**INTERVENTIONS ON MILITARY MOBILITIES**

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**Abstract**

“Military geographies may be everywhere, but they are often subtle, hidden, concealed, or unidentified” (Woodward 2005, 719). More so, an examination of the *mobilities* that shape these geographies likewise remains ‘subtle’, ‘hidden’ and ‘concealed’. Yet (im)mobilities saturate military enterprise. This intervention raises a series of provocations for thinking seriously about the intersections between the ‘military’ and ‘mobilities’. Through four provocations, a collaborative, critical knowledge of military (im)mobilities, is identified, unlocking accounts of militarised mobilities, movements, manoeuvres; across varying scales, times and contexts.

**Keywords**

Military, Mobilities, Manoeuvres, Methods, Bodies, Social Media.

**MILITARY MOBILITIES: AN INTRODUCTION**

**Peter Merriman and Kimberley Peters**

Military mobilities of a particular kind have been widely discussed in political geography and related fields over the past decade, from critical analyses of the use of military drones for remote warfare, observation and killing-at-a-distance, to discussions of extraordinary rendition, histories of aerial bombardment and the spatialities of naval warfare (Gregory, 2014; Shaw, 2013; Williams, 2011; Adey et al., 2011, 2013; Raphael et al., 2016; Davies, 2013). This intervention builds upon emerging literatures concerning military movements to argue for the importance of focusing on the highly distinctive motivations, strategies, practices, experiences, spaces and infrastructures of mobility associated with military actions and military lives. In doing this it seeks to bring together broader work on military geographies with critical scholarship in mobilities studies. In what follows we suggest ways in which these different bodies of work intersect and can inform our understanding of the distinctive (but also ubiquitous) character, politics, practices and technologies of military mobilities. To do so we examine three interrelated themes: the role of technological innovation and more-than-human terrain in militarised activities; the role of bodies and embodied experience in military life; and the complex, interwoven relationship between civilian and military movements, spaces and worlds.

Technological innovation is frequently positioned as central to the geostrategic capabilities, decisions and actions of advanced military powers, whether in political-theoretic accounts of war, vision, speed and power (Virilio, 1986, 2002, 2005; De Landa, 1991; Der Derian, 1992), or historical accounts of military campaigns (van Creveld, 1989). In short, the development and use of military technologies has shaped and indeed enabled the mobilities and embodied practices of individual personnel and troops. For example, military organisations have developed and deployed a broad range of specialist vehicles which possess unique qualities necessary for military engagement, exemplified by the covert movements of the stealth bomber and nuclear submarine, all-terrain capabilities of the tank and Humvee, or the strike capability and speed-potential of jet aircraft. However, as Forsyth contends in her intervention to follow, military mobilities are not just produced to aid ‘fluid, fast and effective’ action in the battlefield, or elsewhere. The military also use a range of technologies – both state-of-the-art (such as target-missiles) and rudimentary (barbed wire) – to block, still, and prevent mobilities of the ‘enemy’. Military mobilities, then, are facilitated, enacted, blocked, stilled, tracked, and covered up by a broad range of technologies beyond transport vehicles, including walls, rocket launchers and guns, camouflage, the internet, and telephone networks (Krell, 2002; Netz, 2004; Robinson, 2013; Till et al., 2013; Forsyth, 2014, 2015).

Of course, such technologies do not operate outset of spatial contexts. Technologies are designed, developed, tested in relation to the geophysical terrains in which they will be used (see Forsyth 2014, 2015). Military mobilities, then, shape and are shaped by the specific environments in which they take place, and these environments – through often extreme geo-physical conditions and violence – require technologies that are robust enough to navigate and manoeuvre theatres of war. As Forsyth shows in her intervention, there is a need to focus on the edges, or forgotten elements of military worlds (in this case the more-than-human dimensions), in order to grasp the entangled geographies of military mobilities.

Moreover, bodies are required in the operation of technologies, enfolding the two together in the manifestation of military mobilities. With the rise of remote decision-making and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, so the embodied nature of military engagement has changed. However, this does not simply represent a shift to disembodied military combat, rather what is evident is a highly diverse array of embodied practices and engagements, ranging from the micro-scale movements of bodies undertaking drill practice or interacting with computer keyboards and screens, to the global movements of military personnel (and often their families) to military bases or theatres of war (see Cresswell’s intervention to follow). The bodily movements of military personnel are highly choreographed, trained, and entrained, but they may also be radically transformed through the exertions and violent actions of war, with the production of traumatised and mutilated bodies (military and civilian) (Woodward & Jenkings, 2014).

