

# Editorial Essay

Questions such as “what is nature?” and “what is natural?” are confounding because, most often, positions that seek to describe nature are imbued with normative dimensions. Indeed, it is impossible to talk about what nature is without confronting ideas about what nature should be. At times, nature is a resource, an explanation for behaviour or an object of scientific inquiry. In other instances it is an inalienable common good or a pristine wilderness to be preserved, while for some it is an empty term into which diverse cultural meanings are inserted. These conflicting meanings suggest that, at every turn, nature is mobilized in the service of diverse political agendas; in any number of contexts, different things are asked of nature. This volume of *UnderCurrents*, *Mobilizing Nature: Militarism and the Environment*, is attentive to the connections between military mobilization and nature. The essays in this issue provide an opportunity to reflect on the often-contradictory understandings of how nature is both mobilized and militarized.

The events of the new millennium have made this reflection an increasingly necessary part of any environmental framework. Through the seemingly geographically limitless war on terror, the reliance on defence infrastructures in peacekeeping and disaster relief, the increasing scale of conflicts throughout the world, and the localized use of military technology as recreation, including Global Positioning Systems and satellite phones for remote wilderness trips, the militarization of the world is dependant upon using and representing nature.

Within this issue, Joni Seager’s “Global Wildings” critiques the environmental impacts of military actions from an eco-feminist perspective and draws attention to militaries as untouchable agents of environmental catastrophe, which operate with impunity behind the façade of security and law. David Tough looks to Canada’s history of military response to environmental disasters within our borders to deconstruct the image of the Canadian military as a heroic force. In “Operationalizing the State,” Tough suggests that the Canadian state mobilizes an image of the earth as a tyrant that demands an efficient military response to save lives and nature, presenting an opportunity for the intervention of a benevolent military figure.

The militarization of nature, however, is not a recent phenomenon. William de-Jong-Lambert’s piece, “Lysenko Lives,” illustrates the similarities between the current American administration and Stalinist uses of science to control the proletariat. Lysenko’s philosophy was about more than simply changing the physical face of the Soviet Union; it was about forcing an agenda that was driven by unsound science. In “Cabinda: Africa’s Forgotten War,” Jeff Shantz turns our attention to a decade’s long but little-known conflict raging between the Angolan government and separatist factions of the Cabanan independence movement. While Angola secured formal independence from Portugal in 1975, Cabanan separatists have waged their own war of independence with little hope of similar autonomy.

Rounding out our attempt to see the process of mobilizing nature in a creative way, Emily Hermant’s photo essays, “Textualising Militarism,” including the cover image *Thumbpins* provide a unique artistic representation of militarism using an every-day object: the straight pin. The unique arrangement of these common objects provides a metaphor for military bureaucracy, and the loss of autonomy experienced by soldiers and civilians alike when caught in the grip of military action.

Volume 15 is itself a way of mobilizing nature from a critical and creative standpoint. It is through these textual and visual images that this issue of *UnderCurrents* seeks to provide readers with an empowering mosaic of literature from which to engage in their own activism and reflection. While the pieces in this issue do not exhaust all possible connections between militarism and the environment, they are an attempt to take up Seager’s call to investigate militarism with a broad curiosity and all point to further areas of potential exploration.

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“(The) surge in  
militarism  
requires critical  
vigilance; in turn,  
this vigilance  
requires a broad  
curiosity.”

Joni Seager