three problems: 1) The overall legality of their unilateral use by the United States in an international legal system of sovereign states that stakes its claim to legitimacy on its capacity to first and foremost secure equivalencies in sovereignties between states; 2) the moral legitimacy of using a non-human machine to kill humans in the name of humanity; or finally, 3) the overall strategic effectiveness and/or ineffectiveness of this weapon in a global war against terrorists and terrorist organizations, primarily because using drones in this manner requires U.S. forces to primarily target already devastated, exploited, and disenfranchised communities that are said to be so-called “hotbeds” of terrorist recruitment and sanctuary. Only two articles in a critical vein directly address drones: the first treats this technology as a Deleuzian assemblage of embodiment. While I am sympathetic to such a conceptualization, beyond that article’s paltry attempt to explain the assemblage-ness of drones, the
technology and context within which that technology are situated are theorized to a particularly vacuous and indeed, dangerous effect. The second of these articles, much like the present attempt, seeks to assess the “dronification” of the United States security strategy vis-à-vis the biopolitical forms of knowledge through which drones are made possible and necessary, ultimately identifying an imperial topology of relations embedded in the ontological reasoning of the program itself. Where that article and my own part ways, however, is 1) my attempt to understand drones as part of a longer history of colonial and neocolonial relations of biopower and necropower to which colonized peoples are uniquely vulnerable, and 2) to understand drones not only through the more recent trend of reading of security strategy by way of Michel Foucault’s theories of biopower, but also through his earlier work in which he coins the topological concept of the heterotopia. In other words, in this paper I want to critically conceptualize what I see as a neocolonial tendency to identify, locate, and lethally intervene upon supposed terrorist threats in the Global South through the securitizing discourses of contemporary international politics, specifically as the labours of these processes are increasingly either implicated in, or wholly assigned to drones and what are called their reconnaissance-strike complexes.

Drones, it is claimed, offer the United States three strategic advantages over the vaguely-defined enemy presupposed in and targeted by counterterrorism operations, and as such, it is through these claims that the drone is publicly circulated as a (neo)colonial sign of precise and thus politically and legally legitimate killings: First, they are believed to be more cost-effective than manned aircraft. Second, they reduce, or indeed, almost entirely eliminate the risk of mortal harm visited upon the pilot. Third, they allow the United States to establish a persistent and indefinite surveillance infrastructure globally, that can collapse and undo the spatiotemporal limits of how far and for how long a human body can move through the air at high speed. To these strategic advantages, we might add a final tactical advantage that was best articulated in a recent speech delivered by one of the Obama administration’s chief legal counsels speaking to the legitimacy of the weapon and its current deployment under the Geneva Conventions on war, claiming that “In U.S. operations against al-Qaeda and its associated forces - including lethal operations conducted with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles - great care is taken to... ensure that only legitimate objectives are targeted and that collateral damage is kept to a minimum.”

In invoking the notion of a neocolonial “sign,” while remaining sensitive to the problems of that term and the issues of semiology that follow from this concept, I am instead attempting to read a particular phenomenon of contemporary international politics as an expression of the work of death that goes into the ongoing coloniality of that admittedly difficult to define field of study. Following both the cues to attend to the “images” produced in and through

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counterterrorism strategies that der Derian suggested above, and thinking of drones, in particular, as a “striking image” à la Bashir and Crews, we can say that to read the drone as a neocolonial sign of international politics is to express concern with the rather stubborn persistence of colonial relations in international politics, despite claims to the “postcoloniality,” or indeed, the moves beyond postcolonialism in and of the international system of states since the beginning of decolonization in the 1950’s and up to the present.¹⁶ To this end, I follow Himadeep Muppidi’s especially brilliant recent work to read what he calls the Colonial Signs of International Relations as a practice of “an IR that is anti-colonial rather than simply postcolonial... [delving] into the protocols governing the narration of atrocities in international relations.”¹⁷ The logic and justifications underpinning drone warfare are exemplary of such protocols and their attendant atrocities.

