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To cite this article: Tara Woodyer & Sean Carter (2018): Domesticating the Geopolitical: Rethinking Popular Geopolitics through Play, *Geopolitics*, DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2018.1527769](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1527769)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1527769>



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Published online: 30 Oct 2018.



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# Domesticating the Geopolitical: Rethinking Popular Geopolitics through Play

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we take the emergence of the Her Majesty's Armed Forces toy range in 2009 as a starting point for thinking through the domestication of geopolitics through practices of play. Empirically, the paper draws upon substantive, innovative and original research undertaken with children in their homes, via a series of play ethnographies; conceptually, the paper draws upon the notion of 'domestication' and argues that ideas from these literatures might be usefully adopted as a means of reconfiguring popular geopolitics. In so doing, we argue not only that toys, games and play warrant much greater attention as forms of popular geopolitics, but also that the idea of *domestication* has much to offer wider conceptions and framings around popular geopolitics itself. The paper thus advances claims for a significant reformulation of popular geopolitics as an encounter between texts, objects, bodies and practices. More specifically, the rich ambiguity of the observed practices emerging from our play-centred ethnographic approach speaks clearly to the need to avoid prioritising the public over the private, cultural producers over audience, and the discursive over the affective in our theorisations of domestication. While we should be attentive to the highly orchestrated practices of anticipating domesticity and the multiple sites of geographical production assembled through these practices, we should not ignore the excess inherent within the incomplete, experimental process of domestication.

## KEYWORDS

Popular geopolitics; domestication; play; war toys

## Introduction

In 2009, in the midst of British military involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan, a new toy range was launched at RAF Northolt. The *Her Majesty Armed Forces* toy range (hereafter HMAF toy range), produced by Character Options and directly licensed by the UK Ministry of Defence, featured a series of action figures, accessories, and dress-up costumes modelled on serving British troops. The range drew explicitly upon contemporary overseas conflicts in its product design, and could be seen as an attempt to tap into a particular national mood of re-enchantment with the Armed Forces (see Jenkins et al. 2012). Marketing for this new range of toys (that included, for example, action figures

in desert fatigues and a Lego-style Reaper drone and remote pilot set) promised to ‘transport kids into the adventurous world of military manoeuvres’ (Toys N Playthings 2010, 50). In so doing, the range arguably draws upon a spatial imaginary that connects the ‘distant’ wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the domestic play spaces of homes in the UK. Indeed, it can be argued that the success of the range depended in part upon previous forms of domestication of the ‘war on terror’ – such as the ‘free promotion’ provided by coverage of British military operations in television news bulletins. For example, at the time of release, the toy trade press reported:

‘Licensed ranges have a tendency to be screen related, however, Character’s imminent launch of the HM Armed Forces range is stirring up a lot of excitement in the trade. With a lack of military products over the past few years, the new range from Character will satisfy boys’ love of all things regimented and combines collectability as well as the ultimate role-play experience. The range celebrates the Navy, Army and Air Forces and although they don’t have their own daily animated series, the real life heroes are rarely out of the news making them familiar figures for young boys, and likely to be a favourite with parents who want children to have good role-models’ (Toys N Playthings 2009, 24)

In this paper, we take the emergence of this toy range as a starting point for thinking through the domestication of geopolitics through practices of play. In so doing, we wish to not only argue that toys, games and play warrant much greater attention as forms of popular geopolitics, but that also a focus on the idea of domestication – as advanced along the conceptual lines outlined in this paper – has much to offer wider conceptions and framings around popular geopolitics itself. The last decade or so has seen a series of critiques made of popular geopolitics focused variously on its emphasis on texts (Müller 2008), its neglect of everyday life (Dittmer and Gray 2010), and the presence of a residual masculinism through a focus on elite practices (Glynn and Cupples 2015). These critiques sit alongside broader challenges to critical geopolitics, such as the ‘materialist challenge’ (Squire 2015; see also Dittmer 2014), and a wide range of feminist critiques that argue for various kinds of re-scaling of geopolitical analysis (e.g. Brickell 2012; Dowler 2012; Pain 2014). Re-thinking the ways in which we conceptualise popular geopolitics through the lens of both play and domestication provides, we would argue, a constructive way forward for geopolitical analysis of culture. The paper draws upon innovative empirical research undertaken with children in their homes, via a series of play ethnographies. The research is thus sited within domestic spaces in a very literal sense, while also seeking to question and problematise the bracketing off of the home as a bounded, discrete space or site. This is an unavoidable tension, and one that in part arises from a lack of previous research on play in the home, where studies of outdoor play have prevailed in the field of children’s geographies (see Woodyer, Martin, and

Carter 2015). Although home life has been addressed as a subject of study, the home as a *site* of study is still relatively nascent.

Conceptually, the paper draws most explicitly upon the ways in which the notion of ‘domestication’ has been employed within debates about the adoption of new technologies in the home (e.g. Silverstone 1994; Sørensen 2005) and, to a lesser extent, the ‘taming’ of wild animals (e.g. Anderson 1997), and shows how ideas from these literatures might be usefully adopted within popular geopolitics. In so doing, the paper makes three main arguments; firstly, we propose a reformulation of popular geopolitics as an encounter between texts, objects, bodies and practices; secondly, and more specifically, we highlight the indeterminacy of play, as a corrective to the tendency within popular geopolitics to reify assumed intentionality within any given cultural text and/or object; and thirdly, the paper explores the utility of the concept of domestication for reframing popular geopolitics.

Following this brief introduction, the second section of this paper reviews the various ways that ‘domestication’ has been utilised within both Geography and Media Studies, as well as the ways in which the domestic has been framed within geopolitical study. The third section begins with a more detailed discussion of the recent critiques of popular geopolitics, before moving on to a brief overview of the war play literature, in order to show how attending to both the domestic and the playful can productively respond to these critiques. In the fourth section, *Taking Play Seriously*, we present and discuss some of the findings of our empirical work, using this to illustrate how popular geopolitics more broadly could be re-thought through an attentiveness to domestication. In *Assembling the Domestic*, the fifth section, we reflect on some wider geographies and networks that need to be incorporated into our understanding of the domestication of geopolitics through play. We conclude by re-stating our key claims: that the notion of domestication has much to offer on-going debates in popular geopolitics; and that play needs to be seen not only as a significant mode of geopolitical encounter in its own right, but also as a fruitful lens through which to explore this notion of domestication.

