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DOI:

[10.1177/0309132517735697](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517735697)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Akhter, M. (2019). The proliferation of peripheries: Militarized drones and the reconfiguration of global space. *Progress in human geography*, 43(1), 64-80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517735697>

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## **I Drones and global space**

In the summer of 2013, President Obama delivered some unexpectedly personal remarks about the controversial killing the previous year of Trayvon Martin, a black college student, in Florida. Obama sensitively drew on his own experiences as a black man in the US. He did not shy from addressing the question of race at the center of the controversy, and alluded to slave labor and anti-black racism in the US as a “set of experiences and a history that doesn’t go away”. Despite Obama’s eloquence, not everyone was impressed. In an article titled “If Trayvon were Pakistani” analyst Micah Zenko contrasted the President’s sensitive approach to domestic racialized killing with his notorious campaign of drone attacks in the highlands of northwest Pakistan. Especially controversial were the so-called “signature strikes” Obama repeatedly authorized – drone killings based on “appearance, associations, and statistical propensity to violence” (Zenko, 2013) of racialized target populations. While the situation of young men in northwest Pakistan and the urban US are different in a multitude of ways, Zenko noticed a common thread. Populations in both instances were subject to violence based on racial and geographical assumptions – who and where they were (or were not supposed to be). As police departments in urban US and Europe increasingly turn to drones for purposes of security and surveillance, the thread of colonial and unaccountable state violence that links peripheral spaces and populations in wildly disparate locations is harder to ignore (Wall, 2016).

This paper conceptualizes the periphery as the spatial effect of colonial state power at multiple scales and locations. Peripheries are colonial spaces because of their occupation by what Lisa Parks (2016) calls the “targeted class”– populations subject to state violence, surveillance and/or control based on racialized assumptions. This conception of global spatial hierarchy encompasses and exceeds traditional understandings of the periphery as the “Global South”, “the developing world” or the “Third World” (e.g. Patnaik and Patnaik, 2017). The paper takes the rise of militarized drones (remotely piloted vehicles used for surveillance and/or killing) as a unique vantage point from which to analyze and rethink peripheries and global space. Militarized drones provide a privileged analytical entry point into reconfigurations of global space because they are a technological embodiment of the political and economic imperatives of colonial state power (Shaw, 2016b; Chamayou, 2015).

The proliferation of militarized drones is reconfiguring global space in at least two senses. First, militarized drones are proliferating to the global periphery, understood as economically and militarily less powerful regions of the world where territorial sovereignty is increasingly contingent. Second, and more surprisingly, the deployment of militarized drones by states within their own territory is causing a proliferation of peripheries at multiple scales beyond the global periphery. As argued in detail below, the link between the foreign and domestic deployment of drones is the essential function of the drone as an instrument of colonial power at all scales. This paper synthesizes insights from the literatures on militarized drones, Marxist geography, and state/nation theory to reflect on the geopolitical and spatial implications of the increasing use of militarized drones by states. For manageability, the paper focuses only on drones used by states as unmanned aerial combat/surveillance vehicles, or militarized drones.

The paper also offers a critical internationalist response to the proliferation of peripheries and the “dronification of state violence” (Shaw and Akhter, 2014). The use of militarized drones has catalyzed protests and opposition not only in Southwest Asia and Africa, where some of the most controversial drone attacks have occurred, but also within countries that deploy militarized drones abroad, like Israel and the US. These geographically scattered yet structurally connected protests, from Washington D.C. to northwest Pakistan, illuminate the “powerful ways in which objects can spark publics into being and function as vectors of political agonism” (Walters, 2014: p. 104). The academic and policy opposition to armed drones from dispersed locations suggests how drones are transforming not only the spaces of war, but also the spaces of anti-war. Protestor around the world have used diverse strategies to counter militarized drones, ranging from artistic interventions to marches to appealing to international law. The defense of territorial sovereignty plays a contradictory role in these protests. On the one hand, the state is the primary wielder of colonial power. On the other hand, however, the state can also serve as a site of resistance to colonial power at different scales. Embracing this contradiction means developing a dialectical theory of state power and an internationalist strategy of resistance to the proliferation of peripheries. This paper offers such an analysis by drawing on the anticolonial state theory of Antonio Gramsci and Frantz Fanon.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reconceptualizes the periphery to account for the spatial effects of colonial state power that exceed the space and scale of the territorial state. Section 3 synthesizes and elaborates insights from the literature on militarized drones. The focus of this section is on colonial state power, a concept that blurs the distinction between class war and inter-state war, between policing within countries and war between them. Section 4 discusses two modes of global proliferation related to militarized drones – the proliferation of drones to states in the global periphery, and the global proliferation of peripheries. The concept of colonial state power sheds light on the unified nature of state violence in a capitalist world economy. It also provides a starting point for the articulation of a political response to the proliferation of peripheries. Section 5 presents an internationalist position on the defense territorial sovereignty in the context of the proliferation of peripheries at multiple scales. I conclude by summarizing the major contributions of the paper with respect to the reconceptualization of the periphery and the colonial technologies of state violence, and charting some paths for future research.

