

1660. Nevertheless, readers from different backgrounds who are willing to overcome this knowledge gap on their own are in for a treat as this book demonstrates how combining different archival fragments can tell a new and important story of early English colonization and society.

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Emmanuel Kreike, *Scorched Earth. Environmental Warfare as a Crime Against Humanity and Nature* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021). 521 pp. ISBN 9780691137421.

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In 2013, historian Rob Nixon coined the concept of ‘slow violence’. With that phrase, he meant that violence caused by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, and oil spills takes place gradually and often invisibly. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon moreover states that the environmental aftermath of war can have devastating consequences, especially for the globe’s poor. Can war be seen as a crime against humanity and nature? That is at least what Emmanuel Kreike posits in his impressive and provocative *Scorched Earth. Environmental Warfare as Crime against Humanity and Nature*.

In contrast as to what the reader might expect based on the book’s cover – a well-known picture of British soldiers during the First World War amid a landscape of destroyed trees and pools of mud – Kreike’s main focus is on the period prior to the twentieth century, not only in Europe but also in Asia and North America. Although it would seem logical to include the twentieth century – after all: it saw the widespread use of chemicals in war (see World War I and Vietnam), as well as the use of two atomic bombs – Kreike makes a convincing argument for above all focusing on the early modern period, more specifically Brabant and the Austrian Netherlands.

Kreike states that ‘war affects environment and society simultaneously because humans are shaped by and in turn shape the environments they inhabit’ (p. 2). According to the author, there is ‘environcide’, that is, (un)intentionally ‘damaging, destroying, or rendering inaccessible environmental infrastructure through violence that may be episodic and spectacular (e.g., genocide or mass killing) or continuous and cumulative (e.g., everyday violence)’ (p. 3). Whereas

according to Kreike previous scholars have predominantly studied total war, ecocide, and genocide as isolated events, he suggests that they should be studied more holistically and be seen as the interaction between war, society, and the environment (p. 394).

If phrased in that way, Kreike is absolutely correct when he states that the sixteenth century can already be seen as a period of 'total war', as 'it affected anyone and anything in its wake' (p. 25). Kreike makes clear convincingly how various factors intertwined, when, for example, large parts of the province of Holland were flooded: 'The flooding was cumulative; the inundation waters could not be extracted because the drainage infrastructure of sluices and windmills had been damaged or destroyed' (p. 42). As (almost) always, it was ordinary people who suffered the most, also at the hands of groups of soldiers who roamed the countryside. Villages and hamlets in the region of Peelland complained that after the fall of 's-Hertogenbosch, they were subjected to 'great violence and nuisance by day and night [...] with entire groups taking loot [and] plunder' (p. 118).

Kreike makes convincingly clear that the scorched-earth operations of William Sherman and Philip Sheridan (both would have named famous tanks after them in the twentieth century) of the American Civil War were nothing new: 'They carried on a practice of environcidal warfare that marked conflicts across the globe throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries' (p. 396).

In fact, when fighting against the Cheyenne and the Arapaho in 1868-1869, Sherman and Sheridan campaigned above all during the winter. During that time, the former were the least mobile and most vulnerable. In Kreike's words: 'With their weakened horses, the indigenous people's fighting ability was at its lowest, and they could neither quickly move their families, lodges, and other property nor save their own winter food' (p. 308-309), while also denying them valuable prey, 'thereby practicing a form of scorched earth' (p. 309).

The Dutch colonial army did something similar during the Aceh War (1873-1904), with devastating consequences for the local population and environment. Kreike states with justification: 'The impact of the violence on Aceh society constituted environcide: the intentional destruction of environmental infrastructure and resulting population displacement triggered a humanitarian disaster' (p. 319). Already at the time, critics in the Netherlands labelled the policy as genocide. Using many first-hand accounts and primary documents from across the globe and using many remarkable case studies, Kreike does an

excellent job of analyzing the interplay between warfare and nature/natural disaster.

The author concludes that despite dramatic changes in armies and technology between the 1500s and the early 1900s, environcide remained at the core of the practice of war: 'Although soldiers became less motivated by and dependent on plunder and extortion, the opponent's population and environmental infrastructure remained a main target, objective, and means in war' (p. 400).

One is tempted to think: but has anything really changed over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? It would have been interesting if Kreike would have said something about it. After all, the twentieth century saw quite a number of genocides in which attacks on the environmental structure of people were at least an important part. And what to think, for example, about the Second World War, the Eastern Front, and genocide?

Many scholars – military historians and their colleagues, for example, who study the genocide on the Jews and the mass murders of other peoples – point to the interplay between the course of the war in the East, scorched earth, genocide, and deliberate starvation. Stating that the Dutch VOC Hongi campaigns of the late eighteenth century, which intentionally targeted the environmental infrastructure, were as lethal and debilitating as 'such modern weapons of mass destruction as nuclear warheads, napalm, mustard gas, and Zyklon B' (p. 402) is provocative and arguably too far reaching. That being said, one cannot but agree with Kreike's final words: 'The history of total war as environcide highlights how and why such practices as scorched earth and armies living off the land, which culminated in the deliberate destruction of the human-shaped environment, should be condemned as a crime against humanity *and Nature*' (p. 417).

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