In Woodward’s intervention to follow, she attends to the ways in which we might research the body and embodied experience in military settings. There are challenges to any kind of research that involves understanding the intricacies and intimacies of lived experience (Colls, 2012; Nash, 2000; Valentine, 2008). In a military setting, however, issues of access, security, and the bodily abilities of the researcher are all called into question in attempts to uncover the fleshy and felt realities of military mobilities. Given the perceived importance of military secrecy and covertness to questions of national security it is not surprising that, as Woodward argues, military mobilities can be difficult to research using conventional social science methods. Go-along interviews, participant observation, and other mobile or ethnographic methods may well be seen as problematic for military authorities, but there are a broad range of humanities and social science methods – from interviews to textual analysis – which can be useful for exploring the experiences, embodied movements, and strategic decisions of military personnel (see Williams et al., 2016). Yet in spite of such challenges, researchers must continue to consider the corporeal dimensions of military life in order to shed light on the varied mobile experiences of those living and working in militarised settings. Indeed, there is not a single military ‘body’ or embodied experience. As Forsyth contends, it is also vital to explore those individuals who are on the edges of war – ‘collateral’ bodies – who are subject to ‘state sanctioned violence’ (see intervention to follow). And as Adey likewise argues, there are intimate geographies of military life to be investigated through understanding how social media use might bring dispersed bodies closer into touch, whilst disrupting channels of intimacy through quickening processes by which news of military personnel and events is spread.

Attendance to social media technology alerts us to the movement of information in/between military realms and with the outside civilian world. As Woodward and Cresswell both note in the interventions to follow, military spaces are often understood as distinct and different from civilian spaces. For example, ideal or effective military movements possess qualities which are, at times, quite different from civilian mobilities. Qualities of speed, comfort and efficiency may well be desired by both military and civilian authorities, but qualities of stealth, covertness and the potential to move and strike with ‘shock and awe’ are also highly significant in military spheres, leading to the development of technologies designed to provide intelligence on movements, and track and trace movements (e.g. radar, RFID, aerial photography). That said, attention to mobilities in a militarised context also works to unhinge the stark differentiation between military and civilian spaces. Moving from contemporary social media technologies, to the telegraph, railway and later the telephone, Martin van Creveld (1989) argues that civilian technologies were frequently re-engineered for military purposes, just as military technologies and military practices can become reworked in civilian settings.

In both Peter Adey and Tim Cresswell’s interventions to follow, we see how the lines between civilian and military mobilities, lives, technologies and spaces can be blurred, redefined, or policed. In Adey’s contribution, we see how technologies of communication and social networking may enable the movement and circulation of information, opinions, emotions and affects between military personnel and their friends and families, but also how this can present challenges for military authorities seeking to maintain morale, focus and security during active operations. In Cresswell’s intervention, we see how a whole host of seemingly ordinary practices, technologies and spaces are underpinned by technologies and practices which were first developed in the military, including ‘boot camp’ style exercise regimes and commercial logistics networks. To Cresswell’s list we could, of course, add a whole host of media and technologies – from GPS and the internet, to military videogames and scientific research – where the spaces, practices and mobilities of military and civilian life frequently intersect (Kaplan, 2006a; Power, 2007). Moreover, if we are to consider the mobilities of bodies and embodied mobile experience, it is possible to trace the deeply interwoven lifeworlds of military and civilian populations. Nowhere are the blurred lines between military and civilian mobilities more apparent than in life-changing and landscape-changing events of recent war and terror campaigns, as evidenced in conflicts in Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Here, military movements generate enforced mass movements by thousands and on occasions millions of refugees fleeing war-torn areas (Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Mannik, 2016).

In what follows, the four contributions comprising this Intervention on Military Mobilities expand upon these three lines of enquiry, outlining key avenues of future enquiry on a subject which has received relatively little attention by scholars. Mobilities literature has paid scant attention to the military. Political geographers and critical geopolitics scholars, whilst undertaking important research on the territorial imaginations underpinning military and militarised actions, have largely omitted examinations of military movements. This Intervention seeks to demonstrate the potential of bringing together these lines of enquiry. In short, we contend that a focus on the distinctive qualities, embodied practices, catastrophic effects, and complex and diverse experiences of movement associated with military actions, can shed new light on mobilities of military life and action, rather than simply approaching movement as merely “a brute fact” of physical displacement (Cresswell, 2006, 3).

**“[T]HE FRANTIC AND PORTENTOUS BEATING OF THE WINGS OF THE DEATH ANGELS”: INTIMACY, MOBILITIES AND MILITARY SOCIAL NETWORKS**

**Peter Adey**

The concept of military mobilities is frequently associated with military technologies, ordnance and their logistics, but I want to turn our attention to the relationship between military personnel, their families and wider social networks, and the mobile technologies of social media. These technological mobilities, combining with the rhythm of already extensively mobile personnel and their families who move together through circuits of postings and cycles of deployment, have the capacity to redraw the political and cultural geographies of military lives, while presenting particular concerns for those tasked with military governance. Here, I argue that notions of intimacy, or “intimate mobilities” (see also Holdsworth, 2013), may provide us with a particularly powerful concept for the furthering of military mobilities.