## **Domestication as Practice and Process**

What does it mean to speak of domestication? In the introduction to this special issue, we outline a series of ways in which the geopolitical has tended to be seen as distinct from the domestic; that by its very nature, the ‘geopolitical’ speaks to a world ‘out there’, demarcated in significant ways from both domestic politics, and from the familial home or dwelling. While critical geopolitics has from the outset been opposed to such demarcations of political space, in practice, the ‘home’ has often been overlooked within even critical geopolitical analysis. The case for paying more attention to the geopolitics of home, and by extension practices and processes associated with domestication, has been forcefully made in a series of papers that

have emerged within the last five years or so. Brickell (2012) for example, reviews those ‘literatures which have sought to problematise conceptual divisions (once) held between the public sphere of geopolitics on the one hand, and the so-called “private sphere” of everyday life on the other’. Brickell’s review is organised around a discussion of three particular thematic areas, home and modern warfare, home(land) and nation, and geopolitical homes. In so doing it highlights a series of ways in which the domestic worlds of various geopolitical orders require a recognition of ‘the interactive and entangled nature of domestic life and geopolitics, collapsing together the dualism often set up between small “p” non-state politics (read:home) and big “P” politics (read: geopolitics)’ (Brickell 2012, 576).

Such arguments have, of course, been a feature of feminist critiques of both geopolitics (see, for example, Fluri 2009; Mountz and Hyndman 2006) and International Relations for some time, not least through the works of Cynthia Enloe, especially her 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (Enloe 1989). Reflecting on the significance of this work 25 years later, Enloe re-states that ‘it is the politicisation of domestic, personal and private life that is the pillar that holds up the international system’ (Enloe, Lacey, and Gregory 2016, 545). Feminist work within critical geopolitics has similarly called attention to the necessity for analysing the ‘intimate outwards’ – how, for example ‘is intimacy wrapped up in national, global and geopolitical processes and strategising, international events, policies and territorial claims, so as to already be a fundamental part of them?’ (Pain and Staeheli 2014, 345). There are obviously a number of different kinds of framing devices within this body of work, such as the home, the intimate, and the everyday, which are not direct equivalences and across which there are nuanced differences; but taken together these arguments make a collective case regarding not only *where* geopolitical analysis needs to be directed, but also *how* these sites of geopolitical practice should be conceptualised. Thus, the domestic ought not to simply be added as yet another site that the ‘real geopolitics out there’ impinges upon, but as a site that is already entangled within geopolitical processes. We take the metaphor of domestication then to refer not only to the ‘bringing in’ of global geopolitics to domestic spaces, but crucially to a set of processes that take place in this encounter. Thinking about domestication in this way, is, of course, to invoke it as a metaphor. The term has been most commonly associated with the human domestication of animals, which (Anderson 1997) traces back at least 11,000 years, a process ‘where that which is culturally defined as nature’s “wildness” is brought in and nurtured in some guises, exploited in other guises, mythologised and aestheticised in still other forms of this complex cultural practice’ (Anderson 1997, 464). Such studies of the domestication and taming of nature, have in turn inspired the use of domestication as metaphor across

a number of different fields of enquiry, perhaps most notably in Media Studies, especially through the work of Roger Silverstone. Reflecting on domestication as metaphor, he writes; '[a]ll concepts are metaphors. They stand in place of the world. And in so doing they mask as well as reveal it. They offer an invitation to compare, to seek illumination from somewhere else, to confront an opaque reality with perhaps another one, and to divine some meaning from their mutuality' (Silverstone 2005, 230).

A series of studies undertaken by Silverstone and others, sought to understand processes of technological adaptation within the home through the idea of domestication. As Silverstone argues in an essay reflecting on the life of the concept, 'it was an attempt to grasp the nettle of socio-technical change where it could be seen to be both mattering most and where it was almost entirely taken for granted: in the intimate spaces of the home and household' (Mountz and Hyndman 2006, 231). The analysis of technological encounters in the home via the frame of 'domestication' has much to offer studies of geopolitical cultures, as we discuss in more detail later in the paper.

Taking inspiration from Silverstone, the notion of domestication has been put to work in a number of different contexts, as a means to explore the relations between various kinds of macro and micro processes. Alasuutari (2008), for example, sought to utilise the concept for understanding the ways in which advanced market economies 'implement exogenous policy models' – in particular, neoliberal reforms. Primarily this work was concerned with how global economic models and policies are both near universal but also locally inflected. Similarly, Salmenniemi and Adamson (2015) have sought to understand the diffusion and domestication of post-feminist ideas in neoliberal Russia, through self-help literature, arguing that 'domestication is not a simple process of diffusion, but rather one of complex articulation in which elements of different systems of meanings with diverse trajectories are sutured together to produce a novel interpretation' (2015, 89).

Economic geographers have also shown an interest in these ideas (for example Smith and Rochovská 2007; Stenning et al. 2010), especially in the context of household negotiation of an emerging neoliberalism within post-socialist transformations. Rather than taking inspiration from Silverstone this work develops the arguments of Creed's (1998) anthropological study of the reproduction of Communism in Bulgaria. As Smith and Rochovská (2007, 1165) observe 'for Creed, domestication involves translating "big" political-economic projects that are not general and simply "out there" and all-powerful... Rather, such projects are always already particular domestic and local phenomenon – always mediated through everyday practice'. These various examples attest, then, to the flexibility of the concept of domestication as a lens through which to make sense of the encounter between the supposed 'world out there' and the life of the everyday, or domestic 'in here'. To differing degrees these examples also offer up ways

of theorising that encounter and relation in ways that do not either reinforce the spatial binary of inside/outside, or privilege one over the other. The following section proposes how such an approach might be usefully applied to popular geopolitics in general, and to the analysis of war toys in particular.

### **Reframing Popular Geopolitics through Domestication**

Recent debates in popular geopolitics have focused less on arguing for the significance of culture as co-constitutive of the geopolitical, and have instead been characterised by a series of critiques of some of the ways in which this relationship has been conceived, analysed and mobilised. More specifically, connected critiques have arisen around sites, agency, and method; arguments that share much with feminist critiques of critical geopolitics more broadly (though of course feminist geopolitics is not reducible to these critiques alone). Put briefly, it has been argued that certain sites of popular geopolitics have been prioritised more than others (the public over the private, for example), that the agency of cultural producers has been prioritised over that of audiences, and that textual and discursive methods have been prioritised over more embodied and affective approaches (see Müller 2008; and Dittmer and Gray 2010; for overviews of these arguments). Our contention in this paper is that the notion of domestication can help to reframe popular geopolitics in ways that respond productively to these critiques. To begin this task, this section of the paper explores some of the critiques in a little more depth, before introducing our empirical focus on ludic – or playful – geopolitics.

