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Introduction for *Green Letters*, special issue on 'Modern Warfare and the Environment'.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the First World War, industrial warfare has harnessed the power of 'nature' to create ever-more efficient means of destroying human life through its use of chemical, biological and nuclear technology. At the same time, it has developed the potential to cause what has been termed 'ecocide', examples of which include the long-term impact of high density herbicides in Vietnam, and the Kuwaiti oil fires. As in other areas of modern life, in warfare nature has been understood as: 'either logistical problems to be overcome and defeated or opportunities to be exploited.'¹ Conflict in resource-deprived nations can lead to the mass-movement of refugees into environments that may not be able to support them. And yet, it was an investigation by the US military – in an attempt to control the environment – that led to the first research into climate change. Climate change itself has been regarded as an issue for 'national security', and a war that 'we are fighting'.

In this timely issue of *Green Letters* – published during the four-year anniversary of the First World War – authors address the range of approaches that ecocriticism can bring to examining representations of modern warfare, and how the language of war has been appropriated for 'environmentalist' causes. While there is a lack of international and domestic safeguarding of the environment in wartime, there is both a growing realisation that work to protect the environment during and after conflict increases the prospects for peace (UNEP nd: 2), and that climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion increase the potential for global conflict. The articles collected in this edition touch on the language, forms, imagery and tropes that authors use to describe the impacts on the environment of war, and, conversely, they examine how the discourses of 'war' and 'national security' compare to other ways of framing climate change and environmental crisis. As well as addressing the impacts of war on non-human nature, this issue considers how ecocriticism offers tools to consider the impact of war on human ecology. How does the virtualisation of war affect humans? How can feminist, postcolonial and ecocritical insights into the relationship between language, discourse, and the real world oppression of women, colonised subjects and nature be developed to inform our understanding of man's destruction of man in wartime? These experiences of warfare may reveal more about our psychological interdependencies with non-human nature than has hitherto been realised. Finally, this issue asks how we can reconcile struggles for national security with the evidence of interconnectedness, both ecological and cultural, across the planet?

The tentative connection now being made in political discourse between environmental crisis and national security raises the question: is environmental degradation a security threat? In one sense, it is clear that environmental damage, poverty, health issues and social instability are certainly threats to individual, national and global security for humans and other species. The discourse of 'securitisation', as it has been called by scholars of international relations, has the potential to put environmental issues ahead of the ordinary political agenda, and to generate action at an international level. In doing so, action need not be restricted to 'emergency measures' but may

address the ways in which environmental degradation unravels and reveals itself slowly and unpredictably across seemingly vast scales of time and distance.

Since the 1980s, researchers have sought to define a new concept of security that encompasses 'non-traditional' threats to the individual rather than the traditional threat that a nation faces due to its involvement within international networks of power. The idea of Human Security extends the concept of security to transnational threats to individuals, such as drug trafficking and ethnic conflicts, as well as environmental damage. Theorists might also seek to amplify the object of security to the environment itself: the threat is then considered potentially damaging to the biosphere. Yet even the Human Security perspective need not be at odds with the deep ecology perspective, if it is aimed at the security of the globe as a whole. These newer concepts of security, which focus on individual or planetary wellbeing, rather than the potential conflict and instability of a nation, can lead to incentives for action on climate change. However, the 2007 and 2011 UN Security Council debates over mitigating climate change – which occurred in precisely this context – demonstrated that nationalistic concepts of security were deeply entrenched. Even when the international political arena is able to move beyond national self-interest, it may focus on short term, quick-fix solutions that show little patience for the complexity of environmental problems.

Another problem for non-traditional concepts of security is how exactly to formulate the connection between environmental problems and human displacements and conflict. Yet it seems obvious that environmental destruction such as the depletion of resources (which are often located unequally and with no respect to national borders) increases the vulnerability of individuals faced with another threat. All that is required is the presence of groups who are willing to manipulate resource shortages to amplify existing ethnic or social conflicts and existing border disputes.

As discussed in Adrian Tait's contribution to this collection, below, Margaret Beckett, the British Foreign Secretary between 2006 and 2007, considered climate security the most important aspect of British foreign policy. In the US, the 1993-2001 Clinton administration recognised non-military threats to its national security such as ozone depletion. Other nations have used their army for non-traditional security objectives: in Brazil, to deal with illegal logging; in Bangladesh to provide relief following Cyclone Aila. At the transnational level, both the UN and NATO have programmes that aim at environmental security. These examples suggest the potential for the military, governments, international institutions and NGOs to work together against newer threats to human and ecological wellbeing. Yet while the securitisation agenda may provide a further framework for multilateral cooperation against climate change, many of the advocates of 'environmental security' struggle to define what would count as a security threat or are constrained by traditional models of state security and the 'high politics' of self-interest which have been developed over many years.

