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Challenging Contemporary Ecocritical Place Discourses: Military Brats, Shadow Places, and Homeplace Consumerism

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Abstract

"I have become a queer mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere" (Nehru qtd. In Young 348).

Nehru's difficulty in situating himself in place was a problem of circumstance. He lived at the time when the East was in the process of divesting itself (with Nehru's help) of the West (i.e., Britain). And yet Nehru's 20th century narrative of (very real) upheaval and (very real) dislocation is rendered as he says "out of place" particularly when compared to current accounts of habituation and continuity, where settlement and stability are the preferred images of place in an increasingly unsettled, unstable economic and ecology-depleted world. This essay began as a lament to the elusive One True Place; it turned into a cry for alternative narratives of place – narratives that recognise the inhabitants of the Everywhere and Nowhere camp – where following the global shake-up of decolonisation, the legacy bequeathed millions of Military Brats is disempowerment and displacement.¹ This investigation into the ways in which particular (coloniser) histories and (colonised) geographies, situated within an economic framework, can work for or against a mobile, military dependent's quest for the rhetorical carrot known as the "One True Place" finds an odd bedfellow within the terms set out in Val Plumwood's essay, "Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling" (2008).

Val Plumwood's Challenge to the One True Place

Dominant Western narratives of Place are found to be inappropriate when applied to a military model; so too is the very notion of a One True Place (hereafter, OTP). In one of her last if not the last essay before her death in 2008 Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood,² noting the trend towards place studies in the eco-humanities, raised a problem to do with place discourse and ecological consciousness. She argues that the contemporary focus in the

eco-humanities on one's homeplace "as a locus of continuity [and] identity" (139)—a locus that is crucial in the formation of an ecological consciousness—disregards the "shadow places" that "provide our material and ecological support" (139). She challenges the idea of the OTP, seeing it as antithetical to an ecological form of consciousness in that it generally ignores the "multiple, complex network of places that support our lives" (139). In her discussion of current place-based discourse she asks: "Can discourses of place and belonging marginalise denied, dislocated and dispossessed identities, privileging 'the self-identical and well-rooted ones who have natural rights and stable homes'?" (140). My answer to that is the purpose of this paper. Paradoxically, Plumwood's *ecofeminist* challenge to the OTP rhetoric offers a way in which the OTP-disenfranchised *Military Brat* might begin to renarrativise exclusionary place discourses that focus on in-dwelling and continuity. Plumwood's acknowledgement of place-multiplicities in the functioning of the OTP invites investigation into the historical role of the military, stationed in those shadow places that have helped sustain the "homeplace" communities. Of particular interest are the "Everywhere and Nowhere" Military Brats, subalterns in theory and practice, excluded from civilian notions of the OTP due, not least of all, to mobility and therefore to their engagement with multiple places. This essay assumes the theoretically "in process" speaking position of a female ex-military brat, in its investigation of military engagement in the shadow places. And Plumwood's essay offers a way in which the Brat experience, while confirming her thesis concerning the homeplace/shadow place relationship, also requires a more inclusive approach in future place discourse, and in ecofeminist generalisations concerning that "death-directed" supremely patriarchal institution, the military. It concludes by asking if there is room in place discourse and ecofeminism to be truly "structurally pluralistic" (Warren qtd Tong 266)³ in accommodating the voices of those military children who reside, or have resided, within what Mary Wertsch refers to as the "fortress."

Ecocriticism and Place Studies: Which Approach?

In taking up the invitation to submit this paper, I note that "OSLE-India understands ecocriticism as the application of ecological or deep ecological concepts to cultural texts." One of the things this paper isn't is an essay on deep ecology. There is little to be found in this offering that contributes to a discussion of biocentrism; indeed, its stress on the personal experience of patriarchal colonial processes would seem to distance it even from an ecocritical engagement. Yet we need only look at the introduction of monocultures, such as tea and rubber plantations, during the British Colonial period in India, or the introduction of sheep by the British to Australia, to be aware that colonial processes invariably shape representations, let alone landscapes and their people. Similarly, the examples given illustrate ways in which the hypothetical OTP of the colonising country is bound, by historical and economic ties, to its "shadow places." The hierarchies implied by the terms OTP (with its capital letters) and "shadow places" (in lower case) would therefore seem more conducive to an ecofeminist analysis of the colonial experience than to the biocentric, non-hierarchical premise of deep ecology. In addition, ecofeminism recognises that *all* forms of oppression (sexism, naturism, speciesism, classism, racism, colonialism) are interrelated.

As for postcolonial frameworks, this essay is primarily about the *decolonising* process, and the *post-decolonising* effects on place discourse. For instance consider the possible disjunctions when childhood experience of place is informed by the colonial contexts of the

(legal) homeplace and the (lived) “borrowed” place. Which is to be the cherished topography? For are we not told repeatedly that childhood experiences of place shape future responses towards landscape, and that these experiences are important in creating a felt-responsibility for that particular locale? Given the assumption that place is considered important as “a locus of continuity [and] identity” (Plumwood 139) and is therefore crucial in the formation of an ecological consciousness what kind of landscape is shepherded by military children who experience little or no continuity of locale? Or who experience too many locales to form a coherent, holistic sense of place? What options are there for those unable to satisfy certain basic narrative premises concerning the OTP? Does one consciously opt for say, a Walden? A hill station? An island? Is such a demographic able to develop an “ecological consciousness?”