One aim of this paper is to respond to the kinds of challenges made by, for example, Dittmer and Gray (2010, 1664) where they argue ‘for a renewal of popular geopolitics through the adoption of a research agenda that emphasises everyday life’ (see also Bos 2018). Their argument was partly based on a recognition that ‘[w]ork in critical geopolitics has tended to engage with the “public sphere” of elite, gendered geopolitics as its main focus of investigation, stripping the private and domestic of political significance (Sharp 2000b)’ (Dittmer and Gray 2010, 1666). In calling attention to this they explicitly draw upon earlier such arguments made by, amongst others, Jo Sharp, particularly her piece in a 2000 review symposium, published in *Political Geography*, on O Tuathail’s landmark text Ó Tuathail (1996). In addition to critiquing this work for reproducing some of the binaries it sought to overcome (such as international/domestic, and elite/everyday), Sharp also criticised O Tuathail for his conception of agency at work in his account, specifically in relation to consumption of popular culture. Sharp (2000a) claims it ‘reduces ordinary people to culture industry drones, empty of agency and awaiting their regular injection of ideas’. Questions of agency and power are thus brought to the fore, a line of argument also taken up by Müller (2008) who refers to what he calls the ‘agency concept’ at work in



popular geopolitics; ‘a focus on human agency through which actors draw upon discourses *qua* representations as a means of acquiring power over space and pursuing specific interests’ (Müller 2008, 325).

While these critiques have been circulating for around a decade, and while there have been examples of work responding to these kinds of critiques, it is also true to say that vestiges of both ‘the agency concept’, and the denigration of the domestic are still present across cultural analysis in both critical geopolitics and international relations. For example, in their recent discussion of the US television series *Commander in Chief*, Glynn and Cupples (2015) argue that, television remains rather overlooked, precisely because of its association with the domestic. Moreover, they further argue that ‘television is so deeply rooted in cultures of everyday life throughout the world that it seems unthinkable that the emphasis on the everyday called for by Dittmer and Gray (2010) could avoid close engagement with this medium’ (Glynn and Cupples 2015, 274). Similar arguments can be made in relation to the prior neglect of play and toys within studies of popular geopolitics, a lacuna that the empirical research on ludic geopolitics presented in this paper begins to address. While our primary aim in this paper then, is to consider the notion of domestication as a means through which popular geopolitics might be reframed, we do so through a specific empirical focus on play and war toys. More specifically, we focus on the re-emergence in the last decade or so of the military action figure toy within the UK – in particular the HMAF toy range. The range comprises a vast collection of 10-inch action figures reminiscent of G.I. Joe and Action Man, children’s dressing-up uniforms and Lego-style kits and figurines. In a toy industry dominated by TV and film tie-ins, the HMAF range has proved notable for being commercially successful without being part of a media franchise. While there is a long history of British action figures, starting with Tommy Gunn and Action Man in the mid-1960s, the HMAF range marks a return to the action figure’s militaristic roots, and the connections between the action figure and the military becoming more explicit than has historically been the case (see Woodyer 2014 for a summary of this history).

Of course war play itself has been the subject of much debate and concern. Within critical geopolitics, this has mostly been viewed through the lens of videogames (see Bos 2018; Shaw 2010; for recent examples) and less frequently through the ‘acting’ or ‘playing out’ of geopolitical scenarios (see Dittmer 2015 on model United Nations). Our focus has perhaps more in common with longer running debates about younger children acting/playing at war with each other; a debate in which agency, power and the everyday have tended to figure in ways that are reminiscent of those critiqued above in relation to popular geopolitics; that is to say that these debates have often ignored the everyday experiences and agency of children, and have often assumed that an inherent ‘power’ embedded in the war toy object is



determinant of the play outcome. Thus war play is frequently treated as if it occurs in such a social vacuum, with little consideration of the specific contexts in which play happens (Woodyer, Martin, and Carter 2015). This reductive approach sits in sharp contrast to the advocating of children as competent social actors by the 'new social studies of childhood' (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Through an innovative, multi-sited ethnographic focus on military action figures, the research informing this paper makes a crucial intervention in the ongoing war play debate, addressing war toys not just as power-laden ideological texts, but also as ambiguous objects within embodied practices of play. This innovative approach draws on theories on the ambiguity of play, which position it as an activity that flows through various events, practices, actions, moments and ages, allowing us to understand the entanglement of children's ludic geographies with wider geopolitical climates and cultures of militarism.

Our focus on domestic play provides an important addition to interdisciplinary research on war play that has overwhelmingly focused on school settings. Subsequently, this research tends to have a narrow focus on the behavioural effects of war toys, and is often inattentive to the wider social contexts within which children's play is situated (Goldstein 1992; Malloy and McMurray-Schwarz 2004; Rosen 2015a). Some recent work has been more attentive to wider media influences on children's play (Holland 2003) and the advantages of figurative approaches to death tropes within play (Rosen 2015b), but these largely remain rooted within school-settings.

There remains a disjoint between these school-based studies, which often focus on early years play, and geographical work examining play as a political process in relation to practices of subjectification (see Gagen 2000; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Holt 2007; McDonnell 2018; Thorne 1993) and as the questioning, parodying and subverting of socio-cultural norms (see Katz 2004; Marsh and Bishop 2013). Or in other words, while recent school-based research is important for emphasising children's negotiation rather than simply reproduction of social worlds, there remains a lack of focus on the particular characteristics of play through which these political processes operate. This is, in large part, due to a general disconnect between empirical studies of children's play and the scholarship that explores the broader cultural significance of play and elaborates on its central features such as paradox and ambiguity (Bateson 1972; Huizinga 1949; Sutton-Smith 1997), fluidity (Csizkzentimihalyi 1975; Schechner 1993), and a questioning of the normative (Stevens 2007; Turner 1969; Vygotsky 1978). It is in this vein that play carries the potential for transformation. Katz (2004) elaborates on the mechanics of this, using ethnographic work to demonstrate how play involves not simply the mimicking of wider social practices, seeing resemblances and creating similarities, but also contains within it the 'flash of insight made or read off of that process that impels a moment of invention'

(Katz 2004, 97). A central feature of play, then, is a tension between order and disorder, creation and destruction. This potential for transformation has also been identified in a wider set of ('serious') play practices beyond childhood (see Chesters and Welsh 2001; Cook and Woodyer 2012; Flusty 2000; Shepard 2015; Woodyer 2012).

In the following section we draw upon empirical examples of situated performances of children playing with HMAF action figures, to examine how play, by its very nature, is a site of entanglement that does not consist of pre-determined linear outcomes. Attention is paid to how the messy network of play links the supposed proximate (domestic/familial/everyday life) and the supposed distant (international geopolitical realm) in particular ways.

