Australian Journal of Environmental Education, vol. 33(3), 223–237, 2017

Book Reviews

Environmental Crime and Social Conflict: Contemporary and Emerging Issues

Avi Brisman, Nigel South, and Rob White (Editors) Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham, UK, 2015
doi: 10.1017/aee.2017.16

Reviewed by Dr Lorne Butt, TAFE NSW West Region; Institute of Leaders and Managers, Orange, Australia

---

A fan of films such as the *Pelican Brief* (Pakula, Jan Brugge, & Gilchrist, 1993) or *Erin Brockovich* (DeVito, Shamberg, Sher, & Soderbergh, 2000) might cherish the idea that 'green crime' is a well-established field of criminology, whereby — if the evidence can be obtained — government, corporate, and individual actors are held to full and public account when they engage in criminal activity, bypass regulatory frameworks, and cause harm to humans, non-human animals, and the environment. These types of films might also reinforce a fan's belief that government, corporate, and individual actors often resort to a variety of unsavoury and illegal practices to achieve their ends, including intimidation, bribery, and murder.

Environmental Crime and Social Conflict is part of a series on environmental crime and green criminology, and provides a specific examination of the relationships between the environment and conflict as its primary contribution to the field of green criminology. While the portrayals of environmental and social criminality in films such as *Erin Brockovich* (DeVito et al., 2000) and other media are certainly reflections of real events, the extent to which state, corporate, and individual actors are routinely held to full account for the damage they cause is questionable. Green criminology is still an emerging legal field, and the issues are dangerous to investigate — verifiable evidence is variable on a case-by-case basis and the actors involved often go to great lengths to ensure their activities remain hidden from the public eye, including discrediting evidence and threatening (or worse) those working to make such activities visible.

*Environmental Crime and Social Conflic*t brings a different perspective to this arena by working to move the reader's understanding away from what is technically legal and towards whether harm has been caused — to humans, non-human animals, ecosystems, and the biosphere, as a result of human activity. Harm includes pain, suffering, indignity, inequality, food insecurity, climate change, social and economic exclusion, environmental damage, death and disease, physical displacement, and undermining of the financial capacity of governments to provide essential services such as schools and hospitals. Further, green criminology seeks to link harm and illegality, as understanding grows about the security threats generated by human activities that cause harm to both the planet — in terms of the continuous damage being done to the life support systems it provides for all species — and stable systems of government and society. The book also seeks to counteract the short-term focus of neoliberal economic policy that has prevailed since the end of World War II, and the advent of what the editors term 'supercapitalism', by illustrating to the reader the complexity of environmental-social conflict. Authors of the studies in the book break down simplistic perceptions

of activities that cause immense harm, such as wildlife poaching and trafficking, and guide the reader in rebuilding a more in-depth awareness of these activities based on the understanding that in the majority of cases, local situations are directly linked to global networks of power, politics, trade, influence, corruption, and organised crime that have their origin in the colonialist and imperialist traditions of the previous 400–500 years.

Environmental Crime and Social Conflict proposes a typology of environment-conflict relationships, with a central issue being the duality of the environment as a victim of conflict, but also a contributor to or instrument of conflict. While a variety of examples are provided to illustrate the different types of environment-conflict relationships, a common theme is the combination of factors contributing to the generation of a 'criminogenic environment':

- Conflict over natural resources possession — natural resources as a driver of conflict, but also the use of natural resources to fund conflict. Examples include timber (South-East Asia), wildlife (Asia and Africa), diamonds (Africa), minerals (Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America), and land (South America). This type of conflict has given rise to a new term — 'transnational biopiracy' — whereby natural resources are exploited to ultimately support the global economic market and particular political agendas, rather than the health and prosperity of the people and communities to which resources belong.
- Conflict over declining resources — resource exploitation and dispossession that is often described under the euphemism of 'economic development', which typically involves state and/or corporate actors gaining control of resources through accumulation processes that exclude rightful owners. Examples include mining in countries such as Columbia and Brazil. Transnational biopiracy is also endemic to this type of conflict.
- Conflict that destroys environments — whether the 'the criminal exploitation of natural resources in wartime' should be regarded as an international war crime. As recently as January 5, 2017, the United Nations has stated that the deprivation of water to over 5 million people in Damascus and its regions in Syria 'constitutes a war crime' (Wintour, 2017). A parallel issue is the increasing militarisation of conservation efforts, also known as 'fortress conservation' or 'counter poaching', as species and resource conservation efforts strive to counteract the increasing global trend of criminal enterprise and corrupt state involvement in the trade of illicit goods. A particularly disgraceful example is provided in the case presented by Collins in Chapter 7, 'Somalis Fight Back: Environmental Degradation and the Somali Pirate' (pp. 153–173) examining the rise of piracy in Somalia. While Collins fully acknowledges the involvement of the Somalis in illegal fishing, it is clear that countries such as China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Pakistan, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Thailand, and the United Kingdom have also engaged in illegal fishing in Somali waters; Switzerland and Italy also engage in toxic waste dumping in exchange for weapons and ammunition. While warships from a variety of countries patrol Somali waters on the lookout for pirates, these warships do not prosecute ships observed in the acts of illegal fishing or toxic waste dumping.
- Conflict over natural resources extraction processes — in this discussion, the focus is on how the environment and conflict are represented through stories and narratives (in particular, by the media), what is kept 'hidden' versus what is 'visible' in these types of representations, and how this affects perception and understanding of the issues by the broader community. A key example is provided in the discussion of the mining sector in Australia, with a policy focus at all levels of government on short-term economic gain, and little to no attention being paid to the large-scale impacts on

https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2017.16 Published online by Cambridge University Press

communities such as increased living costs, higher levels of violence, and industry-led employment insecurity.

