

**Wilcox (2017) analyses** the nature of drone warfare - specifically through the lense of one case in Afghanistan in 2010 where an American Predator drone crew killed 23 civilians, mistaking them for supposedly legitimate targets. Using an analysis of the case through for instance transcripts of dialogue within the crew operating the drone during and after the massacre, Wilcox showcases what she calls the *embodying* element of drone warfare, arguing that the acquisition of targets for drones - which bodies are deemed to be “killable” through this necropolitical violence - “distinguishing whose life is to be managed and those who are subject to the right of death” (Wilcox 2017, p. 5) - follows a *racialized* and *gendered* logic.

Targets for drone strikes are acquired through algorithms searching vast databases filled with different forms of intelligence, looking for “patterns of life” associated with being a terrorist. But despite all the technology involved, drones are not “other than human”, as Wilcox argues they are sometimes fetishized to be, but “posthuman” in an entanglement of machines, humans and discourse. The final decisions always come down to a drone operator’s eyes and biases – there is a visual and affective element to drone warfare.

You cannot, Wilcox argues, separate humans from the use of visual technologies, algorithms and artificial intelligence in drone warfare – “algorithmic war” is not simply about rational target identification and destruction. Wilcox uses the concept of *corporealization* (defined as “the interactions of humans and nonhumans in the distributed, heterogeneous work processes of technoscience”), arguing that “the sciences are imaged to be able to simplify and condense complex relationships and situated knowledges into singular digital maps of the body that are free from the alleged ‘failures’ of culture” (Wilcox 2017, p. 7), when in fact these practices are corporealizing their targets. Or, in short:

“As such, I understand the turn toward data and machine intelligence not as an ‘other than-human’ process of decision-making but as a form of embodiment that reworks and undermines essentialist notions of culture and nature, biology and technology, often but not necessarily in the service of projects of domination.” (Wilcox 2017, p. 7)

This can all be related to how Reid (2005) construes the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as having been presented through a logic of “humanitarian” or “liberal” warfare, and therefore as not having been expressions of a return to old forms of imperialism but of something new. The analysis provided by Wilcox could be seen as somewhat putting Reid’s argument into question by showcasing the arguably fundamentally imperialist notions driving the war in practice – but the logic of drone warfare is also one that differs from the traditional idea of imperialism. As Wilcox puts it, drone warfare extends American sovereignty “‘vertically’ through the air”, but therefore it also has “an ambiguous relationship to imperialism on the ground”, since drones operate in countries where the US has no troops (Wilcox 2017, p. 5).

## REFERENCES

Reid, Julian. 2005. The Biopolitics of the War on Terror: A Critique of the ‘Return of Imperialism’ Thesis in International Relations. *Third World Quarterly* 26(2).

Wilcox, Lauren. 2017. Embodying Algorithmic War: Gender, Race and the Posthuman in Drone Warfare. *Security Dialogue* 48(1).