A bear’s biography: Hybrid warfare and the more-than-human battlespace
A bear’s biography: Hybrid warfare and the more-than-human battlespace

Abstract

This paper makes an intervention highlighting the animal dimension of military geographies as an overlooked yet illuminating aspect of the hybrid nature of warfare. By bringing animal geographies into dialogue with critical military geographies and with a focus on relational ethics, the processes, performance and consequences of the more-than-human nature of the battlespace are examined through a vignette of Wojtek the bear. Wojtek was a mascot, pet and officially enlisted soldier of the Polish Army in the Second World War who travelled the desert plains, helped to fight at the Battle of Monte Cassino, before being demobbed with his fellow Polish comrades in the UK, eventually ending his civilian days in Edinburgh Zoo. Although a well-known figure Wojtek and his biography have predominately been used as a means to explore the Polish soldiers’ experience of the Second World War with the result that the bear as an animal is absent. This paper, therefore, puts the bear back into his biography in order to acknowledge the role and lived experience of animals in the military. Further, it suggests that exploring the place of animals in the military requires geographers to articulate the hybrid nature of warfare and also to explore the ethico-political relations this produces.

Keywords: more-than-human, animal geography, military geography, relational ethics

Introduction

In the late 1940s at Edinburgh Zoo once in a while something strange would occur at the bear enclosure. Large mammals always draw the crowds but this specific enclosure, home to a large Syrian brown bear, held a very particular pull for some. Other than children on school trips and families on outings, the bear drew an array of visitors who would variously serenade him with the violin, throw him sweets and cigarettes, others would simply come to see him, to talk and recall. As Whatmore explains the very ‘physical fabric of the zoo [is] a showcase for public entertainment and education, designed to keep animals and people in their proper place (2002, page 42). Yet, these relatively rare and seemingly peculiar visitors to the bear enclosure were not there to witness nature or the wild, but were in fact visiting an old comrade, Wojtek who like them had been a soldier of the Polish Army in the Second World War (see figure 1.). Wojtek had served alongside these men on the battlefields of the Middle East and Italy and after the war like many of the soldiers from the Polish Corps the bear began to forge a new identity in post-war Britain. In those meetings at the zoo between old comrades, old identities were recalled and performed. There at Edinburgh Zoo in those moments of correspondence between bear and human, the distance between human and nonhuman momentarily enfolded and different, more fluid forms of identities and affinities between human and nonhuman were performed.
In the Second World War, Wojtek became a mascot, pet and officially enlisted soldier of the Polish Army helping to unload ammunition and even apparently capturing a thief. Wojtek has held a place in popular imagination for over forty decades, his story first published in 1968 has been translated into English and French, serialised in Woman’s Weekly and animal magazines such as Monde Animal and Wild about Animals. He became an animation for the children’s TV programme Blue Peter, rendered in sculptures from London to Poland, via Edinburgh and Grimsby, memorialised in exhibitions, film and on stage. In these narratives Wojtek’s biography has focused predominately the experiences of the soldiers who were his comrades and keepers.

In the film Wojtek; The Bear That Went to War (2011) the opening credits declare: ‘Like the men and women he fought with, Corporal Wojtek would win a war but lose his freedom’. This sentiment was echoed in a speech at the opening of the Wojtek exhibition at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London, in October 2010 when Lady McEwan addressed the absence in contemporary history of the Polish contribution to the Second World War, stating: ‘Poland after decades behind the Iron Curtain is free at last. But recognition of what she did in the war? This is what Wojtek can bring. The tale he can tell. That is the burden he can now carry’ (cited in Ivell and Baczor, 2013, page xi). Thus, the bear has become a way into the story of Polish soldiers and exiles of the Second World War. Wojtek has become symbol, a memorial in flesh, fur, brute strength and abused loyalty, his animality written out, his creaturely ways erased. However, Wojtek’s story can be explored through a different lens, whereby his biography can reveal something about the experience of being or more precisely becoming in the battlespace, it can disclose the relational hybrid nature of warfare and the embodied and lasting consequences of transgressing the human and animal boundary.

That war is a process combining and reconfiguring human and nonhuman in the execution of violence is not in itself a novel claim. Geographers have demonstrated the ways that technologies reconfigure the battlefield into techno-cultural spaces (Graham, 2009; Gregory, 2011; Shaw et al 2012) and how the military has drawn on nature to develop and justify their technological capabilities (Gregory, 2015; Johnston, 2015; Kosek, 2010). Much of this work has highlighted how twenty-first century warfare is increasingly becoming a cyborg assemblage; dispersed, complex and ambiguous. The contemporary battlespace, is thus, depicted as being increasingly populated with lively nonhumans disrupting notions of who or what is enacting warfare. This paper argues that although focus on the technological nonhumans enrolled in warfare reveals...
something of the more-than-human nature of warfare it does not portray the full spectrum or history of nonhuman lives active in the battlespace. Therefore, by bringing critical military geographies into dialogue with animal geographies through a vignette tracing Wojtek’s biography in the Second World War, this paper reveals that the role of the nonhuman animal warrants closer attention as it highlights the active place of animals in shaping warfare. In so doing so the aim is to historicise the notion of hybrid warfare and to enable analysis on how more-than-human warfare demands consideration of relational ethics.

Military Geographies: Human-environment relations

Critical military geographies has sought to place the military and forms of legitimate state violence in their spatial, temporal and cultural contexts, accounting for and critiquing the militarism of space, knowledge and culture. Variously geographers are attending to the diverse ways in which war is as a process that is shaped by and shapes geography (Farish, 2006: Clayton, 2012), which leaves its marks - physical, economic, political and cultural - on landscape (Woodward, 2014), is driven and influences the geographical imagination (Driver, 2001), and demands new relations with space and of course has lasting consequences for those it impacts upon (Fluri, 2011; Cowen, 2008). An important strain of this work has been to explore the role of technology in producing contemporary warfare as a hybrid endeavour executed by an array of increasingly complex and ambiguous relations between humans and nonhumans. Perhaps most notable has been the research interrogating the evolution, deployment and material-semiotic networks of unmanned aerial vehicles (Shaw, 2013: Gregory, 2011: Graham, 2010), which exposes the unsettling character of more-than-human warfare as accountability for killing becomes disperse and ambiguous. From a historical perspective Adey (2010) and Kaplan (2006) have examined the role of the aeroplane in extending the scope of the battlespace and the scale and speed of violence, thus producing new visualities in and performances of war, while Robinson (2013) and Forsyth (2013) have explored the development of camouflage technologies to subvert these seemingly dislocated visualities. A key contribution of this research has been to highlight the active ways in which technologies have meditated and shaped military geographies and violence, revealing war to be a hybrid performance.