**“**[T]he frantic and portentous beating of the wings of the death angels, as it were”.This is how Tom Wolfe’s (1979, 5) classic book *The Right Stuff*, a tale of the military test pilots drafted into the United States’ astronaut training programme,characterises the curious intimacy, separation, uncertainty and confusion of military personnel and their families, whilst anticipating the worst news. This is, of course, the news that a pilot might have been killed during a test flight. Wolfe delineates the circuits of communication between the test pilots and their wives, who learn the fates of their partners through means other than official military channels. The circuits Wolfe has in mind are those of informal conversation and gossip. After thirty minutes, explains Wolfe, “a wife begins to feel that the telephone is no longer located on a table or on the kitchen wall. It is exploding in her solar plexus” (1979, 4). The fluttering reports of the death angels can make the event better or worse; better by avoiding the slow and measured response of the military staging the process of delivery, and worse by fostering distortions of events. Death can be transported with too much speed and informality.

Wolfe’s analysis of family, marital and extramarital military relations and mobilities, is a useful starting point for making sense of a quite different emphasis on the “rush to the intimate” in contemporary military geographies and mobilities (Gregory, 2008). Indeed, the lives of contemporary military personnel involve social relations and networks that are articulated through a far more elaborate and sophisticated prosthesis to Wolfe’s death angels.

The concept of intimacy can help us to focus on these issues and identify the ways in which particular spaces are being blurred and confused through the expanding mobile social networks of military life. Moreover, these mobile social networks are increasingly the object of military governance. A focus on intimate mobile social networks can contribute to the now familiar story of the confusion of death and distance, war and peace, in contemporary conflict, as imagined and described by the scholarship of Derek Gregory, Jennifer Fluri, Stephen Graham, Caren Kaplan, Alison Williams, and many others who have made sense of the current assemblages of networks and relations that telescope and compress distances and decisions in conflict. Instead, these processes can be nuanced by exploring the mobile military lives that, however far removed from one another, live closeness and distance in differentiated ways. They do so through their mobile phones, tablets and computers in ways that complicate not only the far and away, but personal and professional military boundaries.

Of course, Gregory’s (2008) writings have attuned so carefully to apprehensions of distance and death, an intimacy wrought – following Anne Laura Stoler’s (2006) reckoning – of a modern military “cultural turn”. This turn impresses the rewards of ethnic sensitivity and techno-legal mediation, leading one military historian to compare the United States’ counter-insurgency strategy as more like “social work with guns” (Bacewich, in Weizman, 2012, 18; see also Fluri, 2014). But perhaps these literatures do not attune as closely as we might like to the mobilities and intimacies of military personnel themselves.

Geographers Oswin and Olund (2010, 60) have described intimacy as “a sense of self in close connection to others, other selves or other things that inhabits that elusive space somewhere between a purely solipsistic ‘me’ and a wholly subsuming ‘us’”. This comes in advance of a host of writings on the relation between feminist geopolitics and intimate relations. These literatures realise the capacity for distant spaces and global scales to intersect the proximate, the intimate spaces of the body, or the household. Such an emphasis does not put these spaces into a hierarchy of outcomes, as if the intimate were a product of higher order, wider or bigger forces and processes that drip down to local scales. Neither is it to simply see the body or the home as synonymous with intimacy either. Rather, it recognizes that intimate relations are embroiled in wider sets of relations: local, geopolitical and global.

This thinking emphasises the relation with governance. As Oswin and Olund (2010, 60) suggest, “Rather than straightforward liberation or oppression, then, what intimacy offers these scholars is subjectification. It is the sphere in which we become who we are, the space in which the self emerges”. Their approach is to see intimacy as a bridge that expands a microphysics of power into larger and more expansive relations. Moreover, they help by naming what would count as intimacies increasingly subjected to power and governance: “Kinship, procreation, cohabitation, family, sexual relations, love, indeed all forms of close affective encounter are as much matters of state as they are matters of the heart” (2010, 60).

This is timely, and would look to go beyond long-standing critiques of the disempowerment and exclusion that militaries have performed on female bodies (Enloe, 2000). Recent writers have begun to articulate even more precisely the burdens of the attachments of military kinship. Militaries, as writers such as Tom MacLeish have argued, appear knotted together by the “lived affects” of intimacy. Such a kinship is as good as material, holding together through what MacLeish (2013, 159) calls the “substance of intimacy” of the wider military family.

**The Substance of Mobile Military Intimacies**

Such an onus on networked relations and spaces, might help us to foreground the spaces of the domestic. Thus far, the growth of social media within military families has been represented and regulated in different ways around the idea – but especially the ‘problem’ – of domesticity. To some extent, little has changed since Wolfe’s characterisation of the gossiping “death angels”, a pretty misogynist interpretation of apparently irrational wives, chattering excessively to the detriment of the military across the intimate spaces of the home, linked by the telephone.

Twitter, Facebook and Vine breakdown particular barriers between deployed personnel and their social networks. Part of this slippage is rendered in a feminised and heteronormative grammar, the language – even in the media, and conferences on the theme – is constantly of the ‘loose talk’ of wives and girlfriends. UK Ministry of Defence information videos equate grandmothers posting details on Facebook with inviting hooded insurgents to their sofas, or the school playground. These themes are graphically realised in quite shocking videos. This is more than simply about blunt divisions of home and away that no longer seem to suit, but the ways in which popular ideas of home and gender are rendered problematic through their social media incorporation.

