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## Special Edition: Green Criminology Matters

### Guest Editors' Introduction

#### **Tanya Wyatt**

Northumbria University, UK

#### **Piers Beirne**

University of Southern Maine, USA

#### **Nigel South**

University of Essex, UK

In 1998 the journal *Theoretical Criminology* published an innovative special issue on green criminology, which was compiled by two of the editors of the present collection. The focus of that special issue was a plea for the theoretical development of green criminological approaches to our relationships with 'nature', including how we adversely affect the state of the environment and the lives of nonhuman animals (henceforth, 'animals'). Work in this new field has since continued apace. The study of harms against humanity, the environment and other species – inflicted systematically by powerful profit-seeking entities and on an everyday basis by ordinary people – is increasingly seen as a social concern of extraordinary importance. Green criminology matters!

Green criminology comprises a variety of perspectives that highlight key issues to do with exclusion, exploitation, inequality, harm, suffering and death. Howsoever these issues are identified and voiced, green criminology is well placed to examine how extensively and in what ways humans harm what Benton (1993) has referred to as 'natural relations'. These harms and crimes range from the abuse and exploitation of ecological systems and species other than humans to the long-term damage wrought by states, corporations and militaries to the land, air and water; from illicit trades in toxic materials and at-risk species to the monopolisation of natural resources. Of no lesser importance to green criminology are emerging bio-ethical issues around genetically modified food; bio-piracy; and the new forms of conflicts and harms that arise with environmental degradation (Beirne and South 2007; Brisman, South and White 2015; South, Brisman and Beirne 2013).

Sometimes the harms examined by green criminology are defined as crimes. Sometimes they are not. Sometimes they are quite visible and at still other moments, they are ignored or else their significance is denied. But whatsoever their legal or social status, the expanded notions of harm employed by green criminology need wider dissemination not only in the academy but also in the corridors of power where public policies are forged, enacted and enforced.

Some aspects of this process are already underway. This is evident, for example, in the burgeoning research on issues of green criminology presented at scholarly conferences. In 2013

and 2014, for example, green criminology has been designated as a new thematic stream for the American Society of Criminology annual meetings.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded a 'Green Criminology Research Seminar Series' which took place from October 2012 through July 2014. In these seminars an international community of scholars explored questions raised by examination of crimes against the environment and against animals and their available habitat. This special issue is a collection of papers based on presentations by keynote speakers in this seminar series.

Despite the expansion of work in this new area, much of the scholarly and scientific attention to environmental harms has continued to come mainly from ecological or conservation disciplines whilst the criminological aspects of such harms have often continued to be marginalised, despite their having a global impact far more damaging than that of conventional crimes (Lynch and Stretesky 2007, 2014). Yet criminology can provide highly relevant and topical analyses of environmental harms and also engage in timely scrutiny of relevant criminal regulation and law enforcement and the implications of continuing environmental crises. Furthermore, the examination of green harms and crimes and the range of victims and offenders remains, and should arguably be one of the most important concerns of society.

One of the aims of the ESRC series was to publicise these grounds for concern. The seminars aimed to bring together speakers, writers and researchers from different professional backgrounds and national contexts so that they could share information and put green harms and crimes more prominently on the public agenda. It was also intended that the seminars be preserved and their contents disseminated through both a web page hosting the lectures and panels (visit [www.youtube.com/channel/UCdaWIZtrkGDUdv5PtCnyqQg](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdaWIZtrkGDUdv5PtCnyqQg)) and publication of papers.

Papers in the six-part seminar series examined some key aspects of the dynamic field of green criminology. Clearly, scholars of green criminology come from a variety of disciplines and perspectives and unsurprisingly, the theoretical and conceptual breadth of the current field is quite extensive (South and Brisman 2013; White and Heckenberg 2014). This diversity is quite obvious not only in the presentations in the seminar series but also in the diverse lines of questioning pursued by members of the audience. The papers published in this special issue reflect the chronological order and the thematic content of the seminar series; so, as introductory papers from the first seminar, South and Brisman cover some aspects of the development and breadth of green criminology. South traces the evolution of green criminology, describing its simultaneous emergence in various parts of the globe, influences from within traditional criminological thinking and some possible issues for future consideration. Brisman furthers the discussion of the connections between traditional criminology and green criminology, conceptualising the use and integration of theory in green criminology. This is categorised into intra-disciplinary and extra-disciplinary theoretical engagement, which provide the foundations for exploration of the aetiology of green harm and crime.