### Taking Play Seriously

Sat in his living room, 10-year-old Tom<sup>1</sup> holds up an HMAF action figure dressed in desert fatigues, the best selling model in the range, perhaps evidence of the close association made between this range and the recent British military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Behind Tom is a Christmas tree: the television is on, an unidentifiable programme playing, though from the music and dialogue it would appear to be aimed at pre-school children. Directly facing the camera, Tom announces 'Hello, this is the soldier's film. Here we go!', followed by the singing of what sounds like dramatic TV/film theme music. Over the next five minutes or so Tom plays with various HMAF action figures as well as a number of vehicles from the range, including a helicopter and a jet. The narrative that unfolds in this 'soldiers tale' is difficult to follow and certainly defies easy categorisation. It begins with something more or less resembling what one might call 'classic' war play; the action figure first held up (now named as Jeremy and identified as English), is attacked and seemingly killed or injured by an enemy, identified both by name and by the accent given to the action figure's speech as German. The 'German' action figure itself is actually another figure from the British HMAF toy range. Subsequently a further action figure, given an American accent and identified as part of a 'SWAT force' by Tom, comes to the aid of the stricken Jeremy, and attacks the 'German' action figure. Further action involves the German soldier seeking cover in the Christmas tree, and the injured soldier being flown to the 'infirmary'. At this point, a toddler enters the room, heads for the box of HMAF toys, and begins to pick up action figures and discard each of them in turn on the floor. Tom swiftly incorporates this event into his play, identifying the toddler as a 'demon warlord, killing everyone!'. Subsequently, Tom mobilises the US SWAT force, announcing that the 'SWAT force is coming... coming in for justice', using the fighter jet as a means of attack, until both its wings unintentionally fall off. This event too, quickly becomes incorporated into the narrative, as Tom narrates 'I think the warlord has made radiations in the city! Mayday! Mayday! I'm going down!'. At this point, Tom himself takes on the part of another 'warlord', and picks up his little sister/demon warlord' and they both end up lying on the floor, at which point she begins to cry and the game ends.

All of this action takes place in a little more than 4 minutes. It was recorded by a camcorder lent to the child by the research team, to enable him to make

a record of his play in the family home with a selection of HMAF action figures and accessories, also lent to him as part of the research project. Child participants were free to use these toys in any way they wished, including incorporating them into play with other 'war' toys and genres of toy from their personal collection. This helped to contextualise play with loaned toys within the children's broader individual and peer-based play preferences. Beyond brief demonstrations of the basic recording and playback functions of the camcorder, and how it could be held in the hand or secured on a tripod, children were given no instruction about what or how to film. Children were loaned toys and cameras in and between 1 or 2-weekly 1-hour research sessions that involved playing with the researcher in the family home, typically over the course of 3 months. The child would lead the play that unfolded during the sessions, including the type of play, toys used, setting (such as family room, bedroom, or garden), duration, role of the researcher within the play and how much of it was recorded. This is a methodological approach that was developed and implemented as part of previous geographical research on children's domestic play with toys, albeit a wider range of toy type (see Woodyer 2008 for a fuller account of the method used). The children involved had been recruited through a series of school-based workshops undertaken in and around the city of Portsmouth in southern England, in 2016.<sup>2</sup> All together the project has involved more than 70 hours of observed play (either directly by a researcher, or via the video recordings made by the children in between research sessions). The video recordings comprise around 20 hours in total, involving around 20 children, aged 4 to 12 years, both boys and girls, playing with these toys either alone or with siblings or friends. This 4-minute extract from this one particular child is both unique (in that the specifics of the play event described here took place in this way only once), but also fairly typical across the many hours of play that were recorded and/or observed (in that the various kinds of play, actions and narratives evident in it are also evident across many other play events). That said, many of the play events that feature in the observed play are not so obviously categorised as 'war play', however ambiguous this example might be in that regard. It is not the intention here to systematically describe or analyse all of this data, but rather to use specific vignettes from this body of research as a means of beginning to think through both the usefulness and necessity of a domestication approach in analysing war play (specifically) and popular geopolitics (more generally).<sup>3</sup>

As a starting point then, HMAF toys can be understood as one means through which contemporary geopolitics becomes domesticated; the world out there, specifically overseas military engagements by British forces, is literally brought into the domestic spaces of childhood through such toy ranges. But how might we analyse what is actually going on in this process? One way might be to place such toys within wider concerns about militarism and its effects, where

militarism is ‘broadly understood as the preparation for war, its normalisation and legitimisation’ (Stavrianakis and Stern 2018, 3). We could then look to the way HMAF toys might play a role in naturalising an ideologically charged British militarism based on the juxtaposition of ‘hero’ with ‘extremist’ (Kelly 2013). In this way, these toys are perhaps part of a wider cultural process that includes the well-publicised repatriation ceremonies of British soldiers at Wootton Bassett, the rise of charities such as ‘Help for Heroes’ and appearances by military personnel on prime time television shows such as ‘X Factor’ and ‘Dancing on Ice’. Taken together, it has been argued that these cultural phenomena serve to normalise the presence of war in general, and the ‘war on terror’ in particular (Kelly 2013). As Jenkins et al. (2012, 361) contend, such displays ‘[should] be seen as part of a trend of the rehabilitation of the military in the aftermath of the Iraq war, and the legitimisation of the Afghanistan war.’ The potential contribution of this toy range to this institutionalised homage to militarism is evident in the brand owners’ open acknowledgement of the range’s role in a wider re-enchantment with the British military:

‘I think there is so much excitement about the range as it’s important to have the right products for the time and I think the new ranges have really hit the psyche of the nation. I think it would have been more difficult to launch this range three to four years ago but now the public perception of the armed forces has changed significantly.’ (Marketing Director, Character Options, Toys N Playthings 2009, 24)

These kinds of approaches tend to problematise such ‘war play’ in all kinds of ways – that warfare becomes normalised, or sanitised, that children are militarised without any awareness, and that children are taught that violence is the solution to problems. Or to use vocabulary borrowed from debates on the domestication of animals, it could be argued that toys are powerful examples of what Anderson (1997) terms the aestheticisation of wildness, in that they import a *stylised* version of the ‘wild’ international geopolitical realm into the home. This can be likened to the importation of a stylised ‘wild’ into the city through zoos, aquariums and circuses as part of a domestication of exotic animals from the nineteenth century onwards, a process that was extended to the domestic space of the home through a *subdued* version of wildness in the form of playing with stuffed toys, collecting dead insects and pressing wild flowers. According to Anderson (1997, 496), such commodified forms of wildness offer sanitised versions that “‘bring in” and remake the wild’.

