JPM718

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Reading's Title: Embodying Algorithmic War: Gender, Race, and the Posthuman in Drone

1. Summary of the Reading:

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), better known as drones, are remotely piloted aircraft designed to detect targets with great precision. Up until now, they have made it possible to detect and eliminate terrorist experts of the highest rank. In addition, the use of drones is often considered the least bloody method. UAVs are also considered more effective and less violent than the army. They can control and monitor areas over an extended period.

However, the massacre in Uruzgan province reveals the inadequacies of relying on drone warfare, especially when we contemplate how many accidental deaths of innocent people there have been. According to American estimates, this technology has allowed between 2011 and 2013 to neutralize 3,300 al-Qaeda militiamen. However, data from other organizations paint a very different picture. According to estimates by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in 2011 alone, drones killed as many as 146 civilians, an almost 90% of people killed by attacks carried out with UAVs are civilian victims. The main reasons why drones cause the death of civilians, are the use of Signature-Strike and the use of the Pattern of Life method. The Signature-Strike is the criteria by which the CIA and the US Army identify targets. According to this method, the objectives are identified not as a result of certain evidence, but based on patterns of behavior, which in turn are often analyzed through racist prejudice. Any suspicious activity, such as the repeated crossing of borders or unloading and loading of material on a car is enough to be considered a potential target. Kids who do sports and train, according to this method, may be considered members of an enemy training camp. Therefore, it's clear that this criterion often leads to miscalculations and the resulting deaths of innocent people. Terrorists also often live close in contact with local communities, and by doing so they jeopardize anyone who comes into contact with them. The Pattern of Life method is based on the use of signal intelligence also called SIGINT, which collects and groups information from videos, phones, emails, social media, and the internet. Algorithms, and artificial intelligence, are taking the place of humans in decisions making. Drones are called "the eye of God", to symbolize the fact that they can interrupt the life of people by hitting them with precision from above. As Shaw said: "everywhere and nowhere, drones have become sovereign tools of life and death, and are coming to a sky near you".

But this mathematical perfection of theirs is an illusion. The delusion of being able to see everywhere from a disembodied position. Drones do not have an omniscient view of the globe, they are seemingly perfected, and they are lacking accuracy and efficiency. Feminist theories make it clear that there is a tendency to speak of drones as "other than human" to reinforce the separation between humans, and artificial intellects and algorithms, to symbolize, as already mentioned, the superiority of the latter.

3. Relation to the Main Reading:

The two papers are connected in many ways. Although the central arguments may seem different, both speak of the war on terrorism and specifically about the role of the United States.

According to Julian Reid, there can be no talk of a return to imperialism because the strategy of power moves on a track between biopower and sovereignty. The war on terrorism is not a regression to an imperialistic system but is better understood if we analyze the forms of development that have changed and reshaped the international system, especially considering the relevance in today's world of international and regional organizations.

However, the war on terror has no boundaries, it's the theatre of operations transcending traditional borders—both ethical, legal, and geographical. This is certainly a new type of war, against a new enemy that does not respect the rules of classical war. The war on terror, with the use of drones, allows the

United States to control the population at any time. Because is a new model of war, the United States have more room for movement because the laws are not yet defined. By invoking self-defense and the need to act quickly because the threat is imminent, they can act and make mistakes without many or little repercussions. Speaking of self-defense, reference is made not only to the security of the American state but also to the protection of the international order based on the state system. Nevertheless, something that could be positive in the sense that it means that the army does not have to fight and lose their lives on the battlefield, it's turned into a double-edged sword because the separation between the man and the drone can be used to deny any responsibility, even though people are always behind the operation of the drones. In addition: the guidance and supervision of drones by operators who are located thousands of miles from areas affected by conflict risks generating a "PlayStation mentality" where they kill as if they were playing a video game and as if their actions don't have consequences.

2. Critical Analysis:

In my opinion what is explained precisely, is the relationship between drones, race, and gender. It may seem strange that a military weapon which on paper defines itself as a superior way of dealing with war, may involve a type of violence that mainly affects some specific bodies. This happens because behind every drone there is a core of people with opinions and prejudices that guide them. Moreover, the target is chosen not only based on the behavior analyzed by an algorithm, but also based on a human interpretation. One striking example is that of Sikh men who have been shunned as enemies based on a racial profile. As Paul said: "What is being preempted is not the danger of the known but the danger of the not-knowing". Furthermore, perhaps due to a morbid charm that is connected to the idea of hitting and destroying targets, often the seek of an accurate assessment of the thread is done only if this assessment confirms the prejudices that there are a priori. Even more than in the case of classical war, the dehumanization of the targets adds hatred and satisfaction when the target is annihilated.

Another case where drones are used for racist purposes is the Mare Nostrum missions. This mission, which in theory should serve to protect the borders of Europe and reduce deaths in the Mediterranean, was born to hit a specific type of body and is based on racist prejudices. What seems clear, is the will to militarize even more the borders and prevent the arrival of people. Humanitarian organizations spoke of the "dirty hands of the EU", because "making the controls more rigid does nothing but lengthening the migratory routes and often making them more dangerous".

What I think is missing in both papers, is an analysis of why drones, even with many flaws, are used, especially in the US war against terror. The US government defends itself against the criticism of illegal attacks by claiming that the nation is in a global war against a sneaky enemy, Al Qaeda, and other organizations. Normal military technologies and traditional armed conflicts are useless against these unconventional opponents, which base their strategy on unpredictable attacks and guerrilla actions. The use of drones is also more human than the use of bombs. When Obama took office in the White House in 2009, the United States already had many years of exhausting war in the Middle East. Public pressure to reduce the number of people in this theatre was very strong, but the threat posed by terrorist organizations and local militias was equally strong. The UAV, therefore, was the best solution to handle this situation. The drones have allowed the US administration to maintain pressure on its enemies, constantly targeting and eliminating several high and low-caliber terrorists, all this without having to send new troops to foreign lands and thus allowing to reduction the military commitment abroad (the reduction of the so-called "boots on the ground"). It was therefore a mere technical choice and an optimization of the cost-results ratio.