

Environmental Crime and the Resistance of Female Forest Rangers: A Green Cultural Criminology Analysis of Mpu Uteun

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Keywords:

green cultural criminology;
environmental crime;
ecofeminism; female rangers;
Stuttgart

ABSTRACT

Environmental crime is a serious threat to ecosystems and local communities. Mpu Uteun's resistance as a ranger group to environmental crimes in the Damaran Baru Forest, Bener Meriah, Aceh, in this article is seen through the perspective of green cultural criminology and ecofeminism. The approach used is a qualitative approach, by conducting FGDs and interviews with Mpu Uteun members and observation of areas that are the scope of Mpu Uteun's work. This article reveals how Mpu Uteun interpreted their actions as the enforcement of socio-ecological values and confronting the local patriarchal culture. It was revealed that Mpu Uteun members made efforts to prevent environmental crimes with a patrol strategy in the forest, where as a result of this strategy they faced cultural resistance. This article concludes that the integration of green cultural criminology and ecofeminism perspectives complements the understanding of environmental crime as a socio-cultural phenomenon, as well as contributes to policy empowerment of female nomadic communities.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental crime is a form of contemporary crime that has a wide impact on the sustainability of ecosystems, the lives of local communities, and the sustainability of natural resources. Practices such as illegal logging, forest encroachment, land burning, and illegal exploitation of natural resources not only cause ecological damage, but also raise social, economic, and cultural problems in communities around forests. The high rate of forest destruction in Indonesia shows that environmental crime is still a serious problem that requires the involvement of various actors, including local communities, in environmental prevention and protection efforts.

The study of environmental crime develops through the perspective of *green criminology*, which places environmental damage as a form of crime that is not only seen in terms of formal law, but also in terms of its impact on ecosystems and living things. *Green cultural criminology* is here to understand how meaning, values, symbols, and culture affect the practice of environmental crimes and forms of resistance to them. This perspective emphasizes that the response to environmental crime cannot be separated from the social and cultural constructs that develop in society. Therefore, environmental protection measures are not only understood as technical activities, but also as cultural practices that contain social meaning (White, 2016; Brisman & South, 2013).

Environmental issues are also closely related to gender relations. The perspective of ecofeminism views that exploitation of nature often goes hand in hand with subordination to women in the patriarchal system. Women are often placed in marginal positions in natural

resource management, even though they have a close proximity and direct involvement with the environment on a daily basis. In many cases, women's involvement in environmental movements faces a variety of social and cultural barriers, ranging from gender stereotypes to resistance from the surrounding community. However, women also have great potential as important actors in community-based environmental protection movements (Rifandini & Triguswinri, 2020; Agarwal, 2018).

The above phenomenon can be seen in the existence of Mpu Uteun in the Damaran Baru Forest, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. Mpu Uteun is a ranger group whose majority are women, they carry out various efforts to protect the forest through patrols, area surveillance, and prevention of activities that have the potential to damage the environment. The presence of this group is interesting to study because it not only shows the form of community participation in fighting environmental crimes, but also presents women as the main actors in a space that has been synonymous with male dominance. Because of this assumption, Mpu Uteun members face challenges in the form of cultural resistance and the construction of local patriarchy that views forest conservation activities as a masculine realm (Dewi & Rohma, 2023).

Research related to environmental crimes has tended to focus on legal, policy, and ecological damage aspects, while studies linking the cultural, gender, and resistance practices of local communities are still relatively limited. Research on female rangers from the perspective of green criminology has also not been widely conducted, especially in the context of the local Gayo community in Aceh. This makes this research important to fill the gap in the study of how women interpret resistance to environmental crime and how these practices are influenced by local social and cultural dynamics. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of green cultural criminology and ecofeminism perspectives to analyze Mpu Uteun's resistance, which has not been done in previous studies. Unlike Darwin et al. (2025) who focused on agency and negotiation strategies, this research examines how cultural meanings, symbols, and local patriarchal norms shape both the practice of environmental crime prevention and the forms of resistance faced by female rangers. Additionally, this study provides empirical evidence from the Gayo community in Aceh, a context that has been underrepresented in global green criminology literature. By combining these two perspectives, this research offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding environmental crime as a socio-cultural phenomenon and women's resistance as both ecological and gender-based struggle.