Many green harms and crimes are hard to uncover because their location is often so isolated. Quite specialised local knowledge and innovative methods are therefore sometimes required to expose green harms and crimes and to demonstrate links between certain actions and particular harms: toxins causing harm to humans, for example. Boekhout van Solinge's article details his personal journey to becoming a green criminologist and his experiences as an ethnographer in Brazil's Amazon rainforest. His focus is illegal trafficking in timber. Whilst providing insight into ethnography that is beyond the scope of any formal methods training, Boekhout van Solinge criticises 'mainstream' criminology for marginalising green criminology as a 'soft' topic when its objects of concern are just as injurious and violent as street crime, if not more so.

Green criminology has paid considerable attention to the harms that we humans inflict on other animals. These are important concerns for criminology on a number of levels: how far the project of animal protection can (or cannot) be advanced through law; the links between animal abuse and violence between humans; and challenges to criminology's anthropocentrism about what crime and victimisation might be (for example, Beirne 2009). Green criminology has also contributed to the multifaceted discussion of the respective rights of humans and other animals, including the advantages of biocentric and ecocentric views over anthropocentrism (for example, Halsey and White 1998; White 2008) and of the importance of thinking in terms of species justice and ecological justice rather than simple criminal justice, social justice or even environmental justice. Beirne takes these points even further in his proposal here that our killing of animals deserves and requires a proper naming: theriocide. This neologism is designed to challenge the privileging of human lives and deaths over those of other species. Vincent then details the work of the Law Commission of England and Wales in undertaking a major consultation on reform of wildlife laws. This work has included preparation of an overview of wildlife law in England and Wales as well as an exploration of the role of various sanctions for wildlife violations.

Air, water, and soil pollution as well as the dumping of traditional and e-waste pose challenges for most of the world. The most disadvantaged populations, both in the West and in developing nations, are those most likely to live in or near environmentally harmful surroundings (Lynch and Stretesky 2007). Corporations and governments seeking cheap disposal of various forms of waste exploit areas with less political power and voice by bullying or by negotiating 'rights' to dump the waste in proximity to these communities. In further efforts to reduce costs, multi-national corporations buy illicit products such as ozone-depleting substances used in electronic goods from nations that are not signatories to the international conventions, thus flouting environmental regulations and perpetuating environmental destruction. Scholars contributing to the seminar series presented papers on the economic, political, and social implications of such toxic environments and the emerging illicit markets in waste and prohibited products. Bisschop's article provides a discussion of the range of challenges for the variety of stakeholders involved in governing the shipment, trade and disposal of e-waste.

All these scenarios of harm also generate attempts to protect the environment and animals; these protective initiatives are diverse and complex. Presenters also explored the challenges of regulating environmentally damaging practices in a globalised world and, in particular, the problems besetting criminal justice system responses to environmental harms. The use of the criminal law as a means to prevent (or limit) harms to the environment and to animals is increasingly common in both national and international jurisdictions but there is also an increased use of regulatory approaches (including self-regulation within various public and private sectors) to environmental protection. The challenges associated with both criminalisation and regulation include the actual creation of new laws, their meaningful enforcement, the detection and policing of offences (including those by the state), and the meaningful application of punishments and penalties for breaches. Insights into these processes are provided here by Hall.

We are indebted to the UK Economic and Social Research Council for funding the seminar series. We wish also to thank the editors of the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* for providing a home for this special issue. Reasons of space dictate that this special issue can only present a selection of the excellent keynote papers from the series. (Other papers from the extended seminar on 'Brown Crime: Hazardous Waste and Pollution' and the final two conference will be published later in edited collections with Ashgate). On behalf of all the participants in the seminars, Piers and Nigel offer special thanks to Tanya Wyatt. She coordinated the successful bid for ESRC funding and the subsequent administration of the series. She has also served as co-editor of this special issue. Finally, we hope that the ideas and

arguments of the papers in this volume will contribute to the growing understanding of the precarious condition of planet Earth and the plight of our fellow creatures.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013 the ASC also hosted a 'Presidential Panel' on green criminology and the three papers presented there are available at the ASC website:  
[https://asc41.com/Annual\\_Meeting/2013/Presidential%20Papers/2013\\_Presidential\\_Papers.html](https://asc41.com/Annual_Meeting/2013/Presidential%20Papers/2013_Presidential_Papers.html)

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