The Colonial Experience and Displacement

Place-nihilism is not an option in an ecological framework. It is preferable that new place narratives be recognized and given form. Frame in your mind the dominant images of colonialism; it’s quite possible that the image will be accompanied by familiar phrases—oppressor and oppressed, the alien and the homelander—dualisms engaged in nibbling around the edges of one others’ cultures, engaging in language swapping, food experimentation, gene pool exchange but, more often, engaged in physical negotiations concerning economic interests on the one hand, and self-determination on the other. Modify the dialectic slightly and consider the pluralities of external and internal hierarchies, where “[i]n the colonial era the British ruling class was as indifferent to its own working class [substitute ‘enlisted military class’] as it was to colonized peoples: both were subject to persistent devaluation of their own cultures and both were used instrumentally for the creation of private wealth” (Young 9-10).

Now frame in your mind, if you can, a demographic group situated in a different but dependent dialectic: the children of the 20th century retreating (working class) coloniser (specifically military personnel). These are the children raised in “alien homelands” by locals, by the *ayahs* (the nursemaids or nannies) who bathe, clothe, feed, and yes, even *mother* their charges. *Ayah* and charge, female and child, are another forgotten demographic in the internal politics of colonisation.⁴ Furthermore, the *ayah*/child relationship disrupts and inverts power relations. Consider for instance the transfer of power when (arguably) that which is most precious to the coloniser is entrusted to the subjugated. In reality neither *ayah* nor charge is empowered to enunciate their subject positions within the social and geographical politics of place that binds them. These particular politics of place represent the shifting scenario after World War II when little wars pitted the globe; when the British Empire divested itself, and was divested, of its colonial ‘possessions’; when colonial outposts finally achieved self-determination; when an incalculable number of military dependants were dislocated from their alien homeplace, to be sent “home,” away from a place that would seldom again be accessible other than through the viscera that shapes childhood subconscious. The two generations following the Second World War would be particularly susceptible to place-complexities following the politics of decolonisation and enfranchisement. And while in the above scenario both female subjects (black and white) lend themselves to an ecofeminist analysis of the interconnections between systems of oppression as a result of western patriarchal frameworks, I can speak only on behalf of the brat.

Defining the Military Brat

To investigate the complexities of the “lost tribe” that has no homeland, see Wertsch (1991), and Musil (2005). Their comments that “Military brats do not know what belonging is about” (Wertsch 422); and that they are “a new indigenous subculture with [their] own customs, rites of passage, forms of communication, and folkways” (Conway xx, in Wertsch) confirms my notion that dominant Western narratives of Place are inappropriate to descendants of “the military model.” Furthermore, being exclusive, these narratives of Place are ecologically unsound. My immediate purpose here is more literal: to define “military brat” and then to trace the kind of narratives that result from the brat’s connection with colonial history and the “shadow places” of consumerism. In which case we find that “brat” [a ragamuffin; an ill-mannered annoying child (Webster’s Dictionary)], denoted “rubbish” back in 1656 (SOED); and it still does, in the mining of coal.⁵ Current use, however, is said to have originated in England, at RAF (Royal Air Force) Halton, in 1920 where Lord Trenchard initiated training for Aero Engineering Apprentices as young as fifteen. Their knowledge beyond their years challenged the senior members who referred derisively to the boys as Trenchard’s Brats (Tams 2000). By way of establishing my speaking position as a brat I confess to being born at RAF Halton; that my mother was ex-WRAF, and my father (a single parent with four dependents from a previous marriage) was a lifer in the RAF. In all, I “served” as a military dependent, primarily in Occupied Territories, for eighteen years. And although my experience of Britain took place in Asia, dominant narratives of place insist that birthplace and parentage make Britain the likely site of the OTP; the lived experience in Occupied Territories however is dismissed off-handedly as a mere temporary absence from the homeplace.

Which is why an irritating question for a Military Brat is “Where are you from?” The reply “Nowhere and Everywhere” (echoed repeatedly in the documentary *Brats: Our Journey Home* by Donna Musil, 2005) is challenged by birthplace essentialism: “But where were you born?” The Brat’s equivocation arises because being *from* somewhere suggests a “my place,” a one true place that is usually associated with continuous childhood place experience. The concept of a singular homeplace:

creates a split between a singular elevated conscious ‘dwelling’ place, and the multiple disregarded places of economic and ecological support, a split between our idealised homeplace and the places delineated by our ecological footprint. In the context of the dominant global consciousness, ideals of dwelling compound this by encouraging us to direct our honouring of place towards an ‘official’ singular idealised place consciously identified with self, while disregarding the many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material and ecological support (Plumwood 139).

The Brat’s place (Nowhere and Everywhere) requires rethinking along the lines Plumwood suggests where “we [OTP-lovers] may have to start the process of recognising denied places by owning multiplicity, envisioning a less monogamous ideal and more multiple relationship to place” (17). In order to show the positive attributes of Brat-place rather than concentrate on its “lack” when placed alongside “‘official’ singular idealised place” narratives, we find it decentres the individual ownership that is suggested by the “my place” equation. It decentres the accidental or intentional local and nationalist overtones to which the “my” affirms identification. In its refusal to ignore the “shadow places” that have

sustained the individual's life experiences, it therefore insists that engagement with a wider community be recognized. The Brat's answer resists parochialism; it insists on pluralism.