However, this focus on the more-than-human relationship between human and technology in war has been at the expense of considering the role of other nonhuman relations which act, alter and shape the battlespace. As Gregory (2015) recently explained, the battlespace is a place of co-productions and formations where the geo-spatial intelligence or visualisations of war always
depends on the bodies of soldiers to be immersed in and attuned to their environs. Thus, how
the military impacts upon human-environment relations is a key element in making sense of the
geographies and ‘natures’ of war. The role of the environment in shaping technologies and
methods of warfare has been examined in research that has variously traced salient imaginative
and material geographies that produced the Arctic as a site for military and engineering
engagements (Farish, 2006) the tropics as a militant space of guerrilla warfare (Clayton, 2013),
and the North African desert as a landscape that enabled increasingly deceptive methods of
warfare to be experimented with and justified (Forsyth, 2014 and 2015). Each of these studies
demonstrates the way in which the history of militarisation can only be understood if
environments are considered as active in shaping war, analysing how the natural is deployed in
crucial ways to legitimise military geographies and state-sanctioned violence. Indeed, at times the
relationship between the military and nature is one which is openly fostered and deployed by the
military. For example, Rachel Woodward (2004) highlights how environmental diversity on
military owned lands connects military activities with issues of environmental protectionism.
Concerns with preserving the fairy shrimp or the Great Crested Newt shifts focus, Woodward
argues, from taking a critical approach towards military activities, and instead, directs it towards
the military’s beneficial impacts on the environment, as guardian and protector.

Research examining the military and its relationships to landscapes, environments and ecologies
thus reveals the ways in which nature is enrolled, produced and used to legitimise warfare, which
is important to analysing and accounting for the ways in which military strategies have been
deployed and legitimised. In short, nature is used to naturalise military violence, yet the place of
animals within this process presents a particularly ambiguous role.

Military Geographies: Human-animal relations

In the main, the biographies and lives of nonhuman animals are largely absent, but a more-than-
human approach focusing on the animal and exploring the individual and personal can produce
compelling and critical narratives of war. Helen MacDonald (2006, page 139) has expressed that
it is by ‘turns bewildering, amusing, horrifying, that the traditional supposition that war and
nature [are treated as] utterly separate realms,’ a separation persistently revealed to be illusion.
Although war is often painted in broad brushstrokes as perhaps the most fundamental of human
activities for channelling primal animal natures inherent to the human towards savage ends, the
role of animals themselves in war is largely understudied (Wilson, 2012: Chagnon, 1988). The
animal is but a symbol, not a fleshy, living and at times dying body in the battlefield: instead it is
reduced to telling us little more than of the violence inherent in the human whiles remaining entirely mute to its own nature of being.

Yet, animals have been enrolled in warfare for several thousands of years (Hegiger, 2012: Kosek, 2010) and continue to be very much active and present in conflict as companions in the battlefield, means of labour, and modes for fighting. From cavalry horses, camels for transport, the ox or elephant for carrying equipment, the messenger dog or pigeon, the dolphin, dog, rat or pig for mine clearing, the mascots of bears, dogs, cats, birds, goats, monkeys, rabbits, all have been used by the military to wage war (Gardner, 2006). Therefore, war provides an interesting space through which to explore the complex relations between humans and animals because in war animal lives and relationships can be characterised through the extremes of devotion and affection, but also by their utility, abandonment and sacrifice. However, often texts which narrate an animal’s war to a large extent reinforce divisions between human and animal, as Juliet Gardner’s description reveals: ‘there are countless stories and anecdotes about individual animals in war, about their bravery, loyalty, steadfastness and ingenuity and these deserve to be told’ (2006, page 10). This framing of these animal as ‘heroes’ is problematic, it instils an innocence in the animal and drains it of any agency, the resulting narratives deplore the violence and savagery of war but render war as anaemic, apolitical and a pitiful inevitability. What is more interesting, indeed more pressing, than telling ‘the countless stories and anecdotes’ is to examine how these relations - which by turns are novel, unsettling, intense, tender and exploitative - between human and nonhuman animal came to be in the battlespace, and further, to analyse how those experiences were then (re)translated into the traditional boundaries between humans and animals after war. Such a relational hybrid approach allows for the ethical implications of more-than-human warfare to be examined.

Military Geographies: Hybrid warfare

Recently research has begun to emerge which thinks seriously about the hybrid nature of warfare through the ways in which animals become enrolled in the military. Johnson (2015) has explored more-than-human encounters in the laboratory drawing on lobsters as an example of the ways in which scientific practices are enrolled in the militarization of biological life. By taking the emergent focus on ‘geographies of encounter’, as a means to examine how more-than-human relations ‘take hold of one another to produce our worlds’ (Johnson 2015, page 297) she highlights how animal lives have recently become overlooked as focus moves ‘beyond bodies’ in an effort to grapple with the processes and consequences of relations between human and
nonhuman. Although such efforts may describe the world more thickly, they do so perhaps at the expense of intimacy, neglecting the embodied consequences that individuals bear in such relations. Through describing an encounter between a lobster, technology, chemicals and a scientist in the laboratory, Johnston reveals how the routine processes of experimentation operate in a ‘terrain of violence – where lives are imperilled’ (2015, page 299), raising questions about how and where ethical relations regarding whose bodies are disposable, are produced and naturalised in the military-industrial-academic complex.