Drones are seen to allow for the maximum capacity of precision and facilitate the minimalization of any potential collateral damage that may occur in the event that an attack need be launched against a specific target. This paper argues that drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes are facilitating the constitution of a neocolonial exceptionalism insofar as they open up supposedly perfect spaces of biopolitical administration. It is biopolitical insofar as drones are said to facilitate “making life live,” in and through the precision these weapons supposedly enable. (Drones are thus also necropolitical, in the terms of Achille Mbembe’s helpful extension of Foucault’s theory to address the necessary and active violences that biopolitical regimes enact in pursuit of their projects to secure the conditions under which life can and must be properly lived, not the least of which take place in the neocolonial structures of contemporary international politics.)¹⁸ This regime is exceptional because neither the structural claim of a wholly-imperial nor, obviously, a wholly-international theoretical perspective can give a satisfactory account of the political form drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes indicate to my mind. Here, I follow RBJ Walker in his observation that “neither international nor imperial are entirely persuasive terms through which to understand the dynamics of contemporary political life, even if neither of them is simply dispensable, while claims about the exceptional are increasingly disturbing in their implications.”¹⁹ Consequently, I use the term neocolonial less as a structural and more as a substantive claim. Drones operate within an epistemological and ontological genealogy of the administration of life and death directly inherited from the colonial legacies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:²⁰ attacks are measured, conceptualized, and launched through scientific discourses and practices of ethnographic mapping for the purposes of specifically killing certain peoples in certain spaces the Global South, such as those who have been the victims of drone attacks, so that certain other peoples and spaces contiguous to these targets can be disciplined to take up political allegiances and
behaviours deemed to be “safe” for and by the distant metropole.\textsuperscript{21} As Achille Mbembe notes to this effect:

\ldots to colonize is to put to work the two-faceted movement of destroying and creating, creating by destroying, creating destruction and destroying the creation, creating to create and destroying to destroy\ldots To colonize is also to deploy a subjectivity freed of any limit, a subjectivity seeing itself as absolute but which, to experience that absolute, must constantly reveal it to itself by creating, destroying, and desiring the thing and the animal that it has previously summoned into existence. From the standpoint of the conqueror, the colony is a world of limitless subjectivity.\textsuperscript{22}

This old colonial strategy has taken on new life vis-à-vis the recent turn in politico-strategic logics in, for example, counterterrorism strategies, to map and calculate the spaces and identifications of threat, I argue.

Whatever the empirical veracity of the Obama administration's claim to drones' facilitation of precise targeting and minimal collateral damage may be (and to be sure, they are at best highly suspect), drones undo and recalibrate the spatiotemporal obstacles previously posed to the targeted assassinations about which military strategists have long-fantasized. As the military historian Steven Zaloga puts it:

With the advent of UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles], real-time targeting can be extended hundreds of miles into the depth of enemy territory. On the modern battlefield, what can be seen can be destroyed. In an age of information warfare and network-centric battlefield tactics, something has to go out and gather real-time intelligence... UAVs are finally making possible the "reconnaissance-strike complexes" first dreamed about in the 1970s... They are a critical element in a battlefield network that begins by collecting real-time information on potential targets, then rapidly passes this information to a data fusion system that in turn rapidly processes the targeting information and passes it to the "shooter" best suited to attack the target, whether an artillery battery, tank, strike aircraft, UCAV, or missile system.\textsuperscript{23}

The so-called reconnaissance-strike complexes that drones facilitate are most helpfully read as places without place, or what Michel Foucault called “heterotopias.” These complexes are unseen by the bodies over and against whom they are lethally deployed and they disappear at the very moment that they are fully realized. (Though to be sure, they are experienced by their targeted communities \textit{aurally}, terrorizing and thus disciplining targeted
populations in potentially novel registers that this paper unfortunately does not theorize, though an examination of the implications of this aural experience is certainly called for.)

Moreover, drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes naturalize and legitimize a hierarchical set of relations inherited from the imperial structures of the nineteenth and twentieth century. As Jean-Luc Nancy notes, “War is indissociably the physis and technē of sovereignty.” In this context, we can understand drones to be a weapon that is the most recent, and insidious, realization of a whole series of technic attempts to extend sovereign exceptionality through the praxis of war, particularly as it follows from an ontology of threat that primarily locates its enemy targets in the spaces and bodies of the Global South.

Michael Dillon and Julian Reid are right, I think, to note that deploying Foucault’s theories helps us to understand biopolitical attempts in contemporary counterterrorism strategies that, on the one hand, claim to “... examine the detailed properties and dynamics of populations so that they can be better managed with respect to their many needs and life chances,” while on the other how, through such attempts, “... biopower deploys force and violence, not least because biopower hides its violent face and, ‘gives to the power to inflict legal punishment a context in which it appears to be free of all excess and violence’.” This is to say that through Foucault, as Dillon and Reid argue, it is possible for us to understand the topology/ies of relations between the neocolonial global North and their neocolonies in the Global South, established by the anxieties that produce the latter as a location and source of threat to the former, such that these anxieties necessitate and thus legitimate the deployment of drones and drone warfare (this being what I otherwise mean when I deploy the concept of “ontology” in this paper).

