### ARTICLE IN PRESS

Political Geography xxx (2017) 1-7



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Political Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo



Reading Ian Shaw's *Predator Empire: Drone Warfare and Full Spectrum Dominance* 

Predator Empire: Drone Warfare and Full Spectrum Dominance, Ian G.R. Shaw. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis (2016). 336 pp £18.47 (kindle edition), £81 (hardcopy), £22.99 (Paperback) ISBN-10: 0816694745, ISBN-13: 978-0816694747

#### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Majed Akhter

This forum draws on an "Author meets Critics" session organized around Ian Shaw's *Predator Empire: Drone Warfare and Full Spectrum Dominance.* The session was held during the American Association of Geographers' conference in Boston in 2017. The reviewers, all US-based political geographers, share an admiration for the book's bold engagements with drone war as symptomatic of a larger socio-technological process of civilizational enclosure. The reviewers also voiced their views on the limitations of the book, especially in terms of its treatment of racial hierarchies and exclusions, the economic geography of the drone industry, and the all-encompassing nature of what Shaw refers to as the "Predator Empire".

Shaw characterizes the Predator Empire as a "concept used to gather together and theorize the multiple military, policing, and surveillance apparatuses that coordinate an increasingly dronified war on terror," with a focus on how this war is carried out by the U.S. security state (p.6). Predator Empire, posits Shaw, manifests along four distinct axes. These are a "mode of state power (policing), a military strategy (predation), an archetypal technology of remote surveillance (the Predator and Predator B drone), and a geographical scale (the planetary)" (Kindervater, 2017). Shaw elegantly draws these four threads of Predator Empire together to diagnose and theorize a reconfigured socio-technological terrain that both enables and enhances the geographical (as well as the psychological and affective) reach of the U.S. security state.

Predator Empire weaves discussion of philosophical ideas into a clear and compelling narrative that addresses the ethno-political implications of the invasive technologies of state control and violence. The introductory chapter is a theoretical review and reflection on technological civilization as a form of historical and ongoing enclosure. Chapter 1 explains the historical geographies and theoretical implications of the English enclosure movement and Chapter 2 recounts and analyzes the technological experiments and advances made by the US security state in Cold War Vietnam. Chapter 3 charts the globalization of the electronic battlefield pioneered in the jungles of Vietnam in the war on terror, while Chapter 4 is a sustained engagement with the political philosophy of

Hannah Arendt, especially around the bureaucratic dimensions of state power and surveillance. Chapter 5 rounds out the book by drawing on urban theory to discuss policing as a form of internal pacification, with a focus on the context of the U.S. The geographical, historical, and theoretical range of these engagements support Shaw's ambition of analyzing Predator Empire as a global and totalizing condition.

In what follows, three critics reflect on *Predator Empire*, with an eye towards identifying the openings created by the book for further research into the technological geopolitics of securitization, surveillance, and state power. Sue Roberts highlights Shaw's tendency to portray the Predator Empire in all-encompassing terms, to the point where there seems no room for constitutive differentiations in the analysis. Roberts also argues that despite Shaw's engagement with Marxism, there is a "relative neglect of the economic or political economic dimensions of Predator Empire." Vanessa Massaro draws on the feminist, postcolonial, and black radical traditions to highlight how Shaw's concerns are narrowly focused on the power relations of capital and class. She suggests that accounting for "technologies of difference beyond that of class" could allow Shaw to expose the "fragility of both masculinity and whiteness" that undergird the injustices and exclusions of capitalist modernity. Kate Hall draws on black feminist scholarship to elaborate on one of Shaw's central themes – the deeply politicized determination of what is on the "inside" of civilization, and the related question of who gets to count as fully human. In addition to the importance of technology in determining these boundaries, Hall urges greater attention to the constitutive role of "processes of racialization" in the history and present of capitalism. Thus, while Shaw examines the English enclosure as a historical precedent of violent enclosure, future research may shed greater light on the explicitly racialized dimensions of enclosure with a historical examination of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Undergirding these engagements are more abstract questions about the concept of "Predator Empire" itself. What type of concept is Predator Empire, and what type of analytical work can we ask of it? Shaw seems to move between understanding the Predator Empire as an emergent global condition versus one that is already firmly entrenched in our socio-technological landscape. I find it interesting to read Predator Empire as cautionary abstraction. This means that rather than describing the current configuration of world politics Predator Empire captures, in purposively stark terms, we might ask how technologies like militarized drones exert a technological imperative that pushes towards a specific trajectory of securitized state-formation. I take this to mean that the technopolitical structures Shaw so carefully explains in the book, once in place, push state formation in a specific direction – the direction of the Predator Empire. These same structures also structurally limit alternate socio-technical arrangements not predicated on strategies of enclosure, dispossession, accumulation, and overall 2

"full-spectrum dominance." It is therefore not necessary to accord the Predator Empire suffocating omnipotence, dominance, or completion in order for the category to shed new and critical light on the geopolitical and ethical-political dynamics of mystified technologies like drones.

Predator Empire stands apart from most of the proliferating literature on militarized drones. In contrast to the technocratic, statecentric, and tactical character of the journalistic, juridical, activist and geopolitical commentaries on drone war, Shaw directly engages the philosophical, existential, and civilizational implications of the ever-increasing technological capacity for surveillance and tracking that targets specific individuals and population groups. Another welcome contribution of the book lies in its style and grace. Constructing a message with the potential to proliferate a critical and materialist understanding of state violence beyond the confines of academia is one of Shaw's major commitments. To this end, he has also produced Remote: A Documentary about Drones and Humans that supplements the book and that has great pedagogical potential for a range of publics, especially students (https://vimeo.com/222209662).

