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Terms to Know

- Anti-speciesist* - A person believing against the use of animals as resources and against the hierarchy of species labels
- Barrio* - A camp within the occupation typically within the networks of the forest treehouses
- Cis-Male and Female* - A person whose identity matches with their born sex
- Drug-Aware* - Aligned with a space's individual drug use guidelines, meaning consent must be given by a consensus of the space for drugs to be used
- Drug-Free* - Aligned with a space's individual drug use guidelines, meaning no drugs are allowed to be consumed
- FLINT* - Stands for "Female, Lesbian, Intersexual, Non-Binary, Transgender"
- Female and Male Associated persons* - A person identifying as a male or female
- Freegan* - Food and products that are not vegan but were freely acquired
- Vegan* - Food and products that are not made from animals

Introduction:

It is funny how when you walk through a forest of fallen trees and decaying bark you may notice small blades of grass peaking through; a ring of fungi blooming; or a row of ants criss-crossing away from your hands as you lean down to lift up the log. That moment is the cross section between human power and the nature we are surrounded by. The underlying connectedness of wilderness and humans that is constantly evolving (Vining, 2008). The cohesion and the conflict of resource management is tangible in the varying ebb and flow of everyday life. What or who has power over others in terms of humans or nonhumans? How is the hierarchy constructed between humans, dead trees, ants, or fungi and by whom is this pyramid created? Just as the monoculture was planted, capitalist ideologies were also incubated, spread, and made to appear “progressive” or better yet, “the right way” to live (Tsing, 2017). Maintaining that pyramid structure becomes the focus of those sitting at the top (Harvey, 2005), through capitalists states and leaders, there is attention to commodifying nature and the hierarchy of species fueled by the mantra of growing economies. Beyond witnessing climate change and inequalities through media and everyday life, questions arise of how successful contestation or change could be made in order to pump the brakes on the escalation of anthropocentric effects on the earth. Who is able to reinforce changes to systems supported by major world powers and what would that change look like to live in a more equal and cohesive way with our environment to which we rely on?

The conversation of capitalism and nature between media and academia is often one of picking sides, conflict, and competing forces- quite rarely are the two merged in open dialogues with give and take. With the rise of privatization and free market systems as a result of neoliberal processes (such as restructuring and influencing different economies and states within the 20th century), the planet saw major shifts in the mindset of the West and effects on populations of people and nature as a result (Harvey, 2005). Within her work on the Matsutake, Anna Tsing, for instance, mapped and created a dialogue around the network of mushrooms and the structures that both grate against and enable success through cohesion of nature within the Anthropocene. Accumulation and precarity create a skewed system, “capitalist ruins” per se (Tsing, 2017), that is manipulated over time through hierarchical structures linked with wealth, power, and

oppression. It is the structures, themselves, that further divide the human anthropocentric mentality, which causes a “tension with nature, the environment, and non-human animals,” from the more inclusive ways of thought (Boddice, 2011) which Tsing looks to counteract. Inherently, by talking about nature within the context of humans, it becomes politicized (Latour, 2017), separating the natural ecology from nature perceived by humans and for humans. On the other side, anthropologists have also realised the inadequacy of using nature-culture dichotomy (Descola, 1996) and suggest practicing the research to not radically separate the two (Kohn, 2013). For the sake of this thesis, I look to instead focus on how the mushrooms provide a lens into understanding the complex relationship between humans and nonhumans, such as relational “shimmers” (Rose, 2017) and “encounters” (Haraway, 2008). Just as I explore the details of the interconnectedness of the monoculture log with the earth and ants in response to my own action, my research will replicate this on a larger scale with environmental activism in the Hambach Forest. I look to understand the influences of the land occupation and ecoactivism and how the Hambi Bleibt community touches on relations with nature both as a motivation and future.

Growing Hierarchies within the Anthropocene

While the duration is still contested, the Anthropocene has been in motion since at least the 18th century, as humans are considered to be a centralized power and subsequent main driver of ecological effects (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). Effects of the Anthropocene can be seen by the distribution of value on elements of the earth and also humans as social habits prove to have immense impacts on the environment (Latour, 2017). The ideas of a few in power became the default for the masses through neoliberalism, casting humans in the main directive role, also known as the nature-culture paradox (Shaffer and Young, 2015). David Harvey explains how dispossession and inequality become results of the system and globalization normalizes such behaviors and ‘rights’. Power is fueled by resource accumulation and monetary gain for some humans who are higher on the ladder through privilege, structural oppression, and even geographical access to resources (Harvey, 2005). It becomes important then within anthropology to be critical of treating humans as exceptional and understand the constructs that have bound earlier views of the field (Kohn, 2013, 7). There becomes a fine line of researching human

cultures with understanding of nonhuman actors versus feeding into anthropocentric narcissism and misplacing nonhuman representations within human contexts (19). How to cope with everything in between becomes convoluted in the quickening pace of daily life pressured by Western forces.

The Anthropocene is not only a time of changing mentality around humans' relationship with the planet, but the physical makeup of the planet, itself, through actions based on ideology; such as resource extraction, or more specifically, mining. What begins as a means for capital gain and position within the global trade markets and power structures becomes an end for many structures outside of that beneficiary cycle. The relationship between humans and their environment becomes based on take and gain within fossil fuel systems (Moore, 2015). These systems and their allies create new definitions of what it means to survive and what is necessary on a global scale. How can a person, city, or country survive *economically*? The boom of coal mining in Germany after the industrial revolution is an example of this survival system (Brock and Dunlap, 2018). Companies such as Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke, or RWE, build business around extraction of resources in the form of brown lignite coal in order to provide electricity for their own country and within Europe¹. This is exemplified with RWE's Hambach mine, in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Just as survival based on economics and accumulation are spiking, the justification for needing and taking more becomes easier- it falls within the system of "growth" (Harvey, 2005). RWE provides jobs to locals and 40% of the power requirements of Germany, reframing their position as necessary and integrated since the 1970's². However, as coal energy is marketed and normalized, it simultaneously creates negative consequences in the form of inequality, whether it be relocated people, hurting wildlife, or other ecologies and persons that fall below it on the capitalist pyramid (Rinscheid and Wüstenhagen, 2019). We see that same inequality with accumulation and dispossession, as Harvey mentioned, between the earth's resources and how humans and non-humans benefit or suffer (Harvey, 2005). Using "corporate counter-insurgency," RWE strategically divides the narrative of resistance to coal extraction into their 'normal' business being threatened by "eco-terrorists"

¹ <https://www.group.rwe/en/the-group>

² <https://www.group.rwe/en/the-group>

(Cullman and Curry, 2011) and using Germany's dependency on capitalism to justify their practices as economical and valuable (Brock and Dunlap 2018).