This article aims to analyze Mpu Uteun's resistance to environmental crimes in the Damaran Baru Forest through the perspective of *green cultural criminology* and ecofeminism. The research conducted seeks to understand how Mpu Uteun members interpret their forest protection activities, the strategies used to prevent environmental crimes, and the forms of cultural resistance they face. This article is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of *green cultural criminology* and ecofeminism, as well as make a practical contribution to strengthening the policy of empowering the female nomadic community in environmental protection.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in depth the experience, meaning, and strategy carried out by the Mpu Uteun group in fighting environmental crimes in the Damaran Baru Forest, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. The type of research used is descriptive-qualitative research, in order to describe and analyze social phenomena related to forest patrol practices, forms of resistance to patriarchal culture, and the meaning of Mpu Uteun members to their conservation activities. This study uses the perspectives of *green cultural criminology* and ecofeminism as an analytical framework to understand the relationship between environmental, cultural, and gender crimes.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, *focus group discussions* (FGDs), and field observations. Interviews and FGDs were conducted on Mpu Uteun members to gain an understanding of their experiences in patrolling the forest, dealing with environmental crimes, and the cultural resistance they experienced as female rangers, while observations were conducted to see firsthand the condition of the forest area and Mpu Uteun patrol activities.

The research subjects consisted of members of the Mpu Uteun group and parties related to conservation activities in Damaran Baru. The determination of informants was carried out purposively by considering their direct involvement in forest protection activities and their experiences with environmental crime issues and gender stigma.

The data analysis technique is carried out thematically through the data coding process. Data from interviews, FGDs, and observations were transcribed, then analyzed through *the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding* to identify key themes related to forest protection strategies, cultural resistance, environmental crime, and women's experiences in community-based conservation. The analysis was carried out by associating field findings with the perspectives of *green cultural criminology* and ecofeminism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Crime in the New Damaran Forest

Environmental crime is a form of contemporary crime that has a wide impact on the sustainability of ecosystems and the lives of local communities. *Green criminology* sees environmental crimes not only as acts that violate formal laws, but also as a form of *environmental harm* that damages the ecological balance and causes social losses in a sustainable manner. This approach broadens the understanding of crime by placing environmental destruction as an ecological justice issue involving power relations, economic interests, and weak protection of nature.

The destruction of forests in Indonesia shows that environmental crime is still a serious problem that is taking place structurally. The practice of illegal logging, encroachment of forest areas, and exploitation of natural resources continues, despite various environmental regulations that have been implemented. Data from *Global Forest Watch* and *the World Resources Institute* show that Indonesia has lost millions of hectares of forest cover since the early 2000s, which has an impact on biodiversity loss and increased carbon emissions (TanahAir.net, 2025). Environmental crime cannot only be understood as an individual act, but is related to the economic-political structures that encourage the massive exploitation of nature (White, 2016).

Aceh Province is one of the regions experiencing ecological pressure due to forest destruction. Although Aceh still has large tropical forest areas and is an important part of the Leuser Ecosystem Area, deforestation and forest exploitation practices have persisted in recent years. Data from the HAKA Foundation shows that Aceh experiences the loss of thousands of hectares of forest cover every year, including in protected forest areas and conservation areas (HAKA Foundation, 2024). In addition, WRI Indonesia notes that forest destruction in Aceh has been going on for decades and has led to the loss of the ecological function of forests as a buffer for the livelihood of local communities (WRI Indonesia, 2018). This condition shows that environmental damage in Aceh is a systemic problem and is related to weak supervision of natural resource exploitation activities.

The ecological crisis also occurred in the Damaran Baru Forest, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. Forest destruction in this area has a direct impact on people's lives, especially the flash flood disaster in 2015 which damaged residents' homes and agricultural land in the surrounding community (Dewi & Rohma, 2023). The disaster shows that the impact of environmental crimes is not only ecological, but also social and economic. *Green criminology* views that local communities affected by environmental damage can be understood as victims of *environmental harm*, although in many cases the losses they suffer are not always recognized in the formal legal system (White, 2013).