At stake in this seemingly linear process of aestheticisation and thus domestication of the ‘wild’ international geopolitical realm, is not simply the reflection but rather the legitimisation of particular geopolitical logics and technologies. MacDonald’s (2008) analysis of how Cold War militarism was sustained by popular movements linked to space exploration and enacted through mundane activities like playing with toy rockets is a powerful

example of how play is co-constitutive of geopolitical climates and cultures of militarism. He recounts how toys such as the Dinky Supertoy no.666 – the Corporal – were ‘licensed correlates that encourage[d] an interest in and support for the original hardware in its strategic context’ (625–6). Domestication of the Corporal missile through its introduction to the toy box ‘eased nuclear weapons into the political mainstream’ (612), naturalising the anxieties of the Cold War. Children’s playful rehearsal of defending ‘us’ (the Western, free, capitalist world) from ‘them’ through mastering the missile launch in miniature legitimated and sustained particular geopolitical logics. Importantly, MacDonald asserts that this is ‘not merely a matter of *representing* the geopolitical power of nuclear weapons through fiction, but that this *is* the power of nuclear weapons: we are dealing with the effect (rather than the referent) of representation’ (622–3). The toy is pivotal to the co-constitution of geopolitical logics and technologies precisely because play’s banal and taken-for-granted nature can enable its role in sanitising and thus sustaining popular geopolitical imaginaries to go unchallenged.

While we might read MacDonald’s historical study as a template for unpacking the example of Tom’s play with HMAF toys above, its application quickly demonstrates its limitations. While the play event begins with historical World War references demarcating a German enemy, in mobilising the US SWAT force and announcing that they are ‘coming in for justice’, Tom twists the play to become reminiscent of the geopolitical era of the ‘war on terror’. This demarcation of US characters as heroic saviours existing on a higher moral plane is a familiar feature across different children’s play. The idea of a Manichean world and the justification of militarised responses on the basis of retaliation appear to be normalised, or at least expressed through action figure play. However, there is much more going on here, not least the mashing of geopolitical references. When viewed in the context of the wider ethnographic material, including Tom’s rather eloquent discussions of geopolitical events, this mash up does not simply speak to the filling in of gaps in knowledge with related, if inaccurate information, and the creation of errors in making sense of and representing the geopolitical realm. It also demonstrates the fun of making *nonsense*, enjoyed for its immediate affective benefit. This is reiterated by the pleasure Tom derives from spontaneously responding to unpredictable occurrences – such as parts falling off toys and interruptions by family members – rather than following a set narrative. The melding of ‘reality’ and ‘fantasy’, of making nonsense *and* striving for realism through fidelity to geopolitical and military references, is common across different children’s play. The relation between the two is complex, mostly marked by ambiguity. Less ambiguous is the immediate entanglement of the distant ‘world out there’ of the international geopolitical realm with the proximate ‘in here’ of the domestic space of the home with its intimate familial routines, relations and festive traditions of everyday life. This

entanglement is enacted through embodied and affective modes of interaction: singing, twisting, balancing, crashing, shooting, imitating, and ‘going with the flow’ of the action (see Pain and Staeheli 2014; and Askins 2014; on emotional modes of interaction).

Clearly, there are valid concerns to be recognised in play’s role in an institutionalised homage to militarism (generally) and the effects of such on childhood (specifically), and our aim here is not to suggest otherwise. But here we think it is instructive to turn to Katz (2004), who provides an important three-fold categorisation for elaborating on the entanglement between play and wider geopolitical climates and cultures of militarism, which challenges the reduction (in this instance) of war play to ‘normalisation’. Firstly, playing is altered by social transformation; children absorb and reflect changes in their playing. Secondly, playing marks social transformation; it exaggerates aspects of change. Thirdly, and crucially, playing itself can be transformative; it allows children to experiment with social roles and socio-cultural and political-economic practices. As Katz (2004, 102) argues ‘play scripts may mimic familiar socio-material practices, but each enactment of these practices is original and open-ended, containing the possible “spark of recognition that things could be otherwise”’. While playful practices can work to normalise (as seen in Gagen’s (2000) study of the sedimentation of existing power relations through playground design), they never quite fully achieve this (Harker 2005). Play is thus as much about invention as mimicking, experimenting with how relations and selves might be otherwise<sup>4</sup> (see Woodyer, Martin, and Carter 2015 for a fuller discussion of Katz’s framework.) We share Katz’s concerns that analyses of play are often overly deterministic, and run counter to the kinds of provocations raised in the emerging work of domestic and intimate geopolitics – that global politics does not just ‘drip down’ into the domestic (Pain 2015), but is entangled with it in more complex, nuanced ways. In her recent book on military violence, the historian Joanna Bourke (2014) makes a set of forceful claims about the ways that ‘war play invades our lives’, but what such claims lack is any sense of play itself, and the manner in which play, by its very nature, does not consist of pre-determined linear outcomes. Play itself is a site of entanglement, linking the proximate and the distant in particular ways, as clearly evidenced by the description above of the play event between Tom and the HMAF toys. By addressing the nature of play *itself*, we wish to critically analyse the process of *domesticating*, moving beyond reductive connotations and accounts of normalisation and sanitisation. For while the act of aestheticisation is important, the resulting aestheticised products should be seen neither as overly deterministic, nor as an inert or empty signifier.



Two boys, aged 10 and 6 years are playing in a child's bedroom. Stacked up in front of them are three military vehicles from the HMAF toy range – a tank, an armoured personnel carrier, and a jeep – piled one on top of the other. One of the boys (Scott) pushes the stack over, and immediately giggles, taking pleasure in the act of knocking things over and seeing them crash and fall. His brother Callum, picks up an HMAF action figure that is to hand. He animates the figure, making it walk towards the tank that was at the bottom of the pile, and also gives the figure a voice: 'aarrgghh I'm a Zombie'. Scott responds by using the fallen vehicles to create a barrier, lining the tank, armoured personnel carrier and the jeep, end-to-end on their sides. Undeterred, Callum's HMAF soldier/zombie begins to climb over the 'barricade', before Scott retorts with 'no he can't climb over the big one [meaning the big vehicle, the tank] it can shoot him'. The zombie soldier continues on regardless, making it over the barricade, at which point he is confronted by what appears to be a Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtle figure (controlled by Scott), which charges at him, forcing him back over the barricade. 'It killed him!' exclaims Scott, at which point Callum, speaking on behalf of the action figure proclaims 'I'm a helicopter!', and begins to spin the figure by the arms. The ninja turtle moves in, and is used by Scott to bash against the soldier/helicopter, with Scott once again claiming to have killed him/it. Callum puts down the action figure, and picks up a small plastic gun, saying 'and now, a flying machine comes past', and using his arm as the flying machine, and the plastic gun as a weapon attached to this flying machine, begins to spray fire, complete with sound effects, over the barricade in the direction of the hiding ninja turtle.