Primary Place inscriptions on the developing Body

Like Military Brats, geographers recognise many places – area, region, location, and so on. They recognise also the importance of interconnectedness where locations are linked “by flows of people and goods to other places” (Relph 3). This is similar to what Plumwood refers to, where shadow places are the “multiple, complex network of places that support our lives” (139). Geographers engage in rational geography, in the mapping of terrain, the use of GPS systems and so on. They also recognise existential, lived-geography: the subjective and experiential. And it is the subjective lived-geography that is of relevance here.

In his seminal book *Place and Placelessness* (1976), Edward Relph argues that constructing place-meaning begins with pre-consciousness development. During infancy, it begins with the body and the senses negotiating primitive space – left, right, up, down, and so on (Relph 9). If we accept this, then place-consciousness and the developing physical body of the child are linked. Consequently the register of place-consciousness for the mobile military child raised in various contexts identified with conflict will differ from that of the singular stable context generally associated with the civilian child.

As consciousness develops, the perceiving self locates the world from a personal vantage point; this is what Relph calls “perceptual space,” and it is relative to the individual. Hence the “uniqueness” of place. “Perceptual space is also the realm of direct emotional encounters with the spaces of the earth, sea, and sky” and with built spaces (Relph 10). The result is that “these personal experiences of space [. . .] are the basis for much of the meaning that environments and landscapes have for us” (Relph 11). The statement that “[f]or children in particular, places constitute the basis for the discovery of the self” (Cobb qtd. in Relph 11) confirms a circular framework where discovery of the self comes about, in effect, because place – where meaning and action have been ascribed – represents interiority; place is self-inscription. Simply put, we have a vested interest in place.

The Body in the Text: *O/oikos* place-inscription as self-description

The following example of place-inscription as self-description is drawn from the work of Australian writer, Henry Lawson (1867-1922). Lawson contributed to the 19th century construction of a Consensus Identity of Australia. In terms of his global footprint he has much to answer for delaying the Australian settlers' acceptance of their adopted homeland as an intrinsic landscape, valued beyond economics. This extract from Lawson's “Fragment of Autobiography” describes his developing consciousness of childhood place in the goldfields of Grenfell:

There was a tree in front of the tent—or hut—a blue-gum I think, and I know it had a forked trunk; and on the ground between the tree and the hut had stood a big bark publichouse . . . [s]ome of the post holes were there yet, and I used to fall into them, until Father filled them up. (Kiernan 5)

Lawson concludes that “[T]he tent and the tree are the first things I remember. They stood there back at the beginning of the World...” (3)). The sentence affirms Relph’s belief that “[t]here is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places we were born and grew up” (Relph 43). All together, Lawson’s inscription of childhood place, through the positioning of the props, presents a blueprint for his life and his fiction—with drink (represented by the postholes of the old public house) as the buffer between the responsibilities of the unstable, vulnerable domestic place—significantly, a tent—and the perceived isolation and threat of the bush. Lawson, an alcoholic, alienated by a “dialectics of inside and outside” (Bachelard 211) reveals place (*O/oikos*) to be highly coded, and sadly ironic of what he had become.

The Body in Context: the Suez Canal as *Oikos*

Lawson’s autobiography is useful for its introduction of the role of the domestic habitat (*oikos*) in place-consciousness. A socialist utopian, agitating for Australia’s independence from Britain, Lawson died in 1922; this was the year when another colony, Egypt, gained independence from Britain but remained under its jurisdiction. Egypt was an important shadow place; the Suez Canal was regarded as “vital for imperial communications, that is between the “mother country” and its Asian empire, especially the most important colony, India” (Bickerton and Pearson 113). Egypt was to be my first experience of what Relph calls place-consciousness. The domestic *oikos* was a tent; the larger *Oikos* was conflict. The years 1951-1955 were deemed The Suez Canal Emergency; at the peak of the Emergency 80,000 troops were stationed in the Zone. Our place was on the Tent Line. The primary soft targets during the Emergency were civilians and married families (“Canal Zone Casualties”).

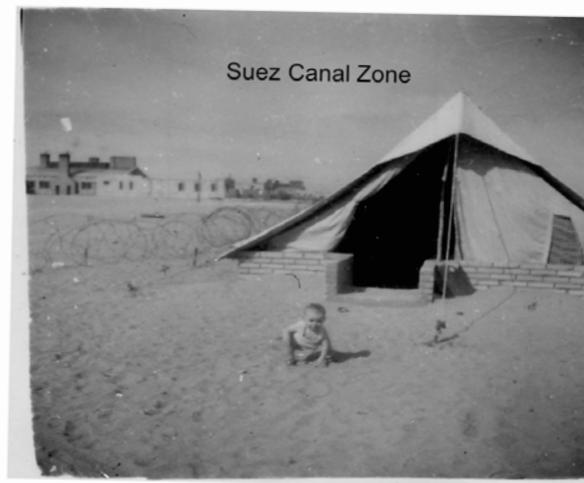
Why were we there? One photo and various historical records say the same thing—Trade. The Suez Canal Company was a commercial company; the British Government had a controlling interest. Prior to being nationalized (in 1956) the Suez realized a profit for Britain in the realm of £4,000,000. In 1955, 80% of Europe’s oil came from the Middle East, and over half of that went through the canal (Bickerton and Pearson 113). Troops (along with their invisible dependents) were there to make sure it happened.