The systematic destruction of the ecosystem by the military and non-state actors during conflict has happened for as long as humans have used technology. But the recent mind-boggling technological advancement in warfare, and recognition of the limits of the earth's carrying capacities since the 1970s, have caused a backlash against this. The damage has included weapons testing, pollution, as well as deliberate defensive and offensive destruction of ecosystems. The author and barrister Polly Higgins is one recent advocate for the criminalization of 'ecocide'. She defines the crime as

extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an

extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished. (Higgins nd: np)

Like certain versions of the security discourse, Higgins's version of ecocide is formulated to consider humanity as a whole, as well as the rights of future generations, nature and indigenous populations. Higgins proposed in 2010 that the United Nations should codify ecocide as the 5th international Crime Against Peace. This would mean that ecocide is a crime that can be prosecuted by the ICC in the Hague, alongside war crimes and genocide. However, in September 2016 the ICC issued a policy statement that has broadened its remit to include crimes that result in 'the destruction of the environment' in peacetime, in particular illegal land grabs and resource appropriation by governments and corporations (Polly Higgins October 18, 2016: np). This document does not implement the full force of Higgins's idea of ecocide, since it is couched in terms of ecocide's 'negative impacts on civilians' rather than in the language of interspecies rights. The ICC paper considers the broader context to crimes that are already included under the Rome Statute, including arms trafficking, human trafficking, terrorism and financial crimes, and explains that it seeks to help those states that are struggling to deal with these issues unilaterally. The ICC has jurisdiction over just those 124 countries which have ratified the statute. And, like the war crimes it has traditionally prosecuted, the ICC needs the resources and political will to initiate such cases. However, this document has given hope to various human rights organisations who investigate the impact of land grabs. Questions remain as to whether the adversarial approach is the best way to foster collaboration necessary to deal with environmental problems, or whether the ICC is able to operate without political bias.

It might be suggested that these issues have no meaning for ecocritics, since they are couched in the economically-deterministic language of resources, or the traditionally anthropocentric discourse of rights. What's more, the idea of security might be seen as holding too tight a grasp on an ecosystem that is itself beyond human control. However, given that environmental problems are linguistically formulated, there is the need for humanities scholars to consider how we address the questions of value which are at the heart of these international negotiations. Within these debates, what counts as of value will always be determined by the most powerful. Whether this value is elicited in terms of self-determination, security or wellbeing, the arguments should be based on a multiplicity of voices, and with respect to multiple timescales. The literature discussed in this volume encompasses these perspectives and voices in ways that mainstream media and policy documents often do not.

One of the motivations behind the securitisation agenda is that there are huge differences between what various discourses mean by 'environmental problems'. These range from the overtly scientific, to the political, to the militaristic. Ecocritics can engage with these debates in a number of ways. For example, the security discourse, in the form of 'planetary security' may meet the ethical criteria of green philosophy, while the traditional security agenda is clearly at odds with many forms of environmentalism as discussed by Adrian Tait in his article in this special edition. The 'ecocide' discourse may be compatible with ecologism when elicited in terms of interspecies rights. This special issue of *Green Letters* was put together with a view to helping ecocritics engage with these issues, and to allow us to consider what alternatives may exist in addition to the securitisation, scientific and political discourses when discussing the environmental impact of warfare.

Literary criticism, including ecocriticism, should not limit itself to the study of discourses, and questions of form must play a part in determining why and how certain texts move us to new understandings. This edition of *Green Letters* demonstrates the range of literature that conveys experiences of modern warfare and environmental change, from the anglophone tradition, and from both hemispheres. We have an equal share of articles on poetry and prose, from fictionalised and poetic experiences of trench warfare and the Home Front in World War One (Richard Aldington and Edward Thomas), to mediated contact with the landscapes of the Iraq War (Andrea Brady); from literary imaginings of the aftermath of civil war in Sri Lanka (Michael Ondaatje) to the indigenous experience of military occupation in the Pacific islands (Craig Santos Perez). These essays engage with issues as diverse as the development of a post-pastoral voice; the opposition between militarised space and homely place; and the relationship between modern warfare and the Anthropocene. They consider how the newer forms of philosophical materialism can inform our understandings of the human and nonhuman inhabitants of conflict zones; how novels and poetic forms can deal with the scales that produce the 'slow violence' of modern warfare; and the implications of Western Foreign Policy and 'soft imperialism' on geographically distant regions. It is hoped that this issue of *Green Letters* paves the way for renewed ecocritical attention to modern warfare, from a truly global and interdisciplinary perspective.