In this understanding, the home and family are not only verbs, processes, or achievements (Holdsworth, 2013), but problem spaces, locations and interferences. It is evident that serving personnel are drawn into stressful and banal domestic matters which commanders would rather they not think about, from getting a household appliance fixed to domestic discord. The photos, “likes” and alerts that make up social media space, also enable forms of what Ito and Okabe (2005) call ambient and intimate visual co-presence, which produces far more complicated relations in tension with one another. A social media alert could just as easily remind one of home, safety or love, just as it can provide an annoyance or an obligation to respond.

Social media can be incredibly positive for maintaining family life and friendships; feeling close, letting off steam and recreation, enabling tight and intense social networks to form before families arrive at their postings. They enable communities to coordinate social gatherings. Social media even help military families solve banal problems. Relatives can see children growing up. Social media does produce division though, reinforcing existing cliques and isolation. Formal military relations like rank can be visible, public, social but also intimate, exacerbating social differences rather than removing them.

The governance of military social media mobilities may struggle with these relations. Fears of rumours spreading over extra-marital military affairs, especially high profile ones are now fairly common. The risk of bad news challenging or undermining the feeling of a unit, the individual, and even the chain of command, may undo how militaries hold together. Domestic intimacies, in particular, are perceived to challenge the social bonds inculcated within military organisations.

Prevalent rumours are attached to heavily gendered social networks of apparently bored wives, with nothing better to do. On one base, a pack of dogs – wild from having been left behind by past personnel – disturb some residents. Rumours circulate Facebook that they are carriers of disease. Someone names them before a neighbour threatens to shoot them, provoking intense and passionate criticism from other responders on a Facebook group. Personnel are frequently disciplined for precisely this kind of activity. These too prove difficult to manage effectively. Bad sentiments quickly circulate that a soldier has been reprimanded too firmly or unfairly; angers and frustrations erupt over the ‘*bureaucratisation* – of social ties” (Lambert 2013, 3). To some extent, the self-surveillance commonly performed by social media may provide internal mechanisms that work to quash these kinds of circulating intimate affects.

In this light, the intimate relations and mobile intensities of feeling that are evident within the experiences of mobile military personnel are potentially enrolled by forms of governance seeking to regulate or discipline behaviour. And yet, as Harker and Martin (2012, 771) suggest, the affects of intimacy are always potentially “excessive”. Intimate affects and passions may prove impossible to contain, spilling over and erupting in unpredictable ways, and precisely because of attempts to control them.

Perhaps it is evident that military mobilities and new media are producing intense kinds of Stoler’s (2006) intimate violences of ‘non-distinction’, that cut through the private, domestic or public, personal and familial, work and home. The outcomes of these cuts may not be the simple blurring or erasure of boundaries to ever closer degrees of oversight, scrutiny and regulation. Even if military lives exceed efforts to govern them, these intimacies may actually be re-configuring other distinctions, different kinds of walls, barriers, cliques, hierarchies and exclusions. We might deploy this view in relation to the political-economic and

**MILITARY MOBILITIES IN THE EVERDAY**

**Tim Cresswell**

When thinking about military mobilities I had two immediate inclinations. One was to reflect on my own biography as a child in an airforce family who moved between airbases in three different countries before the age of 11, perhaps mentioning early experiences of flight that would not have been available to me if I had not been the son of an RAF ground engineer. My second instinct was to write about the more dramatic and exceptional moments of military mobility as they occur in circumstances of war. Here I was thinking of “the fog of war” and the concept of friction in the work of Carl von Clausewitz ([Clausewitz, 2007](#_ENREF_2); [Cresswell, 2014](#_ENREF_4)), about drones and the radically asymmetrical mobilities at work in Israel/Palestine or about the contrasts between militarized US police departments and black bodies prevented from moving or forced to run away . My natural inclination, in other words, was to write about exceptional (for me) forms of mobility. The military, at first blush, appears to be a world apart, marked by the violence of warfare. While this is very much a part of many people’s everyday lives around the world, as the people of Gaza or Ukraine would testify, it seems a very long way from the lives of most of us (white, wealthy) residents of the West.

Then I considered the days leading up to my journey from Boston to London in order to attend the conference where these thoughts were to be presented. Rather than focus on the exceptional I decided to argue instead for the everydayness of military mobilities in lives such as mine. The day before I left Boston I left the house early in the morning. I took the car to the airport to pick up my daughter who was returning from a holiday with her aunt in Orlando. I took the interstate as instructed by the stern female voice on our Garmin satnav device. When we got home I found a package from Amazon waiting in our porch – a new copy of Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis* to replace the one a student never returned ([Cronon, 1991](#_ENREF_5)). After lunch I walked to the gym and followed a strict routine provided for me by a sympathetic personal trainer provided at cut rate by the University. What I argue here is that military mobilities are everywhere in our everyday life. From ordering a book from Amazon, to attending the local gym, to driving down the highway, we are enacting forms of mobility with origins in the conduct of warfare.