## **II Theorizing the periphery**

This section conceptualizes the periphery as an effect of colonial state power at multiple scales and across scattered sites. This departs from core-periphery models in dependency theory and world-systems theory (Patnaik and Patnaik, 2017; Wallerstein, 2004), where “the core” is a geographic zone that enjoys high levels of income, social welfare, and consumption at the expense of “the periphery”. In such models, the core maintains and reproduces its exploitative relation with the periphery through political means – for example through undermining industrialization or enforcing unfavorable terms of trade (Flint and Taylor, 2006; Chase-Dunn, 1996). World-systems approaches have also introduced the category of the “semi-periphery”, which encompasses regions that are either ascending into core status or descending into the periphery. Even though this adds flexibility to the theorization of global hierarchical space, critics point out that core-periphery models tend to remain rigid, dualistic, state-centric, and blind to the many networked, splintered, and modular economic and political flows that constitute the dynamics of contemporary globalization (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Sidaway, 2007).

Furthermore, traditional models of world economy and politics do not sufficiently account for the multi-scalar nature and articulation of core-periphery dynamics. The geography of militarized drones, the focus of this paper, is particularly revealing of peripheralization as a multi-scalar process. The deployment of armed drones has confirmed the fact of a global periphery where the territorial sovereignty of states is violated by more militarily powerful states in practice, even as the equality of all states in the inter-state system is formally maintained (Kindervater, 2017; Williams, 2010). This global periphery, where lethal drones kill and surveil despite the absence of a declared battlefield, includes spaces within the territories of Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Somalia – all places traditional world-systems theory would consider the global periphery. At the same time, however, geographers and others have challenged notions of a unitary global periphery by pointing out how drones create colonial spaces in other places, and often by states within their own territories. These spaces include the US/Mexico border, the Chinese interior, the Turkish highlands, the Mediterranean, and the urban centers of US and Europe (Shaw, 2016a; Wall, 2016; Gregory, 2011). The geographies of militarized drones reaffirm the need to move beyond a dualistic approach to the core-periphery model while retaining the concept of the “global periphery” to acknowledge that in some regions of the world, territorial sovereignty is violable by drones deployed by militarily and economically stronger states.

This analysis retains and reworks the concept of a global periphery. As state theorist Wang Hui insists, “irrespective of level and aspect, the interaction between center and periphery is common to all regions” (Wang, 2011: p. 192). Although Wang is critical of ahistorical analyses that understand “core” and “periphery” as static regions, his analysis of world politics leads him to argue that “the center-periphery relationship is constant and clear no matter how complex the structure is” (ibid: p. 182). Wang insists that the “structural element” of core-periphery dynamics is always in dialectic conversation other factors that shape regions and their constitutive interconnections. I follow Wang in this respect, and hold that a continued relevance of a global periphery, in politics and in theoretical analysis, does not foreclose nuanced and spatially flexible notions of peripheralization as a process of producing disparate regions as colonial state space. This more dialectical understanding eschews binaries and spectrums, and instead understands core-periphery relations at different scales to be “distinctions within a unity”. This means that even as core and periphery refer to distinct regions and populations, these regions and

populations are mutually constructed and constitutive of a larger multi-scalar process. Instead of dismissing the notion of peripheries on the one hand, or insisting on a rigid and unchanging spatial periphery on the other, the analytical challenge is rather to understand how an array of social and political forces work to realize, complicate, or interrupt processes of peripheralization at multiple scales.

Peripheralization is a process of “demotion or downgrading of a socio-spatial unit in relation to other socio-spatial units” which result in “relationships of socio-spatial inequalities between centers and peripheries” (Kühn, 2015: p. 374). Going further, we can understand peripheries to exist at multiple scales and in a variety of spatial forms – including enclaves, regions, corridors, countries, and neighborhoods. That is to say that the production of peripheries, or of spaces subject to colonial or neocolonial logics of rule, exceeds the space of the Global South or the global periphery. Anticolonial geographer Jim Blaut drew parallels between the socio-spatial relations he analyzed in the ghettos of racial and ethnic minorities in the US and in colonized countries around the world. “The essential attribute” he argued, is “the use of political oppression to enforce and sustain a pattern in which labor suffers exploitation” (Blaut, 1987: p. 165). For Blaut, “modern capitalism finds it to be necessary to maintain a massive super-exploited labor force at places central to the system as it does in peripheral regions that is the world of colonies and neocolonies” (p. 54).

What Blaut identifies as colonialism is a political and spatial logic inherent to capitalist rule – the creation of socio-spatial gradations, segments, and hierarchies amongst the population and across scales. The black radical tradition has also highlighted the concrete historical nature of capitalism as inherently racializing and segmenting (Robinson, 1983). Along with postcolonial theory, this tradition highlights the way state violence is crucial to processes of racialization and colonization. Following this thread, a recent paper provocatively draws parallels between the practice of racial lynching in the US and contemporary drone strikes by situating both within a history of covert state action that the news media frames as ‘open secrets’ (Kearns, 2017). Drawing on imperial world history, Ann Stoler has argued that imperial formations are “founded on gradated variations and degrees of sovereignty and disenfranchisement – on multiplex criteria for inclusions and sliding scales of basic rights” (Stoler, 2006: p. 139). Stoler’s concept of

“imperial formation” has a sensitivity to spatial and social unevenness that informs my use of the word “periphery” to designate a range of discontinuous spaces at multiple scales that are in positions of political subordination and economic insecurity. Colonial power in this broader sense is the power to segment the laboring and resident population into hierarchies of political and economic inclusion.