As a group, overseas military camp dwellers, or “occupiers,” differ from other itinerant camp dwellers such as Romanies, or Australian indigenes, or even Circus troupes. As Suzanne Langer notes (Relph 30) it’s possible to see those camp dwellers as sustainable communities: communities that aim to integrate social, economic and environmental components; be safe and inclusive, and offer equality and opportunity. The military context, however, renders the description of sustainable communities as unintentional parody. For Service families there is no extended kinship; they are part of a patriarchal, authoritarian “warrior,” and “obedient,” community where the emotional needs of the family are sacrificed to meet the needs of the military (Stephanie Donaldson-Pressman, in Musil DVD 2005); it is where the father’s rank determines the social place for every member of the family; it is where no family has a say as to which place, when or where, they will be posted. In a classic reworking of the way colonial violence works dialectically on the individual, the parent on the roof with the rifle watching for snipers was my mother, an ex-WRAF, demobbed for getting married. Her new-born by her side, she watched the terrain until her

husband was out of range; he was under orders not to carry a gun as it might be seen as incitement. The scene demonstrates that in the military, all dependents are enlisted; the emotional terrain is significantly edgier, and any notion of settlement is temporary, fragile and ironic.

Dominant Western Narratives of the Domestic Place (*oikos*): Bachelard and Malouf

Contestation, disempowerment, and violence all serve as fretwork in the pattern of military control. With that in mind, let's compare a brat's experience within the camp "settlement" with the rhetoric that connects childhood, consciousness, and place—particularly the house as place. To begin with, Gaston Bachelard's seminal text, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; rpt 1994) fulfils the promise of poetics, but doesn't ring true for those excluded from the secret places promised by the philosopher in his presumption that *a* place exists *somewhere*. In a process he calls topoanalysis, Bachelard reads houses, complete with interpretations for cellars and garrets (Bachelard 17).



It is similar to what Australian writer, David Malouf, promises in his use of the inclusive pronoun, as he revisits the precise location of his childhood home, in *12 Emondstone Street* (1985):

"First houses are the grounds of our first experience" says Malouf. "Crawling about at floor level, room by room, we discover laws that we will apply later to the world at large; and who is to say if our notions of space and dimension are not determined for all time by what we encounter there . . ." (Malouf 205)

The final sentence echoes Relph's comments concerning pre-conscious connection with place. And make no mistake about it, Malouf's words, and also Bruce Bennett's essay, "Living Spaces: Some Australian Houses of Childhood" where he compares the tent with the castle, are central to a dialogue about settling into country. The imagery is enriching and persuasive; it is comfortably civilian and privileged in its outlook; and it's quite possible that we are witnessing the OTP (for these writers).

But for those whose experiences of space and dimension differ, whose place is a bricolage, and whose “house” is neither owned nor fixed, these domestic-place narratives create anxiety and alienation; they make casualties of millions of military children by authenticating place-scripts where brats simply don’t *fit*. Take the statement by Anne Balif (qtd. in Bachelard 72) that if a child is happy s/he will “succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations.” Bachelard extrapolates: “When the house is happy, soft smoke rises in gay rings above the roof” (72). Psychoanalysis shows its Western assumptions and architectural centrality and the inset photograph above contests Western narratives of Place. Why for instance would *this* European child draw chimneys?⁶ This kind of Place, as celebrated by Malouf and Bachelard, is what the Military Brat sacrifices to serve in the shadow places of consumerism. There’s no mental history of continuity – continuity of housing, schooling, family or friendships. No place to return to.

The Politics of Dwelling

And when Lukermann comments that “Place involves an integration of elements of nature and culture” (Lukermann qtd in Relph 3) he perhaps did not have in mind a nature/culture *O/oikos* confluence where the Arabian desert *is* the floor of the domestic space. Similarly, while there may be “underground manoeuvres” at work in the cellars of Bachelard (21) and of Malouf, they are not the deadly kind at work in the front-line camp. The point here is not to ridicule, but to demonstrate how exclusionary and inappropriate the normative narrative is to the subalterns – the Third Culture Kids whose identity is a mixture of all the cultures they’ve lived in.⁷

The picture above is one of only four remaining from nearly two decades of travelling, a consequence of moving, military freight allowance (based on rank), the jettisoning of the past, and the normalisation of loss. To the left of the tent the coiled barbed wire signals an alternative reading of Plumwood’s “Politics of Dwelling”; this was the Perimeter fence of the RAF Tent Line which ran alongside the airfields and hangers and which was patrolled in the event of surprise attacks from the Egyptian Air Force and Army. The barbed wire also separated the tents from the buildings⁸ that housed other branches of the Service and Officers’ families. For in the military, no matter where one is in the world, it is important that NCOs, British enlisted men, and their families, “know their place.” Postcolonial theorist Robert Young (9) writes:

In the British case, a minority elite, the ruling upper class, controlled Britain as well as the British Empire well into the twentieth century: Britain and the British people were their first imperial realm (Riddell 1993: 69; Trotsky 1970). As Goldwin Smith, the radical Regius professor of History at Oxford, argued in 1863, it was not the people but the parasitical imperial class in Britain that benefited from the Empire (Smith 1863; 74 qtd. in Young 9).