A parallel conversation conducted predominantly by Brisman in Chapter 13, 'Environment and Conflict: A Typology of Representations' (pp. 285–311), as well as more tangentially by other authors, examines the issue of the 'master narrative about [human] demise'. These narratives have been a part of how humans explain their world and imagine their future for millennia. Modern examples combine cautionary tales of complete ecocide (e.g., Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, 1957) and hope for (more collaborative) survivors (with a more cooperative understanding of resource allocation and equality) in a dystopian future (e.g., Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy, 2008–2010). However, Brisman challenges the modern narratives of technology (humans are infinitely adaptable and will always find a technological solution to all problems) and alternatives (space exploration will find our 'Planet B') as to whether they actually reinforce the current anthropocentric eco-philosophy of continual exploitation, rather than forcing humanity to change its relationship with Earth.

The different types of environmental-conflict relationships appear to have substantial overlap; however, a central theme is this prevailing anthropocentric eco-philosophy in which humanity continues to believe it has a right to exploit the Earth and other species, in an age when, as Brisman notes, economic power invades every part of life and promotes the short-term and the individual, while undermining civic society, public institutions, long-term community-focused citizenship, and the rights of other animal and non-animal species to their own existence. This discussion continues through the book's chapters within the broader context of the current lack of legal and regulatory framework provisions that would support the criminalisation (and prosecution) of environmental-social harm caused by human activity.

While somewhat dry in tone, *Environmental Crime and Social Conflict* is a revealing, and at times distressing, exploration of the types of activities that drive environment-conflict relationships, how these are legitimised (or not) under current regulatory frameworks, and where there are regulatory gaps that urgently need to be addressed in terms of criminalising activity and behaviour that causes socio-environmental harm. While the book lacks a direct and deep critique of the complicity of the developed, Western world in the pillage of the Earth that is otherwise known as 'economic development', it shines a powerful light on many hidden issues of environmental conflict and socio-environmental harm using both well-known and more obscure examples. *Environmental Crime and Social Conflict* is another in a worthy line of publications bearing witness to humanity's endless folly of planetary exploitation — whether humanity can realise the magnitude of change needed to hold the various actors accountable for the criminal harm they cause remains to be seen.

References

Collins, S. (2008). *The hunger games*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Collins, S. (2009). *Catching fire*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Collins, S. (2010). *Mockingjay*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

DeVito, D., Shamberg, M., & Sher, S. (Producers), S. Soderbergh (Director). (2000). *Erin Brockovich* [Motion picture]. United States: Jersey Films.

Pakula, A.J., Jan Brugge, P., & Gilchrist, B.D. (Producers), Pakula, A.J. (Director). (1993). *The Pelican Brief* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Shute, N. (1957). *On the beach*. London, UK: Heinemann.

Wintour, P. (2017, January 5). UN warns of war crimes over disruption to water supply north of Damascus. *The Guardian*. Retrieved January 8, 2017, from

https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2017.16 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/05/syria-conflict-leaves-millions-of-damascus-residents-with-limited-access-to-water

Reviewer Biography

Dr Lorne Butt is the Sustainability Coordinator at TAFE NSW West Region. Lorne trained as a biologist before joining the higher education sector. With a background in quality management, strategic planning, and corporate governance, Lorne now specialises in sustainability practice, governance, education and research, and convenes the Leading for Innovation and Sustainability and Business Research Methods units in the Australian Institute of Management Business School postgraduate program. Lorne is an Associate Fellow of the Institute of Managers and Leaders, and a member of the British and Australia/New Zealand academies of management, and the Australian Association of Environmental Educators.

Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods

Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie New York, Routledge, 2015
doi: 10.1017/aee.2017.17

Reviewed by Susan Germein, Western Sydney University, Australia

---

As I engage with place research within a new materialist framework, this book by Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie is a valuable addition to my bibliography. In a world that is increasingly globalised, with neo-colonialist/neo-liberal/capitalist imbrications, theorisations of place research provide a welcome perspective.

We live in place and/or we carry place within us. Local places are where the global is made real: places are sites of resistance, emergence, renewal, and sustainable futures. Place is not just a passive setting for social science inquiry. As described in this book, it is, rather, alongside other non-human and human elements, agentic, and co-constitutive. 'Social science research is always undertaken by researchers and participants embedded in *places,* places that are both local and global, shaped by and constitutive of culture and identity' (p. 1).

Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie conceptualise place; interrogate methodology and methods of place such as posthumanism, new materialism, indigenous, and decolonising perspectives; and propose an ethics of place that serves the ecological futurity of human and other than human entities.

Critical place inquiry is defined in the book as:

> *research that takes up critical questions and develops corresponding methodological approaches that are informed by the embeddedness of social life in and with places, and that seeks to be a form of action in responding to critical place issues such as those of globalisation and neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation. (p. 2)*