

Weaponizing Environmental Destruction: The Epistemology of Ecocide in Myanmar's Post-2021 Military Coup

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Abstract

This paper investigates the epistemological underpinning of ecocide in the current crisis happening in Myanmar, following the February 2021 coup d'etat. This paper argues that the environmental destruction is not just simply a collateral damage of the war, but a deliberate and calculated maneuver of the military junta in pursuit of their self interests. These include leveraging nature to fund their military operations, displacing the Rohingya people from their territories and suppressing pro-democracy movements. The increased exploitation of natural resources such as timber, minerals, and gem stones— predominantly in ethnic minority areas— reveals how these places have been transformed into strategic sites of counter-insurgency and military control.

Conceptually, this paper integrates political ecology with epistemology of ecocide in understanding how ecological violence is produced and epistemologically obscured as an international crime. It asks how a large-scale environmental destruction in Myanmar is visible, knowable, and legally legible as international crime, while at the same time being dismissed by existing dominant narratives of “collateral damage”. Even though ecocide is an advanced international crime, which includes its proposal in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, there still exist epistemic challenges such as establishing intent, knowledge, and criminal responsibility for environmental destruction that is spatially expansive and temporally diffuse. Overall, this paper employs doctrinal and critical discourse analysis in understanding how the current ecocide in Myanmar functions as both an instrument of environmental destruction and a tool against democratic struggle and self-determination.