In 'Representing Conflict and Environmental Crisis: Fragments from a Speculative Future', Adrian Tait examines the possibilities for literary exploration of military involvement in environmental crises in the form of the speculative novel. While he posits both environmental breakdown and modern warfare as hyperobjects that evade traditional modes of representation and conceptualisation, he considers how the 'logical fantasies' of speculative fiction may criticise the nationalistic, hegemonic and pro-Western agenda of securitisation discourse. With reference to the post-War works of speculative fiction, John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956) and *The World in Winter* (1962), and John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), Tait argues that they show the 'hollowness' of the securitisation agenda premised on the strength of national armies which fail against the unfathomable scale of environmental threats. Ultimately, for Tait, it is the Czech writer Karel Čapek's under-read novel *War with the Newts* (1936) that manages to convey the interdependence between militarisation and environmental issues. It is this novel that best shows how the traditional securitisation agenda is just another manifestation of man's 'dreams of dominion' over the rest of nature.

What language do we use when we consider a place as a 'military installation'? This is the issue at the heart of Robert Briggs's essay in this collection, 'There's No Place (Like Home): Craig Santos Perez's Poetry as Military Strategy'. While the Us Air Force's Andersen Air Base occupies a third of the physical landscape of Guam, the recent relocation for of US Defence personnel and their families to Guam from Japan from 2010 onwards means that the island now has an extra 80,000 extra Americans to support, with major infrastructural projects alongside this. Briggs highlights the dangerous possibility of cultural amnesia, reaffirming Rob Nixon's criticism of ecocritical silence around American foreign policy and its imperialistic practices. As well as the creation of a military port in Guam, the Chamorro have been displaced into new regions, drafted into the Army or enlisted in the Navy. More than this, the conversion of the island into a military installation removes from it the qualities that had made it inhabitable – namely its ecology, land and language.

Briggs notes that in America's military installations in Afghanistan and Guam, 'place and space are in constant negotiation as the occupied and the occupier struggle for tangible or noticeable placeness' (53). The nature of the damage that has been done to Guam and the Chamorro often evades attention but deliver long-lasting damage. Briggs argues that Perez's poetry, with its foundation in Chamorro culture, enables an outsider a glimpse at the scale of the transformation of culture, language and landscape of this oceanic island. Like Tait, Briggs asks how a writer can address transformations or destruction that is temporally or spatially removed from our purvey. He answers that 'a poet's imaginative use of language often comes closest in capturing the damage' (53). For Perez, this is in part achieved through the use of strikethrough text, footnote text, the summoning of both native 'insider' and 'outsider' readers and perspectives, and open-ended forms of verse, which convey both the transformation of Guam and a counter-attack against the transformation. Rather than ignoring the force of the transformation in a form of 'sentimentalism' for past ways of life, Briggs argues that Perez's poetry 'invigorates' Chamorro culture in a changing landscape. In concluding, Briggs urges greater responsibility from the American government towards the environmental impact of occupation, and a greater critical awareness of literature from indigenous perspectives that addresses this transformation.

Lucy Collins's essay 'An etiology of metaphors: toxic discourse and poetic form in Andrea Brady's *Wildfire*' explores how the poet evokes the movement of fire to suggest the transformation of natural landscapes in warfare, with particular reference to the second Iraq war. But rather than creating an allegory with a single viewpoint, she explains, Brady's formal innovation, which include digital and print media, creative and scholarly text, 'approximates our own exposure to mediated forms of warfare' (76) beyond the Middle East and Iraq in particular. In doing so, Collins explains, Brady's formal innovations provide a textual analogue for the 'complex temporalities of war and the dispersed effects of chemical weapons' (66). As with Perez's open-ended verse forms, Brady's long poem can be seen to address something too vast for human understandings. Collins shows us how Brady's work conveys the transformation of matter through the process of war, which in turn enables us to consider the 'resilience and vulnerability of all life forms' (76). Rather than setting up the poem through the first person, she creates a displaced perspective that encourages the reader to reflect on material history.

'Of bicycles and bombs: assembling ecological testimonies of conflict in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*' Sreyoshi Sarkar offers a new materialist reading of this novel set during the Sri Lankan war. While existing readings of the novel have focused on interactions between human and spectral agents, Sarkar argues (after Latour) that 'bicycles, forest spaces, plantation houses and bombs are invested in as seminal 'actants' in the novel that impel a complex narrative of conflict violence and imaginaries of the future' (28). These agential objects offer the possibility of 'material cultures of reconciliation' (30), although, as Sarkar contends, ongoing entanglement, signalled by the bicycle, means there is no obvious or easy means of disentangling the agencies at stake in the conflict, or of coming to a simple resolution. The everyday exists in the context of war, and neither subaltern nor material agencies are 'abject' or 'dependent': 'material agencies keep alive subaltern subjects, register testimonies from "ground zero", and assemble for contingent non-violent futures in encounters with humans' (41). In addition to her focus on the materiality of conflict, Sarkar contributes to critiques of rights discourse by addressing how the novel resists the Western gaze and the obligation to make sense of the war through its frameworks. By refusing to adopt the perspective of the Western gaze on postcolonial warzones – the 'deathworlds' of conflict zones