This approach is also explored by Jake Kosek (2010) in a study of the place and history of the honey bee in the military, culminating in its current use in the war on terror. He highlights why attending to animal bodies and the ethics afforded or denied to them in the military matter, arguing that in war, nature and culture are reconfigured and human and nonhuman (animal and technological) are materially and discursively remade. With a focus on the enrolment of bees in scientific experimentations into micro-sensor technologies he explains that bees are reduced to little more than mechanical devices whose manipulation, mutilation and transformation reshape the biology of the bee, strategies of warfare and the boundaries of the human. This study reveals what Kosek terms the “zoological consequences” of war; the transformations in the conduct and practices of war have far reaching effects on humans and animals. Both Johnson and Kosek, focusing on the laboratory space, highlight how certain animals become entangled in the military-industrial-academic complex, to reveal how relations between humans and animals are framed not as lived beings entangled in violent interactions but as scientific or engineering problems. In the battlespace the “zoological consequences” of military human-animal relations are at times more consciously immediate and caring which highlights the plurality of relations in hybrid warfare. Focus on the battlespace can also examine the different strategies employed by the military to frame, justify and sustain more-than-human relations, and further, to account for the violence inherent in these more caring military human-animal relations.

Therefore, there is a need for an ethics and politics that takes military human-animal relations and their consequences seriously. This task requires a process of scrutinising upon whom or what ethics are applied, and an attempt to engage ethico-political relations that account for the hybrid nature of warfare (appreciating its plural, material and embodied characteristics) while critically accounting for the modes of dying and living (for human and animal) that military activities and practices produce. Therefore, the battlespace offers a potent site for examining the processes and relations that shape humans and animals living and dying together. The practice of war is an assemblage of knowledges, bodies, practices and spaces; each incident a knot tying ‘a vital point of connection’ (Van Dooren, 2014 page 27) drawing in a range of spatialities and

https://mc04.manuscriptcentral.com/societyandspace
temporalities with implications for the individuals, species, technologies and natures who are active in this process, and who in turn are shaped through these experiences. Therefore, through a vignette tracing Wojtek’s biography as one knot in a lineage of emergent more-than-human relations in warfare, this paper reveals the hybrid nature of war, and the consequences of these relations.

Animal Geographies: Hybrid relations

Animal geographies offers a means through which to explore the hybrid nature and place of nonhuman animals in warfare through its attention to the particular spatial narratives of animal’s lives. Since its revival in the 1990s animal geographies has been ‘about making animals – their presences, agency and materiality as well as their ordering, use and treatment by humans – visible and account-able’ (Buller, 2015, page 2). Various research has taken animal lives at their centre drawing attention to the diverse relations between human and nonhuman animals (see Davies, 2012: Lorimer, 2006: Patchett, 2008: Philo, 1995), acknowledging the pervasive and active place of animals in seemingly human spaces (Hinchliffe et al, 2005), revealing that the understanding of what defines an animal (and thus what it is to be human) is culturally relative and spatially and temporally contingent (Ingold, 1988). As well as making the place of animals visible, animal geographies has pursued a commitment to critique the tendency to maintain the human-animal binary. This research has explored the impacts of environmental changes such as extinction, invasive species and conservation efforts (Van Dooren, 2014: McKiernan and Instone, 2015), habitat loss (Proctor and Pincetl, 1996), culminating in the current anxiety regarding the Anthropocene (Robbins and Moore, 2013). Further, it has also exposed ethical concerns surrounding the commodification of animal bodies through industrialised agriculture (Morris and Holloway, 2014), science (White, 2005) and for fashion (Patchett, 2012) and entertainment (Davies, 2000). As well as revealing the ways in which animals spatialities, biologies, cultures and lives are directly impacted upon by human activities, the sub-discipline has also examined the ways in which human semiotics are inscribed upon animal bodies, such as articulations of nationhood (Howell, 2013: Matless, 2000) or signalling anxieties around issues of race and gender (Emel and Wolch, 1998). In brief, what this work has drawn attention to is that the animal, as individual, species or symbol has been fundamental to sense making processes. As Emel and Wolch (1998, page 19) explain, ‘the frontier between civility and barbarity, culture and nature increasingly drifts, animal bodies flank the moving line. It is upon animal bodies that the struggle for naming what is human, what lies within the grasp of human agency, what is possible
is taking place’. Animal geographies have revealed that flanking ‘the moving line’ animals occupy spaces of devotion and brutality, theirs is a history and narrative conversely seeped in violence and care. By (re)narrating the biography of Wojtek, this paper builds upon research in animal geography in three ways; it traces the lived geographies of an individual animal to demonstrate that the battlespace is another seemingly human space in which animals are present and active, it claims that animals are entangled in shaping and being shaped by strategies of violence, and finally it, suggests that studying the hybrid nature of war relational ethics of violence can begin to be accounted for.

As Hodgetts and Lorimer (2015) explain, since the revival of animal geographies in the 1990s there have been two approaches to animal geographies that were set out in the seminal book Animal Spaces: Beastly Places (2000); ‘animal spaces’, attending to the ordering of animals and the second, ‘beastly places’ which explores animals lived geographies. They suggest that the latter approach has to some extent been overlooked due to the difficulty in developing methodologies which help to facilitate geographical research into what they term ‘animals’ geographies’. Yet, with increasing concerns to acknowledge animals as ethical and political subjects, and, in an effort to further destabilise the predominant anthropocentric focus of research such difficulties require addressing. Methodologies are mechanisms informing integral parts of the apparatus which shape and maintain particular epistemologies and ontologies (Barad, 2007). The work in animal geographies, as discussed, has revealed how humanist and modernist apparatuses have had consequences for the ways in which the world is ordered, engaged with and made sense of (Buller, 2014). Thus, the current effort to address ‘beastly places’ or ‘animals’ geographies’ is not an attempt to erase the figure of the human from research into animal lifeworlds. In regards to research attending to animals and technologies in tackling questions of difference Whatmore has stated that, such ‘modes of enquire neither presume that socio-material changes is an exclusively human achievement nor exclude the ‘human’ from the stuff of fabrication’ (2006, page 64). Instead, such enquiry is an endeavour not to allow the human to dominate the central frame of research, and thus, to acknowledge the shared nature of becoming by tracing the consequences on individuals and species entangled in these hybrid relations.

