

## What can critical realists say about ecocide?

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The concept of 'ecocide,' originating in the 1970s, has recently re-emerged as a prominent theme in international criminal justice scholarship and practice. While some countries, particularly in Europe and Latin America, have strengthened environmental protections, member states of the International Criminal Court are beginning to discuss the global criminalisation of mass environmental destruction under the label 'ecocide'. While the necessity and applicability of ecocide law are debated by legal theorists and practitioners, the fact that mass environmental destruction has accelerated concurrently with the development of global and national environmental regulation regimes raises questions about the effectiveness of such laws in addressing the structural conditions that shape and reproduce exploitative production and consumption patterns.

Against this backdrop, this presentation explores the insights that critical realism can bring to this evolving debate. Revisiting Bhaskar's works on 'social cube'—which conceptualises human agency as conditioned within 'four-planar social beings' embedded in stratified structures—is both timely and essential. Beyond the ongoing debate over ecocide's qualification as an international crime, I aim to examine how critical realist frameworks can challenge ecocidal tendencies through emancipatory scientific thinking and informed action. In particular, from a critical realist perspective, I will analyse the generative mechanisms underlying ecocide and delineate five categories within a stratified ontology, contrasting this with 'flat ontology' approaches. This analysis further aims to challenge positivist perspectives on the construction of nature and the framing of environmental crime.

The presentation is structured as follows: first, it traces the conceptual genealogy and historical context of ecocide; second, it reviews current policy and scientific debates, which have predominantly focused on individual criminal offences rather than the structural factors driving ecological disorganisation; third, it situates the five categories of ecocide—namely, ecocide as punishment, ecocide as collateral damage, eco-genocide, slow-onset and everyday ecocide, and industrial accidents and disasters—within a stratified ontology to elucidate their causal mechanisms; and finally, it concludes with open-ended questions regarding what critical realism can contribute to understanding and addressing ecocide and ecocidal tendencies.

### Bio

Juneseo Hwang is a green criminologist currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the DFG Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies "Futures of Sustainability" at the University of Hamburg, Germany. His main research areas include ecological justice, environmental peacebuilding, victimhood, and criminal justice, with a geographical focus on East Asia, Europe, and Africa. One of his ongoing projects explores the possibilities and limitations of ecocide law in confronting the liberal paradigm of peace and security, which underpins the existing international criminal justice system, by integrating a critical realist approach to the analysis of ecocidal tendencies.