As transparency behind the negative effects of the anthropocene rises, the narrative gains more credibility, and the study of contestation and activism becomes intertwined with the growing worldwide effects of the anthropocene. This highlights the use of activism, and subsequently, eco-activism which combats climate injustices from coal extraction and deforestation to pollution and extinctions (Scarce, 2017). Within anthropology, the study of people is critical to the field but when maintaining a critical view of the anthropocene, it becomes important to reflect on how nature intertwines and shapes the narratives of such communities (Hejnal, 2017). Provoked by Tsing (2017), Latour (2016), and Descola (1996), the focus should include the interplay of human and nonhuman to gain an accurate view (Tsing, 2017). The effects of anthropocentric values naturally affect the humans participating in the systems, or not in the case of climate change, but by studying the points of contention, new relationships and alternatives can shine through.

The Field; Forest history then and now

The Hambach Forest in North Rhine-Westphalia Germany becomes an epicenter for people bridging the gap between themselves and nature; breaking the hierarchy that is so present within the anthropocene. The forest itself dates back to 12,000 years ago as the last ice age receded and is home to some of the oldest wildlife and trees in Europe (Brock and Dunlap 2018). With the surge of extraction from RWE gaining monopoly in the lignite coal industry, land was subsequently purchased and the forest destroyed to expand the mine. In 2020, only a fraction of the forest remains³ compared to just before the mine was created in the 1970's (Brock and Dunlap 2018). Although there has recently been political ruling to end further cutting, there is continued water pumping from the forest area to the mine that has irreversible, harmful environmental effects⁴. The expansion of the mine also led to forced evictions and buy-outs of neighboring towns such as Manheim and Morschenich with over 5000 people displaced from

³ See Figure 1 in Appendix

⁴ Interview, Mouny, 24/3/2020

their homes⁵. As one older resident of the neighboring town, Buir, puts it, “pro-mine people are just sitting back twiddling their fingers blindly while the other half (points to self) hates it. I try to keep my forest traditions alive with my daughters so they can do something.. Which they do”⁶. As humans started to notice the injustices taking place for human and nature persons (systematically considered lower on the hierarchy by humans) the need to change this zero-sum game narrative became imminent for some. Human intervention becomes intertwined with evolution breaching the point of nature and creating irreparable impacts based on anthropocentrism (Boddice, 2011).

Occupations, forest walks, and protest demonstrations started forming in and around the Hambach to raise awareness and use action to create change. Links between government and big corporations (Brand, 1999), the separation of individual action from state sanction policies, and people attempting to take back control of their future comes into play (Sternsdorff-Cisterna, 2015). Eco-activists then take on this hybrid role by displaying ecocentric counter-culture (Zimmerman, 1986) with “scientific citizenship” as they seek out alternatives and combat the health (in this case environmental) standards from the state (Sternsdorff-Cisterna, 2015). With the growth of the Hambach Bleibt occupation in 2012, direct action and anarchy became results of such citizenship and methods of gaining attention while stalling the deforestation efforts to expand mining. The occupation becomes one of environmental justice as eco-activists occupy the trees in order to stall cutting- using their own agency to speak for and “save” the forest (Scarce, 2017).

Based on the guiding question of “who decides?” (Hambach.org, 2020) the group focuses on anti-capitalism and environmental justice, while self-organizing within the forest environment using a direct democracy model. According to occupants, Hambach Bleibt is seen as “a ‘try’.. We are trying this new organizational way of living together and coexisting..what comes of it, I don't know. But we are trying now to make something different”⁷. In reference to Maple Razsa’s work within the Occupy Slovenia movement, the self-organizational model and every day actions highlight best the perceived ideal outcome or success for the occupation (Razsa 2012). Through

⁵ Fieldnotes, Hambach Camp Diary, 17/3/2020

⁶ Interview, Dominic, 17/2/2020

⁷ Fieldnotes, Hambach Camp Diary, 1/2/2020

this lens, it provides a way to research how eco-activists in the Hambach occupation negotiate their ideas of what the future should look like through their own day to day actions and focuses. The negotiation of temporality used within eco-activist groups offers insight into influences, goals, and practice. Timescapes analysis becomes an ideal way to understand climate justice movements (Barnes, 2016), as the goals and future outcomes go beyond current generations on the earth. It becomes an important tool when evaluating a group to understand their “hindsight and foresight” (Zeiderman, 2016, 171) in order to add temporal context to present actions. Additionally, considerations for how the future influences the present using Eduardo Kohn’s (2013, 217) “living-future logic.” Therefore, this thesis looks to weave the value of temporality together with the environmental movement initiatives within the political context of the Hambach Forest to gain a greater understanding of the effects and outcomes that hold influence transnationally for futures near and far.

Guiding Questions and Methodology

This thesis intends to better understand how the everyday experiences of eco-activists within the Hambach Forest occupation transcend initial political and environmental goals and highlight tangible environmental shifts for the future. By evaluating the tools eco-activists use and the motivations of actions, the community structure becomes the focal point for how the future is perceived. The fieldwork was then driven by a central research question:

“How are perceptions of the future negotiated and informed by human-nature entanglements among eco-activists within different spatial contexts in the Hambach Forest, Germany?”

After following the occupation topic previously and becoming more aware of environmental movements across Germany, it was my intention to look beyond just the occupation and account for the meaning in between the lines. There was inspiration to see how the practice of an occupation and self-organized community structure could uncover motivations and tools (Razsa, 2011) that would be transferable to different movements. The relationship between eco-activism and the influence of security, as a concept, can be compared to Maple Rasza’s work with Occupy Slovenia and others worldwide providing a theoretical framework for how motivations and actions shape the occupation and culture. By using the history of activism within Germany, and

influential transnational movements, the consequences and ideologies that influence and share a narrative with the Hambi Bleibt eco-activists are shaped.