One method to account for the relational nature of the world as a continual process of becoming and the agency of animals within this is storytelling. As Cameron states, since the cultural turn the story for geographers has ‘became a site for thinking through the workings of power, knowledge and geographical formations at the most intimate of scales’ (2012, page 574). She explains there have developed three broad strands; stories that account for the lived experience in its particularity and intimacy, stories that attempt to politically mobilise in order to enact
transformation and stories where the narrative is an affective (post)phenomenological tool. Taking the biography of a bear and exploring one animal’s experience in war is an effort to account for the plurality of bodies that live, sense and shape the battlespace, its attention to intimacy is an effort towards an ethico-political exploration of the more-than-human battlescape.

In particular for narrating Wojtek’s biography storytelling is the only means left to studying his life. The fragmentary stories of Wojtek that have survived in memoirs, photographs and film are highly anthropocentric re-tellings, there is scant other material - zoo autopsies and claw marked trees - where his life and presence can be traced. Lorimer (2003) has argued that creative biographies (constellations of sites, times, materials, perspectives and experiences) focused on ‘small stories’ can be unsettling. This ‘unsettling’ is a tool for considering relations in the world, it figures the individuals at the centre as ‘fluid and multiple’ and always unknowable, the biographies themselves are not presented as ‘systematic or sealed’ but as lines that are contingent, partial (Ibid, page 204), and thus, the personal story can provoke an array of emotions and responses revealing a multitude, as well as contradictory ways in which the world and our relations within it are performed. This biographical storytelling acts and participates in shaping of the world. As Van Dooren explains, stories have consequences ‘one of which is that we will inevitably be drawn into new connections, and with them new accountabilities and obligations’ (2014, page 10). Such stories are more-than-human as they take animals lives at their centre to narrate their lived experiences as active and important presences in the world, and in order to explore the character and consequences of human-nonhuman relations. Further, through a study of birds on the edge of extinction Van Dooren frames each individual as ‘a single knot in an emergent lineage: a vital point in connection between generations (2014, page 27). Analysing Wojtek’s life as a knot - an entanglement of politics, cultures, environments, human and nonhuman animals - is an effort to recognise the inherent hybrid nature of warfare, exposing that animals are a ubiquitous presence in the military and draw attention to the transformative (however long lasting or transitory) nature of becoming in the battlespace.

**Adoption and adaption**

In April 1942 a group of Polish prisoners and deportees were making their way from Siberian Labour Camps to Palestine, the mustering point for a new Polish Army, the 2nd Polish Corps. In the Persian Elburz Mountains they came across a young boy carrying a hessian sack that appeared to be wriggling (Ivell and Baczor, 2013). After sharing some food with him, one of the men, Peter Prendys peered into the sack to see that it contained a young brown bear cub. The cub’s mother had been shot and the boy was going to sell the cub, most likely to be trained as a dancing bear. After a period of bartering and with the exchange of some local currency, food
and a Swiss army knife the cub was handed over and the group decided to name him Wojtek, an old Slavic name meaning “he who enjoys war” or “smiling warrior” and Peter Prendys, a self-effacing man who in his mid-forties was the eldest of the group was appointed Wojtek’s guardian (Orr, 2010, pages 23-27). When the group arrived in Palestine to join the 2nd Polish Corps the commanding officer, Major Chelminski, agreed that Wojtek could stay as it was clear he was a fine military mascot as the soldiers’ morale was buoyed by his presence (Orr, 2011, pages 28-30). Military mascots highlight what Hediger (2012, page 3) has described as the ‘often paradoxical contours of human-animal relationships’ in warfare, where human and animal lives are co-constituted and it is through these relations that soldiers cling to a sense of humanity. In these engagements animals remain objects through which humans locate and maintain structures of the self. Such relations and figurations of the animal – as a tool for identifying and articulating the human - have long and enduring histories. For example, the figure of the bear has held a particular place in human history and imagination as Bieder summarises; ‘Long ago bears lumbered into human imaginings and left legends, stories and myths’ (2005, page 49) they persist in folklore and myth; as a worthy adversary in big game hunting, a creature with appealing aesthetics for an endearing toy and possessed with an intelligence to be tamed as a performer. These bear stories continue to shape and mediate the world around us as: ‘[s]tories are politically and ideologically charged, they illuminate specific historical and cultural periods’ (Bieder, 2005, page 117). Wojtek, thus contributes to a long tradition leaving his mark on the imaginings of the soldiers who shared his journey, and on those who know him through the retelling. However, Wojtek has contributed something further, if the nature and practices of his relations with those around him in war are explored it appears he did not reflect but challenged categories of bear and human, perhaps even highlighting the ambiguity of who or what can be considered a ‘soldier’.

Figure 2: Wojtek as a cub with Polish soldiers (courtesy of Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum)

In the desert the cub quickly became part of, and embedded in, military life. Wojtek lived with and adapted to the soldiers as they travelled through Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt as part of the 22nd Transport Company. He shared their supplies, slept with them in their tents and rode with them in their trucks. The soldiers in turn became attuned to Wojtek’s experience of their military posting. For example, the demands of the desert terrain led the soldiers to adapt their camp to the bear’s needs; a makeshift canopy was erected to protect him from the sun (Ivell and Baczor, 2013, page 41) and while on a posting to Egypt the soldiers dug him a bathing pool in the sand to keep him cool during the searing heat of the day (Orr, 2010). As Wojtek grew from cub to full sized bear, he socialised with the soldiers; wrestling with them, mimicking their
behaviour such as drinking beer and saluting when greeted (Orr, 2010). Many of the soldiers enjoyed his company and were patient of his inquisitive nature, although on occasion discipline had to be enforced and Wojtek was tethered in the camp when he raided their limited food supplies. One soldier, Stanislow Kroczak (cited in Ivell and Baczor, 2013, page 54) recalled that with no trees in the desert a metal stake was driven into the ground, Wojtek would then spend his time swivelling backwards and forwards until the stake came free and he was able to wander where he pleased. The soldiers would have to go after him in a truck until he was willing or could be cajoled to get on board and be taken back to the camp.

