

# Palgrave Studies in Green Criminology

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Criminologists have increasingly become involved and interested in environmental issues to the extent that the term Green Criminology is now recognised as a distinct subgenre of criminology. Within this unique area of scholarly activity, researchers consider not just harms to the environment, but also the links between green crimes and other forms of crime, including organised crime's movement into the illegal trade in wildlife or the links between domestic animal abuse and spousal abuse and more serious forms of offending such as serial killing. This series will provide a forum for new works and new ideas in green criminology for both academics and practitioners working in the field, with two primary aims: to provide contemporary theoretical and practice-based analysis of green criminology and environmental issues relating to the development of and enforcement of environmental laws, environmental criminality, policy relating to environmental harms and harms committed against non-human animals and situating environmental harms within the context of wider social harms; and to explore and debate new contemporary issues in green criminology including ecological, environmental and species justice concerns and the better integration of a green criminological approach within mainstream criminal justice. The series will reflect the range and depth of high-quality research and scholarship in this burgeoning area, combining contributions from established scholars wishing to explore new topics and recent entrants who are breaking new ground.

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Lorenzo Natali

# A Visual Approach for Green Criminology

Exploring the Social Perception  
of Environmental Harm

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*For my father, Adriano, who taught me how to see, think and move  
forward festina lente*

1. In this important contribution to criminology Lorenzo Natali offers a powerful invitation to understand one of the world's most compelling social problems in fresh ways. Wide ranging in scope the book explores environmental harms and crimes through a distinctive combination of cultural, green and visual criminologies. It is essential reading, a defining statement that immediately defines its field as a vital, shared point of reference. Making creative use of visual methods, and written in a clear and accessible way, this highly engaging text will be an invaluable resource and succeeds in stretching the criminological imagination beyond current orthodoxies.

—Professor Eamonn Carrabine, *University of Essex*

2. The vitality and excitement of a new field of inquiry depends upon contributions that challenge and expand its original horizons. This fascinating book provides conceptual and methodological innovations for green criminology that are simultaneously provocative, stimulating, exhilarating and thought-provoking. A must-read for those wishing to look at the world in new ways.

—Professor Rob White, *University of Tasmania, Australia*

3. Environmental crime is perceived and experienced by different people in different ways. In this beautifully written book, Natali makes a compelling argument for why and how to study those social actors who are the direct victims of various environmental harms. *A Visual Approach for Green Criminology* is a path-breaking endeavor that should prove enormously inspirational for those interested in cultural criminology, green criminology, visual criminologies, their points of overlap and their lacunae.

—Professor Avi Brisman,  
*School of Justice Studies at Eastern Kentucky University*

4. Lorenzo Natali has written an important book, which provides an elegant and compelling argument for a broader approach to green criminological research. Natali argues that we must learn how to “listen visually” to the voices of the victims of environmental crime. His fascinating account of the use of photo elicitation interviews reveals a rich and at times unexpected explanation of the participants' complex social reality. This is essential reading for anyone interested in pursuing qualitative green criminology research.

—Dr John Cianchi, *University of Tasmania, Australia*

## PREFACE

The social and natural worlds—the attitudes we adopt towards them and the multiple languages we use to describe them—change unceasingly. Sometimes, these transformations happen in a dramatic fashion: think of what is evoked by the names “Hiroshima,” “Chernobyl,” “Love Canal,” “Exxon Valdez,” “Deepwater Horizon” or “Fukushima.” Other times, these processes are slower and the changes resulting from them are so gradual that they no longer arouse amazement or shock. Faced with those environmental transformations that occur in the name of “progress” and that make the landscapes inhospitable, our sense of place is shaken and transformed. In addition, our very capacity for imagination becomes disarmed.

The object of the research presented in this book is to bring into the field of green criminology the visual dimension of environmental crimes and harms. More specifically, this book attempts to show how images can provide a means for eliciting narratives from people who live in polluted areas—describing in detail and from their point of view what they know, think and feel about the reality in which they find themselves living. This challenge concerns issues—environmental crimes, on the one hand, and visual dimensions of crime, on the other—that until recently were not explored sufficiently in the field of criminology. To make room for these new discourses and sensibilities, it is necessary to broaden the boundaries of the criminological discipline and to incorporate the visual Other into the heart of green criminological imagination, favouring a sort of Self-change in our discipline. Obviously, it is not easy to achieve this kind of change for it implies not only a re-thinking of our discipline but

also, and above all, a revolution within our *habitus* as social scientists. The interaction between the images and the words used to describe the socio-environmental worlds in which we live will be shown to be at the basis of our experience of environmental crimes and harms. The continuous exchange between these two dimensions (images and words) will promote “mutual understanding” (Morin 1999) capable of inaugurating a breadth of vision appropriate to the phenomena investigated.

This book is an invitation to open the eyes of the discipline to wider and richer explorations of environmental harms and crimes. My goal is to argue for the value of visual methods—and, in particular, for the importance of *photo elicitation*—in carrying out qualitative research in green criminology. This aim is accomplished in seven chapters. In [Chap. 1](#), I develop some reflections designed to open the way for new visual explorations of environmental harms and crimes, enhancing the mutual relationships between green, cultural and visual criminology. In [Chap. 2](#), I briefly examine the physical location of my research: Huelva, a town in southern Spain, heavily polluted by huge industrial and chemical plants established during the 1960s and built in close proximity to the town. I then describe the theoretical and methodological framework that informed my approach. In [Chap. 3](#), I provide a detailed examination of the visual explorative phase of my empirical research, accompanied by some excerpts from the field notes that illustrate the very first steps of my methodological proposal. In [Chap. 4](#), I show how photo elicitation can be crucial in promoting narratives about the social perception of contamination and about experiences of socio-environmental injustice. I also explain how photographs can become a reflexive and collaborative bridge between the subjects and the researchers. Finally, I consider how the use of photographic images helps to appreciate and enhance the reflexive and active role of social actors in the symbolic and social construction of their environmental experiences, and how such photographs contribute to our understanding of how the victims relate to the uncomfortable and complex reality of pollution. In [Chap. 5](#), I return to the initial questions directing my empirical research, suggesting that it is essential to develop an active listening approach to the voices of lay people, rather than relying just on the knowledge of experts and academics. Furthermore, this chapter describes how the coming into contact with those narratives—promoted by the use of photography—helps us to develop different forms of reflexivity that are also useful for imagining and confronting the present environmental crisis. In [Chap. 6](#), I propose some theoretical and methodological

principles for the use of the photographic image as a method of research. More specifically, I focus on the technique of photo elicitation, already described in [Chap. 4](#), in order to illustrate how to develop a method that is attuned to the perspectives of the social actors under study. The book concludes in [Chap. 7](#) with a call to use qualitative visual approaches for carrying out research in green criminology. I suggest that it is necessary to develop not only flexible methods, but also flexible conceptual tools— instruments sensitive enough to capture the vagueness and elusiveness of environmental issues without severely diminishing their multiple dimensions. To this end, taking into account the visual dimension of environmental crimes, and using photographs as tools of qualitative research, represent unparalleled means of addressing these complex questions.

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