Let’s start with the body. At the end of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 there were a number of inquests in France into why the French army performed so badly. Georges Demeny’s suggestion was that the army was simply unfit and too tired (1902). He went about developing a training routine for an energetic fighting machine. This involved the invention of a rigourous system of physical education in order to produce model soldiers. Demeny’s diagnosis was informed by the idea of neurasthenia – a popular diagnosis at the time that argued that the speeded up world of the modern metropolis has led to a kind of psychological and mental breakdown. In order to counter this, Demeny went about scientifically studying the bodily mobilities of soldiers using advanced photographic techniques developed by Étienne-Jules Marey that were seeking to capture the mobility of moving bodies. Demeny and Marey between them came up with handy measurements for the French army such as the ideal weight of a soldier’s backpack and the quickest walking pace it is possible to maintain without breaking into a run (seventy paces a minute) ([Braun, 1992](#_ENREF_1)). In 1902 Demeny published *Les Bases Scientifiques de L'Éducation Physique* and this made him one of the most significant inventors of what we now know as physical education ([Demeny, 1902](#_ENREF_6)). Hence the presence of the military in our visits to the gym. This has become more obvious, of course, in the recent popularity of ‘boot camp’ style training for people who are not members of the armed forces. Demeny’s work also became influenced by the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor in his attempts to improve factory output through the engineering and disciplining of worker’s bodies ([Doray, 1988](#_ENREF_7)).

Another site of the everyday where mobilities are simultaneously military is in the way the multitude of things in the world manage to end up (most of the time) in the right place for us to consume them as commodities. The distribution of things has been subjected to less critical analysis than the realms of production and consumption, but it is in the moving of things, as Marx was quick to point out, that value gets added ([Cowen, 2014](#_ENREF_3); [Easterling, 2005](#_ENREF_8)). The role of logistics in the distribution of things is immense and rapidly changing. Logistics is the body of knowledge that focuses on the storage and flow of people, things and information so that the right things turn up at the right place at the right time. It is a form of calculation and accounting that has its roots in the Roman Empire where there was the formal position of *Logista* – an army officer skilled in calculation who could ensure that supplies reached troops at the edge of an expansive empire at the right time. Before this and for many centuries afterwards, armies had typically survived on looting and stealing whatever was available in the territories they had conquered. Or, alternatively, carrying everything they needed with them. Logistics involved transporting materials to the troops along supply lines. Although it originated in the Roman Empire it was not really part of warfare more widely until the middle of the nineteenth century. Now logistics is one of the most important parts of the capitalist world system ensuring flexible and just in time production and consumption. If something sits still for too long it loses value and incurs a cost. The things we consume need to be kept in motion. It is a mastery of logistics that has made companies such as Amazon so successful. They are, for all intents and purposes, a logistical organization.

These various military mobilities are everyday mobilities. They frequently come together is disturbing ways. Recent investigations into employment conditions at Amazon, for instance, have revealed conditions that increase both physical exhaustion and mental illness (BBC, 2013). A BBC investigator was employed as a picker where he was supposed to pick the orders you or I might make from an 800,000 square foot warehouse in Swansea. He was given a handset which told him what to do and where to go and then gave him a set number of seconds to achieve his task – at which point the scanner would start beeping. The scanner tracked the picking rate and sent the data to performance managers who threatened action if the rate sank too far (BBC, 2013). The kind of measurements of workers’ bodies that Demeny’s work informed have become part of an ever-more logistically managed workplace.

Another report, in the *Financial Times Magazine*, reported that,

“They might each walk between seven and 15 miles today… Before they can go home at the end of their eight-hour shift, or go to the canteen for their 30-minute break, they must walk through a set of airport-style security scanners to prove they are not stealing anything. They also walk past a life-sized cardboard image of a cheery blonde woman in an orange vest. "This is the best job I have ever had!" says a speech bubble near her head”. (O’Connor, 2013).

This kind of factory-style discipline is everywhere too. It is not just Amazon that practices it, as Anja Kanngieser has recently shown. She recounts how logistics companies, in particular, enact close disciplining and monitoring of their workers just as though they were the commodities they ship around the world. RFID tags and GPS devices are regularly used to track the movements of workers in logistics warehouses ([Kanngieser, 2013](#_ENREF_9)). Both RFID and GPS have their origins in military uses. RFID were refined by the Royal Air Force in World War Two to help identify friendly planes. GPS was famously developed by the US Department of Defense and used extensively in the First Gulf War in 1991.

So when we speak of the militarization of everyday life we are not speaking metaphorically. Many of the mobilities of everyday life have their origins in the apparently removed world of the military. When I drove to the airport I drove, however briefly, on a road funded by the Defense Highways Act of 1956 to allow easy passage of US forces in the event of attack. I was charged a dollar thanks to the EZ pass RFID transponder in my car, another product of the military. The GPS system that allows my satnav to guide my way was the result of a system that allowed the air force to drop bombs on tanks in the 1991 Gulf War. We have already seen the use of such military technologies in the logistical nightmare and miracle that is Amazon. My routine at the gym owes something, at least, to the efforts of Demeny in the invention of physical education. Many of the mobilities of everyday life, from the movements of the body to the existence of GPS are, in some way, military mobilities. The boundary between the military and the everyday is a permeable one. None of this should belittle the experience of people who spend much of their lives in actual war zones and the other kinds of military mobilities that frequently come freighted with death, destruction and displacement, but the ghostly presence of the military in the seemingly mundane moments of everyday life outside of war zones is worthy of critical consideration.