Further, such a mode of investigation suggests that we interrogate the historical conditions under which the kind of anxiety and its subsequent expressions, as I describe them here, can be articulated and addressed in the first place. To that end, I want to use drones, and the reconnaissance-strike complexes they are said to make possible, as a neocolonial sign (or alternatively, sign of neocolonialism) that are indicative of three recent shifts in the process of conceptualizing and confronting security problematics in strategic counterterrorist discourse and practice, conceptualizations and confrontations within which the injunction for, and actual deployment of, drones and drone warfare are deeply implicated and embedded. These shifts are 1) a shift in the ontological act of Locating Threat; 2) the biopolitical process of Coding Bodies to be Killed; and 3) what I call the Neocolonial Administration of Life and Death, and I will now address them respectively in the following three sections.
I. The Location(s) of Threat

In an unpublished and unfinished lecture from 1967 titled “Des Espaces Autres (Of Other Spaces),” Foucault opens his discussion of what he theorizes therein as heterotopias by invoking the second principle of thermodynamics: the accumulation of unused energy increasing in the absence of absolutely equal relations between two thermal bodies, thereby constituting a mutually imbricate but nevertheless distinct tertiary boundary negotiating the inside/outside of the body properly understood.\(^{28}\) The invocation of this principle foreshadows the course of Foucault’s subsequent theorization of heterotopias in at least two ways: formally, it foreshadows the six principles of heterotopias that Foucault will lay out by the end of the lecture. However, it also foreshadows the troubling of the notion of fixed bodies and his recognition of the necessity of the unequal relations between any given set of bodies. In other words, Foucault’s use of this thermodynamic principle points to the constitutive function of dissymmetry between bodies that modern concepts of spatiality necessarily presuppose universally in order to orient, situate, and render intelligible any particular place, or site.\(^ {29}\)

The invocation of this thermodynamic principle then, is articulated in relation to what Foucault calls the “mythological resources” of nineteenth-century philosophies of history. What Foucault attempts to demonstrate in drawing this metaphorical analogy is that, between, say, Hegel and Nietzsche, an epistemic break occurs wherein, generally, the tendency of historicity is less the attempt to totally and completely theorize relations between two symmetrical bodies according to a (Kantian) transcendental reason, and more of an attempt to understand and come to terms with the aporias that attend the stillborn failures of such a project. (It is worth noting that Fabian, who first traced the concept of allochronism - the institutionalized, disciplinary frameworks of temporal understanding through which knowledge about colonized peoples are subordinately “Othered” - notes similar movements in the emergence of ethnography and anthropology throughout roughly the same historical period.)\(^ {30}\) Foucault suggests that heterotopias need to be understood as a response to these aporias. As such, he suggests that these constitutive aporias are crucial to understand the purpose and function of spatiotemporal organization, negotiation, and administration in the modern épistème.\(^ {31}\) As he notes in his opening remarks:

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than

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that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. One could perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics oppose the pious descendents of time and the determined inhabitants of space.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus understood, heterotopias are indeed spaces of simultaneity, but they are places that can only be perceived as such insofar as they are always already understood to be in relation to other places. Such is the case in the unequal relations between ontologically discrete sites such as the safe, liberal Homeland(s) circumscribed by the strategic discourse of counterterrorism on the one hand, and the threatening, marginal(ized) Global South on the other; in short, what we see is a hierarchical allochronism deeply embedded in contemporary securitizing ontologies.\textsuperscript{33} The reconnaissance-strike complexes that UAVs make possible, as we noted in Zaloga’s use of that concept above, are spaces that are not, in fact, fixed in one particular geographical location, but instead rely on a geopolitical topology of relations wherein the assumed singular and homogenous presence of an empire such as the United States (by which I mean, the presumption of a global and universalized set of interests and thresholds of (in)security regardless of sovereign boundaries),\textsuperscript{34} cannot tolerate the presence of spaces in which its own singular, universal, and monolithic presence might be in any way “threatened.” Connecting and distantiating the spatial divisions predicated in counterterrorism discourse, reconnaissance-strike complexes perform the labour of simultaneously separating friend from enemy, here from there, us from them, while at the same time exposing the latter to the self-evidently necessary violence of a drone strike in which the presence of a secured, singular, and universal power like the United States is fully realized. These reconnaissance-strike complexes are an expression of the obsession with resolving the problems posed by modern spatiotemporal limitations to which, Foucault argues, the constitution of heterotopic spaces is a response. The simultaneity in time principled on a universal, naturalized time, by virtue of the distantiating of human communities throughout the space of the globe, allows for the rendering of these communities as hierarchically subordinate and indeed, even dangerous to those bodies and spaces said to be defended by the use of drones and drone warfare in global counterterrorism operations.\textsuperscript{35} Reconnaissance-strike complexes are thus places without a place, places only possible on the condition of radically opposite, indeed self-evidently so, relations between places: “‘UAVs have gained favor as ways to reduce risk to combat troops, the cost of hardware and the reaction time in a surgical strike’ and ‘to conduct missions in areas that are difficult to access or otherwise considered too high-risk for manned aircraft or personnel on the ground,’” as one recent Congressional report on drones notes.\textsuperscript{36}