Therefore, on occasions the restrictions of army life and the physical geography of the battlespace proved more laborious in the company of a bear, while army life also served at times to restrict and curtail Wojtek’s spatalities. What appears from considering this relationship between human and nonhuman animal is that through a process of negotiation, novel strategies of co-dwelling were trialled and brought into being. The battlespace here is an example of Haraway’s (2008) notion of ‘response-ability’, as a space operating outside normal conventions the soldiers’ in the desert practised attentive relations of care while adapting to Wojtek’s presence. As captive companion animal Wojtek is comparable to the elephant in the zoo who, as described by Whatmore, becomes adapted ‘to a more impoverished repertoire of sociability, movement and life skills that will always set her apart’ (2002, page 56). But for Wojtek the effects of captivity are less clear-cut. He enjoyed relative freedom and a very close, social and embodied relationship with the soldiers. They slept, played and ate together, some of the soldiers in turn clearly found their military life enriched through their relationship with the bear. Their everyday routines and rhythms were shaped by a continual choreography of co-dwelling.

Yet of course, as Haraway (2008) has also drawn attention to, such spaces or encounters do not eradicate asymmetrical relations and strategies of control were devised to constrain Wojtek’s everyday geographies; he relied upon the soldiers for food and water, just as they relied upon the military for their own supplies. All were finding their military identities and place in the war.

However, the relationship between Wojtek and the soldiers in the company should not be over romanticised. For some, Wojtek’s presence was not welcome but a further unnerving addition to army life. One soldier, Franio Rodowicz, had the rather terrifying experience of being woken in his tent by the great weight of Wojtek upon him, his teeth bared, which left Franio with an occasional stutter (cited in Ivell and Baczor, 2013, page46). This demonstrates that the consequences of the blurring of boundaries between human and nonhuman animal did not apply only to Wojtek, it drew in other lives not all of whom were consenting to this challenge. Thus, entangled relations of being and becoming in the battlespace, as experienced by Wojtek and the
soldiers in his company, should not be considered innocent because the process of ‘making available’ so to inhabit spaces of intimate co-dwelling can put difficult demands on bodies and lives. In the Second World War operating and living in the desert environment for both human and nonhuman influenced their embodied experiences, helped to produce their relations between one another and shaped the everyday rhythms of military life. Therefore, Wojtek reveals how the hybrid nature of the battlespace demands, to varying levels, relations between human and nonhuman which in turn facilitate a continual negotiation of precarious co-dwelling in the making.

Further, Wojtek was not the only animal living amongst the Polish soldiers and certainly not the only animal enrolled in desert warfare. As Gardiner explains, animals in war provide morale, comfort, an outlet for sentimentality when faced with danger and a distraction from boredom (2001, page 141) and as a result novel interspecies relations develop between nonhuman animals. In Egypt, Wojtek, for example, befriended a Dalmatian, Krikuk, who was the pet of a British liaison officer. There was also for a time another bear, Michal, who joined the Company after he had been abandoned in Palestine by an Infantry Battalion, but due to a hostile and at times violent relationship between the two bears, Michal was eventually traded with the zoo in Tel Aviv for a monkey, Kasia (Krockzak, cited in Ivell and Baczor, 2013, page 61). The boundaries, therefore, for some nonhuman animals were still firmly in place and reinforced through difficult nonhuman relations, and in this instance, Wojtek’s presence prioritised. Thus, where Wojtek’s biography intersects with a variety of other animals in the battlespace and some uncomfortable humans, it chimes with Van Dooren’s (2014) narrative on Whooping Crane conservation where intense efforts to save a species from the brink of extinction is characterised by care and hope but equally violence and coercion directed at “sacrificial populations”. As heterogeneous and plural the military and battlespace may be, but cuts are still made to exclude specific animals deemed not or beyond use (be that as labour or for companionship or morale). Wojtek reveals the cuts that care enacts, between species and individuals. Further, his narrative reveals that asymmetrical power relations in the military are not explicitly drawn between human and nonhuman animal but along the lines of care, attachment and use. In fact, issues of inclusion and military identity appear to be more an issue decided by rank than by biology as an incident at the Port at Alexandria reveals.

**A bear’s biography: becoming soldier**

In December 1943 Wojtek arrived in Egypt when the company were being mobilised for a move to Italy and action. Up until then Wojtek had been one animal amongst many living with the
soldiers in the Middle East as one soldier recalled: ‘there were mascots everywhere – dogs, ferrets, owls, lizards, foxes, pigs. Everybody wanted something to love’ (Lavis, 2011). However, animals were forbidden to travel to Italy. In order to gain passage aboard the British transport ship, Wojtek had to become officially drafted into the Polish Army, issued with a military ID and rations. Archibald Brown – who was Courier to General Montgomery – recalled that in February 1944 when the ship was preparing for departure one Polish soldier remained unchecked on the rostra, a Corporal Wojtek. Eventually two of the Polish Officers were cajoled by Brown to insist to the Corporal he be registered in person. On their return, Brown, obviously shocked at seeing a bear being brought forth, refused to allow Corporal Wojtek passage. A heated discussion ensued whereby the Port Authority was finally persuaded to phone the High Command in Cairo in order to speak to General Anders, Commander of the 2nd Polish Corps. Anders confirmed that Wojtek was indeed a bear and a soldier of the Polish Army and should be allowed on board (Lavis, 2011). In that moment between shore and ship, Wojtek transgressed from animal to soldier, from bear to Corporal, simultaneously inhabiting the role of pet, mascot and comrade. Wojtek’s being in this moment is hazy, his ontology of ‘animal’ becomes slippery, but his identity is clearly defined as a soldier of the Polish Army. Further, this moment reveals the power of who can categorise, classify and name. To Brown, Wojtek, as a bear, was obviously not and could not be a soldier because he was an animal. But General Anders overrides this ‘commonsensical’ reasoning, and thus, from this point Wojtek not only embodies the soldier-identity in the everyday but is also discursively subjectified as one in the power relationship by which the General can make and enact Wojtek is a soldier. Therefore, much like the assemblage of the laboratory in which the scientist-as-expert determines the bee as a ‘mechanical device’, so does the assemblage of the military hierarchy in which the general-as-authority determines the accepted status of Wojtek as ‘soldier’.