The critical geographic literature on militarized drones renders visible the proliferation of peripheries through a detailed interrogation of the history and politics of militarized drones. This paper engages this literature as part of a broader shift in geographic thinking to analyze emerging forms of socio-spatial marginalization by comparing the formation and struggles of peripheries that are spatially distant or seemingly unconnected. Methodological concerns around comparison in theorizing the global have featured strongly in recent discussions of global urbanism (Roy, 2016; Sheppard et al., 2013) and neoliberalism and nationalism (Hart, 2016). Critical theorists of drone warfare share this impulse to draw parallels between uneven political and economic relations in diverse social and spatial sites that are subject to analogous pressures and constraints. This paper contributes to these discussions by forwarding a concept of the periphery as the spatial effect of colonial state power on multiple scale, and by theorizing the contradictions of colonial state power in an uneven world economy and inter-state system.

### **III Colonial lineages of the drone**

Much of the critical literature on drone war emphasizes the rupture introduced by drone war by virtue of the unique materiality and spatiality of its tele-connected assemblages (Shaw, 2016b, 2013; Crandall, 2014; Shaw and Akhter, 2014, 2012; Walters, 2014; Holmqvist, 2013; Williams, 2011; Singer, 2009). Scholars also situate drones within longer technological lineages of autonomous killing (Bolton, 2015) or surveillance (Kindervater, 2016). As Priya Satia (2014: p. 20) notes about the focus on technological novelty, however, “this makes sense only if we write the history of drones as the history of remote control and robotics rather than the history of aerial counterinsurgency and surveillance”. Reifying the drone as game-changing military technology obscures histories of war, state violence, and imperialism. A more specifically anticolonial perspective on the history of drones, however, highlights how drones act as an “imperial border-control technology for the age of late capitalism” and are an “inherently colonialist technology”

(Gusterson, 2016, pp: 148-149). In this section, I selectively read the critical literature on drone war to elaborate a key insight: the explicitly colonial character and lineage of militarized drones.

The fact that drones are a form of “air power” is crucial to their colonial character. Situating drones as the latest in a line of technologies of colonial air power forefronts issues of asymmetric violence at the global scale, authoritarian control, and the techno-cultural politics of vision and ordering. Gregory (2014a) traces the complex “lines of descent” of contemporary militarized drone operations through the air bombing campaigns of World War II to counterinsurgency actions in Indochina in the 1960s and 1970s. Gregory highlights three developments that enabled the transition from fixed to fluid targets in the history of air power. These are remotely piloted aircraft, real-time visual surveillance, and a networked sensor-shooter system. For Priya Satia, who has examined British aerial campaigns in 1920s Iraq “[t]he crux of the matter is not so much that drones are unmanned but that they promise panoptic aerial surveillance of a region understood as otherwise essentially unknowable” (Satia, 2014: p.1)

Satia (2014), along with Gregory (2014a, 2014b, 2011a, 2011b, 2010), argues the greater visibility afforded by aerial surveillance is never simply the result of a greater technological development. Instead the seemingly greater “vision” provided by an aerial view is always already embedded in colonial “scopic regimes” (Gregory, 2011a). These regimes are always selective and contingent – certain people and relations are rendered culturally invisible, even as other people and relations become visible. Moreover, these scopic regimes cannot be separated from the larger cultural-technical-political practices of locating targets in the enemy space of the alien “Other” and thereby excluding them from the expectation of basic human rights or protection under the law (Gregory, 2010). Indeed, a growing number of scholars, drawing to different degrees on Giorgio Agamben (1998), approach militarized drones through a focus on the practices and rhetorics that enable the construction and maintenance of “killing spaces” (Jones, 2016, 2015; Williams, 2015; Allinson, 2015; Shaw and Akhter, 2014, 2012). These spaces are constructed via sophisticated geospatial and geo-visualization technology (that are always already culturally mediated), and are populated exclusively by targets, enemies, and cultural others (Duffield, 2015; Crampton et al., 2014; Shaw, 2013). Even while acknowledging the cultural and techno-visual implications of drones, other scholars emphasize the colonial



genealogy of militarized drones through the historical connections between capitalism and state violence (Shaw, 2016a, 2016b; Neocleous, 2014; Wall, 2013). The connection between drones and capitalism is the key function of the drone: the control of surplus population and the maintenance of social order.