Such self-evident relations between the particular spaces considered to be too dangerous for either manned personnel or aircraft are, as the above quote
suggests, part of a deeper geopolitical ontology of security characterized by “a renewed focus on the ‘Third World’ as the primary source of danger.” This strategic search for danger directs its geopolitical gaze toward spaces and bodies at the edges of its normative concept of global order; so-called “failed states,” as well as cities and megacities, come to geographically and culturally signify spaces of extreme threat in contemporary securitization discourse. In its most recent manifestation, this gaze is evident, for example, in David Kilcullen’s strategic imaginary of what he calls “Islamist Theaters of Operation,” most of which are identified on the African and Asian continents. While Kilcullen suggests the Americas and Western Europe are further theaters of operation, they are only considered so because of what he sees as infiltrations of these spaces by transient bodies from the outside - again, mainly Africa and Asia (including the Middle East) - all of which share basic “cultural links” which can be traced back to militant tendencies in Islamic cultures, on this account. In such a figuration, evident in the work of a figure like Kilcullen, we see a heterotopic organization of hierarchical relations between discrete sites according to a primary presupposition of threat as emerging from specific spaces and specific bodies within those spaces. Indeed, the logic of such an argument extends directly into the legal injunctions and justifications for drone strikes as the Obama administration sees it. As one Department of Defense lawyer argues:

If there is a government willing and able to either capture or kill a sought-after belligerent within its territory, the United States is not likely to undermine that state’s sovereignty and risk the certain diplomatic blowback by targeting the individual anyway. However, in countries such as Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, where the respective governments maintain only partial control over terrorist actors and activities, the United States has resorted to territorial incursions through drone strikes.

This kind of relation demonstrates reconnaissance-strike complexes’ heterotopic capacity to organize such culturally and geographically disparate sites as, for example, the American Homeland and targeted spaces and bodies in Pakistan, Yemen, or Somalia. Further, the organization of these sites as such thereby constitutes their relations hierarchically on the premise of a radical horizontality between all sites at all times; indeed, this is the very logic of the states-system that still by and large underpins such geopolitical imaginaries, as the legal argument above suggests. Ostensibly “dangerous” spaces co-constitute the external data that render their counterparts’ internal milieu intelligible (the safety of the Homeland is only intelligible vis-à-vis its juxtaposition with the violent threat of “dangerous” spaces). Moreover, this internal milieu is always already necessarily implicated in and referentially constituted by its radical relationship to all other sites that it takes to be in a hierarchically more or less proximate
relation to itself. These spaces of threat are always already threatening the Homeland, and thus need to be intervened upon as quickly as possible in and through reconnaissance-strike complexes that drones are most equipped to facilitate. Through this relationality, the heterotopic site of the reconnaissance-strike complex is thus rendered as a place without place: it is neither totally located in the Homeland (though it originates and operates in defense of that place), nor is it totally located in the spaces of danger (though these are the spaces upon which intervention is necessary). Crucially, for Foucault, heterotopic relationality is capable of organizing sites and their constitutive relations hierarchically because it does so on the dispersed (re)investment of these spaces and their relations with principles of temporality. Regarding this capacity to organize relations according to principles of time, however, Foucault notes that “[h]eterotopias are most often linked to slices in time - which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.”

Not the least of these relationalities, it is worth noting further, is expressed in what Foucault sees as the heterotopic space of the colony: “their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation, and I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner. In certain cases, they have played, on the level of the general organization of terrestrial space, the role of heterotopias.” As we have seen, the temporal subordination of these spaces is based on the colonial inheritance of the time of “the West” over and against that of “the rest.” This is a crucial, operative inheritance of contemporary counterterrorism’s biopolitical logics, and as such, it is to the biopolitical constitution of such spaces that we now need to turn our attention.