The ecological damage in Damaran Baru shows the link between the exploitation of nature and social injustice. Halsey and White (1998) explain that environmental damage is often produced through the logic of economic development and exploitation that ignores ecological sustainability. Environmental degradation has an impact on the surrounding community, causing the loss of livelihood sources, increasing vulnerability to disasters, and disrupting the community's relationship with their living space. This shows that environmental crimes not only have an impact on nature, but also threaten the social and cultural sustainability of local communities.

Green cultural criminology sees environmental damage not only as a material problem, but also as a result of cultural constructions and social practices that legitimize the exploitation of nature (Brisman & South, 2013). Forest exploitation is often framed as part of economic development and industrial needs, so that ecological damage is normalized in people's social lives. This perspective shows that the practice of environmental destruction cannot be separated from the cultural narratives, power relations, and social structures that support the exploitation of natural resources (Ferrell et al., 2015). Environmental crime in the Damaran Baru Forest is not only a problem of ecological crime, but also a cultural and political problem of the environment.

The ecological crisis that occurred in Damaran Baru then gave birth to the collective awareness of the community about the importance of forest protection. The experience of being victims of ecological disasters encouraged some women in Damaran Baru to form the Mpu Uteun group as female rangers who patrol and supervise the forest (Dewi & Rohma, 2023). The emergence of Mpu Uteun shows that local communities are not only victims of environmental damage, but also important actors in building resistance to environmental crimes. The emerging community resistance can be understood as a form of social response to the failure of environmental protection by the state and other formal structures (South, 2014).

The perspective of *green criminology* and *green cultural criminology* looking at environmental crimes in the Damaran Baru Forest shows that ecological damage is a multidimensional problem that involves the relationship between the environment, culture, power, and social injustice. Forest destruction not only destroys ecosystems, but also affects the lives of local communities who depend on forests as living spaces. Thus, an understanding of environmental crime needs to look at how the practices of natural exploitation are produced structurally as well as how local communities build forms of resistance to maintain the sustainability of their environment.

Mpu Uteun Patrol Strategy in the Prevention of Environmental Crime

The patrol strategy carried out by Mpu Uteun is a form of collective effort by the local community in preventing environmental crimes in the Damaran Baru Forest, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. The presence of Mpu Uteun cannot be separated from the community's experience of ecological damage caused by forest degradation, namely the 2015 flash flood disaster that damaged residents' homes and agricultural land in the surrounding community (Dewi & Rohma, 2023). The experience formed the collective awareness of group members about the importance of forest protection as a living space and a source of sustainability for local communities.

Through the perspective of *green criminology*, the practice of illegal logging, forest encroachment, and illegal exploitation of natural resources is understood as a form of *environmental harm* that has a wide impact on social and ecological life (White, 2016). Forest destruction not only causes economic losses, but also damages ecological structures, increases disaster risk, and threatens the sustainability of the lives of communities around forests. This has led to the emergence of community-based resistance in response to weak environmental protection and limited state oversight of forest areas. The forest patrol carried out by Mpu Uteun is a form of prevention of environmental crimes born from the direct experience of the community as victims of ecological damage.

The patrols carried out by Mpu Uteun members aim to monitor forest areas from illegal logging activities, poaching, and other actions that have the potential to damage the environment. Patrol activities are carried out periodically by walking through forest areas that are considered prone to illegal activities. In addition to supervising, group members also replant trees in damaged areas and maintain the area around the river basin to prevent wider environmental degradation (Dewi & Rohma, 2023). This practice shows that the Mpu Uteun patrol strategy is not only oriented towards monitoring regional security, but also on ecological restoration efforts and protecting environmental sustainability (Goyes, 2023).