**ON THE EDGES OF MILITARY MOBILITIES**

**Isla Forsyth**

Military mobilities are inextricably mobilities of violence. They are developed and innovated to aid the fluid, fast and effective flow of military (and thus nation-state) capabilities while also targeting and attempting to limit the potential of their enemies. Military mobilities are caught up in and drive the flows of violence, yet, they also innovate methods and technologies to subvert, stem and resist flows of violence. These processes are produced, performed, and targeted at an array of technologies, knowledges, politics, economics, materials and, of course, bodies. These consequences are not, and never have been, neatly contained or bounded by the theatre of warfare; people, environments and technologies on the edges are drawn into the fray of military actions, their own movements curtailed, halted, controlled and enforced, and the reverberations are experienced diffusely – temporally and spatially – beyond the specific sites and events of military violence.

This intervention asserts that analysing, explaining and accounting for military mobilities requires attention to be directed both to the implementation and enactment of those mobilities, as well as to the experiences of those who are on the edges – the ‘collateral’ – of state sanctioned violence. This requires an expanded and relational approach to who is considered to be included and caught up in military mobilities and a more diffuse examination of what and how such military mobilities are implemented, enacted and experienced as apparatuses of control and coercion. This approach, I suggest, can be achieved by engaging with feminist geopolitics (Hyndman, 2004; Sharp, 2009) and emerging theories in more-than-human geography (Whatmore, 1997, 2006), in order to attend to the shifting, intra-acting scales of violence and multiplicity of lives (human and nonhuman) that implement and experience the lasting and devastating effects of military mobilities (Fluri, 2011; Ramadan, 2012).

Sheller and Urry (2006, 208) have explained that for too long the social sciences approached travel as “a black box, a neutral set of technologies and processes” whereby the means of mobility were the outcome, rather travel having the capacity to shape and produce structures and experiences of the world. The “mobility turn” that has emerged variously in anthropology, cultural studies, geography, sociology, and science and technology studies has challenged this approach, seeking to reveal the means by which movement is enacted and places are connected and constructed, all-the-while examining the entanglements of movement, power and politics (Merriman, 2015). These entanglements have consequences for the people and places who are connected or disconnected, shifted and shaped, propelled or held. As Adey (2006) explains, movement is differentiated and relates to different people in different places and, by extension, different times. Acknowledging the spatial and temporal contingency of the ways in which mobilities are enacted and experienced poses important questions for researchers attempting to trace and analyse the influence and impact of military mobilities. There is now an emerging body of geographical research which critically examines the networks and processes of how military mobilities are implemented through technologies (see Adey, 2010; Gregory, 2011), law (Jones, 2015) and spaces (Kaplan, 2006b; Weizman, 2007). This work examines the methods through which the military produces and (re)presents itself, and further, how mobilities of violence reproduce and entrench power relations. However, less attention has been given to the corporeality and materiality of military mobilities and yet a focus on the experiential can expand analysis on the consequences of state-sanctioned violence. Efforts to trace lasting and embodied effects of mobilities requires not only an expanded view – spatially, temporally and regarding who or what is enrolled and enact such mobilities – but also close, attentive study to happenings on the peripheries of action: to things, processes, relations and people on the edges.

The importance of incorporating an awareness of corporeality and embodiment into research practices and knowledge production has been emphasised by feminist scholars. Particularly influential have been Haraway’s (1991) arguments about “situated knowledges”, in which she embraces the partial and embodied nature of knowledge production. She explains this approach as highlighting:

“politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives; the view from a body, always complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (Haraway, 1991, 195).

Sharp (2009) explains how engagements with feminist theory, although influential in cultural geography, have to a large extent been absent in political geography, asserting that “nowhere has the ignorance of feminist interventions in understanding global processes…been more evident, than in political geography” (Sharp, 2007, 382). Hyndman suggests that geopolitics presents a clear opportunity for dialogue between political and feminist thought as a feminist geopolitics can “extend the work of arguably disembodied critical geopolitical analysis by (re)situating knowledge production as a partial view from somewhere” (2004, 309). A vital aspect of feminist geopolitics she explains is that it accounts for the care of bodies across and between scales and thus “promulgates a multi-scalar approach to analysing power relations” (Ibid, 319). War, power and violence are inherently spatial, they are expressed and experienced across and through a variety of scales, from (the macro) global geopolitics and the nation-state to (the micro) individual experiences and localised events. Mobility studies has much to offer such an approach that “celebrates jumping scales” (Sharp, 2007, 382), because studying processes of military mobilities unsettles discrete boundaries between sites of violence and non-violence. It also unsettles linear expressions of scales as focus is upon the ways in which performance and practice entwine through an array of technologies, politics, economics and environments (Cresswell & Merriman, 2011). This approach enables analysis which can encompass and account for the seeping edges of military violence. Military mobilities are thus conceived of as dynamic and require an expanded notion of who and what are included in the execution of war and security. As Latour explains, “purposeful action and intentionality may not be properties of objects, but they are not properties of humans either. They are the properties of institutions, of apparatuses” (1999, 192). Military mobilities are produced, enabled and constrained by a whole host of actors, from technologies of movement (e.g. the boot, car, ship, plane, and drone), and technologies of location (e.g. the map, compass, and GPS), to the environments and ecologies that alter and transform military technologies, shape their rhythms of mobility, and influence the character of warfare.