II. The Bodies to be Killed

The actual practice of targeting bodies in these spaces is necessary to understand, given the principle of precision upon which the justification for drone strikes is predicated. Indeed, though this process is still highly classified, the principles and logics under which drone strikes function can be read in the terms of what Dillon and Reid call the biopolitics of global liberal governance, the war on terror, and/or the liberal way of war - all phenomena of which drones are a direct product. One of the most consistent themes with which Dillon and Reid most seriously concern themselves is the value of reading Foucault’s theories of biopolitics as a crucial point of departure in an understanding of what they call the information revolution in the production, monitoring, and neutralization of threat in securitization discourses and strategies emerging primarily from the United States and its military-industrial complex, a revolution that itself is often
seen as part and parcel of the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that took place during the 1990's.

This Revolution in Military Affairs, of which contemporary UAVs are more or less a product, attended the inauguration of this liberal and thus, biopolitical way of war. Moreover, the RMA, as Dillon and Reid note, roughly coincided with the Information Revolution, generally understood as an acceleration in the frequency of production and advance in the sophistication of technological capacities of information communications technologies (ICT). This explosion - largely a consequence of advances in computing software and hardware in both the private and public sectors⁴⁵ - precipitated a fundamental reconfiguration in conceptualizations of “the very nature of materiality as well as force - ‘code is the prime mover’ said its two early pioneers - military strategic thinkers began to rethink force, power, and war as such. A newly biologized discourse of military strategic affairs thus entered the biopolitical lexicon of the liberal way of war.”⁴⁶ In other words, Dillon and Reid suggest that this revolution in ICT digitized biopolitical informatics in a very specific register of discursive and indeed, epistemological presuppositions underpinning its production of knowledge. This digitization has had a powerful import on these epistemologies to such a great degree, they argue further, that this process comes to (re)constitute the very materiality of the human body.

Here it is worth noting that, although Foucault’s theories concerning heterotopias precede those concerning biopower by a decade or more, this should not mean that a focus on the former is incongruous with, or forecloses a synthetic reading of it alongside the latter. Indeed, in enunciating his theories of biopower much later, Foucault demonstrated that the key sites in which these phenomena functioned were those of, for example, the milieu, the population, and the body.⁴⁷ In his theorization of heterotopias, he portends the importance of these sites in his brief discussion of the discipline of demography, in which he demonstrates that this discipline constitutes a heterotopic conceptualization of spatiotemporalities in its obsession with the organization and administration of bodies according to their propinquity and/or necessary distantiation. Indeed, in “Des Espaces Autres,” Foucault gestures toward “the problem of siting or placement... in terms of demography. This problem of the human site or living space is not simply that of knowing whether there will be enough space for men in the world - a problem that is certainly quite important - but also that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end. Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites.” The preeminence of space as an organizational principle facilitates the horizontalization of relations between institutions, milieux, and bodies, hierarchical principles through which control and discipline find their legitimacy in regimes of temporality. Foucault continues,
“time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space.”  

Moreover, not only does Foucault foreshadow his later focus on the administration on the life of the species, the race, the nation, etc. presupposed in the enframing of certain bodies through the governing technology of the population, he also demonstrates a subtle sensitivity to the then-nascent problems and “solutions” of data warehousing, coding, and circulation: “the importance of the site as a problem in contemporary technical work is well known: the storage of data or of the intermediate results of a calculation in the memory of a machine, the circulation of discrete elements with a random output... the identification of marked or coded elements inside a set that may be randomly distributed, or may be arranged according to single or to multiple classifications.”