Because of the environmental focus within the political occupation, I then looked to see how the actions and alternative lifestyles of the occupants would highlight potential human and nature connectedness within a capitalist country (Tsing, 2017). Human and nature entanglements prove to justify a spectrum of actions as seen within naturecultures, the Gaia complex, and contrasting disentanglement with cohesion (Haraway, 2003; Latour, 2017; Tsing, 2017). Future making and use of time then also comes into play when thinking of climate effects and the timeline the Hambach forest is on for survival. Through environmental future discussions (Bryant, 2019) and perceptions of the future (Appadurai, 2013) I relate daily activities and references to time to better understand goals and where the occupation fits within that ideology. Discussions of hope as a vital tool (Lueck, 2007) that is both obvious and disputed throughout the occupation becomes the concluding point.

Throughout my fieldwork, I had to adapt to structures and social norms that I had not previously anticipated, such as social norms formed by the influence of security and fear in the form of “security culture” and the effects it would have on my own experience. Original plans to develop strong profiles of who the activists were proved to be both inappropriate and unattainable in many ways and so my focus needed to shift to the constructs that made that so. The scope of my community profiles was altered, but highlighted new aspects of security that would go on to shape how the occupation functioned and altered future making for myself as well. While I gained invaluable insight and data from outside networks and supporter relations, the focus was shifted to just my participants in the occupation and detailed how the relationships they have affect them from the inside. My own experiences coming in as an outsider have also shaped how I will address education and on-boarding of ideals and history and have taken on more significant meaning within my fieldwork. My positionality in many ways helps me to build rapport but also excludes me from certain social groups. I will use my own reflexivity and conflicts to highlight the shaping of eco-activists through a personal example of “on-boarding” for a new activist and observations of access in the occupation to better understand norms.

In order to gain insights for my case study into my research question and subsidiary questions, I have used qualitative research to structure my fieldwork with an emphasis on participant observation. Specifically, my tactic of “being there” for the everyday tasks and activities of my participants (Boccagni, P. and M. Schrooten, 2018) became a key point of access. My participant observation hinges on the successful methods used by Kathleen and Billie R. DeWalt with consistent logging of each day and event (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011) and those reinforced by O’Reilly as I depended on informal interviews, casual chats, and observation in many situations. Additionally, by conducting semi-structured interviews I enabled my participants to lead the conversation and gain better insights on their own perspective (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). On my first day of fieldwork, I attribute luck and the initial “being there” strategy to having it fall on a Kufa night within the camp- when the entire occupation gathers and the Hambi Camp cooks dinner for everyone. It was there that I met my gatekeeper, Tucker, who would provide not only knowledge and social access to parts of the occupation for me (O’Reilly, 2012), but physical skills as well with climbing. Recognizing the value of trust, loyalty, and physical ability to actually climb up into the treehouses to stay in the forest highlighted my potential bottlenecks at the start (O’Reilly, 2012) but also gave me concrete steps to follow in order to be accepted and participate more. These steps also provided valuable information to reflect on as an outsider (O’Reilly, 2009). Learning to climb and moving into the forest also gave me access to two other long-term occupants, Mouny and Thistle who would prove to be both confidants and friends throughout my time. Because of the sensitive nature of activist anonymity, I have changed all names of the persons I interviewed and had conversations with. Additionally, for their safety, I will not be sharing background information or profiles on persons and will be maintaining a gender neutral pronoun for each (they). The persons I have chosen to include in this thesis are those who are active amongst the occupation and were in the space for nearly my entire research time.

Being a part of an established occupation also gave me structured participation in workshops, projects, and plenaries where all were welcomed (Low, S.M. and S.E. Merry, 2010). By attending the majority of these meetings and events, I gained exposure with more eco-activists and could build rapport in a more natural way. Over time by gaining rapport with

more participants by showing up each week and my frequent climbing lessons, I was able to move living sites from the Hambi Camp 2.0 to the forest barrio of Lluna and live in a treehouse. Switching my sleeping sites was a small move but provided the spatial contexts I was looking for to better understand the occupation as a whole. Having small scale multi-sited fieldwork within the large occupation provided well-rounded insights and comparisons of different spaces with reference to Mark-Anthony Falzon's compilation and argument for ethnography bound and unbound (Falzon, 2009). I was able to be identified as not just a long term visitor in the Hambi Camp but a "forest person," gaining more trust and respect (O'Reilly, 2009). Once living inside the Hambach forest, I categorized my diary logs to separate spaces and my observations in different areas, they would later be broken into two main sections: Hambi Camp (week 1-3) and Forest Camp (week 3-9) and one smaller section for interactions in Mahnwache. My final section of note logging comes in week 9-12 where I am out of the field doing digital analysis and reflection. By using diaries and daily logs to keep track and remember my observations and conversations, I was able to maintain day to day observations (O'Reilly, 2012). Because of limited access to electricity and internet connection, I used two journals; one larger for drawings, maps, and details, and one small pocket sized for on the spot interviews and notes throughout the day. I experienced limitations with using my phone because of security reasons and carrying larger journals or my laptop for notes was too difficult while climbing up and down fifteen meters each day to access different materials. Within such field notes, I logged, sensory observations, personal feelings, mapping of sites, recommendations, and created drawings.

I complement the participant observation with sensory ethnography through my weekly logs and my own reflexivity and positionality. My own position as a white woman from the United States doing graduate studies enabled me access to spaces such as FLINT events and gave me credibility outside of being a visitor potentially working with police. Because of security culture, being from the U.S. was only discussed in trusted groups and also helped my trustworthiness because I had "gotten out" of such a "capitalist trash fire" to seek out alternative lifestyles that combat such capitalism. My lack of experience within radical leftist movements set me apart because of my style of security culture knowledge and dress- I was repeatedly known as

the “clean girl”⁸ or thought of as a supporter causing trust issues with new people. My American personality and openness may have caused certain social groups to stay away from talking to me but it also helped others identify with my vocal vulnerability and mistakes. I use these experiences to better understand “ideal” activist norms and dress and reflect on how my position was contested and exposed in different situations. I do recognize that while “language accessibility”⁹ was a large part of the occupation structure, navigating German speaking situations enabled me to have more contact with different people because I would need to ask for a translation or was needing help which helped to build rapport. Many situations were international or I had a “translation corner” or personal translator, but with a majority of occupants having their first language be German, there are definitely restrictions on details and small social cues that I may have missed, however it was not as problematic as anticipated.