This is because “demands for security are at once demands for accumulation” (Wall, 2013: p. 40). As Neocleous puts it, the “key practice of pacification is nothing less than a feat of enormous social engineering to rebuild a social order [to provide] a secure foundation for accumulation,” (Neocleous, 2013a: p. 8). Neocleous (2014) further posits that aerial bombardment and surveillance has historically been a form of primitive accumulation – a violent project of separating populations from the means of their reproduction and thereby driving them to join the ranks of waged workers. This key function is what makes militarized drones useful not only to military forces, but also to policing agencies, as the desire to order unruly populations is not restricted to wars abroad, but also to populations within state territory (Wall and Monahan, 2011).

This line of analysis, which links air power to the social ordering imperatives of capitalist accumulation, points out 20<sup>th</sup> century air power was used not primarily to “attack enemy states or to defend the states from enemies”, but instead for “the fabrication of colonial order as part of a new geopolitical system” geared towards accumulation (Neocleous, 2013b: p. 584). Air power “turns out to consist not just of bombing the enemy as a military strategy, but as a key mechanism of order-building... [and] as a form of government, a mechanism of good order” (ibid: p. 581). Drone technology draws on the old colonial “cosmic view of air mastery through technological speed, verticality and vision” and adds it to “a new surveillance and killing system with capabilities previously not offered by conventional air power” (Wall and Monahan, 2011: p. 241). Drones are important for capitalism not only in that they present opportunities for profit (Crampton and Roberts, 2016; Kaag and Kreps, 2014; Wall and Monahan, 2011), but more profoundly because of their social ordering or police effects. The distinction between “police power” as a clean, legitimate, and a domestic affair and “war power” as a ruthless, external, and military affair is therefore analytically misleading and ahistorical (Wall, 2016, 2013; Neocleous, 2014).

The critical literature on drone war situates militarized drones in a colonial history of air power as police power. A major contribution of this literature is precisely to demonstrate the fundamental “unity of state power” animated by the logic of security and violent practices of pacification (Neocleous, 2013a: p. 9; Wall, 2013). A critical deployment of the concept of war/police, therefore, focuses attention to the productive rearrangement and social ordering that produces waged laborers – which in turn enables capitalist surplus accumulation. Focusing on this aspect of the drone has enabled a series of powerful interventions. First, it de-mystifies the drone as a technological artifact and presents it instead as the latest technological manifestation of a much older logic of state power. Second, it allows theorists to understand how “dronification of state violence” is applicable not just to the Global South, but is indeed integral to the proliferation of peripheries across the planet. Just as the deployment of drones across borders illuminates targeted classes and spaces in foreign spaces, their deployment within state territory reveals the proliferation of colonial spaces and targeted population groups within territorial borders. Thus, this literature shows militarized drones to be a process that blurs the distinctions between inter-state expressions of state violence and domestic deployments of police power. That is, the critical literature on drone war has helped to illuminate the colonial logics of controlling and monitoring a segmented and hierarchically ordered population through both military and police power.

However, militarized drones continue to display specific scale-specific dynamics. The deployment and politics of militarized drones at the inter-state scale involve formally equal but substantively unequal territorial sovereigns. Even as we analytically and compellingly demonstrate the essential colonial unity of police power and war power, the political struggle over militarized drones takes place on a terrain ordered fundamentally by territorial rights and ideologies. Moreover, the inter-state system and the world economy continue to be racked by massive inequalities of military and economic power (Patnaik and Patnaik, 2017). The notion of the global periphery thus continues to have relevance even as we see a proliferation of peripheries at different scales scattered across the world. The analytical challenge is to recognize war power/police power not as a binary, or even a spectrum, but rather as a dialectical “distinction within a unity”. This means paying attention to how the fundamentally colonial

function of air power, and militarized drones as the latest manifestation of that power, plays out on different terrains of political conflict at distinct but related scales. Greater sensitivity to scale and particular historical geographies are important to keep in mind when attempting to make generative use of insights from the critical drone literature (Aradau, 2015; Holmqvist, 2015). The next two sections interrogate the reconfiguration of global space in light of the proliferation of militarized drones.

#### **IV Proliferation *to* the periphery and *of* peripheries**

Given relations of inequality in the inter-state system and the world economy, the concept of the global periphery continues to carry political and analytical relevance. This resilient importance, however, operates in dialectical tension with the operations of peripheralization at other scales. As discussed in the last section, the militarized drone provides a special vantage point from which to understand processes of proliferation because of how states deploy drones as an instrument of colonial power at multiple scales. This section explores two senses of proliferation: the proliferation of militarized drone technology from militarily advanced states to states in the global periphery (Joshi and Stein, 2015; Kaag and Kreps, 2014), and the proliferation of scattered peripheries made visible by the deployment of drones across the planet at multiple scales (Shaw, 2016b; Wall, 2016).