With this in mind, we can begin to understand how and why, since the end of the cold war, American security frameworks have tended to focus on the pure potentiality of networked-yet-individuated bodies that constitute complex forms of absolute threat that can spring up at a moment’s notice - what Dillon and Reid call becoming-dangerous bodies. It is this network of pure potentiality to which drones are supposed to respond. Pure potentiality though these enemies may be, we have seen how such an imagination crystallizes in the form of a teratology of threatening geographies and cultures; a teratology that both implicitly and explicitly refers to peoples and spaces in the Global South. As the aforementioned Congressional report on drones notes regarding the advantages this technology affords ongoing neocolonial conflicts: “The nature of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has also increased the demand for UAS, [as] identification of and strikes against targets hiding among civilian populations require[s] persistent surveillance and prompt strike capability, to minimize collateral damage.” This final claim about the minimalization of “collateral damage,” is not only indicative of the positive powers to “make live and let die” upon which biopower stakes its claim to legitimacy, but more immediately, it is a claim that, as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism has helped to highlight, is dubious at best and insidiously misleading at worst, thereby revealing the effort to establish a biopolitical self-evident legitimacy of drone warfare as it attempts to hide the violence inherent to the project of “making” bodies live. In this regime that codes bodies to the end of determining from whom, where, and under what conditions threats can emerge, the geopolitical specificity, and biopolitical exceptionality that drones and their reconnaissance-strike complex make possible recalls Foucault’s observation that “It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed... The principle underlying the tactics of battle - that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living - has become the principle that defines the strategy of states.”
While Dillon and Reid specifically focus on the genealogical relationship between the parallel advents of both counterterrorism strategy and complexity theory, it is worth noting that though the knowledges these disciplines produce are at bottom doubtless biologized and biopolitical, they also need to be understood in the context of the historical trend to locate threats in the Global South through the topological principles underpinning the logic of counterterrorism/counterinsurgency strategy, such as I described it in the previous section. Indeed, if the reconnaissance-strike complexes that UAVs inaugurate open up a heterotopic space of hierarchical relations between the United States and the targeted spaces and bodies upon whom their lethal payloads are delivered, then the biopolitical coding of bodies to be killed demonstrates the obsession with propinquity and/or distantiation characteristic of such heterotopic spatial complexes. However, while we have hitherto seen the crucial spatial aspects of these complexes at play by focusing on the ontological situation of threat in the spaces and bodies in the Global South, and thus, the coded biopolitical conditions under which bodies in these spaces can and must be killed in order to make life live, we have not yet determined the explicitly hierarchical nature of such relations. These relations, as I suggested above, are animated and determined not according to spatial considerations, but indeed, temporal ones. I will thus now turn to the temporally-determined allochonic nature of these relations by discussing the contemporary role of anthropological knowledge in what I call the neocolonial administration of life and death, recalling that such knowledge and administration is neocolonial by virtue of its historical forebears in the administration of colonies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

III. The Neocolonial Administration of Life and Death

Intended to mitigate various problems that occupying ground forces were commonly believed to be facing in their occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Human Terrain System (HTS), is a military program designed as a response to problems encountered in the military occupations of those countries throughout the last decade. Since 2006, the HTS has actively sought to train, employ, and utilize cultural and linguistic academics in fields such as anthropology, sociology, and political science, in order to equip outward-facing combat troops with an anthropological and sociological literacy of the populations and territories they would be penetrating in order to both maximize the success and efficiency of military operations in these regions, as well as to mitigate the marginal danger supposedly posed to soldiers, perceived as a consequence of inter-cultural and -linguistic unintelligibility between occupiers and occupied. Simply put, HTS detachments, known as Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) serve the tactical task of socioculturally taxonomizing and categorizing individuals in a combat environment as either “friends” or “enemies.” A task that Carl Schmitt once reserved for the unique space and practice of the political has thus been
reduced to the utilitarian ends of military engagement by American forces and their weapons in an age of, as the HTS website claims, “persistent war”. As Schmitt once predicted, even the most basic presuppositions of modern politics have been dissolved into technical sociological calculations about the limits of humanity in a pervasive economy of violence.

While the theoretical and methodological presuppositions both implicit and explicit in the impetus for and doctrine of this program (especially with regard to its heavy reliance on ethnographic data collection) is doubtless of some interest to us here, I want to maintain my focus on the imbrication HTS data in the deployment of drones and their reconnaissance strike complexes, and thus how this technē and praxis of war are inaugurating a neocolonial administration of life and death. There is a good deal of anthropological literature that already helpfully frames this problem in terms of the ethics and history of contemporary anthropological practice, however, this literature does not especially discuss the broader implications of this program as it is increasingly imbricated in drone warfare, and what this might hold for conceptualizing the conditions of contemporary international politics as such. I am thus more interested here in how this biopolitical and geopolitical economy of violence has itself already departed from the on-the-ground demand for and exercise of sociocultural knowledge expressed in the constitution and operation of the HTS.

Indeed, in their capacity to create “an enduring sociocultural knowledge base” that is housed in a so-called “Reach-back center,” the HTS and its HTTs are actively producing and contributing to an existing database of “maps... assembled in layers so that analysts can correlate previously unrelated qualities of an area to each other... One map might show the locations of all the tribes in a region. A second map of that same region might depict the known locations of all the suspected insurgents. By superimposing one over the other, an analyst might discover that the bad guys are in a single tribe.” Indeed, the labour performed by Human Terrain Teams, and the database of HTS knowledge to which this labour contributes, is directly implicated in the constitution of reconnaissance-strike complexes inaugurated by UAV strikes. The data collected by the Teams is processed through the very mechanisms of biopolitical coding discussed in the previous section, which is subsequently relayed to drones and their operators via what is known as “Tactical Common Data Link, which has become the services' standardized communication tool for providing ‘critical wideband data link required for real-time situational awareness, as well as real time targeting data to tactical commanders.”