Finally, as my fieldwork took place during the early stages of the global COVID-19 pandemic, there were increased conversations about public health and increased security because of gathering size regulations and lockdown protocol. While the virus ultimately did cut my fieldwork short, this was a result of my own positionality and comfort levels. COVID-19 did not substantially change daily life for my participants or the occupation as a whole. The adjustments in legally unregistering as a demonstration point and having increased police surveillance on Hambi Camp were perceived as part of common insecurities linked with political occupations and activism¹⁰.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized to both share with the reader a way of entangling humans and nature in concurrent dialogue with use of natural references and scenarios, and to shed light on the complex evolution taking place within communities linked with environmental justice.

The first chapter introduces the occupation environment as an example of politicized nature and why the participant ecoactivists are actively there. Through examples of security culture, the current climate of human-focused hierarchies and how intimidation and power

⁸ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 6/2/2020

⁹ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, multiple informal conversations throughout

¹⁰ Reflections on fieldwork, 15/4/2020

through such patriarchy are both negotiated and experienced. From here the second chapter focuses on the effects of living and acting within an alternative community that combats mainstream ideologies of capitalism and oppression. Different spatial groupings within the occupation camps and barrios and links to transnational activism are highlighted and develop a narrative for how protests create a global solidarity that helps us to understand motivations and goals, locally.

Chapter three brings the reader into the physical forest structures of the occupation and how everyday actions and projects create an alternative to traditional capitalist lifestyles. There is an exploration of how ideologies are executed in a self-organized system that works cohesively with nature while on the literal edge of the largest mine pit in Europe (Brock, Andrea, and Alexander Dunlap, 2018). The commodification and objectification of nature and then power dynamics that creates and exploits becomes key to changing the future narrative of human and nonhuman relations, which Hambi Bleibt strives for. The final chapter speaks to the temporality that is exposed with everyday actions and ideas of the future. The history of the now eight year long occupation becomes crucial for present motivations and the uncertainty of the future exposes hope as a guiding tool. How timescapes and history are engaged with create a narrative for the occupation's past, present, and future in and out of the Hambach Forest.

Acknowledgments

Hambi Bleibt offered many new experiences and insights but I attribute my greatest understanding to the pine monoculture. This first part of the forest that both confused me and gave me the most clarity to look outside the mainstream systems I was socialized with, myself, and would be a driving force to this thesis. As large parts of the forest were planted inorganically by man, the trees without a doubt get sick or are the first to fall and die during extreme storms. During my time in the forest, I lived next to a section of pine trees which were barren or on the ground, killed by the unnatural ecosystem they were planted in, lack of ground water from the mine pumping, or a rejection from the centuries old native forest ecology around them. As humans try to fix problems that they created, like a quick fix monoculture to fill deforested land, it becomes clear that larger systems need to change. When the monoculture began crashing

down, the occupants cheered and shared excitement with me. When I saw sad, dead trees they saw a little more opportunity; that nature can win and then use that decay to make new, natural life according to its own plan. With this and thousands of other small moments and conversations, I want to thank my participants within the Hambi Bleibt occupation for teaching me to see the good in an otherwise ugly or scary situation and humility amongst the trees.

Chapter 1: Security Culture

Living as a political or environmental activist comes with restrictions, paranoia, and sometimes danger because of outside media or stigma (Baybars-Hawks, 2015). Within the Hambi Bleibt occupation, anarchy and resistance to police are pillars to everyday action and squatting within the forest and neighboring towns. The tension between occupying the space in protest and surveillance of security creates restrictions on sharing one's identity and relationship building. This chapter will introduce the current climate of the occupation and activists living within the Hambach forest and how the "battlefield has become the battlespace" with militant policing and surveillance integrated in everyday life within the community (Graham, 2012). Through examining the effects of policing (Baker, 2008), intimidation and fear to justify politicized security (Goldstein, 2010), and understanding the relationship between conflict and commodity (Baybars-Hawks, 2015), the profiles of activists and their perceptions can be better understood within the context of the Hambi Bleibt occupation.

1.1 Living in a "danger zone"

On my first day in the occupation I was warned by the first two people I encountered about being mindful when walking in and out of Morschenich because of the security cars that may come to harass me; the partly evicted ghost town was also considered part of the "danger zone." In 2018, the Hambach Forest was declared a danger zone by the German government (Earthfirstjournal.org, 2018), further allowing the use of heavy machinery and expansive police force to evict the treehouses and evacuate activists in and around the forest. This declaration enabled police to check identification for any suspicious person and furthermore "control" them if they did not have an I.D. present (Bundesministerium Der Verteidigung, 2020), the term becoming synonymous with areas of war or combat and persons as potential terrorists. In this case the natural environment of the forest became "politically destabilising" (Dunlap, 2014) as anticapital anarchists challenged the use of the forest as a resource which was already linked with German politics- creating space for civil disobedience and law enforcement. Walking out of the Hambi Camp 2.0 with visitors, when headlights would flash at us at night, I was quickly

asked “are we still living in a danger zone here?”¹¹ which translates to “should we run from the security car or are we safe?”

In less formal declarations, many of the eco-activists within the forest described the area as a “war-zone”¹²; a place of constant battles with police and civilians both using a variety of tactics to stop their perceived enemy. “War-zone” speaks for the history of the space and violent past whereas “danger-zone” speaks to the immediate label on present police engagement. Within feminism movements language of being at “battle” are also used to insinuate the “combative nature of front-line activism” and the presence of a system “fighting back” (Chamberlain, 2017). When coming to the forest by the Hambachforest.org website’s directions, there are slight warnings about security and police and best ways to enter or possible situations that may occur to prepare you (Hambachforest.org, 2020). Being privy to the occupation struggle, a person can also follow along with live tweets from within the forest to know day to day situations or police presence, if needed (@HambiBleibt, 2020). From the get-go there is a feeling of insecurity and danger from participating in the occupation. With the forest being militarized (picture riot gear, hundreds of police at a time, and political statements manipulating the narrative of leftist threats within the media) the risks for one’s legal future and physical health while undergoing protest actions becomes high¹³. The war-zone that is the Hambach Forest occupation never seems to settle as the “abstraction, commodification, and financialisation of nature have increased investment in land acquisition and by extension conflict” (Dunlap, 2014).

