

6-1-2018

**Parks, L. & Kaplan, C. (Eds.). Life in the Age of Drone Warfare.  
London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.**

Ọláyọkù Philip Adémóǵá Ph.D.  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria, philip.olayoku@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Adémóǵá, Ọláyọkù Philip Ph.D. (2018) "Parks, L. & Kaplan, C. (Eds.). Life in the Age of Drone Warfare. London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 9 : No. 2 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol9/iss2/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**Parks, L. & Kaplan, C. (Eds.). *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*. London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.**

The title *Life in the age of Drones* is an edited volume of three parts of five chapters each that comprehensively addresses the trajectories and modes of intersectionality between man and drones, the new technology of visibility with a scopic expansion from initial deployment by the military for surveillance and target attacks/killings to private and commercial use by civilians for agricultural construction and monitoring, delivery, news reporting, and leisure, among others. With a multidisciplinary approach, the 16 authors<sup>1</sup> transverse the juridical, technosocial, psychosocial, biopolitical, gender, power, race, historical literary (at times biographical), securitization, spatio-temporal, and dialectical contexts of how this advanced technology of real-time imaging has shaped lives and relations at the global, transnational, and local levels. The methodology adopted basically entailed a critical analysis in engagement of these major themes by the authors through data drawn from sources including oral testimonies from interviews, court cases, science fiction, film, letters, archival sources, media reportage, and musical lyrics and videos. The editors, Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan, in their introduction emphasized five critical themes addressed in this volume to include cultural imaginaries, the biopolitics of drone technology (for power assertion), the paradox of difference and affectation in man's relations with drones, the sensory and perceptual manifestation of drones as both the subject and object of imagery, and finally, lawfare, which explores the justiceability of the impacts of drones across local, national, and transnational applications amidst the emergence of techno-imperialism.

The first part, "Juridical, Genealogical and Geopolitical Imaginaries" addresses the ethical dimensions of verticality in asymmetrical technosocial relations between man and man-machine<sup>2</sup> through surveillance in collapsed spatio-temporal contexts. The first article, by Derek Gregory, "Dirty Dancing," discourses the vulnerability of borderlands (referred to as Federally Administered Tribal Areas – FATA), historically considered spaces of exception with legal anomaly, to extra-judicial killings without accountability. Within the Pakistani context, the presence of contested and multiple legal authorities resulted in the collaboration between the Pakistani government and the United States in carrying out targeted killings, which has resulted in unjustified killing of civilians, as exemplified in the stories of Mamana Bibi and Baitullah Mehsud. According to Gregory, there is need to reassert the agency of the inhabitants of FATA in demanding accountability of drone operations and exploring the oppressive biopolitical context that has redefined the human body as the battlefield. The next article, by Lisa Hajjar, "Lawfare and Armed Conflicts," explores the concept of state lawfare as negating lawfare – the judicial arguments that demand accountability from the military and security policies of sovereign states under international law. Therein, she argues that state lawfare has undermined international humanitarian laws as sovereign states legalize actions that violate these laws. Drawing from the examples of the Israeli policy of targeted killings during the first intifada and those of the US in Yemen and Pakistan in post 9/11, she notes that the justification for these killings was based on the policy that it was legal to kill enemies that posed imminent threats but could not be immediately arrested. She consequently posited that the primacy of lawfare over state lawfare should be restored to assert the illegality and illegitimacy of targeted killings to curtail "assassination campaigns."

The article "American Kamikaze" is a historical narrative of the emergence of drones during WWII whereby arguments for the application of advanced media technology to flying planes were presented to counter the Japanese Kamikaze, even before the latter became

operational. This drive for technical superiority, devised “to construct and counter” the enemy, entailed a presentation of the television-guided drone as precise in real time and safe to avoid civilian casualties. However, technical failures leading to drone crashes and civilian casualties negated the superiority of the TV-guided drone to the Tokkotai Kamikaze, thereby contesting the inevitability of unmanned aerial vehicles, as the sociotechnicality of their operation ultimately centralizes the role of man. Andrea Miller situates the complexities of the criminalizing the affective and intrinsic potentials of netizens to inspire future terrorists activities in her “(Im)material Terror.” She critiques the criminalization of subjective motives and intents of racialized subjects through pre-emptive governance instrumentalized by the 18 US Code 2339B. This, for her, is rooted in the legacies of racism, colonialism, and genocide, which redefine the spatiotemporality of violence at the service of the United States’ imperialistic drive. The final article in Part I is titled “Vertical Mediation and the US Drone War in the Horn of Africa” and explores the activities of the United States military in its Djibouti base to fight al-Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia. This exploration is divided into three main parts: the infrastructural, which discusses the use of metadata from mobile phones for drone attacks; the perceptual, which discusses how the vertical imaging is redefining race, death, security, and ‘otherness’; and the forensic, which focuses on the failure of drones through crashes and how this has diversely affected social and sociotechnical relations of the Djiboutians, military, and al-Shabaab.