The issue arises of how to account for these apparatuses and the heterogeneity of their actors without losing focus on the precarious place of humanity within military structures or the politics that expose the devastating and diffuse experience of state-sanctioned violence. Whatmore (2006, 602-3) has proposed that emphasis should be given to the “livingness” of the world which shifts “the register of materiality from the indifferent stuff of the world ‘out there’…to the intimate fabric of corporeality that includes and redistributes the ‘in here’ of being human” that connects bodies (human and nonhuman) and (geo-physical) worlds. This more-than-human approach – attending to how the world is continually becoming and performed – acknowledges the role of the nonhuman in mutually transforming relations in the production of space and experience. Badmington (2004, 1345) reiterates Whatmore’s position, claiming “that clinging to anthropocentric assumptions just is not good enough anymore, [and] cannot hope to do justice to the way of the world”. Therefore, a relational approach which extends politics beyond the human and acknowledges processes of geopolitics as embodied and practices displaces fixed boundaries (Whatmore, 1997) allowing research to examine the hybrid more-than-human nature of military mobilities and where the fate of those caught up in the ever extending scope of military violence is not consigned to demarcated edges. Both feminist theory and more-than-human studies focus on embodiment as a means to acknowledge and include those who have traditionally been positioned on the ‘edges’ of research and knowledge production. Braun (2004, 1354) has suggested that when considering bodies in the world we “have to forget about beginnings and ends, and instead attend to the middle – that place where everything happens, where everything picks up speed and intensity”. Not being the intended target of military action does not necessarily create distance from their processes or diminish the intensity of the impact of military apparatuses. A more-than-human approach acknowledges that military processes have no distinct spatial or temporal boundaries, have no neat edges. This lack of clear demarcation or boundary is akin to Deleuze’s (1992, 159) analysis of “apparatus” which he conceives of as a tangle “composed of lines, each having a different nature. And the lines in the apparatus do not outline or surround systems which are each homogenous in their own right, object, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace balances which are always off balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another” (Deleuze 1992, 159). Linear notions of scale do not capture the complex and dynamic nature of military mobilities to be described. Worse still, they reproduce neat narratives of boundaries and edges which at times result in and enforce catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

Military mobilities have always been more-than-human, they have always been enacted and experienced across multiple scales, and they have always been embodied. I suggest that by critically exploring military mobilities through feminist geopolitics and more-than-human geographies – focusing on hybridity, corporeality and multiple and entangled scales – the consequences of the military and militarism in its various guises – brutal or benign, overt or obscure, but always pervasive and enduring – can be traced and interrogated in more accountable ways. This conceptualisation of the implementation and impact of military mobilities blurs the edges of what and where is considered to be military space. The speed and scope of military mobilities are accelerating and intensifying, so too are their effects, the reverberations of war and conflict lead to a proliferation of violent and desperate mobilities which are experienced by and inflicted upon the most vulnerable. As military apparatuses grow in complexity and the consequences of military action bleed and seep without edges or boundaries, surely it is imperative to reimagine the ‘edges’ as an entangled middle, and at the very heart of research, establishing novel means through which to hold to account inherently violent mobilities.

**THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF EXPLORING THE MOBILITIES OF MILITARY PERSONNEL**

**Rachel Woodward**

A consideration of military mobilities sometimes involves very practical questions. Thus, while we might consider mobilities in the context of military institutions, militarised contexts, and personal, individual mobilities, if we are concerned with an empirically-informed social scientific approach, then at some point we have to consider the generation of data to inform these ideas. Whilst this inevitably involves thinking through the puzzles of data collection as in any research approach or topic, there are issues specific to the mobilities of military personnel, and the application of mobile methods in military contexts, which shape the possibilities and limits of data collection. It is these possibilities and limits which provide the focus here.

Military personnel – soldiers, sailors, air force personnel, marines – live and work within organisations in which the idea of personal mobility is quite fundamental (Woodward & Jenkings, 2014). Capturing data with which to explore and theorise those mobilities is not necessarily straightforward. At issue is not only the proposition that the context of military worlds may be so profoundly different from civilian worlds as to require a methodological re-think – although one of the issues at stake here is a broader conceptual one of the extent and limits to military specificity, and a political question about the extent to which military organisations and personnel can and should be thought of as somehow distinct from a broader civilian world, or not. More specifically, it is a question of the practicalities of generating and constructing research data. There are questions of what can be seen, observed and visualised, and the limits to this. For example, the work of artist and writer Matthew Flintham engages with exactly this task of capturing the mobile, invisible boundaries of military airspace (Flintham, 2016). There are questions around the availability and utility of secondary data in the form of quantitative data and statistics about military personnel and their lives, and the extent to which key features of mobile military operational and institutional practice might be simply untraceable. For example, a military career at any rank and in any service will involve a point of origin on joining the armed forces and a point of leaving, with individualised consequences and a host of complex sociological and geographical processes inflected by and constitutive of social structures in localities, yet data on recruitment and demobilisation often cannot capture the geographies created by this (Herman & Yarwood, 2014). There are questions about the extent to which documentary and archive materials, for all their recording of personnel movements, can actually capture the intricacies of military mobilities through time and space. It may be the case, then, that constructing data to understand military mobilities may be generally quite challenging.