Through the perspective of *green cultural criminology*, the Mpu Uteun patrol strategy can be understood as a form of cultural resistance to the practice of natural exploitation that is normalized in certain social structures (Brisman & South, 2013). Forest protection carried out by Mpu Uteun members is not only interpreted as a technical conservation activity, but also as a social practice that contains moral and cultural values regarding the importance of maintaining human relations with nature. In the Gayo culture, forests have social and ecological meanings that are important for people's lives, so forest destruction is seen as a threat to the social balance and survival of the community (Jamhir & Gayo, 2020). The patrols carried out

by Mpu Uteun can be considered as part of efforts to maintain local values regarding environmental protection (Brisman, 2017; Ferrell et al., 2015).

The existence of Mpu Uteun also shows that the prevention of environmental crimes does not always depend on formal state mechanisms, but can be done through community-based social control. *Green criminology* emphasizes that local communities have an important role in preventing *environmental harm*, especially in areas that have limited formal supervision of natural resource exploitation activities (White, 2016). In this context, the patrols carried out by Mpu Uteun function as a form of social supervision of illegal activities in forest areas as well as build collective awareness of the community about the importance of protecting the environment.

The patrol strategy carried out by Mpu Uteun is also inseparable from various social and cultural challenges. As a group of female rangers, members of Mpu Uteun face gender stigma and cultural resistance that views forest patrol activities as a masculine realm (Dewi & Rohma, 2023). Women who are active in forest areas are often perceived as violating social and customary norms that limit women in the domestic space. This condition shows that Mpu Uteun's struggle is not only related to environmental protection, but also a form of resistance to patriarchal structures that limit women's involvement in public spaces and environmental conservation.

The Mpu Uteun patrol strategy can be understood as a form of preventing environmental crimes that are ecological and social. Patrol activities not only aim to prevent forest destruction, but also build community collective awareness of the importance of environmental protection and women's involvement in community-based conservation. Through the perspective of *green cultural criminology*, the practice of patrolling shows that environmental protection is part of cultural practices and forms of resistance to various social structures that legitimize the exploitation of nature.

Female Gawain Resistance

The involvement of women in forest protection activities through the Mpu Uteun group shows that there is a form of resistance to the patriarchal culture that is still strong in society. Traditional societies that still apply Gayo culture, public spaces and activities related to security and territorial protection tend to be positioned as the realm of men, while women are more attached to domestic roles. These conditions form a social construct regarding the division of gender roles that limit women's participation in conservation activities and decision-making related to the environment.

Patriarchal culture works through a social process that places men as the dominant group in the social structure, while women are placed in subordinate positions. Forest patrol activities carried out by Mpu Uteun members are seen as acts that transcend traditional gender boundaries. Women who actively enter forest areas, conduct patrols, and engage in environmental surveillance are often considered incompatible with prevailing social norms. This condition shows that the resistance faced by Mpu Uteun is not only related to environmental protection, but also to women's efforts to negotiate their position in the patriarchal social structure.

There are social norms in Gayo culture, such as *the sumang* that regulates women's behavior in the social life of the community (Lestari, 2012). These norms indirectly form

restrictions on women's mobility, including in activities carried out in public spaces or forest areas. As a result, women involved in forest patrols can experience social stigma for being considered out of the gender roles attached to them. Goffman (1963) explained that stigma arises when individuals are considered to deviate from the accepted social identity of society. Based on interviews with members of Mpu Uteun, the stigma against female rangers arises because their activities are perceived as contrary to the traditional feminine construct that places women as passive figures and in domestic spaces.

Cultural resistance to female rangers is also seen through stereotypes about women's ability to protect forests. Patrol activities that require courage, physical endurance, and high mobility are often associated with masculinity. Courtenay (2000) explains that masculinity in patriarchal culture is built through social constructs that connect men with power, courage, and dominance over public spaces. Women who enter the space often face doubts about their capacity and legitimacy. The same thing is also explained by Rudman and Glick (2001), that women who show agentic or active characteristics in public spaces often experience social *backlash* because they are considered to violate applicable gender norms.

Despite facing cultural resistance, Mpu Uteun members maintained their involvement in forest protection. This condition shows that there is a form of identity negotiation carried out by women in the face of patriarchal structures. Butler (1988) explained that gender is not a fixed identity, but is formed through social actions that are continuously reproduced in daily life. Mpu Uteun's patrol activities can be understood as practices that challenge traditional gender constructs, by showing that women also have the capacity to be environmental protectors and ecological security actors.