To return to a phrase coined by Val Plumwood, this shadow place – our first home as a family – was a place driven by economics. And the beneficiaries were not the GI Joes: Service Personnel are just that, *service* oriented, not wealth oriented (Musil 2005). The Suez Emergency involved the largest Military Force in any one military theatre since the end of World War Two.⁹ Their focus was on keeping shipping lanes open for the transportation of cotton and oil; and on keeping lanes open for the safe passage of Australia’s largest intake of migrants in the 20th c, a result of the Assisted Passage, and the Displaced

Persons schemes.¹⁰ I too would migrate to Australia. But it's doubtful that migrants to Australia during the 1951-1955 Emergency were fully aware of this shadow place or of the historical interstices that contributed to their settlement in their new homeland.

Likewise they would be unaware that other environmental experiences separated brat-place from the European norm. Women had to protect their children from the usual run of cold-climate diseases experienced in transit. But in the shadow places there was the additional exposure to tropical and sub-tropical diseases, along with Egypt's reputation as one of the world's most disease-ridden countries where schistosomiasis, trachoma, and malaria were unheard of threats for European children. To accept Plumwood's recognition of the role that shadow places play in supporting consumerism at home is to recognise that there are other players in the "military-industrial complex" – players whose sacrifices and losses ecofeminism seems to have "thrown out with the baby" in its portrayal of the military place as occupied by male bodies primarily engaged in death-directed activities. Not to acknowledge the existence of these other players in the military machinery is to make invisible the lives, importance, and contributions of the women and children who find themselves further demeaned as "patch pieces" in the civilian world. Plumwood stresses that "An ecological re-conception of dwelling has to include a justice perspective and be able to recognise the shadow places, not just the ones we love, admire or find nice to look at" (138).

Ceylon as *Oikos*

After what the military refers to as our "tour" in Egypt, we were posted to Ceylon on behalf of the mosquito. Although rational history states that troops withdrew from Ceylon when it gained independence in 1948,¹¹ lived-history knows otherwise. On doing the research for this paper it came as no surprise to discover that Ceylon was an important distribution point for British oil companies. It was also a major port of call for Australians *en route* to England.¹² Britain had built up plantation economies (monocultures) of tea and rubber on the island, and was Ceylon's chief foreign market and supplier. Once again the military occupation kept the shadow place operational in supplying consumer goods to the "homeplace." We were there, however, as a result of the World Health Organisation, which officially initiated a malaria control program in Ceylon using DDT, in 1954 ("SEARO 50 Years of WHO in South East Asia").

In the photograph below my father is the one in uniform, centre right. One of his duties as a Civil Engineer was to oversee the eradication of mosquitoes. There's no one alive who can say with certainty what is in the fumigator; but the formal arrangement of the picture lends importance to the occasion and renders an Asian image of the "battler on the land." The traditional clothing of the workers suggests that they are Tamils. This is consistent with the working relationship that the British maintained with the Tamils, having also brought Indian Tamils to Ceylon during the 19th century to work on plantations.¹³ Did our "tour of duty" make a difference to this community? At the time, Ceylon was cited as a success case in the mosquito control program: the application of DDT was associated with a 100-fold reduction in human morbidity and mortality ("Millennium Development Goals Country Report 7"). Nevertheless the photo presents an ambiguous image of civic

engagement in the sustaining of a community, in the sense of saving lives by combating malaria. As Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) was to enunciate loud and clear, the engagement was also an exercise in ecocide.



Consequently, after the publication of *Silent Spring*, DDT production was regulated. As a result malaria deaths increased (WHO 1971).¹⁴ So in 2007 the Stockholm Convention approved production of DDT for *indoor* application to control vector-borne diseases. To return to Plumwood's recognition of the role shadow places play in our lives as consumers it does to be mindful that communities today producing the old British plantation crops of tea and rubber that sustain the OTP, must return to their home places, their *oikos*, where malaria is primarily controlled by the indoor residual treatment of DDT.¹⁵

Military and Colonial Casualties

The photo also serves as a representation of the population make-up of place that the British Brat is exposed to.¹⁶

Overseas Service families are the minority group; English is not the primary spoken language. The masculine edge of military acronyms (CO; WO; NCO; AWOL; WAAF; NAAFI – or OTP for that matter) is tempered by the mother-tongues of the *ayahs* and *ammias* who, through their care-giver duties, attuned our ears from inherited language to multiple cadences; culture; religion; and food, at the cost of time spent with their own families. My mother hospitalised in Colombo a few months after the death of her child, was mute to her surroundings. Her withdrawal created an emotional space that was increasingly filled by curiosity and familial intimacy with the carers (of children, chickens, geese, and coconuts) who slept at the back of the bungalow. Daily close contact with sympathetic human beings facilitated an awareness of other-than-Anglo communities.¹⁷ It modified, in a deeply personal

way, the perceptual space or “the personal experiences of space” that Relph (11) contends provides “much of the meaning that environments and landscapes have for us.” As a result of those “personal experiences of space” the Brat must declare as alien the national narratives of The OTP that they are expected to ascribe to, as a consequence of birth.

