

Global Wildings

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Militaries are amongst the biggest global environmental players. Militaries are major environmental abusers. All militaries, everywhere, wreak environmental havoc — sometimes by accident, sometimes as “collateral damage,” and often as predetermined strategy. Anywhere in the world, a military presence is virtually the single-most reliable predictor of environmental damage: wherever there is a military presence (whether a base, a war zone, a storage facility, or a testing facility), one will almost inevitably find environmental damage. From Subic Bay to Goose Bay, from the mountains of Afghanistan to the deserts of Kuwait, from Gaagetown New Brunswick, to the South Pacific atoll of Kwajalein, the evidence of a largely unfettered environmental “wilding” by the world’s militaries is overwhelming and inescapable. If every military-blighted site around the world were marked on a map with red tack-pins, the earth would look as though it had measles.

Militaries are privileged environmental vandals. Their daily operations are typically beyond the reach of civil law, and they are protected from public and governmental scrutiny, even in “democracies.” When military bureaucrats are challenged or asked to explain themselves, they typically hide behind the “national security” cloak of secrecy and silence. In countries that are in the grip of martial law, militaries have an even more free and unhindered reign: with wide-ranging human rights abuses the norm under militarized regimes, environmental transgressions are often the least of the horrors for which critics try to hold militaries accountable, and thus even the fact that militaries are agents of major environmental degradation is often overlooked.

Even in Canada, a bit-player on the global military scene, militarism and the hyper-masculinism that typically accompanies it is becoming more entrenched, more intense, more accepted, and more a part of our everyday landscape and psyche than even a decade ago. Under pressure from the American administration, the Canadian government in

2006 is racing into full-dress militarism: increasing budgetary allocations for the military; silencing critics of Canadian overseas operations by saying it’s “not appropriate” to question military strategy when there are active forces deployed in danger zones; widening the net of what is considered to be the purview of “national security” policies, issues that are thus removed from the public view.

This surge in militarism requires critical vigilance; in turn, this vigilance requires a broad curiosity. As a feminist, I believe that gendered analyses of militaries and militarism are particularly useful. The distinctive approach of feminism is to look for the workings of gender — the omnipresent if sometimes ‘invisible hand’ that shapes so much of the everyday world. The challenge for feminist environmental analysis is to assess whether environmental affairs may be “gendered,” and, if so, to what extent such a gender imprint “matters.” In examining an environmental event, process, or condition, we should ask whether gendered presumptions, roles, or actions are at work; and if so, whether gender is merely incidental — unattended baggage, as it were, on the environmental journey — or whether it is an instrumental or causal factor in explaining (indeed, shaping) the state of the environment. In thinking about militaries, which everywhere in the world are deeply masculinized bureaucracies (a fact that is little changed by the introduction of small percentages of women into some of the world’s militaries) a robust feminist-environmentalist analysis seems particularly apt and timely.

Similarly, feminist, environmentalist, peace and anti-militarist activism share common ground — or could and should, to have greatest effect. The Faculty of Environmental Studies at York and outlets such as *UnderCurrents* offer opportunities to share ideas and lessons across disciplines and across organizing strategies.