The geography of militarized drone exports reflects uneven and shifting power relations in the inter-state system. The US security state attempts to restrict the diffusion of militarized drone technology only to other allied states in selected core regions of the world system. Meanwhile, states like Russia, Israel, and especially China are stepping up to ensure the “dronification” of states in the periphery (Shaw and Akhter, 2014). Indeed, demand for drones in the global periphery seems to be increasing rapidly, as the drone becomes “a fetishized object of state desire”, analogous to other charismatic weapons systems like nuclear weapons (Biswas, 2014: p. 110). The Chinese drone manufacturing industry is particularly well poised to sell drones to the global periphery. The Chinese drone industry, and its export-oriented military sector in general, is expected to rise on the back of exports to the unstable and militarizing periphery. Indeed, over 70% of Chinese arms exports are purchased by just three Asian states: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (Fleurant et al., 2016). At the time of writing, states with confirmed purchases of

armed Chinese drones also include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Nigeria, and Iraq (Rawnsley, 2016). It is true that at least one major customer for drones and weapons systems, India, is closed off to China for geopolitical reasons. At the same time, however, China has excellent market access to Pakistan, the Middle East, and Africa – where states are unwilling or unable to purchase drones from other major exporters such as Israel and the United States. Chinese drones are also extremely cheap. A drone from the Caihong (Rainbow) class of Chinese drones can be had for as low as \$1m, as compared to the price of the US-made drone system like the Predator, which costs \$4m, or Reaper, which costs almost \$17m (ibid). This price reflects the lower quality and lower capacities of the Chinese drone systems – especially in terms of the time the drone can loiter and the distance it can travel. The rise of China as a supplier of militarized drone technology to the global periphery reflects the unwillingness of the US to export this technology to what it regards as untrustworthy states.

For example, military elites in Pakistan have petitioned the US security establishment for drone technology for over a decade. The stated aim of doing so is to enable the Pakistani state to conduct its own drone attacks, and thus end US-led violations of Pakistani sovereignty. When, in 2015, Pakistan publically demonstrated its “indigenous” drone, military spokespeople crooned that credit for this “great national achievement” was due to “our military industrial complex for achieving this milestone despite our overall weak industrial base” (Express Tribune, 2015). In these military narratives, state elites present the indigenous dronification of the Pakistani state as evidence of territorial sovereignty and an assertion of substantive equality in the inter-state arena. However, the deployment of militarized drones by the Pakistani security state does not alter the logic of pacification that undergirds this technology of policing (Wall, 2016; Neocleous, 2014).

The Pakistani military desires the essentially colonial functions of militarized drones to maintain its own internal peripheries. Drones exert their policing logic to create zones and sectors of gradations of sovereignty within the territories of peripheral states. This is because drones have the most potential to transform the nature of armed conflict when used not against the militaries of other states, but “against insurgent movements or others that lack even basic air defenses” (Davis et al., 2014: p. 15). A dronified Pakistani state would have greater capacity to escalate bombardment of peripheries within Pakistan. These areas are already enduring heavy

bombardment by conventional Pakistani air power (Shuja and Wazir, 2016). Moreover, the dronification of the Pakistani state parallels the experience of other states global periphery. The dronification of Nigeria and Turkey, to take two further examples, also increases the capacity of these states to exacerbate existing core-periphery divides within their territories, particularly in the name of pursuing militant groups such as Boko Haram and the Kurdistan Workers Party (Joshi and Stein, 2015). In July 2017, the Turkish Ministry of Defense announced that its Anka drone had killed five members of the Kurdistan Workers Party in Bingöl district (Sariibrahimoglu, 2017). By staying attuned to the colonial logic of state dronification in the global periphery, we can better illuminate the inter-scalar nature of the proliferation of peripheries and the dialectic between war power and police power.

Critical geographers have been keen to situate militarized drones into larger logics of state power, including algorithmic target-formation, securitization, and the pacification and policing of restless urban populations (Shaw, 2016a; Wall, 2016; Neocleous, 2014). Significantly, geographers have not confined their analysis to the so-called failed states of the global periphery. The increasing presence of police drones in cities and the use of drones to monitor borders has prompted scholars to draw parallels between the police logics used to monitor “at-risk” young black men in US cities and the military logics used to track and kill suspected terrorist in places like Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. Shaw reports that the FBI spent about \$3 million on developing drone operations between 2004 and 2013, and that the Department of Homeland Security’s Urban Areas Security Program has paved the way for US police departments to acquire drones. Furthermore, the US Customs and Border Protection agency, which operates ten Predator drones along US borders, has loaned its drones to police departments hundreds of times since 2010 (Shaw, 2016: p. 235).

This increased use of police and border drones has provoked geographers to theorize colonial state power not just in the Global South or in the past of the Global North, but instead as a proliferation of peripheries in different and at different scales across the planet. For example, Gregory (2011) refers to an “everywhere war” that involves drones not only in the global periphery but along the US-Mexico border, Shaw (2016a) discusses police drones in the Euro-American urban context, and Wall (2016) demonstrates the overlapping logics of police power,

racialization, and drones in the US. Even outside academic circles, parallels are drawn between the racialized, algorithmic, automated and targeted state violence in peripheral regions in the US and the Global South (Zenko 2013).

The drone war literature, and especially the global parallels it draws between targetable populations and individuals, urges us to move beyond a conception of the periphery as a state-defined territory with low wages, dominant agriculture and extractive economic sectors, and a large informal workforce. Peripheries can be more usefully characterized as spatial effects of colonial state power. Most directly, this entails a process of differential political inclusion. This means that some spaces and some population groups are only selectively included into the system of political rights and obligations. Despite the powerful ideology of equal national citizens, spatially and demographically uneven political rights have been the capitalist norm for at least several hundred years (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Benton, 2010; Stoler, 2006; Robinson 1983).