The preceding would seem to represent a somewhat idealistic view of the island given its long history of colonisation and the recent end (this May) to a bloody civil war. But (if this were) the OTP it would indeed be an idealistic construction. It does also to remember that the military child is only ever a temporary resident, one who is always *en route* to elsewhere. But perhaps because we were invisible members of a transient community we children found ourselves party to local intrigue as ayahs and “houseboys” related stories of unspeakable brutality on the island. These stories, small phenomenological illustrations of ethnic tensions in place before the Sinhala Only Act, or the establishment of the LTTE, were swapped, wide-eyed, amongst ourselves.

There was however a tragic backlash in being an invisible member of a transient community. Child-dependents, especially daughters of “warriors,” brought up never to complain, to bury emotions, to get over it, could seldom share their stories. Their shadow places would be psychological spaces marred by emotional and bodily violation from native carers (see Lyn Metcalf, “A Child in the Canal Zone 1951-1953”) from servicemen (see “Military Brats as Casualties” in Wertsch 209-246; and Heather, in Musil 2005); and the horrific story of “Lisa” who attributes her survival from years of abuse by service men to having “had a wonderful, loving *amma* [nanny] in my first three years of life” (Wertsch 243). In this patriarchal, colonial space, “[w]hatever man many do to nature, he may also do to woman” (Tong 247). And while transience aids the perpetrator it cripples the victim. In military life it means regularly starting anew,¹⁸ moving freely within an impermanent community, escaping the judgements of collective memory. For some, moving is erasure; for others it’s an attempt to forget. For the wounded daughters of “warriors” – and military females routinely have the lowest self esteem in their peer group (Musil 2005) – it means to be “weightless creature[s] without power, without presence, without context, whose color is camouflage, and whose voice is unheard” (Wertsch 95).¹⁹ So before we follow the advice that “even if a person is not a pacifist, he or she can be antimilitary” (Tong 276) first let us rescue the Lys, Heathers, and Lisas from our indiscriminate tar-brushing of all things military. Let us discriminate between being anti-war, and being anti-military, when “military” is inclusive of Service families and children who are born within “the fortress.”

Aden as *Oikos*

After a year in Kowloon, *en route* to the homeplace via the Suez Canal, our ship docked in Singapore. My half-brother, now also wearing military khaki, was posted in Singapore in 1959-1960 during its independence from Britain. As is the nature of families truly in transit, we gathered on board ship to see him, to admire his Air Force uniform and to touch his tattooed arm that bore the name of his favourite beer. That was the last we saw of him. He was to set the pattern as one by one, with no village or town to know us, no locus to connect us, or to be returned to, we eight siblings scattered like shrapnel. Perhaps a more

inclusive narrative of place might begin by acknowledging the human toll exacted on keeping the national homeplaces functioning.

The final example of place multiplicity and its relationship to the theoretical One True Place, is Aden. A British colony since 1937 it was due to be handed over in 1967. We arrived in the newly-named Protectorate of South Arabia in 1963, as the National Liberation Front (NLF) stepped up urban terrorism throwing a grenade at the British High Commissioner, injuring 50 people and killing one woman. A state of emergency was called, and the Radfan war between the NFL and the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) began the following year. This was translated by RAF Khormaksar school children, myself included, into happy faces painted on oranges for distribution to the Radfan troops. Until reports of decapitations, and the upscaling of urban terrorism, from 286 attacks in 1965, doubling in 1966 (“Britain’s Small Wars”).

The RAF Khormaksar crest “Into the Remote Places” reveals its centrism. In fact, by 1965 Khormaksar was the busiest RAF station anywhere, housing three wings of nine squadrons (“The RAF in Aden”). It stressed the “remote” status presumable because of its distance from Britain as the One True Place. Aden soon assumed the familiar pattern of our insider/outsider status where home place meant armed conflict: more barbed wire; a 6 o’clock curfew; patrolling land-drovers; snipers told to shoot on sight. Watching this after curfew from the flat rooftop of the Married Quarters (we had roofs; no tents at this place) we translated the activity into a game of outwitting your own side. All were reminders that we were situated in the no-go space between colonial and post-colonial history. As in Egypt, the NFL’s attention turned to soft targets. A grenade at a children’s party on the camp killed one girl and injured four children. Another, in the open-air cinema, while we watched a Hayley Mills film.²⁰ The mission, we were told, was to train Federation troops to protect themselves against annexation by the Yemen. It should come as no surprise that the main industry in Aden, however, was refining crude petroleum from the Persian Gulf; the British Petroleum refinery was located at Little Aden. To situate the Aden experience in present-day terms (and within Plumwood’s framework) means that whether we be deep ecologists, ecofeminists, or farmers, we are, as consumers of oil products, complicit in power and environmental justice issues, military intervention, and the disruption to civilians on both sides if we ignore the politics of the shadow places that supply our provisions. The shadow place however is the place “consumers don’t know about, don’t want to know about, and in a commodity regime don’t ever need to know about or take responsibility for” (Plumwood 146-147).