All of this action takes place in a little over 1 minute, but also speaks clearly to the ambiguity of play, including the affective pleasure derived from making nonsense and from the tactile sensations of movement. As we have discussed elsewhere (see Carter, Kirby, and Woodyer 2016), play is a fluid and polymorphous process, without stability of either meaning or content (Woodyer 2012). As such, it can have its own internal coherence and meaning. Schechner (1993, 42) perhaps captures the spirit of play best, describing it as 'the ongoing, underlying process of off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring, and transforming the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood below, behind and to the side of focused attention'. This attention to process allows for more complex, contingent and multiple understandings of play that challenge the often assumptive way in which the noun is deployed, and emphasises the need to focus on situated performances of playing.

Ambiguity is central to MacDonald's (2008) historical research on geopolitical play. The Corporal Dinky toy is "at once a rocket and a missile, a weapon and a vehicle" it is at once about war and peace, space exploration and Cold War defence of capitalism (626). MacDonald argues that it was this 'doubling' that helped naturalise the geopolitical anxieties of the Cold War. Crucially, though, he draws on Fleming (1996) to stress that the endless liminality of the toy is perhaps 'more in the eye of the critic-analyst than in the reality and materiality of a culture which appears rather more ruthless than this at deciding how things are' (1996, 33). As a result, MacDonald's



account of the domestication of geopolitical logics and technologies tends to focus on the potential for normalisation and sanitisation:

“the child-consumer-player is inducted into a wider geopolitical frame. Not only do toys and play have extraordinary propagandist value, but more importantly, they also bring about an informal apprenticeship in domains that slip very readily into ‘real world’ technics and activities” (MacDonald 2008, 631).

While it is not our intention to deny this process we want to argue that something more is at stake within the process of domesticating the geopolitical. While MacDonald’s writing is a valuable and instructive starting point for recognising the interplay between the inside/outside of home/global and appreciating the cultural significance of play in relation to geopolitical cultures, without engaging in empirical research with playful subjects and objects, it is difficult to conceptualise play as an active, unpredictable process. As our empirical examples show, children’s embodied practices of war play need to be seen as original and open-ended. Indeed, in many cases the kinds of play enacted with the HMAF figures could scarcely be called war play at all. The examples that we briefly draw upon here are then, examples of the more overt war play scenarios, but even in these cases, they are far from straightforward mappings of a militarised logic of the ‘war on terror’ onto the domestic play spaces of children in the UK. Children are thus more than mere vessels passively consuming ideas and practices through a linear process of socialisation. In the next section, we consider how such war toys are better seen as one element within a wider assemblage.

## Assembling the Domestic

‘Domestication does, perhaps literally, involve bringing objects in from the wild: from the public spaces of shops, arcades and working environments: from factories, farms and quarries. The transition, which is also a translation, of objects across the boundary that separates public and private spaces is at the heart of what I mean by domestication. Through it, objects and meanings are, potentially, formed and transformed.’ (Silverstone 1994, 98).

The problem with much of the analysis of the role of culture (in general) and toys/games (more specifically) in shaping the geopolitical imagination can be considered as a problem with agency and its location. As Dittmer and Gray (2010, 1664) note; ‘an agency-centred notion of discourse permeat[es] critical geopolitics, in which powerful actors shape discourses which then descend upon the masses to ensnare them’. Moreover, it is an issue about *where* this agency is seen to be residing; while Dittmer and Gray suggest that the agency rests with those powerful actors shaping discourse, both the creation of these discourses, and the audience engagement with them tend to be left un-interrogated, such that the text/object itself actually becomes possessed with agency, even if

this is an agency shaped by the desires of its authors. In other words, not only is agency understood as largely residing within one location (elite authors), that agency is often then considered to fully transmit via the text (or object), and with it agential power. Such an understanding invokes notions of mastery and domination commonly associated with reductive analyses of domestication (Anderson 1997).

As a consequence of this (mis)locating of agency, texts and objects are conceived as powerful and 'ensnaring', while the details of their actual construction remain rather obscured. This certainly echoes the 'lament that the analysis of texts, the mainstay in the analysis of discourses in critical geopolitics research, frequently paints an incomplete picture and elides important sites of geographical productions...' (Müller 2008, 324). Crucially though, these sites of geographical 'production' need to be seen as *multiple*; in the case of the HMAF toy range, for example, sites of production might include the design studios of Character Options, the Ministry of Defence 'branding' office in Whitehall, the factories where the toys are made, the trade fairs where manufacturers and buyers meet, all kinds of media coverage (including trade press, advertising and customer reviews), and, not least, the domestic spaces in which such objects invariably end up and are actually played with. Meanings are produced in, through and across each of these sites, as well as through reference to all kinds of other connected 'sites': news coverage of distant wars, classroom lessons on British military history, discussions with families and friends, other cultural texts and objects. It therefore makes more sense to think of domestication not so much as a singular site (one more 'site' to be added to our geopolitical analyses), but as a set of processes, an encounter between bodies, objects, thoughts and imagination: an assemblage (see De Landa (2006), and for recent reviews on assemblage and geography, see Anderson & McFarlane (2011) and Müller (2015)). This also allows us to focus on the capacities of the toy-object, rather than just its properties. As Dittmer (2014) argues 'it is the capacities, rather than the properties, of component parts that are most relevant in understanding resultant assemblages. While the properties of a material are relatively finite, its capacities are infinite because they are the result of interaction with an infinite set of other components'. We might wish to question the notion of infinite capacities, but nevertheless, this kind of analysis clearly has affinities not only with the notion of domestication as developed by Silverstone (1994), but also with the notion of play itself.

Our analytical focus here then, is the toy-object, and more specifically, what happens to and with this toy as it crosses over into the domestic. It is here that drawing upon the domestication literatures, especially the ideas of Roger Silverstone (e.g. Silverstone 1994) and their application in media research, can be most productive. In their discussion of the use of the domestication metaphor in studies of adaptation within households to new

technologies, Helle-Valle & Slettemeås (2008, 46) observe that ‘the academic term at times refers to the act of bringing objects into the domestic sphere (into homes and hence into the realm of the private), and sometimes it refers to the act of domesticating (i.e. “taming”) the wild’. Here, we try to hold onto the possibilities of this double meaning; that these toys, with their obvious reference to violent geographies of the ‘war on terror’, can be seen both as the ‘wildness’ of the international geopolitical realm brought into the domestic life and practices of children; and also that this leads to a playful encounter, in which that wildness may become ‘tamed’, or otherwise transformed.