Reflecting on the coding of bodies, Dillon and Reid have argued that “the body itself threatens catastrophe. Immune structures provided by the very complex adaptive structures of life become the very mechanisms which endanger it as well.” While I see no reason to contend with this argument, I am less convinced
by their further claim that “the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs which [was] initiated in the hiatus of geopolitical threat perception afforded by the dissolution of the Cold War,” altogether. The threat of catastrophe that Dillon and Reid mention is evident in Kilcullen’s work, itself an integral inspiration for and component of the HTS since its inception. As he opens his strategic treatise on counterinsurgency, for example, he contends that “Insurgencies, like cancers, exist in thousands of forms, and there are dozens of techniques to treat them, hundreds of different populations in which they occur, and several major schools of thought on how to treat them [italics added].” What we see here is not only the interpenetration of biologized understandings of life as cellular, viral threat: we also see, to my mind, a recalibration and mutation of the geopolitical location and conceptualization of threat, as I discussed in the first section. Indeed, it bears repeating that the heterotopic space opened up both in strategic discourses such as Kilcullen’s, as well as in the tactical turn to both drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes as well as the HTS, is part and parcel of the post-cold war ontology of threat that geopolitically traces a broad cartography of danger in the Global South.

Historically recent though the concepts and tendencies I have traced thus far may be, it is important to understand that they are an expression of a broader problematic in international relations discourses that Siba N. Grovogui has called the “racialization of history” and the “racialization of international knowledge.” As he notes, “where once analysts sought to advance social justice by examining social relations, power, and the nature of material transactions among entities, the new theories now assume the inevitability of the present order on the basis of the supposed civilizational attainments, cultural dispositions, and work ethics of the inhabitants of different regions of the globe.” We have seen in the context of drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes, the kinds of knowledges that take as their point of departure the “regional” and “cultural” dispositions for their strategic and tactical production and identification of threat. This is evident, for example, in Kilcullen’s description of the supposedly latent militant tendencies in specifically Sunni sects of Islam that cover large swathes of the African and Asian continents. These kinds of self-evident assumptions about spaces, populations, and bodies in the Global South are inheritances from the anthropological and legal representations of colonized peoples during the imperial era of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similar to Foucault’s theory of heterotopias, Grovogui’s argument suggests that these spaces and indeed, technologies of spatial organization were only conceivable as such by consequence of their hierarchical topologies of relations made possible by the imperial temporal registers with which each space is inflected. Crucially, this mode of knowledge production was and remains a process of identificatory realization of the neocolonial self as it is imagined through the location and locution of threat in the Global South, and thus a necessary incitement to neocolonial violence.
Concluding Remarks

My aim in this paper has been to conceptualize drones and some of the most insidious contexts and consequences of their ongoing deployment. Put simply, drones express ongoing violent regimes of taxonomizing, distantiating, and policing otherness in relations between imperial powers such as the United States and the Global South. Further, drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes express novel registers and techniques through which these anxieties are conceptualized, circumscribed, and policed. Reading through some of the presuppositions built into the imperatives and justifications for the use of these weapons is particularly helpful exercise through which we can reflect upon some of the strategic ontological imperatives and anxieties, and thus epistemological practices that follow therefrom, that are embedded in and crystallize around the deployment of drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes. These ontological positions and epistemological practices make possible a novel technique of administering life and death under the conditions of neocolonial relations between, in particular, the United States military apparatus and the Global South. In short, I have attempted to highlight and contextualize the stakes involved in and the implications that follow from the increased deployment of drones in global counterinsurgency and/or counterterrorism operations.