Then there are the practical issues around data on the mobilities of military personnel which may have nothing to do with mobilities in and of themselves, but which reflect the military contexts of study (see Soeters et al., 2014; Castro et al., in press). For reasons of operational security there may be restrictions on access to personnel and information about their movements through time and space. There may be defence institutional assumptions resistant to wider public transparency about mobilities even where there are no operational security issues at stake. We, as researchers, face our own assumptions about what and who we can get access to in military communities, and what we might be able to do when we get there, and these assumptions may be shaped by our own institutional restrictions on mobilities in terms of health and safety assessments for fieldwork, ethical guidelines, and insurance cover for fieldwork deemed risky.

But there are also practicalities about the generation of data about the mobilities of military personnel which have everything to do with those very mobilities themselves. For example, in many armed forces there is a level of individualised mobility built into career structures and job rotations such that gatekeepers and contacts move on, rendering sustained contact difficult. The often-noted conservatism of military institutions may be suspicious of methodologies which stray too far from commonly held assumptions about the appropriate and ‘normal’ ways of doing research. Mobile methods, with their enthusiastic and necessary development of novel and experimental research techniques such as go-along ethnographies or the use of interactive GIS-based mapping or the development of respondent-generated visual or textual materials, may simply be too strange or unusual to those from whom we seek informed consent. There is also the burden of time and effort such research techniques may impose on our research participants.

Exploring the mobilities of military personnel, then, presents an array of practical issues to be thought through, questions of possibilities and limits. But there is something beyond this, about what these possibilities and limits might in turn mean for the questions that we can ask about military mobilities, and the extent to which theorising about the mobilities of military personnel might be shaped by these practicalities. The two issues here which seem particularly pertinent are access to military personnel sufficient to capture their mobilities (using whatever research technique is deemed appropriate), and that of researcher capabilities suited to the generation of data on those mobilities.

The issue of access to military personnel for the purposes of research – any research – is one that sits at the core of discussions of social scientific inquiry about armed forces (Williams et al., 2016). Gaining access to military personnel in order to explore their mobilities is not impossible and examples of published work from those who have done so have been influential in shaping how we consider those mobilities. Although not written as an account of military mobilities, the ethnographic work undertaken by John Hockey in order to write his seminal work of military sociology *Squaddies* (1986) is a case in point. In unpacking the negotiated orders at work in an infantry unit, at scales from the regional (he accompanied the platoon on a Northern Ireland deployment and on exercises to Canada) to the personal (he lived and worked with the platoon, getting close, always observing), Hockey’s *Squaddies* sets out the mobilities of military personnel (and a great deal else besides) informed by close ethnographic work. There are questions, inevitably, of the limits to this access (though the liminal and private spaces of soldiering were open to Hockey in this case) as well as the inevitable issue of what needed to be left out in his final published account. But *Squaddies* remains an authoritative work of military sociology precisely because of the degree of access to his platoon that he was able to negotiate, and in turn is indicative of the levels required in order to inform some of the debates around the performance and experience of mobilities by military personnel.

There is also an issue, when exploring the mobilities of military personnel, of researcher capabilities and limitations. As Hockey himself notes (2016), his prior military experience and high levels of fitness as a distance runner meant that he had the physical and mental capacity to do this work. Another illustrative case, Anthony King’s *The Combat Soldier* (2013), shows that although these are not necessarily firm pre-requisites for informed analysis of military mobilities, researcher capability is certainly a factor. King’s book is not framed as an exposition of military mobilities, but rather as an argument about cohesion in combat units. However, with its detailed exploration of the role of drills and communicative acts in determining the cohesion of a fighting unit, it becomes clear that this requires close attention to the mobilities of military personnel through space in combat tasks, and the planning and management of that by those undertaking such tasks. King’s levels of access to training exercises is certainly a factor in enabling the generation of data through which to draw conclusions. But what is particularly interesting is the extent to which *The Combat Soldier* shows that it is the mobilities of the researcher that count, in terms of being able to (literally, physically) keep up with what’s going on, and thus being able to *understand* what is happening as platoons set out planning and executing tasks. In this instance, King has been able to add quite significantly to the debates on unit cohesion. There remains an open question, though, about how a researcher’s capabilities to be mobile in turn shapes the questions that can be asked of military phenomena in the first place, the concepts that can be development, and in turn the arguments that can be articulated about the mobilities of military personnel.

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