In this sense, the ‘war-toy as object’ is ambiguous, in the way suggested by MacDonald, but its meaning is also unstable, albeit within certain limits. The materiality of the toy (its shape, size, look, feel, rendering) is important in how it gets played with, and in what kinds of meanings become attached to it. In the play-examples outlined previously, all of the children recognise the action figure as precisely that – a toy that does things, and many, although crucially not all, of these things that the toy does, in conjunction with the player, are ‘war-like’. This is a function not only of its design, its advertising, and its packaging, but also of the broader contexts of war that children are aware of. In the case of the HMAF toy range, a series of capacities and even meanings are clearly designed into the toy. The official licensing of the toy through the Ministry of Defence clearly suggests some interest amongst ‘geopolitical elites’ to use the toy range for certain ends; what these ends might be however, remain rather unspecific. For example, in discussions with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) brand management team (MoD interview 2/10/15), who handled the licensing of the range, a variety of reasons for entering into the agreement were mentioned. These ranged from protecting the MoD brand through association with quality products and ensuring accurate reproduction of MoD logos, insignia and uniforms to raising small amounts of money towards the Army welfare fund, and a rather vague sense of ‘positive gentle messaging’. It is also clear that the MoD tends to be reactive in its licensing activities, responding to specific requests from commercial companies, rather than actively seeking these out.

Nevertheless, the design of the toys, with their fidelity to British military uniforms worn in Afghanistan and Iraq, and to the vehicles and weaponry used in those conflicts, together with packaging clearly identifying the relationship with the Armed Forces (and of course, the name of the range itself), clearly sets up particular kinds of play and attendant meanings. Indeed, reflecting on the ways in which objects are prepared for domestication, Silverstone (1994, 99) argues that “Objects... have their own lives. Their individual histories: the histories of the technologies, of the products or commodities, of the individual objects and of the transmitted meanings, all contribute to the particularity of a technology as object and to its changing status within public and private spheres. Once across the threshold of the

domestic spaces, of course, those lives continue, played out in the micro-social and cultural environments of the home. And equally, they are prepared for in their production and marketing” (99). These object lives are entangled in the situated performances of playing that we argue for. As play scholar, Miguel Sicart (2014), notes, play does not consist of a separate sphere with its own set of rules and consequences.

Paying attention to the ‘anticipation of domesticity’ (Silverstone 1994) is thus an important part of the task of critically analysing forms of popular geopolitics, but these anticipations do not fully determine the effects of these cultural forms; as Silverstone (1994, 174) goes onto say ‘[o]ne can think of domestication too, as both a process by which we make things our own, subject to our control, imprinted by, and expressive of, our identities’ (see also Miller 2001). This, then, is the excess within domestication, as seen in the play-examples with HMAF toys above. While domestication invokes notions of mastery and domination, be it in relation to animals or geopolitical texts/objects, Anderson (1997) reminds us that this highly orchestrated intervention, is nevertheless an experimental process ‘without guarantees of success or completion, and is subject to continuous refinement, reversal and failure’ (493). Given its inherently ambiguous nature, play, as one particular example of domestic and domesticating practice is a powerful reminder of the incomplete nature of domestication. As a ‘mess[y] network of people, rules, negotiations, locations and objects’ (Sicart 2014, 6), it speaks powerfully to the need to understand domestication as encounter rather than outcome.

## Conclusion

‘[A] toy is just a collection of signifiers, affordances and constraints placed to cue certain types of play behaviours. The meaning of the toy cannot be located in its design but in the way that it is used, or in how the design is actualised in the act of playing with it’ (Sicart 2014, 124).

In this paper we have outlined how rethinking the ways in which we conceptualise popular geopolitics through the lens of domestication provides a constructive way forward for geopolitical analysis of culture. The critical impulse to do so comes from a variety of sources: from an insistence from feminist geopolitics that the scales of geopolitical enquiry range from the intimate to the global; from critiques of popular geopolitics that suggest that prior studies have tended too much towards textual and discursive analysis; from accounts that stress the need for materialist understandings of the constitution of geopolitical assemblages; and perhaps most particularly from literatures on the incorporation of new technologies into daily domestic life that emphasise the notion of an encounter framed by a dual process of ‘taming’. There are clearly differences and nuances in these literatures, but

also sufficient affinities across them to create productive possibilities for how popular geopolitical analysis might be taken forward.

This has been done specifically through the lens of play, in part because play has been overlooked in our accounts of geopolitics and culture, but also because play as an experimental, ambiguous and non-determined process can inform how we think more generally about geopolitical encounters, both domestically and beyond. While previous geographical forays into the ludic have sought to temporally and spatially set it apart from 'real reality' (Thrift 1997), our new empirical material stresses that play needs to be seen as an entanglement with the (geopolitical) world, rather than a retreat from it.<sup>5</sup> The paper thus argues for a reformulation of domestication – and by extension, popular geopolitics – as an encounter between texts, objects, bodies and practices, as evidenced in the messy network that is play.

In the specific play-examples highlighted in this paper, it could be argued that, in much the same way that we may formerly have read Action Man or GI Joe as domesticating the wider geopolitical frame of the Cold War, we could read the HMAF range as domesticating support of the British military during the post-9/11 US/UK-led 'war on terror'. To do so might seem reasonable if we focus on the toy-object in isolation, or consider some of the reasons why the Ministry of Defence may have been happy to license these products. In the paper, we have begun to explore what happens when we consider these toys within their domestic settings, when actually played with by children, and folded into their everyday life. Such 'active audience research can be seen to connect theoretically with feminist geopolitics in regards to embodiment and performativity... through its emphasis on individualised audiences and the ways in which they use mediated messages for their own purposes' (Dittmer and Gray 2010, 1670). This is not, of course, to ignore the limits to such playfulness; as recognised by Sicart in the opening quotation to this section, the toy design places constraints on players, at the same time as providing a degree of openness; a toy's capacities are not infinite. Likewise, while playful practices might be 'shot through with a frisson of transformation' (Katz 2004, 101), the potential for making different is constrained by habit (Katz 2004; Sutton-Smith 1997; Turner 1982). Understanding the geopolitics of play then, rests on these tensions between openness and closure; or as McDonnell (2018) puts it 'understanding play/ful narratives as everyday micro-political acts and articulations offers important insights into both the vitality and the constrained nature of children's world-making practices'.

