

# Review of: "The Necropolitics of Drone Bases and Use in the African Context"

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I really wanted to like this article on a fascinating and extremely relevant area of politics in Africa. The article raises some interesting points and has a few interesting suggestions, particularly an African conference on the use of drones, which I think is a good idea. However, it needs much more work to make this into an article that could be highly cited, and in particular, I am not sure that the theoretical framework of necropolitics helps or hinders the analysis.

What I mean by my last comment is that necropolitics is very much aimed at the politics of colonialism based, fundamentally, on race, whereas the use of drones generally is much broader than that. Necropolitics essentially extends Foucauldian biopolitics to explore how people are deemed to live and die and how some populations are located in deathworlds as a form of 'living dead', subjected to racialized forms of colonial violence.

This article promised a critical analytical view of the use of drones, but unfortunately, it seems to accept Mbembe's assertions uncritically and then somewhat crowbar any evidence into the theory. There is some very good empirical evidence in this piece - the use of drones by Boko Haram, as well as the use of drones by external actors. However, there is no interrogation of whether Boko Haram or the many other insurgent users of drones are exercising a necropolitical view of the world, or is it only when the drones are fielded by non-Africans? This really needs some digging and some analysis to address questions about the democratisation of drones and who uses them, the extensive use of cheap drone technology, and who is using what technology against whom?

At the time that Mbembe was writing about necropolitics, the use of drones was invariably extremely expensive and limited largely to the US and other western militaries, but the world has changed. A plausible story here is that the technology itself has undermined necropolitics (which raises serious theoretical questions about the technology of biopolitics) through developing a democratised version of the drone that can be used effectively amongst small, elite groups.

The question that also needs unpacking here is the lack of any agency given to Africans. It seems to me that this is not a clear-cut colonial approach at all, but the use of a technology to privilege some groups' power politics over others, namely the technology of the state itself - so in many cases, this is Africans using drones against other Africans.

There may well be some colonial overtones in some of this, but taking the whole of the drone landscape without disaggregating it reduces Africans to passive victims of random colonial violence - a state of the living dead - but the author does not really address this question at all, and it really needs that critical view to elevate the paper and to bring

out some of the empirical information here. I would encourage the author to work on this more and to make it more subtle and more critical.