written of by Mrinalini Chakravorty – Ondaatje instead focuses on everyday threats to life and identifies with the subaltern perspective on the conflict. The ‘slow violence’ of resource extraction, subsistence living and dangerous working conditions come to the fore as inextricably linked to the more expected depictions of the spectacular violence of war. These depictions of human-nonhuman interactivity are set against constructions of the Sri Lankan forest. The forest space is not romanticised or demonised, but is a processual place, capable of providing rest and healing but not ultimate retreat. No place – however ‘natural’ or wild – is altogether away from conflict.

Elisa Bolchi’s article ‘Darkened lands. A post-pastoral reading of Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero*’ also addresses new materialisms in its focus on interactions between humans and ‘agentic partners’. War, Bolchi proposes, is a prime example of this interactivity. Modern warfare and WW1 involved massive intentional landscape change. Kate McLoughling describes warfare as ‘a perverse kind of planting that transforms the country physically as well as politically’ (2011, 87), irrevocably altering ‘the space on and within which it occurs’ (83). Aldington’s novel records the transformation of the Normandy landscape from one of vivid flowers to a khaki mess of metal, bones, mud and the waste of war. In the context of this radical alteration of the rural landscape, Bolchi examines the usefulness of pastoral, anti-pastoral and post-pastoral frameworks for understanding the First World War and its environmental and psychological legacy. *Death of a Hero* is read as a post-pastoral narrative, in which soldiers and flowers die together, and in which the natureculture relation is taken to abject and grotesque extremes through human and environment interpenetration in the wasteland of No Man’s Land.

Elizabeth Black’s article on Edward Thomas also considers the impacts of the First World War, but rather than focusing on the battlefields, the impact is felt in the countryside of South East England. Thomas’s depictions of a depopulated, overgrown and untended countryside connect with Aldington’s, whose character describes how the flowers at Hampton Court look sad and have not been planted out, a rupture in natureculture relations that is a minor, but moving, effect of war. In ‘“Literally, for this”: Edward Thomas’s ecocentric war poetry’, Black explores how the anthropomorphism of this pathos is, however, challenged by the possibility that decreased agricultural activity might be good for both wildlife and for the nature-sensitive poet. In the silenced countryside, the poet can hear the birds singing. That said, human appreciation of nature is not unchanging, and the war has negative impacts on the sound of the countryside, as birdsong is drowned out by the noise of the guns. In this loss in birdsong, a connection is made between absent lives, with the ‘intrusion of human events into observations of nature’ (8). Ultimately, the war devastates more than it ambivalently liberates the landscape from human influence. With the lost generation goes knowledge and connection to the countryside – a break in continuity which brings about a loss of a sense of permanency. War is connected to the wider context of industrialisation, modernity and the emptying of the English countryside since 1870. Warfare is inextricably connected to rural loss, both because of the impact brought on by the conflict, and by the changes brought by modernity, of which the continental war could be read as a culmination. The article also focuses on interconnected environments and the impact of conflict felt in distant places, opening up a global dimension to the local, in a manner comparable to that proposed by Ursula Heise. Thomas, according to Black, ‘recognises the ability of nature poetry to confront global events in a way that recognises the impact of war on human and non-human lives’ (1). His writing of the relationship between war and threat to ecosystems could impact on our response to the current climate crisis).

The articles collected in this special issue of *Green Letters* have created potential for future work on the relationships between modern warfare, nature and human culture. It is hoped that this edition as a whole will also encourage ecocritics to continue to explore the multiplicity of 'voices' and actors at the margins of the security agenda: indigenous voices, past peoples and future generations, refugees, civilians, soldiers, nonhuman nature and the environment. While the themed edition was commissioned in the context of the 100th anniversary of the 'war to end all wars', this introduction is written as the UN Human Rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein, called for an independent enquiry into alleged war crimes in Syria. With the recent threats to cohesion of the European Union, and failure to provide for the needs of refugees trying to enter the continent, the idea of efforts to coordinate action for planetary security may seem wishful thinking. But literature that considers the effects of modern warfare on the environment, the memories and dreams that this inspires, offers one opportunity to consider the universality of our psychological, material and ecological dependencies with the earth and the values we hold to protect them. The essays in this collection offer considerable evidence for this.

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