¹¹ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 4/3/2020

¹² Interview, Pluto, 20/2/2020

¹³ Multiple informal conversations logged in fieldnotes



Source: Taken by me

1.2 Intimidation

Everyday life in the occupation, subsequently, becomes intertwined with constant policing and the threat of eviction as seen through visual cues, projects, workshops, and the on-boarding/education of visitors and new activists. Visually, there are constant reminders throughout the forest of the occupation and police presence that is at bay, which has proven to increase perceptions of insecurity and fear amongst communities (Grassiani and Diphorn, 2015). During the winter months when trees are bare, you can nearly see right through the short distance of the forest to the RWE mine, itself. There are scatterings of spray painted marks on trees in a range of colors; the F# marking the trees that are home to an endangered bat and numbers on treehouse trees occupied throughout the years so police can systematically refer to areas that would need to be evicted¹⁴. Psychologically, when in the forest a person may always feel the threat and realities of the occupation's vulnerability. Such fears and emotions, based on previous experiences and daily interactions form an interpretation of their safety and position in that space (Grassiani and Diphorn, 2015). Aside from static visual cues, there are also the

¹⁴ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 27/2/2020

security cars that would drive around the entrances of the forest, both on the street side and the mine side. The feeling of always being watched was something communicated to me during the early days of fieldwork and ultimately, by paying particular attention to it from their descriptions, has an effect on visitors from early on created a space of insecurity.

Alongside the perceptions of the space, the physical actions are affected by the “battlespace” that is Hambi Bleibt. A large component of the occupation strategy is to occupy the trees to both stall the cutting of the forest (you cannot cut down a tree with people in it) and maintain a life above the ground where occupants could live in case of ground eviction. There is a level of both restriction of freedoms (i.e. having access to the ground to move freely, securing food without having to stock, or saving personal energy that is exerted from climbing) when you are not able to keep valuables on the ground and must work to limit your life in that way. But also a freedom that comes with living alternatively amongst the trees where you are safe-adapting to the dangers or “combat” below. Many of the daily tasks and duties are to maintain supplies (such as military grade water canisters, stoves, wheelbarrows, bikes, and crates on crates of food) in case at any point there is a ground eviction or police come to take or destroy supplies. Oftentimes you would see huge objects hanging around structures or within nets between branches- another reminder of the fragility and potential danger that each day could bring. “You never know if you will wake up to police at your tree or the sounds of chainsaws moving closer as they come for you. In some cases even police in your treehouse before you realize what is happening.. They like to come early to surprise you” Mouny explains as we talk about action plans in case of an (seemingly ever-present) eviction¹⁵.

Projects and workshops were also created in response to the constant threat of police with the hope to save the trees and themselves more time. Barricades (everything from giant strategic holes to nail studded trees across roads to scrap metal and garbage piles) were frequently being built despite their fragility and short term use. Other workshops such as fence jumping¹⁶ were incorporated to help build relevant skills. Aside from physical projects, there were also many instances where police protocol were discussed in terms of legality (main camps and barrios held resources for lawyers to call or organizations that help with controlling or police engagement)

¹⁵ Interview, Mouny, 24/3/2020

¹⁶ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 20/3/2020

and topics of conversations amongst plenaries and general assemblies. The education, or on-boarding if you will, of visitors and new activists ran through the main concerns and safety procedures early on (Grassiani and Diphoom, 2015). From the beginning, Tucker explained the value of learning to climb and positionality for security, “you could wake up to find police ripping open your tent and being controlled... you would rather be in a tree to save you some time”¹⁷. Knowledge of where the security would drive and when you should definitely have your mask on was key along with what to do if police are in the forest. Despite there being a low threat in the time that I was in the occupation, other activists talked about it as though it was very likely and held those memories and experiences close.

To many in the occupation and in surrounding towns such as Buir, “RWE works hand in hand with political leadership.. They put them in office and then they get what they want. If they want to clear the forest and mine.. They will have politicians and state police come to make that happen”¹⁸. This perceived level of power perpetuates the uneasiness felt within the forest and occupation (Grassiani and Diphoom, 2015). The stress this puts on the occupants is noticeable through their actions and abilities to cope both in and out of the forest. While Tucker advised to “take breaks from the high stress and be outside as a ‘normal citizen’,” Thistle claimed that they are uncomfortable not wearing a mask and prefer to keep it on even when going briefly into the cities. Many occupants such as Mouny and Thistle decide not to leave the forest for months or years, if possible, and subsequently perceive their insecurity in the forest to be better than the world outside whereas Tucker was quite overwhelmed by the threats and intimidation. The oppression and presence of police and security create an environment that affects occupants differently, but is used as a tactic to create just that friction within the community.

1.3 Fighting for the Right

It is not all boiled down to paranoia or the effects of personal intimidation and fear, throughout the history of climate activism there is also a history of the politicized label “eco-terrorism” (Cullman and Curry, 2011). With new perceived value of nature (like coal) the pre-existing grid of state and colonial violence and resistance comes to light as “environmental territories” and

¹⁷ Interview, Tucker, 4/2/2020

¹⁸ Interview, Dominic, 17/2/2020

who has access to them is renegotiated by power and hierarchy (Dunlap, 2014). Such territories become the focus of contention as they are marketized and subsequently militarized by states for economic agendas. As eco-activists joined the narrative to combat such effects, and renegotiate the rights of nonhumans and nature the radical movements and actions are therefore seen as direct attacks on the capitalist state and area; creating “political forests” such as the Hambach (Dunlap, 2014). By strategically using this term, it politicizes the activists and amplifies fear which justifies use of the state of exception with police brutality and force (Baybars-Hawks, 2015). Such attention and links with terrorism heighten the risks of participation by activists and therefore lead to particular behaviors in order to cope.