Mpu Uteun's resistance also shows how women are building new spaces for participation in community-based conservation. Agarwal's (2009) research shows that women's involvement in forest management can strengthen conservation effectiveness and improve the sustainability of natural resource management. Women's involvement in forest patrols in the Mpu Uteun group is not only a form of ecological protection, but also creates space for women to be involved in decision-making and public activities that were previously dominated by men. This shows that the activities of female rangers not only have an ecological dimension, but also a social and political dimension related to the struggle to gain recognition and legitimacy in society.

The perspective of ecofeminism sees that subordination to women is related to the exploitation of nature. Merchant (1989) and Plumwood (2002) explain that the patriarchal system builds dominance relations that not only place women as a subordinate group, but also position nature as an object of exploitation. Women's struggle to protect forests can be understood as a form of resistance to two forms of domination at once, namely domination over women and domination over nature. Mpu Uteun's activities show that environmental protection is also a social struggle to maintain living space and reject structures that legitimize ecological exploitation, as well as gender injustice.

The Mpu Uteun group also shows that women have an important position in building community-based ecological justice. Davies (2023) explained that *the gendering green criminology* approach emphasizes the importance of looking at women's experiences in environmental crime and ecological protection issues. In this context, women are not only positioned as victims of environmental crises, but also as active actors who build strategies for

environmental protection and social resistance. Mpu Uteun's experience shows that women are able to build community-based forms of conservation that not only protect forests, but also challenge patriarchal structures that limit women's involvement in public spaces and environmental management.

Ecofeminism's Perspective on Women as Actors to Prevent Environmental Crimes

Ecofeminism is a perspective that sees the relationship between the exploitation of nature and the subordination of women in the patriarchal system (Anjum, 2020; Heidari & Javadi, 2025). This perspective develops from a critique of social structures that place nature and women as objects of domination, exploitation, and control in patriarchal economic and cultural systems (Hunnicut, 2019; Öztürk, 2020). Environmental damage in ecofeminism cannot be separated from power relations that also produce gender injustice. Thus, the struggle for environmental protection is understood as well as a social struggle to resist the domination of women and nature.

The link between women and the environment arises because women often have first-hand experience of the impact of ecological crises in daily life. Agarwal (1992) explained that women in many communities have a close relationship with natural resources because of their involvement in meeting household needs, water management, food, and the environment. As a result, ecological damage not only impacts the environment physically, but also increases the social and economic burden on women. In the context of communities around forests, environmental degradation can disrupt livelihoods, increase vulnerability to disasters, and reduce people's access to natural resources that sustain their livelihoods.

The above phenomenon can be seen in the experience of women in Damaran Baru who face the impact of forest destruction and flash floods due to ecological degradation. The experience of being a victim of an environmental crisis then shaped the collective consciousness of women to be involved in forest protection through the Mpu Uteun group. The presence of Mpu Uteun shows that women are not only affected by environmental crimes, but also important actors in building community-based ecological resistance. This action from the perspective of ecofeminism is a form of women's *agency* in defending living space and environmental sustainability from the threat of natural exploitation (Shiva & Mies, 2014).

The patrol activities carried out by Mpu Uteun members show that women have the ability to be actively involved in environmental conservation and forest protection. So far, ranger activities and the security of forest areas are more often positioned as masculine spaces that are synonymous with physical strength and male dominance. The existence of Mpu Uteun shows that women are also able to carry out their role as environmental guardians while building community-based conservation strategies. Darwin et al.'s (2025) research on female rangers in Aceh, shows that women are able to build social negotiation strategies to maintain their involvement in forest protection despite facing patriarchal cultural resistance.