I have no doubt that Shaw would be delighted if the book should spur further research on the materiality of state formation. But the book is written in a way that it has the potential to go beyond the research community to shape broader conceptions of the imbrications of war, policing, surveillance, and technologies of control. As such, the pairing of Shaw's *Predator Empire* with *Remote* is a model for geographers who aim not only to reshape research agendas in their field, but also to engage broader and more diverse publics.

#### 2. Delineating Predator Empire

#### 2.1. Susan Roberts

This is an important book. In it, Ian Shaw considers the rise of drones as key technologies of state violence. He carefully identifies what is happening in the contemporary moment, and then draws out the precedents, meaning, and implications of current trajectories. The basic question Shaw is concerned with is posed early on in the book: "What does it mean for humans to exist in an era of dronified state violence?" (p. 5).

In terms of identifying the present moment, Shaw takes an historical approach, providing a detailed, yet readable, account of the various initiatives, programs, and plans that enabled the drone to become a key technology and weapon. To describe the contemporary situation, Shaw develops this idea of the Predator Empire. He writes: "Predator Empire is a concept used to describe the contemporary and future US national security state, an arrangement of military power, state violence and unprecedented surveillance technology" (p.241; see also p. 6).

And, in terms of the implications of Predator Empire, Shaw shows how it is a socio-technical formation that is connected to totalitarianism-a new type of totalitarianism characterized by social control (rather than discipline) and machine intensive state violence (rather than labor intensive). It is also a distinctively US empire.

One of this book's major strengths is that Shaw is not afraid to draw out the big picture implications of life under Predator Empire. To do this, he builds on theorists such as Hannah Arendt — particularly to consider some of the frightening political implications, and on Peter Sloterdijk, to help understand how the drone can facilitate geopolitical enclosure of the skies, effectively saturating human life and imprisoning people in "sociopsychic spheres" (p.55). Nonetheless, there seems to be some tension as the overarching depictions of the state of "humanity" and the discussion of allencompassing planetary logics risk losing sight of the geographies

of Predator Empire.

In many parts of the book, Shaw does draw out the formative significance of the geographies of Predator Empire. For example, he delineates the key role of The Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, a region subjected to particularly intense US drone surveillance and strikes. Citing the traumatic effects of living under drones, and how everyday behavior is affected, Shaw shows how the "biopolitical logic of drone strikes, is not simply death, then: it is the ordering and policing of the lifeworld" (p. 126). Nonetheless, Shaw sees the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, and presumably now Yemen, as proving grounds for an evolving "topological empire in which space is unilaterally erased by technics" (p. 129).

Claiming that "[t]he world is being remade into a battlespace" (p.112), though, can be a generalization that glosses over the highly differentiated human experiences of state drone violence. Likewise, thinking of the "dronification of the human condition" in the singular (p. 28) may be too abstract to acknowledge, and also to consider the significance of, the changing geographical intensities of drone deployment around the world.

Shaw writes of the human condition under drones as characterized by "anxious, hypersecured, atomized individuals: soothed and yet ever distressed by the buzz of police robots swarming the skies" (p. 28). But this is not a generic human condition, is it? As Shaw's own emphasis on the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan reveals, there is an enormous, and highly significant, difference between life under drones in that part of the planet, and life under drones in the US, say. By invoking the language of empire, Shaw recognizes that the asymmetries, the inequities, and the power logics, built on historic spatialities of empire and hegemony, while enabled by new technologies, are still significant, and even constitutive or formative, of the vastly different human conditions (plural). And overly abstracting or generalizing does not just occlude the spatiality of present-day trajectories, it also misses acknowledging and analyzing the important multiple racialized geographies at the heart of Predator Empire.

Having said this, Shaw does emphasize that Predator Empire is itself characterized by a spatio-organizational shift from "Baseworld" to "Droneworld." As drones change the ways wars are fought, Droneworld relies on a different kind of spatial organization. Fewer giant airbases, for example, and many more smaller distributed bases. Shaw writes of how a "constellation of bases forms the skeleton of the Predator Empire, providing the material infrastructure of targeted killing" (p. 129). Shaw's overview of what is happening in Africa is extremely interesting in this regard. He points out that there are a few key bases in the region, with multiple smaller facilities, networked together in an "architecture of hubs and spokes, of drones and special forces" under construction, and that this "aims at eradicating the tyranny of distance and brings the dangerous splinterlands of the continent under the watchful eyes of robots" (p. 141). This architecture is supported by communications infrastructure, from satellites to fiber-optic cables, from roads to quays, and represents considerable investment. The "killnet" or, in other words, "the multiple, dispersed, and violent infrastructures that have snapped together in the Predator Empire" (p. 195) is simultaneously thus a technological, geopolitical, and geoeconomic phenomenon.

This book's focus is resolutely on the technological (though Shaw prefers to write of "technicity") and the political. To a degree, the "economic" is treated as a separable (though see p. 33) and subsidiary in terms of the analysis presented. This focus is part of the book's brilliance — for example in pointing us to the significance of the machinic in the emergence of "rule by nobody" (pp. 24—25) or the possibilities of a "more-than-human geopolitics" (p. 39). But the relative neglect of the economic or political

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