In Pakistan, for example, the vast majority of drone strikes have occurred in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a space that, following the example of the colonial British state, the Pakistani state has denied equal rights to political representation within the federal system of Pakistan (Shaw and Akhter, 2012). In addition, the political exclusion of FATA is not merely constitutional – also takes effect through limitations on mobility (Tahir, 2017). In the US and UK police drones are increasingly used to surveil those urban pockets where algorithmic calculations predict that individuals are “more likely” to commit crime in the future – a racialized logic of preemptive policing with parallels to the policing and pacification of colonial populations. This preemptive policing and the presumption of guilt attached to certain spaces and communities means that certain racialized populations are differentially incorporated into the system of political rights.

By deploying Marxist concepts such as primitive accumulation, surplus populations, and enclosure to describe the colonial nature of drone power, critical geographers have signaled their recognition that capitalist reproduction is tied, albeit perhaps not directly, to the production of peripheries (Shaw, 2016; Wall, 2016; Neocleous, 2014; Satia, 2014). While these concepts imply

an absolute “outside” to state power, the periphery implies an internally differentiated system structured within a regional hierarchy. This conception of a complex multi-scalar system wracked by internal contradictions maintains the analytical assumption that discrete regions, no matter how distant or proximate, relate to each in significant ways through the capitalist system of production and political power.

Peripheries are important for more than their ideological function in keeping workers and dissidents in global core regions disciplined and frightened (Brennan, 2005). In the sense that the relentless drive towards automation tends towards the creation of surplus populations, and in the sense that capitalist production needs to engage in rounds of primitive accumulation or the interruption of non-capitalist relations, capitalism cannot exist without peripheries. That is to say, capitalism as a historical structure relies on the state to create and maintain racial and/or national hierarchies (Stoler, 2006; Robinson, 1983). Since the state cannot or does not extend care to all surplus populations equally, a racial/ethnic logic parses surplus populations into more or less deserving groups. The state polices and differentially incorporates surplus populations into a system of state-based political rights (Li, 2010). This is a more flexible sense of colonial state power, and peripheries as the spatial expression of this power, as the production of differentially included, racialized, and economically necessary regions and populations provides the analytical link between drone warfare and the proliferation of peripheries at multiple scales. The question of how anticolonial strategy and analysis may begin to respond to this ongoing reconfiguration of global space is the topic of the next section.

### **V Territorial sovereignty in the global periphery: An internationalist response**

The use of militarized drones in the global periphery has catalyzed the defense of territorial sovereignty in international legal discourse, media commentary, and in parliamentary politics (Shah, 2015; Woods, 2015; Akhter, 2012). However, some liberal and radical commentators shy away from, or even explicitly disavow, the defense of territorial sovereignty as a strategy to counter drone attacks in the global periphery. For liberal commentators, defense of human rights is preferable to defense of territorial sovereignty, because the rhetoric of territory plays too easily into the worst chauvinist and reactionary impulses of state power (eg., Yusuf, 2012). Radical scholars, on their part, have warned that dependence on international legal concepts may well

end up only reinforcing and legitimizing the state violence that activists are trying to temper in the first place (Jones, 2016, 2015; T. Gregory, 2015; Neocleous, 2014; Weizman, 2010). Radical critics also assert that international law, including the principle of territorial sovereignty, is irredeemably rooted in the violence of European imperialism in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and that it exists to enable and justify state violence, not restrict or control it. Embracing a more dialectical approach to the contractions and historicity of state power than these positions, this section develops an internationalist approach to territorial sovereignty in the face of drone attacks in the global periphery.

The perspective of the proliferation of peripheries at multiple scales recasts the defense of territorial sovereignty in the global periphery as a necessary but insufficient anticolonial strategy. This is complex and contradictory political-ethical ground, given that states in the global periphery are agents of colonial power and peripheralization within and beyond their own borders. For example, highly militarized states in the global periphery such as Nigeria and Pakistan already deploy militarized drones to pacify their internal peripheries (Atherton, 2016; Bokhari, 2016). Pakistan in particular has a very brutal history of internal colonialism and bloody pacification, especially concerning the region formerly known as East Pakistan (Bass, 2013). Indeed, drones represent just one part of the arsenal these and other states deploy to exert colonial power and maintain peripheries within their borders (Tahir, 2017; Shaw and Akhter, 2012). Even while acknowledging the colonial capacities of states in the global periphery, however, anticolonial strategy must also account for the dynamics of peripheralization in the inter-state system and the world economy. Peripheralization at this scale is not separable from the proliferation of peripheries at other scales, as state formation is a multi-scalar and inter-regional process (Hart, 2016; Gramsci, 1971). Moreover, far from being simple tools of colonial power, states in the global periphery have in the past asserted their territorial sovereignty and other formal rights under international law for anticolonial purposes in the past (Jones, 2016; Prashad, 2013, 2008; Mazower, 2009; Rajagopal, 2006; Comaroff, 2001).