Wojtek continued to inhabit this ambiguous role in Italy when the Company was posted to the Battle of Monte Cassino. This battle took place between 17 January and 18 May in 1944. At the beginning of 1944, the western half of the Winter Line was anchored by Germans holding the Rapido, Liri, and Garigliano valleys and some of the surrounding peaks and ridges. Fearing that the abbey in Monte Cassino formed part of the Germans’ defensive line, the Allies sanctioned its bombing on 15 February. The destruction and rubble left by the bombing raid provided even better protection from aerial and artillery attacks, so German paratroopers took up positions in the abbey’s ruins. Thereafter the Monte Cassino and the Gustav defences were assaulted four times by Allied troops, who eventually broke through, but at a high cost (Hapgood and Richardson, 2002). It is estimated that the four battles cost the lives of 60,000 soldiers.
survivor recollected: ‘My battalion of 1000 men advanced into Monte Cassino village, three days of fighting reduced it to 97 men’ (cited in Orr 2012, page 43). It was in this battle that Wojtek took on legendary status by helping unload boxes of shells. He was performing a task he had seen the soldiers around him undertake numerous times. Although he had never been trained or instructed to move boxes of ammunition, he mimicked the other soldiers’ behaviour, but as one soldier recalled ‘it has to be said he did the lifting very much on his own terms; he chose when and how long he would work’ (Orr, 2010, page 47). In the Battle of Monte Cassino Wojtek’s shifting of shells consolidated his status as ‘soldier’ and the Polish ‘soldier bear’ became the official badge of the 22nd Transport Company, a symbol that appeared on vehicles, pendants and on the uniforms of the soldiers. One of the soldiers, Kay, recalled: ‘He was a brave brave man, as a bear’ (Lavis, 2011). Haraway has explained that the world is one of ‘webbed existences and multiple beings in relationship’, which is a ‘tapestry of shared being/becoming’ (2008, page 72), and as such, Wojtek’s being and behaviour were shaped by the Polish soldiers, and they in turn, formed aspects of their army’s identity based upon their relationship with him. Wojtek as a soldier in, yet also out of, place, is symptomatic of the capacity of war to create experiential hybrid spaces. Whilst also revealing the capacity for social relations between humans and animals to occur which in turn shape lives, practices and identities in the battlespace. By attending to Wojtek’s biography the battlespace is revealed to be a space of interaction between human and nonhuman animal which can born through the closeness of co-habitation and degrees of trust between soldiers that was produced through everyday, even mundane rhythms of life, in moments and places of exception. Woodward has explained that military-scapes are constituted by military objectives but also through the ways in which they are experienced on personal scales; these elements and scales converge to produce military identities (2014, page 43). In the battlespace military identities (which as Wojtek demonstrates, expands to include specific nonhumans) thus become co-constituted in complex networks and assemblages born of the military-industrial complex. These identities are by their nature hybrid, but also importantly, ones of intimate embodiment, everyday practices and the materiality of the battlespace. Despret explains: ‘The identities upon which identification could ground itself do not pre-exist; the identity is created by the previous construction of affinities. Identity is the outcome, the achievement’ (2013, page 60). Wojtek was both a novelty but also a firmly embedded part of the company. When removed from the battlespace such entangled identities become hard to sustain and peace required identities to be reconfigured.

A bear's biography: becoming bear
By the end of the Second World War the Company and Wojtek were stationed at Winfield Camp in the Scottish Borders. In 1947 the Polish Army were demobbed, but what civilian life had to offer the Polish soldiers was uncertain and Wojtek, as Polish soldier and bear posed a particular problem. Therefore, Wojtek’s experiences in the military demonstrate the slipperiness of categories such as human and animal, exposing them as made through cuts that are not inevitable but material (Barad, 2007). His biography also reveals that not only are there realities (or ethics) to the cuts made through processes of categorisation, but also, ethical questions arise when novel realities which challenge categories of difference are produced, performed and then abandoned.

Raised in the relative freedom of the battlespace Wojtek was neither wild nor domesticated; he was never human yet never quite ‘bear’ either. Accustomed to having food provided, constant companionship and with some freedom to roam as he pleased the choices for Wojtek in peacetime were limited. It seemed he could either be put down or put in a zoo, both upsetting prospects for the soldiers who lived with him. On witnessing Wojtek’s arrival the director of Edinburgh Zoo recalled: ‘I never felt so sorry to see an animal that had enjoyed so much freedom confined to a cage’ (Gillespie, 1964, page 65) and one soldier recalled that Wojtek became ‘a different animal in the zoo’ (Lavis, 2011). Fluri states that it is bodies which are the most ‘immediate and delicate’ corporeal sites of warfare(2011, page 282). Yes they can be damaged, ripped and torn apart but as we are also aware there are other painful consequences and costs of war that bodies must bear, and these include nonhuman bodies.

Kinder has examined how the zoo animal is variously affected by warfare; from being bombed, starved, massacred or eaten, promoted as paragons of civic virtue or enrolled in the military as ‘good soldiers’. He suggests that ‘[s]patially concentrated, physically constrained, their entire lives subject to the almost unmitigated control of their keepers, zoo animals are perfectly primed for wartime’ (2013, page 53). Wojtek’s biography offers a different, distinct but surely not unique story challenging how ‘primed’ army animals are to be fitted into human sites designated and designed for safe human animal encounters. After becoming something slippery and hybrid in the battlespace, Wojtek’s being was forced to become stabilised outside the military. This was a process that required further adaptation from Wojtek, but this time without the same level of mutual accommodation or correspondence with the humans around him. Therefore, Wojtek was demanded to inhabit, become a different form; one that fitted to within defined, clear and distinct categories of human and animal. He was required to become a bear. Indeed in the zoo Wojtek became a different animal: one to be observed as an example of type, species rather than one interacted with as an individual. Although he had to some extent always been a spectacle he
now became primarily an object of curiosity. Soldier-bear and zoo-bear; two quite distinct, discrete beings, each with different spatialities and different relations. One negotiated the other fixed: yet both performed by one life.