Recognising play as both a domestic and domesticating practice in the way we have outlined emphasises the need to see it as an entanglement with the (geopolitical) world. This provides a corrective to play literatures that stress '[p]lay does not spill over, contaminate, reach the other parts one would wish to or has to keep clean; it can be isolated, confined in limits so that it does not affect or disturb what it should not; it could be even kept secret' (Bauman 1993, 170–171). Recognising that war play does not exist in a social vacuum, and addressing war toys not just as

power-laden ideological texts, but also ambiguous objects in embodied, experimental practices of play, permits more grounded cultural commentaries on (militarised) childhoods to come to the fore.

More generally, we have also argued that in developing the notion of 'domestic geopolitics', we need (following Pain 2015) to avoid the temptation to see a drip-down effect from the macro to the micro, from the geopolitical 'out there' to the geopolitical 'in here'. Attention has been paid to how the messy network of play entangles the proximate 'in here' of the domestic space of the home with its intimate familial routines, relations and practices of everyday life with the distant 'world out there' of the international geopolitical realm. This entangled relation of proximate and distant occurs through embodied and affective modes of interaction including laughter, object manipulation, bodily contortion and, above all, 'going with the flow' of unpredictability. Domestication, then, refers not only to the 'bringing in' of global geopolitics to domestic spaces, but also crucially to the processes that take place in this encounter. Holding onto this double meaning is all-important. By addressing the nature of play itself, we are able to critically analyse the process of *domesticating*, moving beyond reductive connotations and accounts of normalisation and sanitisation. In their linearity, such accounts risk reinforcing the spatial binary that they attempt to break down and reifying the 'geopolitical' as primary in spite of their agenda (Pain and Staeheli 2014).

Empirical attention to situated performances of play and the individualised, embodied ways in which children use mediated messages for their own purposes enables us to more fully reveal the entanglements of the domestication encounter and where agency resides within it. The rich ambiguity emerging from our play-centred ethnographic approach speaks clearly to the need to avoid prioritising the public over the private, cultural producers over audience, and the discursive over the affective in our theorisations of domestication. While we should be attentive to the highly orchestrated practices of anticipating domesticity and the multiple sites of geographical production assembled through these practices, we should not ignore the excess inherent within the incomplete, experimental process of domestication. Within the specific context of home-based play, this paper has begun this process: there is no doubt much more work to be done in thinking beyond the destabilisation of the binary divisions between the distant and the proximate, and the domestic and the international. For example, what kinds of possibilities are opened up by such playful, domestic encounters? If geopolitical discourses shaping society are not simply absorbed into play through a practice of mimicking, but rather, children's play enters into these geopolitical contours in different ways, what possibilities of disrupting discourses and reconfiguring relations and practices are offered up, and how? Play, then, is as much about invention as mimicking, experimenting with how relations, selves and geopolitics might be otherwise. As Katz (2004, 102) remarks, '[m]aking that so is not child's play, of course', yet 'play is not immaterial to the task'.



## Notes

1. Pseudonyms have been used.
2. The research, from inception through to implementation, publication and beyond, adheres to a comprehensive research ethics framework informed by the standard codes outlined by the National Children's Bureau (NCB 2003), the British Sociological Association (BSA 2002), the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) and the Social Research Association (SRA 2003). This framework has been reviewed and approved by the University of Portsmouth (SFEC 2013 – 036) and the Economic and Social Research Council in accordance with award ES/L001926/1. The concepts of freely given informed consent and the right to withdraw, privacy, child protection, the avoidance of harm, and best practice are central to this framework. All researchers, irrespective of home institution, are subject to the principles outlined.
3. The video footage was subjected to an analytical framework that used a critical aesthetic mode to examine the non-representational - non-linguistic, bodily performativity, affective register - alongside the representational - primarily narrative (see Callahan 2005). In so doing, it addressed both how children made sense of the geopolitical world (i.e. the fidelity of their play to geopolitical events and representations) and how they made *nonsense* for immediate affective benefit. This is crucial to avoid over-rationalising what is often a more-than-rational activity (see Woodyer 2012). Analysis was conducted by five researchers of different ages, gender and parental status. Interpretation was supplemented with insight from the lead researcher's personal experience of playing *with* the children (and the sensory experiences this involved) and field diary accounts. The analysis was informed by Pink's (2006) reflexive approach to visual research, which incorporates self-awareness of the sensory experiences drawn upon in interpretation. Using multiple researchers facilitated this reflexive approach. Our reflexive, critical aesthetic framework was supplemented by attention to Gould's (1972) psychological framework for the analysis of children's fantasy play, which examines the child's processes of identification - as direct agent or narrator, as provider, aggressor or victim, and the stability of these roles - during play events. Where possible, interpretations of the recorded play were discussed in joint viewing sessions involving child participant and researcher to better understand the play event from the child's perspective (see Woodyer 2008).
4. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2009, 58) argue that children may disrupt discourses and ideas of enmity made available to them through various media in their play. For example, through experimentation with rules and roles, children may renegotiate the meaning of the 'bad guys'; they may not necessarily resemble the 'bad guys' that the west has called 'terrorists' and 'Islamic fundamentalists'. As enticing as this argument is in relation to our own, their study also lacks the sustained empirical bite that we argue for here.
5. Previous work has drawn heavily on Bauman's (1993, 170–171) description of play's temporal and spatial character: '...play is securely protected behind its temporal and spatial walls...Play has its place - the race course, tennis court, dance hall, sports stadium, discothèque, church, chessboard - all well marked: by stage frame, fence, guarded entries. Play does not spill over, contaminate, reach the other parts one would wish to or has to keep clean; it can be isolated, confined in limits so that it does not affect or disturb what it should not; it could be even kept secret'.



## Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under Grant number ES/L001926/1. The methodology used within this research was developed as part of the principal investigator's previous research, also funded by the ESRC, under awards PTA-030-2005-00724 and PTA-026-27-2851.

The authors would like to thank Wendy Russell for her instructive comments on the project's preliminary findings, which have informed the arguments in this paper, as well as the thoughtful engagements of the reviewers and the editorial team at *Geopolitics*.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [ES/L001926/1]. In order to comply with our ethics approval, the video data referred to in this article is not publically available. Other research data from this project, plus additional supporting information, are available from the UK Data Service, subject to registration, at [10.5255/UKDA-SN-852780](https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalog/studies/study?id=10.5255/UKDA-SN-852780)

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