Therefore, as long as extreme unevenness in economic and military power characterize world affairs, the defense of territorial sovereignty in the periphery is a necessary part of asserting substantive inter-state equality. However, this is not in itself a sufficient anticolonial strategy to



counter the proliferation of peripheries. A critical internationalist position should also account for the risk of a chauvinist central state managed by unaccountable elites demanding and monopolizing political loyalties and imaginations (Fanon, 1963). In addition to recognizing the necessity of defending territorial sovereignty in the periphery, an internationalist position must also unceasingly critique “stateolatry”, or worship and reification of the state, in order to “develop and produce new forms of State life” (Gramsci 1971, p. 268). The state thus encompasses both the enabling and constraining of peripheralization.

Embracing this contradictory role of the state calls for a dialectical understanding of state power. A dialectical approach takes the state not only as a force of peripheralization, but also as a possible source of resistance to it. The state is not simply an instrument of the ruling elite nor a mere ideological construct. Rather, it is the name given to a vital and concrete arena for the struggle for political rights, entitlement, legitimacy, and status. Seen in this way, it becomes difficult to dismiss the state as either irrelevant to the immediate drama of everyday life or as an entity that can be seized, controlled, or abolished. Navigating between this binary, a dialectical approach to state power focuses not on achieving a pure political victory, but on a Gramscian elaboration of intermediate steps, maintaining partial conquests, and recovering from partial defeats (Coutinho ,2013; Gramsci, 1971). Moreover, internationalist movements from this perspective are not “based less on place-specific struggles or are less engaged in struggles with and for the state”. Rather, internationalists “use national states to try to forward broader regional or international goals” (Glassman et al., 2008, p. 347; Wainwright and Kim, 2008). Achieving these “broader regional or international goals” requires the capacity and willingness of territorialized populations to work through the contradictions of state power. There are two ways to develop the critique of stateolatry, and by extension a critical internationalist position, in the context of the proliferation of peripheries.

The first is to draw on Frantz Fanon’s theorization of decolonization as process in which the state plays a crucial role at the inter-state and domestic scales simultaneously. Fanon develops a stance that appreciates both the necessity and insufficiency of state-centric nationalism for anticolonial politics (Hart, 2016; Kipfer, 2011; Sekyi-Out, 1996). He argued that the “narrow nationalism” of a morally bankrupt native bourgeois, would “lead up a blind alley” if it were not

“deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs” (Fanon, 1963: p. 204). Despite his harsh critique of bourgeois nationalism, Fanon argues against jumping to a completely transnational and de-territorialized basis for political solidarity. Given the inherently uneven spatial development of world capitalism, the anticolonial bent of national consciousness is a built-in contradiction for capitalism (Kipfer, 2011). Instead, Fanon rests his project on the cultivation of a “national consciousness” which itself must be rooted in the concreteness of a contiguous region and territorialized state. He argues that “national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” and further that “the building up of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universal values” (Fanon, 1963: p. 247).

Accordingly, Fanon stressed the importance of engaging, controlling, and decolonizing the state apparatus. The function of the decolonizing state and party was to engage in political education that cultivated a “enriched and deepened...consciousness of social and political needs” (ibid: p. 204) beyond ethnic, racial or cultural nationalism. This production of an internationalist population can only come about if state power also faces direct challenges to counter *internal* peripheralization. Effective internal challenges to centralizing state power should critique and refashion economic and political structures with the aim of equalizing uneven development across national territory and democratizing political structures (ibid, p. 152). Given that peripheralization is a multi-scalar process, critique of the US as a global agent of peripheralization must articulate with critique of the colonial violence of states in the global periphery, like Pakistan, as they produce and maintain internal peripheries— often with the support of the US security state (Woods, 2015; Shaw and Akhter, 2014, 2012). To elaborate again on the Pakistani case, this highly militarized state’s acquisition and development of armed drones significantly enhances its already formidable capacities for internal peripheralization. Pakistani drones accompany a larger and brutal assault on the northwest of the country, an operation the military dubs *Zarb-E-Azb* has resulted in many civilian deaths, destruction of property, and one of the largest (and largely unacknowledged) refugee crises in the world (Tahir, 2017; Shuja and Wazir, 2016). A defense of Pakistani sovereignty at the global scale should accompany a critique of the violence that the militarized Pakistani state has long relied on to control and pacify regions and populations outside of the country’s political-economic heartland.