**Relational ethics in war**

Focusing specifically on the more-than-human, blurring the boundaries between human and an array of nonhumans examines how the world is becoming through entangled relations. Greenhough suggests this ‘puts us under obligation to find new ways of practising geography that acknowledge the collective agency of geographers and those with whom they research in shaping multiple and lively worlds’(2010, page 41). This approach expands the view posed by Garner who states that ‘animals should not be outside our moral concern… we have some duties towards them’ (1993, page 35). In short, it is not enough to grant or extend anthropocentric rights or politics to animals as this never challenges the apparatus that allowed for an anthropocentric politics and ethics to be produced in the first place. Instead, a more-than-human approach reveals and invigorates the contexts and manners in which ethics are formed, performed and reformed through multiple human-animal interactions (Buller, 2015). This attention to co-presence, mutual corporeality and the responsive nature of non-humans in shaping this world is to produce what Whatmore (1997) terms ‘relational ethics’ rather than to work with pre-existing codes of morals and ethical universals. This ethico-political commitment to embodiment, materiality, hybridity and situatedness is wary of homogeneity and desires for holisms, and instead, by attending to intricate agencies between human and nonhuman (Puig de la Bellacasa, 201, page 87) extends the body politic beyond the human, grounds processes and rationalities as practiced and embodied and displaces ‘the fixed and bounded contours’ of ethics (Whatmore, 1997 page 50).

As Ginn explains, embracing such heterogeneous more-than-human studies requires negotiation that is not focused on a utopian view of such relations but has a more practical consideration of how ‘to learn to live (and die) well together without the promise of harmony, or safe endings for any of those involved in the composing’ (2013, page 3). Wojtek’s biography demonstrates that taking the nonhuman seriously offers interesting and innovative potentials to how the hybrid nature of war is understood, but it unsettles any sense that relations between humans and their animal companions in war are benign, safe or easy. Wojtek’s biography provides an opportunity to study war as a space that allowed different and diverse ways of being with nonhuman animals as well as becoming more-than-human which produced particular materialities and realities. Such geographies can recast histories of military engagements to become stories about the networks
and assemblages which actively transform knowledges, relations and bodies and which diffuse far beyond the confines of battle. In this sense animals not only destabilise essentialist tropes but offer a more-than-human perspective of ‘lives-in-the making’ (Buller, 2013, page 313) as well as histories and geographies in the making.

In particular, by attending to the hybrid nature of warfare through an individual’s biography the everyday practices of care in the battlespace come to the fore. When the soldiers decide to take care of Wojtek they instigated ‘a transformative ethos’ where caring was a ‘living technology with vital material implications for human and nonhuman worlds’ (Puig de la Bellcasa, 2011, page 100). Drawing attention to these embodied, everyday practices and negations of care provides a means to more fully describe the hybrid nature of the battlespace and warfare. Despret explains the potential in taking such an approach stating:

To ‘de-passion’ knowledge does not give us a more objective world, it just gives us a world ‘without us’; and therefore, without ‘them’ - lines are traced so fast. And as long as this world appears as a world ‘we don’t care for’, it also becomes an impoverished world, a world of minds without bodies, of bodies without minds, bodies without hearts, expectations, interests, a world of enthusiastic automata observing strange and mute creatures; in other words, a poorly articulated (and poorly articulating) world (2004, page 22).

Yet, Johnson has called for attention and reflection in regards to which animals are considered as participating in and being the focus of more-than-human geographies. She contends that by attending to reciprocity or ‘other emotional tissue’ may dismantle binary relations but other asymmetrical relations are recast, as nonhumans who do not offer immediate emotive connections remain mute (2015, page 301), raising important questions about which animals and ethical relations gets overlooked in the military-industrial-academic complex.

Although the biography of Wojtek tells the tale of a charismatic creature, an animal like us, Wojtek’s biography also reveals relations of care as provided by war to have unsettling less innocent qualities. Giraud and Hollin (2016) explain how care conversely requires relationships which are attentive to needs, but, they also foreclose certain forms of responsibility. In the military, care for animals can provide succour, it can lubricate relations that produce bodies for labour, sacrificial bodies or techno-cultural bodies and it can also shut down questions of the ethical implications of animals in the battlespace.  Wojtek reveals the way in which war allows diverse relations between human and nonhuman, he highlights how individual bodies and experiences are shaped by military processes and he hints at the lasting consequences of when
knotted relations are unpicked and ordered into the neat delineated lines between human and animal. Thus, taking care to consider who and what are active in the battlespace and how these relations are produced and performed complicates narratives of war and highlights the wide ranging ethical implications of violence on a range of bodies, environments and relations.

A bear’s biography: recalling configurations

To conclude, let us return to Edinburgh Zoo and to the bear enclosure. Wojtek’s visitors, former comrades and fellow soldiers reconfiguring themselves in the post-war era and peacetime space induced a visible response in Wojtek. He swayed to the music, visitors insisted on throwing him cigarettes (a task that could cost up to two packets) until one would finally reach the enclosure, where the bear retrieved and ate it. His ears twitched back and forth when he was spoken to in Polish, occasionally nodding his head in a seemingly sage response (Lavis, 2011). Zoos are, it is been widely acknowledged, abstractions of nature. The closeness to the wild and exotic offered by the zoo only serves to reinforce the distance between human and nonhuman animal. Thus, as Anderson (1995) reveals, the zoo is complexly crafted in order to narrate what it is to be ‘human’, to be ‘self’ as opposed to something ‘other’ something more ‘beastly’ and lacking. Yet as Wojtek suggests, there can be moments of disruption when the physical and cultural fabric of the zoo are temporarily breached, when boundaries dissipate, and the mutual creaturely nature of both – human and nonhuman animal – forged in a different space come into sharper focus. Despret has commented that working closely with nonhumans can induce moments when ‘animals are invited to other modes of being, other relationships, and new ways to inhabit the human world and to force human beings to address them differently’ (2013, page 60). But moments of connection of ‘making available’, are also moments tinged with tension that demonstrate the ‘ways ‘humans’ have not only defined but struggled with their complex relationship to nature’ (Anderson, 1995, page 279).