The second part of the text is titled “Perception and Perspective” and broadly captures how distance is collapsed through space and time to reveal overlaps of these two components in aerial drone warfare and geopolitics. Its narratives explain how drone operations affect modes of perception and the formation of perspectives. Caren Kaplan’s “Drone-O-Rama” contests the assumption that drone warfare is new by tracing the incorporation of cameras into airplanes for representation during WWI to drones’ redefinition of imaging in warfare by influencing representation itself. The author herein lays bare the traumatizing effect of drone warfare on operators and the tensions of domestic securitization in the post-9/11 United States, first between the military and the police, whose functions now overlap, and then between the security agents and civilians with the erosion of the principle of the presumption of innocence. “Dronologies,” by Ricardo Dominguez, specifically addresses the ecological impacts of drones through an analysis of Nano trails by the scientist Dr. Heidegger. While a positive of using drones to mitigate global warming came to the fore, there are serious and damaging consequences for drone use involving nanoparticles including inadvertent health hazards of Morgellons<sup>3</sup> and prion disease<sup>4</sup> resulting from inhaling the mixture of nanoparticles and oxygen. Beyond these physical impacts of the previous two chapters, Thomas Stubblefield contextualizes the psychological impact of representation, aptly captured by Pakistani psychologists as anticipatory anxiety, resulting from the use of drone art for profiling and targeted killings. In adopting the theory of accelerationism, he maintains that the overbearing nature of capitalism in counterterrorism efforts can be mitigated through its inner capacities for self-destruction. Similar to Derek Gregory’s article, Madiha Tahir captures Pakistans’s Waziristan and North West Frontier as illustrating borderlands as inherited spaces of ambiguity subjected to political manipulation and impunity as legacies of colonialism. She expresses how layers of securitization of these areas encourage corruption and violence as exemplified in the everyday hazards faced by truck drivers at checkpoints, while stressing the importance of restoring agency to locals in these ambiguous spaces to reverse the racialized cultural subjectivities. From a perspective of media representation, Anjali Nath’s “Stoners, Stones and Drones” engages the low theory in discussing the visuals and lyrics of Himanshu Heem’s “Soup Boys (Petty Drones)” video. The video,

produced by a diasporic South Asian, contests the visual logic of transnational warfare through a blend of representations of surveillance of South Asians within the homeland and diaspora. As well as feminizing the drone, Heem's video also portrays a subversive art which resists conformity with logics of the drone's optic violence.

The third part of the work details the more technical aspect of "Biopolitics, Automation and Robotics," with authors focusing more on the sociotechnicality of drones and the state-of-the-art, the recursive relationship between drone and man, as well as cognitive dissonance resulting from the psychological stress on drone operators. The coauthored chapter by Jeremy Packer and Joshua Reeves, "Taking People Out," juxtaposes the competing logic of command and control against the aspiration to autonomous action of detachment in the bid to eliminate errors from human noise (through humanectomy) during drone operations. There is thus the experimentation of developing automated image processing technologies, which allows the drones to process information and decide targets independently. Peter Asaro, the author of "The Labor of Surveillance and Bureaucratized Killing," reversed the focus from drones to human operators as key sociotechnical actors, while critiquing the heroic and anti-heroic drone myths as overgeneralizations. Furthermore, he contends surface-level reports of stressors as resulting from overworking drone operators as well as more complex issues of excision from the locales of operation and the difficulty of alternating between combat zones and domestic Life. The next chapter is "Letter from a Sensor Operator," in which Brandon Bryant details a personal narrative of trauma with reference to the killing of Al Awlaki which contradicted the democratic rights of an American citizen. The final chapter, "Drone Imaginaries," is a discourse of two literary texts: *Grounded* – a short play on a female drone pilot traumatized by being watched, which validated the PTSD earlier discussed by Asaro, and *Drones* – which is an Indian narrative work of science fiction detailing the imperialist use of drones by corporate individuals who use religion and technology to subjectivize other citizens. Both texts express the friction between the state and private/corporate drone owners - who that contest state sovereignty through independent surveillance, which also critiquing violence and exploitative economic policies.

This text largely benefits from its array of sources and methodological approaches that enabled substantial coverage of technical, juridical, economic, historical, and ethical issues. However, the volume could have benefitted by covering more topics beyond America's involvement in drone warfare, as this would have enabled audiences of other nationalities to find relevance within local contexts. Likewise, the language technicalities in several articles create difficulty for readers unfamiliar with military technology in spite of their relevance to their fields. In spite of this, however, the volume retains its relevance in advocating for checks and balances within the continuous drive for technological advancement.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The only coauthored chapter is Chapter 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Man" here is used generically to capture the drone targets and those who deploy the drones.

<sup>3</sup> Morgellons disease is a skin disorder characterized by hair-like filaments that are embedded in the skin. Recent studies have associated the condition with tick-borne infection. The use of nanotrails (an addition of nanoparticles to a chemtrails) for weather modification by UAVs in carrying out germ warfare could result in the Morgellons disease when it comes to contact with humans.

<sup>4</sup> Prion disease refers to a group of conditions that affects the brain. Since the ionized nanoparticles have attractions to the potassium-calcium channel in the brain, they have the potential to eat into the brain.

Ọláyọkù Philip Adémólá PhD  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria  
[philip.olayoku@gmail.com](mailto:philip.olayoku@gmail.com)