The second way to supplement the defense of territorial sovereignty is through comparative analysis and descriptive juxtaposition of dispersed and scattered peripheries. Recent studies and commentary have done precisely this by juxtaposing how black populations in the US are subject to violence in similar ways to targeted classes in the global periphery (Kearns, 2017; Wall, 2016; Zenko, 2013). Calling for geographers to produce “countertopographies” that link the peripheries produced by global capitalism, Katz argues that the “juxtaposition” of “thick descriptions of local specificities...can offer the sorts of abstractions needed to reimagine and rework globalization and its effects.” Moreover, following these “abstract connections among disparate places” can light the “spark of insurgence” and inform a “geographically invigorated praxis” and “mobilize new kinds of internationalist solidarities” (ibid: p.725-726). The objective of producing countertopographies as part of an internationalist stance is to cultivate political awareness, sympathy, and communities that exceed, but do not by-pass, the territorial state. To supplement the defense of the territorial integrity of peripheral states, critical analysts and commentators should look “within” to acknowledge internal peripheries, as well as reach “across” to compare and connect the production of spatially disparate peripheries. This understanding of internationalism as undergirded by critical statism and comparison dovetails with Gramscian political theory, for which “communist hegemony represent[s] a modern form of cosmopolitanism within which the national [state] is of strategic importance even as it is built upon both subnational alliances and transnational allegiances” (Kipfer, 2013: p. 86).

The challenge for theorists is to produce countertopographies that bring the connections between internal peripheries to the surface. This may enable diverse and scattered populations subject to the racialized, algorithmic, and targeted violence of the state to internationalize their struggles - even while attending to the dialectical defense/critique of territorial state power. In the case of regions in the global periphery that are subject to drone strikes, the defense of territorial sovereignty (through international law or other means) presents an opportunity to enact an anticolonial politics at the global scale. This is not to say that peoples without states, such as Palestinians, do not deserve defense because they do not officially have a sovereign state. However, it does mean that critique at one scale should not foreclose critique and opposition to the proliferation of peripheries at other scales by other agents of state power.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper engaged the critical geographic literature on militarized drones to present a more flexible conception of the periphery as the spatial effect of colonial state power. This broader understanding of “peripheries” moves away from identifying peripheries exclusively at the scale of the inter-state system. Rather, it understands peripheries as those ethnically and racially marked spaces that are subject to colonial state power – spaces scattered across the so-called global North and South at multiple scales, including the global scale. The paper discussed not only the proliferation of armed drones to the global periphery, but also the proliferation of peripheries as spaces of colonial state power themselves. Critical geographers and others have helped to render this proliferation of peripheries visible through analyses of the drone as an aerial technology of colonial pacification.

This paper also elaborated an internationalist position by arguing that it is necessary yet insufficient to mount a defense of violations of territorial sovereignty of states in the global periphery by drone attacks. This is a geographically situated response to the proliferation of peripheries because in some contexts the defense of territorial sovereignty can take the meaning of an assertion of international equality. It is also an insufficient step because a truly anticolonial strategy would take into account the many ways in which state power must be decolonized through a process of continuous decentralization and popular democratization. Other locations may offer different strategies to counter the proliferation of peripheries – for example, in the US an anticolonial strategy may take the shape of a struggle to exert popular control over the police force and to dismantle the prison system. To elaborate a political strategy in the face of the proliferation of peripheries, a dialectical approach to the state and to peripheralization that avoids binaries, remains attuned to contradictory relations, and that is focused on a strategy of partial conquests of state power is necessary.

To sum, the overall aim of this paper has been to reconceptualize geographic notions of peripheries, colonial power, and global space more broadly. By way of conclusion, I would like to chart three future directions for further research on the spatial and technological politics of militarized drones. First, military geographers could conduct more in-depth empirical and

geopolitical analyses of the proliferation of militarized technologies to the global periphery. This paper has only briefly sketched the emergence of this trend, and much more research is needed to track the geographies of this proliferation, especially as it concerns the rise of China as a major exporter of arms. The analysis offered in this paper informs this research agenda by highlighting the articulations between peripheralization at multiple scales. Second, geographic scholar-activists could examine the emergent strategies and tactics of solidarity and resistance between and within anti-drone protest movements in the political, legal, and cultural arenas around the world. As argued at length in this paper, it is important to recognize that it is not to the strategic benefit of all anti-drone activists in all places to eschew political engagements with state power. Rather than going to battle against all forms of state power, this paper has urged the more dialectical and tactical conceptualization of the state itself as a battlefield that could be turned to interrupt processes of peripheralization. Finally, on a more theoretical register, this paper has gestured towards cross-fertilizations between the black radical tradition and postcolonial theory by conceptualizing capital as a structure that necessarily creates peripheries or zones of racial/colonial subjection. While space limits prevent a fuller treatment, comparative analyses of dronification within and beyond the global periphery may articulate theoretical traditions, such as postcolonial theory and the radical black tradition, that are not often brought together despite their shared concern with racialized criminalization, state violence, and subalternity. These agendas suggest some possible paths for the further development of socio-spatial theory on peripheralization, militarized drones, and strategies of internationalist resistance. By recasting processes of global war and conflict as an expansion of colonial state power and the proliferation of peripheries, I hope to have laid some ground for others to continue interrogating the ongoing reconfigurations of global space through the lens of peripheralization.

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### **Acknowledgements**

This paper comes out of a conference I co-organized with Hamid Ekbia at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) called “Reconfiguring Global Space: The Geography, Politics, and Ethics of Drone Warfare” in July 2015. Many thanks to the IUB School of Global and International Studies and the IUB Office of the Vice President for International Affairs for generously supporting this conference. Andres Guzman and Jessie Speer provided valuable comments on earlier drafts of the paper.