http://www.surveillance-and-society.org | ISSN: 1477-7487
© The author, 2011 | Licensed to the Surveillance Studies Network under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives license.
the apolitical and ahistorical representation of these technologies, he considers what he calls the ‘geocorpographies’ at stake.

Emphasizing the relationship between geopolitical bodies and the biopolitical technologies of inscription, surveillance, and control (p.92), Pugliese considers the strategic use of biometrics in differentiating friend from foe in what Agnew refers to as the ‘territorial trap’ of global politics. In describing biometrics as ‘genealogically situated within regimes of truth, predicated on positivist ontologies of the visible’, Pugliese draws clear lines from the colonial and social Darwinist history of identification technologies, and the constitution and representation of bodies. Perhaps more than any other example, the strategic use of the ‘Biometrics Automated Toolset (BAT)’ by the US Marines in Iraq demonstrates how close to its genealogy biometrics remains. As others have argued (Measor and Muller 2010), the use of the BAT in Iraq is preoccupied with ‘visibility’ in the most nefarious political and racially motivated ways. Pugliese takes this argument further in highlighting the extent to which this not only extends the historical and colonial legacy of biometrics and identification technologies more generally, but the manner in which bodies are reconstituted and rendered visible.

In addition to the example of the BAT in Iraq, Pugliese investigates another important and obvious site for the contemporary geocorpographies of biometrics: the border. Although Pugliese’s references on the ‘biometric border’ are minimal, relying primarily on Amoore’s article, his analysis nevertheless complements much of this literature, which includes the likes of Lyon, Muller, Salter, and others. Certainly the portability of the border, or the way in which the proliferation of borders and bordering practices is enabled vis-à-vis biometrics fits well with Pugliese’s argument on the inscription of these technologies on the body. Again, contra the popular scientific literature on biometrics, whose banal appraisal of political, legal, and social considerations is thin and without irony, Pugliese’s account underscores the extent to which the border is to some extent made portable through the inscriptive technologies of biometrics. At the point of enrolment into biometric programmes the inscription and (re)constitution of gender, race, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, even danger, is made. Certainly the cases of a Palestinian labourer and the EU’s Eurodac information system provided by Pugliese are convincing examples of how ‘the biometric body is geocorpographically and somatechnically mediated’ (p.160), and sits well with the critical literature from Surveillance Studies, Critical Security Studies, and International Political Sociology that has begun to address similar concerns surrounding the politics of these technologies and their applications.

At a time when the securitization of mobility is so ubiquitous it has become almost banal, and the proliferation of the exceptional politics of the border extends outwards and proliferate, whether through the invasive checks in airports or the invocation of state legislation such as Arizona’s SB-1070, technology is regularly represented as a benign panacea to the alleged dangers of mobility. Pugliese’s account is exceptional in its problematization of such claims. By effectively ensconcing the evolution of biometrics in a colonial history leading to ‘infrastructural whiteness’, and exposing the positivist ontologies of the visible that enable biometrics, Pugliese’s argument that the ‘biometric body’ is mediated and constituted both geocorpographically and somatechnically provides a powerful counter argument to the ubiquitous arguments of technological inevitability, the extent to which technology allows any escape from racial profiling, and general claims about the banality of (in)visibility.

References