Australia as *Oikos*

You’ll recall that perceptual space, according to Relph, is informed by “the realm of direct emotional encounters with the spaces of the earth, sea, and sky” (Relph 10). My perceptual space had been informed by deserts, tropical climates, and ever-present warm seas. “These personal experiences of space” says Relph “are the basis for much of the meaning that environments and landscapes have for us” (Relph 11). In the sense that Relph implies,

my landscape legacy, England, was rendered meaningless. I migrated to Australia, the first time, as a British citizen, sailing around the Cape because the Suez Canal had been scuttled during the Arab-Israeli war. I found myself in Altona Migrant Hostel, at Kororoit Creek Road, which happened to be home to the Commonwealth Oil Refinery (COR), Australia's first oil refinery. Given that the word "brat" also refers to a thin bed of coal mixed with pyrites or carbonate of lime (SOED)), it was not without irony that the brat should be once more in the company of fossil fuels. In addition, the military *oikos* was replicated in the transient nature of the hostel's Nissan huts, the canteen, and the concrete shower blocks. And in the nature of transience, the hostel like the military camps no longer exists.

Australia had the right climate and nine distinct deserts, but culturally it was to be a hostile place for a £10 Pom²¹ who was experiencing civilian life for the first time; one who didn't know the cultural cues; who hadn't been brought up in England but in a shrinking Empire engaged in shedding its rebellious colonies, and yet now was marked as a representative, at a time when Australia was undergoing "a sense of independent national identity" (Kiernan 282). And that included rejection of the notion and actuality of the "Mother Country" and her subjects. Unable to "fit" in England, I found that neither was I allowed to "fit" in Australia because the dominant place narrative ascribed to me was "England." Trapped between two major c(l)auses I represented what Mukherjee calls "the colon": those individuals who find themselves doubly positioned in being identified, and resisting that identification, with former colonial powers (Young 19).

Before I left Australia, this time to migrate to the US southwest, I took a road trip from Perth to Melbourne. We could deconstruct this picture as the Nowhere and Everywhere Brat experi-encing "place" amongst representatives of the oldest living culture in the world. It would make a happy Place ending (for me, at least). But that's an imposition, a hindsight reading. When I walked into this camp perhaps I was responding to the viscera that shapes childhood subconscious: perhaps I was drawn to the tent dwellers in the desert. In terms of modifying the dominant narratives of place so that they are more inclusive, we can accept in part Relph's statement that "[t]here is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places we were born and grew up . . ." (43). We only need to remove the civilian assumption that where one is born is where one "grew up." At the time of the photo (1969/1970) I knew nothing about colonialism, though like thousands of service children of the Occupying Forces, we subalterns had lived the legacy. Just as today we continue to benefit, through domicile in Australia, from the "arrogance and violence" (Rose 40) of our 19th century New World conquestors. My ignorance back then of colonial processes in Australia was generally reflected on a national level.



A Global Footnote

Years later I migrated a third time, this time as an American citizen (though no passport represents a Brat's place). Because my own sense of place remained unexamined at the time, I was determined to buy into the narratives of the OTP (Tasmania, temperate climate, was my husband's choice). I was determined to learn about the place, and to perform conscious reinhabitation by collecting the island's stories and writing a book on the place;²²I created a storied place; drove and walked and later hiked into the wilderness to write words to fight for the place, to help publicise the threatened Tarkine rainforest for the World Wildlife Foundation.²³ I can confirm that military patterns of domination and oppression exist in civilian relationships to landscape. As the one writer (and woman) who hiked (rather than stayed home and researched) I was "kept in my place" and rendered invisible in the editorial (the "official" history) in order not to detract from the myth that trekking and tent-living and planet-saving are masculine pursuits. My daughter, born in Tasmania, is however, "in place." She knew the fury of the Roaring 40s against the flysheet before she was one year old; she knows what it's like to live sparingly, to make do, to lay her head down in a hollow in the earth. I am content to know that I have sold her the myth of the OTP, and that consciously I made her a "place" in direct response to my own itinerant lifestyle and the lifeless experience of discovering my family traces in the "storied" landscape of the military archives. And I wonder, how do the millions of other Military Brats fare when their experiences are examined alongside Relph's thesis that early encounters with the earth, or sea, or sky, form our later relationship with the landscape? Do those encounters really require a "locus of continuity"? And if there is no continuity, what form of ecoconsciousness does a military brat develop? Any? None? Plumwood (who is probably turning in her grave at this use of her ecofeminist text in support of a military model of place) closes her essay on *Shadow Places* by noting that "a critical sense of place based on knowledge and care for multiple places could be the form of place consciousness most appropriate to contemporary planetary ecological consciousness" (149). Perhaps (it is my hope) because the Brat is raised to be self-reliant; has experienced a life dedicated to service rather than wealth; has a subsistence perspective; has had to be adaptable and flexible and knowledgeable within landscapes in order to survive — perhaps there is the makings of an ecoconsciousness that is truly ecological, one that refuses exclusivity, that is at home everywhere, and so practices care in all places rather than in the privileged OTP. In which case the Brats' experiences of mobility would situate them at the forefront of place narratives which, in any event, will have to be reshaped given that "the average Australian moves 13 times" (Plumwood 145). Furthermore, in an essay written thirty years after his primary investigation into Place, Relph writes that our current sense of place:

differs from pre-modern, rooted experiences. Indeed, some familiarity with different places facilitates an appreciation of the lives of others and provides antidotes to the development of a poisoned, exclusionary sense of place. It is also essential for grasping the connections between global processes and challenges, and their manifestations in particular places (Relph 316).