Despite the constant threat and almost nonchalant ways police eviction was discussed as being a given on any day, the paranoia was also mixed with everyday nuances and projected activities. What formed from the high levels of political and legal stress mixing with alternative living is security culture; a system where activists can maintain boundaries of communication with one another as a tactic against police surveillance. From “masking up,” to not carrying identification, to using new names, anonymity is a huge part of the occupation¹⁹. The lived history of the occupation also consists of many individual activist experiences engaging with power dynamics, police, which create the need to stay anonymous amongst political radicalized environments. Ecoactivists are fueled by direct action and a contestation to the capitalist states desire for control over humans and nonhumans and therefore to break such control, employ contrary anarchic, potentially illegal, acts (Zimmerman, 1986). Security culture molds the dress codes, conversations, and way people socialize in order to preserve legal identities. By maintaining anonymity it allows for individuals to come participate without fear or discrimination, creating a solidified movement on the outside but diverse on the inside.

A notable change over time has been the use of masks and dress within the occupation. The mask is used for anonymity purposes and helps to wide identity from police or potential legal issues because of a person’s involvement in direct actions or the occupation. Reviewing past documentation of the occupation, there is a stark difference to spring 2020 in the occupation where nearly everyone was masked at all times. “Masks do not have to be worn all the time,

¹⁹ See Figure 3 in Appendix

really unless there is a police threat or a high need to”²⁰ but some activists never took their masks off. They kept their true identity to themselves. On one information board there was a statement that read “I only show my face to 1. Those I love 2. Those I trust 3. Those I have killed”²¹. Security culture has been heightened as more activists are choosing to hide their identities and wear all black or less flashy clothes in order to blend in with one another for their own safety. Patches are sewn over any distinctive brands or logos on clothes and even looking through the “free shop” in Mahnwache and Hambi Camp, you can see the difference of color from donated clothes and material.

Such precautions exemplify the physical threats and changes to a person’s routines or freedoms, but it also highlights the values and overarching mentality that drives the occupation, itself. The feeling of needing to hide or run or camouflage into a group or in the trees mimics the hierarchy of both speciesism with ecology within the forest i.e. squirrels, trees, and other wildlife and the capitalist system that Germany is currently a part of. Security culture in the context of the Hambach Forest is a result of the oppression of systems working against what the occupation is trying to do; defy government which is linked with capitalism and participating in hierarchical systems (Hambach.org). Because of the work of some people valuing accumulation of goods and living in a value system based on money and goods, other people are faced with inequalities and restrictions of their own choice of livelihoods (Harvey, 2005). By defying such a system and outcome for themselves, the eco-activists in a self organized community must face the uncomfortable realities of a “war-zone” both physically and psychologically. The threats linked with being known as an “eco-terrorist” paint the activists in a more dangerous and political light and accentuate the battle that is part of commodity conflicts and the “right” for such resource use (Dunlap, 2014). This collision and dynamic, although present since 2012, provides a larger example of what the occupation stands for and what is at stake. Eco-activists thus navigate different social rules and labels which become part of their own identity and the guide for understanding why the past histories of distrust and combat lead to a quickly adapting occupation to ensure survival moving forward.

²⁰ Interview, Wave, 2/3/2020

²¹ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 4/3/2020

Chapter 2: Eco-Activism in Hambi Bleibt

Living within the Hambach Forest occupation, eco-activists are both guiding the narrative through their personal experiences and activism, while also adapting and developing because of the outside influences on the occupation. The positionality of Hambi Bleibt as a local movement with global ideals involves a mission that is greater than the individual forest environment and looks “beyond borders” (Tarrow, 2005). The fluid nature of projects, networking, and adaptation to revolutions creates a constantly changing place built on the shoulders of historical movements such as the Chiapas in Mexico or new FLINT spaces in neighboring German cities. The steady growth of transnational oriented activism redefines eco-activism citizenship and how it looks on a more globalised scale (Tarrow, 2005). With the use of visual symbols, flags, actions, and workshops, these shared global ideologies are ever-present within Hambi Bleibt and aid in understanding the underlying motivations and histories of participants. The diversity of movements intertwining with each other mimics the overall mission of diverse tactics of action and democracy, giving weight to the greater example of the interplay within Hambi Bleibt that it creates. Understanding the influential nature of transnational activism and how that translates to everyday life within the occupation community helps to understand the spectrum of activism taking place and how it may evolve in the future.



Source: Taken by me

2.1 “Be Water”

Walking around Lluna and other barrios the flags, banners, and references begin to make more sense as activists bring up outside movements and influences they feel passionate about. From two well-known treehouses being named after activists from E.L.F and Rojava to the origins of quotes hanging on banners in between trees, the networks and backgrounds of eco-activists is crucial to understanding how and why Hambi Bleibt is shaped today. The entrance of Hambi Camp and Manhwache both have YPJ (Women’s Defense Units), Antifa, and other political flags showing both support and solidarity with the groups. Inside the forest there are similar visual cues engrained in and out of structures such as a mural project within Lluna of an octopus wearing a mask with the phrase “be water”- a quote from Bruce Lee that was adopted by the Hong Kong democracy demonstrations from mid-2019 until recently (Tai, 2019). This both reminds people of the solidarity of people around the world and influences security culture as the phrase is used to perpetuate anonymity for protestors to blend into the crowds and not be caught for arrest. While Hambi Bleibt is based on anti-capitalism, antifa, and environmental justice (Hambach.org, 2020), these ideals are reiterated by past experiences and present actions towards global solidarity efforts. Because of the fluid nature of transnational movements and individual activists, the Hambach forest occupation is shaped, and actively reshaping, its motivations from fluctuating influences in and out of the occupation. Such ideals and connections are established not only visually in the forest but through blog posts, events shared on Facebook, and word of mouth. By barrios and individuals endorsing certain pan-activist movements, the hope is to raise awareness and bring together transnational allies (Tarrow, 2005) to unify and strengthen it for the future.