Women's involvement in the perspective of ecofeminism in environmental protection is not only understood as social participation, but also as a form of resistance against the system of domination that destroys nature and marginalizes women. Warren (2000) explains that patriarchy builds dualism between men and women, culture and nature, rationality and emotions, in which women and nature are placed in subordinate positions. As a result, exploitation of the environment often goes hand in hand with a disregard for women's

experience and knowledge. Mpu Uteun's activities are a form of resistance to the patriarchal logic that has been marginalizing women from the environmental management space.

The existence of Mpu Uteun also shows the importance of local knowledge and women's experience in environmental conservation. Berkes et al. (2000) and Gadgil et al. (1993) explain that local ecological knowledge has an important role in maintaining environmental sustainability and community-based natural resource management. In practice, Mpu Uteun members not only patrol the forest, but also build public awareness about the importance of protecting water sources, reforestation, and maintaining the ecological balance of forest areas. These activities show that women have an important contribution to building sustainable conservation practices based on local community experiences.

Women's involvement in environmental conservation is also related to efforts to build ecological justice. White (2013) explains that ecological justice is not only about the protection of nature, but also about the distribution of the impact of environmental damage on certain groups of people. In many cases, women are a more vulnerable group to the impacts of ecological crises due to their social and economic position in society. Women's involvement in environmental protection is an important part of creating more inclusive and participatory ecological justice.

The *perspective of gendering green criminology* also emphasizes the importance of looking at women's experiences in environmental crime and ecological conservation issues (Davies, 2023). This approach shows that women are not only victims of environmental damage, but also agents of change who have the ability to build forms of resistance to the exploitation of nature. Mpu Uteun presents women as ecological security actors who not only protect forests from the threat of destruction, but also build social awareness about the importance of environmental protection. The activity shows that women's struggle in environmental conservation is part of efforts to build a fairer relationship between people, the environment, and social structures in society.

The perspective of ecofeminism helps to understand that Mpu Uteun's struggle is not only related to forest protection, but also a form of social struggle against patriarchal structures and ecological exploitation. The presence of women as rangers shows that women have an important position in building community-based conservation and ecological justice. Through patrol activities, forest monitoring, and efforts to maintain environmental sustainability, Mpu Uteun members show that women can be the main actors in resistance to environmental crimes as well as agents of social change in society.

CONCLUSION

Environmental crimes in the Damaran Baru Forest show that ecological damage is not only a violation of environmental laws, but also related to social, cultural, and power relations injustices that legitimize the exploitation of nature. The perspective of *green criminology* and *green cultural criminology* shows that the practices of illegal logging, forest degradation, and exploitation of natural resources produce *environmental harm* that has a direct impact on the lives of local communities, including increased vulnerability to ecological disasters such as flash floods that occurred in Damaran Baru. Environmental damage cannot be understood only as an ecological problem, but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon related to the economic-political structure and social construction of man's relationship with nature. The presence of

Mpu Uteun as a group of female rangers shows a form of community resistance to environmental crimes as well as resistance to patriarchal culture. The patrol strategy carried out by Mpu Uteun members not only serves as an effort to monitor and prevent forest destruction, but also as a social practice that contains moral, cultural, and ecological values of the local community. Patrol, reforestation, and water resource protection activities show that environmental conservation can be built through community-based social control and the active involvement of local communities in maintaining environmental sustainability. This research also shows that women have an important position as actors of ecological justice. The perspective of ecofeminism helps explain that subordination to women is related to the exploitation of nature in a patriarchal system.

Mpu Uteun members face gender stigma and cultural resistance because forest conservation activities are still seen as a masculine realm in society. Women's involvement in forest patrols shows a form of identity negotiation and resistance to traditional gender constructs that limit women to domestic spaces. The presence of women as rangers shows that women are not only victims of ecological crises, but also agents of social change who are able to build community-based conservation practices. The integration of the perspectives of *green cultural criminology* and ecofeminism in this study complements the understanding of environmental crime as a multidimensional phenomenon involving the relationship between environment, culture, gender, and power. This perspective shows that environmental protection cannot be separated from the struggle against social injustice and patriarchy. Therefore, efforts to combat environmental crimes need to involve strengthening local communities, recognizing the role of women in environmental conservation, and developing environmental protection policies that are more participatory, inclusive, and based on ecological justice.

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