I know that I bristle at talk about place, any place, which urges a superior consensus identity, which employs superlatives in relation to other places; which affirms a "my" that is a shadow's breath away from a national identification. The OTP is, as Val Plumwood says, a "system of privilege and *self*-enclosure" (148; my emphasis). To affirm the OTP is,

from a military brat's perspective, to deny the multiplicity of the Gone places—important shadow places with their multiplicity of invisible, magnificent, and wounded peoples—that continue to assert presences and complications we can never begin to unravel.

NOTES

¹ This essay owes much to the insights of Mary Edwards Wertsch, *Military Brats* (1991). Wertsch examines the experience “inside the fortress” of some of the 1.7 million USA brats. While there are obvious differences surrounding the historical circumstances and geographical postings of the Western-oriented (USA, UK, Australia) Military Services, this discussion of place and colonialism is based on my subject position as a British-born, US citizen, resident of Australia, residing in Asian camps for nearly two decades.

² My thanks to Kate Rigby, Monash University, for drawing my attention to Val Plumwood's invaluable article.

³ Step 3 of 8 steps outlined in Karren Warren's ecoethics, urges ecofeminists to be “structurally pluralistic in recognizing the differences among humans as well as the differences between humans and nonhumans” (Tong 266).

⁴ Future work could be done to ascertain if the term *colon* is applicable to the military child. (See Mukherjee, cited in Young 19).

⁵ This usage is not without irony in the context of this paper, with the military involvement in maintaining fossil fuel access in the Suez, and Aden, and distribution centres in Ceylon.

⁶As for foundations, note the short brick wall under the tent, which serves as an ambivalent gesture, part permanence, incomplete mobility.

⁷ Third Culture Kids is a term coined by Ruth Hills and John Hays, recorded in Musil.

⁸ It was from the rooftop of these buildings that my mother kept vigil over my father.

⁹ From 10,000 to 80,000 (“Britain's Small Wars”).

¹⁰ The Australian census dates relevant to this study are 1947 and 1954. Statistics for 1947 show a population of 7,579,400. In 1954 it was 8,986,500. The difference of 1,407,100 is divided by 5 (years) = 281,420 annual growth. .93% net migration = 26,170 per annum. This represents the highest migration levels to Australia since 1871-1880.

¹¹ The British monarchy was head of state until 1972 when Ceylon became a republic and changed its name to Sri Lanka. 1972 marks the outbreak of ethnic war with the LTTE.

¹² Like the Suez Canal, Ceylon was one of the major places linking Europe with Australia. 1955 was the year writer Christopher Koch sailed through Colombo and the Suez, en route to the UK, a trip that found its way into the literature of Australia as *Across the Sea Wall* (1965; revised 1982). Others at this time, en route to becoming ex-pats, included Russell Braddon, Peter Porter, Arthur and Martin Boyd, Joan Sutherland.

¹³ The long-term impact of British favouritism can only be guessed at. There's an ethnic war encoded in this picture. Tamils lost their advantageous positions in public life after the departure of the British. In 1956 the Sinhala Only Act was the catalyst for heightened tensions between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities that eventually resulted in ethnic riots and more serious riots two years later (Source: KM de Silva). It's difficult to say how many Sri Lankan writers migrated to Australia as a result of the conflict following the departure of the Governor General in 1972, but Yasmine Gooneratne, of the Bandaranaike family, migrated to Australia in 1972; as did Michelle De Kretser, winner of the 2008 ALS Gold Medal for *The Lost Dog*. Neela Liyanagedera left Sri Lanka in the 1970s and migrated to Australia in 1985.

¹⁴ In Sri Lanka (Ceylon) only 17 cases were reported in 1966 out of a population of 13,000,000. But between 1968 and 1970 there were 4,000,000 cases (World Health Organization, 1971).

¹⁵ See Global Malaria Programme, *The Use of DDT in Malaria Vector Control*, WHO position statement, 2007.

¹⁶ At that time, USA Military Brats were sent primarily to Europe.

¹⁷ The Australian architect Glenn Murcutt provides an excellent example of the importance of intangibles to a sense of place. Murcutt, spent his childhood in Papua New Guinea. He tells how, on returning to PNG as an adult, he felt like he was “home” because of the re-emersion into language and culture (ABC-TV 2 June 2008).

¹⁸ In an address to the Launceston Film Society in 2000, writer/director and military brat Maurice Murphy discussed his film “15 Amore” (2000) based on his childhood experiences during WW2 when Italian POWs were billeted with his family in Australia. When asked if he had ever tried to track down the major character, Joseph, Murphy replied that it was not in the nature of Service families to “look back”; they were always being moved on, making a “new chapter” rather than dwelling on loss.

¹⁹ The internet has made it possible for unofficial military histories to be recorded, and for Brats who thought their experiences singular, to find support and consolidation within a virtual community linked by concepts rather than geographies.

²⁰ Official stats from “Britain’s Small Wars”: 1964-1967: 68 dead; 322 wounded.

²¹ “£10 Pom” was the term used to describe an English person on a Government assisted-passage to Australia.

²² CA. Cranston. *Along these Lines: From Trowenna to Tasmania, a Peripatetic Perspectives in Poetry and Prose*. Launceston, Tasmania: Cornford Press, 2000.

²³ Ralph Ashton, ed. *Tarkine. World Wildlife Fund*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2004.

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