Heterotopias, we have noted, organize relations between discrete sites on the premise of a radically equal horizontality that nevertheless stubbornly clings to a hierarchical topology of relations, thereby determining either the proximity or distance between sites based on their temporal investments. The obsession with propinquity/distantiating, with the interstices between sites, and indeed as Foucault later put it, with the body itself as a site, organizes the temporal investments of these sites in a colonial context through practices of spatial distantiating. In the colonial era, anthropological conceptualization and ethnographic “observation” of colonized peoples were crucial modes of knowledge production that legally legitimated biopolitical imperatives to administer life and death. Much in the same vein then, the data collected by HTTs and circulated to drones and the operators of their reconnaissance strike complexes are facilitating a neocolonial administration of life and death today. Kilcullen has recently decried drone warfare, arguing that “the use of drones displays every characteristic of a tactic - or, more accurately, a piece of technology - substituting for a strategy.” He continues: “These attacks are now being carried out without a concerted information campaign... or a real effort to understand the tribal dynamics of the local population, efforts that might make such attacks more effective”. What he fails to realize is that, as I have
tried to demonstrate here, the reconnaissance-strike complexes that organize a heterotopic hierarchy of relations between sites of knowledge production, disseminate that information, and act upon that information is nothing less than the logical conclusion of his own strategy to counter what he calls a “global Islamist insurgency.” The Tactical Common Data-Link, through which such coded, allochonic knowledge about bodies and spaces is circulated to drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes, is explicitly designed to allow for the faster flow of information collected and catalogued by HTTs according to Kilcullen’s own sociological principles and imperatives of counterinsurgency/counterterrorism strategy. As the primary logistical delivery system of information for the reconnaissance-strike complexes inaugurated by drones and drone warfare, this Tactical Delivery System enacts the hierarchical organization of relations between discrete sites such as the bodies about whom this information is produced. In short, Kilcullen’s strategic imperatives to certain kinds of anthropological knowledge about peoples and spaces in his counterinsurgency and counterterrorist doctrines, and thus a certain mode of administering life and death therein, are evidence of a neocolonial administration of life and death that drones and their reconnaissance-strike complexes are facilitating to devastating effect.

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While I am acutely aware of the problematics bound up in the act of strictly delineating and fixing geographical nominations such as “Global North,” and “Global South,” or alternatively (though, to be sure, not equivocally) “the Third World,” I find myself in the tricky position of a need to highlight geopolitical orders of difference as they appear in both our discursive imaginaries, as well as in structures of military, economic, and legal power. As such, and for lack of any better alternatives, I here use these categories to denote the asymmetrical power relations between those communities, peoples, and polities in the two camps. To be sure, however, this is categorically not to suggest that such geopolitical categories such as “the Global South” or “the Third World” and their constitutive communities and polities are passive, without agency, and unilaterally only oppressed. Indeed the histories of the these very categories disclose active resistances to the power structures and ideologies emanating from “the Global North” and/or “the First World.” As Siba N. Grovogui notes, for example, “the “Global South” is not a directional designation or a point due south from a fixed north. It is a symbolic designation meant to capture the semblance of cohesion that emerged when former colonial entities engaged in


12 Williams, A. (2011). Enabling Persistent Presence? Performing the Embodied Geopolitics of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Assemblage. Political Geography 30. This is because, mainly, in that article Williams chooses not to examine or even consider the lived and very embodied implications for those who fall victim to this form of neocolonial violence.


21 In invoking the term “allochronism,” I am obviously invoking an understanding of the temporal situation of ethnographic subjects at a distance from the

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ethnographer, as it has been described in: Fabian, J. (1983). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia UP.


29 Foucault, 1967.

30 Fabian, 1983. As he notes on page 32 of that work, linking the concept to his thesis regarding the “denial of coevalness” effected through the discourse of ethnographic fieldwork, and also distinguishing the notion of “allochronism” from anachronism: “If coevalness, sharing of present time, is a condition of communication, then the anthropologist qua ethnographer is not free to ‘grant’ or ‘deny’ the coevalness of his interlocutors. Either he submits to the condition of coevalness and produces ethnographic knowledge, or he deludes himself into
temporal distance and misses the object of his search... Anachronism is a fact, or a statement of fact, that is out of tune with a given time frame; it is a mistake, perhaps an accident. I am trying to show that we are facing, not mistakes, but devices (existential, rhetorical, political). To signal that difference I will refer to the denial of coevalness as the allochronism of anthropology."

31 Foucault, 1967.
32 Foucault, 1967.
34 One need only consult the National Security Strategy published on behalf of the United States President and its executive branch, for example: “For nearly a decade, our Nation has been at war with a far-reaching network of violence and hatred... This is part of a broad, multinational effort that is right and just, and we will be unwavering in our commitment to the security of our people, states, allies, and partners. Moreover, as we face multiple threats - from nations, nonstate actors, and failed states - we will maintain the military superiority that has secured our country, and underpinned global security, for decades.” See: President, National Security Strategy (hereafter NSS), May 2010, i.
35 Fabian, 1983.
36 Gertler, 2012, p. 3.
42 Foucault, 1967.
43 Foucault, 1967.

Dillon and Reid, 2009, p. 119-120.


Foucault, 1967.


Foucault, 1967.


Foucault, 1991, p.137.


Gertler, 2012, p. 16.


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