Among the transnational activist movements and influences, Rojava and E.L.F. were two that dominated visual and ideological space, exposing both a shared global network and historical references. The Rojava Movement, a Syrian revolution looking to solve middle eastern issues and fights against terrorist groups like ISIS through non-capitalist methods²². With connections to revolutionary acts with Zapatistas and Chiapas in Mexico, the occupation recognized the links between these similar-minded activists or had personal experience from

²² Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 14/3/2020

their own involvement as well. “It’s good to have that diversity and bring in more voices aside from just us, we have so much to learn” Thistle said as they were one of the main organizers of the event and holds close relationships with many from Rojava²³. Hambi Bleibt hosted a Kurdish New Year weekend to engage in discussions and workshops with other transnational activists with the intention to skill-share and build relationships. “Solidarity is what we need” Thistle pushes as they organize a follow up social media picture including a sign pledging their solidarity with Chiapas and Rojava²⁴. Literature and flyers can be seen in multiple hotspots within the forest, and becomes intermingled with literature on the forest and mine; further closing the space between the movements in the present.



Source: Taken by me

Other action groups such as Environmental Liberation Front, or ELF, have been around since the early 1990’s and focus on environmental-political actions and tactics to dismantle the systems in place harming the environment (Pickering, 2007). Many of the actions are a point of history for Hambi Bleibt as eco-activists maintain critical conversations of past movements and use workshops and discussions to see how actions and responses by such groups can be applied

²³ Interview, Thistle, 27/3/2020

²⁴ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 16/3/2020

to their occupation for further success. By uniting and linking E.L.F and Rojava, the resources and insights are enhanced and alternative communities are normalized. Such links and conversations are critical to revolutionary activism as the global and local can merge (Boggs, Kurashige, Glover, Wallerstein, 2012). A red thread forms across the globe as activists become fluid to different projects and occupations such as Hambi Bleibt are globalised. The “dynamic between senior communitarians and transient participants provides a synthesis of motivational energies” (Leonard, 2009) which ultimately benefits the community and the greater movements. As a result of this interplay, the shared ideological movements in the future because of the constant ebb and flows of energy.

While the eco-activists come from many walks of life, it is this diversity of experiences within the same political mentality that create a dense ecosystem of radical change and project tactics in the occupation. During weekly “Let’s Talk About Revolution” discussions, activists and visitors can share different experiences or global updates on alternative projects and movements occurring simultaneously in the world. This serves as an intentional transnational workshopping space within the weekly structure of occupation events, much like the Rojava weekend²⁵. Beyond the revolution discussions, there are also scheduled movie nights where activist documentaries, video clips, and topical movies (i.e. *Pickaxe, Brazil, What the World Can Learn from Hong Kong, A Tree Falls*) are shown with additional discussions to follow. These weekly events are meant to expand the horizons of the activists and maintain momentum for the cause- again bringing the global to local projects and unifies the past with present actions. By engaging and discussing movements around the globe, there are levels of solidarity that produce additional inklings of hope that so many people feel and are acting to change systems (Boggs, Kurashige, Glover, and Wallerstein, 2012). With the increase in globalisation leading to increased mobility, access to foreign books and journals, and network building (Tarrow, 2005) movements can act within a network and gain strength on individual levels and larger democratic revolutionary styles.

2.2 Spatial Contexts

²⁵ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 4/2- 31/3/2020

These networks of eco-activists and activists create channels within the occupation where involvement can be catered to the diversity of the people and motivations- diversifying strategies and creating dialogue for growth. While the “Be Water” security culture is in effect, the most tangible diversity can be experienced through the different spaces of the occupation; Hambi Camp 2.0, Mahnwache, Meadowcamp, the forest²⁶, and online. By way of forming networks and social groups, a natural divide occurs between the living styles of each camp as smaller sub communities must collaborate to eat, maintain shelters, and ultimately work towards common occupation goals in their own way. Camps and barrios fall along a spectrum of radical beliefs that are both fixed and fluid based on the flux of activists and the legacies behind barrios. It is seen within these spaces the difference between activists and eco-activists and how evolution is taking place.

Living in a self-organized and (mostly) sustained community means that people have the opportunity to choose how they want to live- in Hambi this is a non-hierarchical direct democracy system where there are no rules beyond safety measures. Direct democracy style exhibits each person having the agency to make decisions and vote on actions as opposed to consensus based models where voting is lead by potential higher groups of power (Rasza, 2012). The intention is to decentralize power to a horizontal structure of decision making and provide equal opportunity for each idea and voice. While the occupation has three main “legal” camps (Hambi Camp 2.0, Manwache, and Meadowcamp) there are additionally about thirteen additional barrios that make up the forest area (notes reference). Around a fire in Lluna (an anti-speciesist, vegan, and drug-aware camp) members of both the present barrio and others were discussing the past history of the camps. “The meadow used to be completely vegan and drug-free” a person said with pride, trying to convince other Lluna occupants that it was true despite the current status only being drug-aware. Lluna, itself, is a very strict anti-speciesist camp and members are quite critical of “corpse and secretion eating”²⁷. I had spoken to a barrio member before, Mouny, who noted how “seeing other animals as resources is like the problem in itself”²⁸ and that this idea was followed to different degrees within the occupation which was a

²⁶ See Figure 3 in Appendix

²⁷ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 23/2/2020

²⁸ Interview, Mouny, 24/3/2020

problem. I observed differences between eco-activists and activists in a “square is a rectangle but a rectangle isn’t a square” type of way; eco-activists work within the boundaries of Hambi Bleibt activism, but activists did not all have the environmental focus. The diversity of ideas and people, while challenging for some, maintains a true democratic environment and creates a history to reference.

While the diversity of identities within the occupation may cause friction, it also sparks discussion, growth, and highlights the structures in place to facilitate solidarity and communication systems. By use of weekly general assemblies, individual barrio plenaries, twitter, and blog posts, activists within the occupation are able gain and share information in safe spaces using decentralized methods²⁹. Information sharing is not plagued onto one person or power ensuring that a variety of voices and people have their opportunity to represent (Zimmerman, 1994). Outside of person to person contact or immediate forest networking, there is also an email list that circulates with occupation supporters and go-to norms with sharing information to temporary and long-term visitors whether it is case by case or as a part of the structured weekly forest walks. By utilizing digital media and online presence, the reach of exposure and attention has grown for activists (Bennet, 2003). Communication methods ultimately mimic the structure of the occupation by producing a spectrum of accessible information that can reach people with or without certain means or in or out of certain regions.