In particular, as this paper has discussed, war draws humans and nonhuman animals into its fray. Wojtek’s narrative reveals the connections, tensions and struggles that such hybrid relations produce. Therefore, this paper has aimed to highlight that the attention given to the nonhuman in critical military geographies has predominately focused on the role of technology at the expense of human-animal relations in war. Through a vignette of Wojtek’s biography, and by drawing on animal geographies and storytelling, this paper reveals the battlespace to be a place of co-habitation and transgression, where categories of human and nonhuman, nature and culture, civilized and wild are challenged and destabilised, because through its hybrid character, war inevitably undermines these naturalised categories of difference. Wojtek’s biography reveals his
place in the military was not borne out of technological or scientific innovation but of a desire for close human-animal relations in warfare, revealing the diverse ways through which the hybridity of war is enacted and performed. The unsettling end to Wojtek’s’ biography begins to suggest that when more-than-human relations are beyond utility or cannot be sustained outside the battlespace there are consequences. From saved and prized in the battlespace, protected and prioritised as companion and then parted from and reconfigured in the zoo, Wojtek’s story is saturated with care but also with the violence inherent in human-animal relations. Thus, as well as highlighting the active role of animals in the military this paper has suggested that there are important relational ethical questions which are raised in the more-than-human battlespace. Wojtek’s experiences demonstrates that reciprocal more-than-human relations expose a double significance of ‘care’ as a tool and relation, as both an everyday labour of maintenance but also an ethical obligation: ‘we must take care of things in order to remain responsible for their becomings’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, page 90). This requires research to articulate the hybrid nature of warfare and also to explore the ethico-political relations for all enrolled in the military geographies. Overall, this paper makes an intervention which argues for tracing the animal dimensions of military geographies which exposes the hybrid relations that compose complex assemblages of military violence to scrutinise and account for the intimate, embodied and unsettling practices of becoming in the more-than-human battlespace.

Reference List

Adey P, 2010 Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affect (Blackwell, Oxford)


Beider R 2005 Bear (Reaktion, London)

Buller H, 2013 “Animal geographies I” Progress in Human Geography 38 308-318

Buller H, 2014 “Animal geographies II: Methods” Progress in Human Geography 39 374-384

Buller H, 2015 “Animal geographies III: Ethics” Progress in Human Geography online first 1-9


Cowen D, 2008 *Military Workfare: The Soldier and Social Citizenship in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto)


Despret V, 2013 “Responding Bodies and Partial Affinities in Human-Animal Worlds” *Theory, Culture and Society* **30** 51-76

Driver F, 2001 *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Blackwell, Oxford)


Farish M, 2006 “Frontier engineering: from the globe to the body in the Cold War Arctic” *The Canadian Geographer* **50** 177-196


Garner R, 1993 *Animals, politics and morality* (Manchester University Press, Manchester)

Gillespie T, 1964 *The Story of the Edinburgh Zoo: The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Scottish National Zoological Park: an account of their origin and progress* (Slains, Edinburgh)

Giraud, E and Hollin, G 2016 “Care, Laboratory Beagles and Affective Utopia” *Theory, Culture and Society* early online 1-23


Gregory D, 2011 “From a View to Kill: Drones in Late Modern War” *Theory Culture and Society* **28** 188-215

Gregory D, 2015 “The Natures of War” *Antipode* **48** 3-56
Hapgood D, and Richardson D, 2002 Monte Cassino: the story of the most controversial battle of World War II De Capo: Cambridge

Haraway D, 2008 When Species Meet (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis)

Hediger R, 2012 “Animals and War: Introduction”. In Animals and War (Human-Animal Relations), Eds Hediger, R (Brill, Boston) 1-28


Hodgetts, T and Lorimer, J 2015 “Methodologies for animals’ geographies: cultures, communications and genomics” cultural geographies 22 285-295

Howel, P 2013 “The Dog Fancy at War: Breeds, Breeding and Britishness, 1914-1918” Society and Animals 6 546-567

Ivell, K and Baczor, V. 2013 Wojtek album: a collection of Wojek photographs and anecdotes (Krystna Ivell, London)

Johnson E, 2015 “Of lobsters, laboratories, and war: animal studies and the temporality of more-than-human encounters” Environment and Planning D 33 296-313

Kaplan C, 2006 “Mobility and war: the cosmic view of US ‘air power’” Environment and Planning A 38 395-407

Kinder, J, 2012 “Zoo Animals and Modern War: Captive Casualties, Patriotic Citizens, and Good Soldiers”. In Animals and War (Human-Animal Relations), Eds Hediger, R (Brill, Boston) 45-76


Lavis, A 2011 Wojtek: The Bear that went to War (Brighsparks, London)


Lorimer, H 2006 “Herding memories of humans and animals” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 24 497-518

Macdonald H, 2002 “What makes you a scientist is the way you look at things’: ornithology and the observer 1930-1955” Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 33 53-77

MacDonald H, 2006 Falcon (Reaktion, London)


McKiernan S and Instone L, 2015 “From pest to partner: rethinking the Australian White Ibis in the more-than-human city” cultural geographies 1-20

Morris C and Holloway L, 2014 “Genetics and livestock breeding in the UK: Co-constructing technologies and heterogeneous biosocial collectives” Journal of Rural Studies 33 150-160
Orr A, 2010 *Wojtek the Bear: Polish War Hero* (Birlin, Edinburgh)


Shaw I, 2013 “Predator empire: the geopolitics of U.S. drone warfare” *Geopolitics* **18** 536-559


Whatmore, S 2002 *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces* (Sage, London)

Whatmore, S 2006 “Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world” *cultural geographies* **13** 600-609


Woodward R, 2014 “Military landscapes: Agendas and approaches for future research” *Progress in Human Geography* **38** 40-61

Wojtek, Edinburgh Zoo (courtesy of Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum)

93x140mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Wojtek as a cub with Polish soldiers (courtesy of Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum)

128x77mm (300 x 300 DPI)