Such diversity of communication plays into the “diversity of tactics and actions” which make up the direct democracy system (Rasza, 2012). Plans are often discussed within small plenaries in order to discuss as a group the way to move forward or not with a proposed project, while still honoring and listening to each individual. Within “Occupy” movements (similar to occupations such as this) a large component is not only to raise awareness but to highlight the voices making up the contestation- creating representation that the original space did not enable (Rasza, 2012). Very quickly there is a noticeable difference between how visitors and long-time occupants communicate with each other, i.e. temperature gauges with hands, encouragement/agreeing hand motions, speaking number systems, and the overarching belief that each person has the right to finish their thoughts without being interrupted. During conversations

²⁹ Multiple fieldnote observations

there becomes a distinction between one person speaking at a time calmly and fluidly, and less experienced groups who may have people speak up almost passively aggressively asking “were you done with your thought?” when a new person tries to intervene. Notably, this is done by cis-male occupants speaking up for a female associated person when they may have had their words or thoughts interrupted³⁰. The decentralization of voices/power attempts to create an environment of equality and combat the oppression otherwise perpetuated in capitalist societies (Zimmerman, 1994). By living in diversified spaces there is opportunity for a variety of ideas and opinions along with vital spaces of self-criticism which helps maintain the health of the occupation. Thistle claims, it becomes more than “just being educated and unlearning to be neutral” but pushes the boundaries of having a valuable impact through the collaboration of the community³¹. Each individual weaves their way through different radical movements and experiences that enhance not only their perseverance but also their drive to see the occupation’s mission succeed.

2.3 Resilience and Lifestyle

Life in the occupation is both constructed by the individual activists, based on skill set and motivations in and out of such transnational contexts, as well as the physical necessities that come along with security culture and political contestation. Hambi Camp is constructed with physical walls and barriers at the front entrance along with strategic mirrors to be able to see who is coming down the dirt road to the site. Although the camp is legally registered and privately rented (Hambach.org, 2020), security and police still drive by to survey from both the main road and private- causing small amounts of stress each time a car is pulling up³² and the environment is constructed based on such anxieties.

In times of increased pressure from police, structures and projects in and around the camp are built or hidden because of the close proximity to “danger-zone” areas in Morschenich. Nearly every night someone would ask if anyone wanted to “take a walk” which, especially in freezing winter weather, was not always ideal, but code for checking out where security was standing or parked around the town to see how safe we were for the night. Walks seemed casual from the

³⁰ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 13/3/2020

³¹ Interview, Thistle, 26/3/2020

³² Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 5/2/2020

outside, but entailed no phones, masks, hoods or hats, and having a person check around corners before moving forward³³. Meanwhile there would be light banter or discussions during the loop—an ongoing contrast of paranoia and everyday life moving forward. New forms of security amongst the community build and ideas of citizenship are molded through the community structures in place. “The citizens’ fears and emotions, based on their previous experiences, form the foundation for their interpretation of security issues in both physical and intellectual sense” (Grassiani and Diphorn, 2015, 10). Security and the fear that fuels its constructs become a part of the citizen identity and creates a shared history. This way of life may be “difficult for other people to get based on their socialization,” Snapper mentioned on one of our walks, but to them, their appearance, reliance on supporters, limited use of technology, and lower levels of engagement with their family were discussed in a banal way³⁴. Showing me pictures of them with their family dog, they looked entirely different (wearing mainstream clothes, surrounded by a comfortable house and relying on the capitalist system) from before they left their previous home. They grew and evolved within this new phase, highly influenced by the activism they are involved in. Breaking from one’s socialized beliefs (that they had for nearly twenty years) comes with challenges and adaptation of identity. Oftentimes fireside chats would lead to what brought people to the Hambi Bleibt occupation; citing personal injustices, education, or a growing split from the lure of capitalism³⁵, each story an unique roadway to one unified ideal of solidarity. While the diversity of occupants and eco-activists serves the democratic mission, as time goes on there are collective histories and temporal constructs that serve to develop and are acted on in the future as a community.

The identity of occupants is negotiated in each situation, depending on their level of security and concern for identification by the police because of their radical political involvement. Just as activists become transient in a more globalised world, there become more opportunities where their identity being linked to direct performance actions, destruction, or illegal/anarchic events (Leonard, 2009). While the Hambi Bleibt community may serve as a “safer” area to live, it is still challenging strong political forces with the German government and

³³ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 20/2/2020

³⁴ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 21/2/2020

³⁵ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 21/2/2020

RWE making them a target for arrest³⁶. Their actions are rooted within civil disobedience, “public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about change in the law or policies of the government” (Bedau, 1991, 104). But because of the direct and sometimes violent actions taking place, activists such as Mounty, Snapper, and Thistle, change their appearance, life stories, and subsequently identities depending on the spaces they are in and the people around in order to stay anonymous (Tai, 2019). Persons choose their “forest name” or may not disclose that information to others at all. Names are also often changed between projects or occupations so what a person is called at one point may change and it is understood by the political community that this is normal. This becomes valuable to understand as citizenship within the occupation is constructed on participation, relationships, and autonomous group actions and belief systems all while being influenced by the contestation from the state (Davis, 2009). Involvement within the alternative anarchist communities subsequently results in new ways of being a citizen on the Earth and how that relates with identity and value.

The subculture within the radical left anarchist scene is a web of networks of both like-minded people and intrigue into alternative living. When asking a new visitor, Surrie, to the forest of what brought them, they expressed that “I have a motivation that when all of these terrible things going on, and you hear about the decline of the environment, you just want to go and see some good being done.. And act yourself. So I came.” They expanded that they knew people in the region working on projects so it is easier to “drop by”³⁷. Within the barrio of Lluna, there were many instances of outside friends coming to see friends, visitors stopping by for an afternoon to learn to climb, or “forest people” returning after an extended period out of the forest. Depending on a person’s relationship with the forest, whether they are known or unknown people to the occupation or use the same social indicators, the greetings and accessibility varies tremendously. Judgements on the attitude, dress, and projected length of stay of a new person help to open or close access to conversations. Occupants who are new like Surrie or more seasoned like Thistle are both just as actively aware of who may be seeing their faces without masks or learning information about them³⁸. This comes from the high levels of stress that police

³⁶ Interview, Mounty, 24/3/2020

³⁷ Interview, Surrie, 18/2/2020

³⁸ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 15/2/2020

are infiltrating the group from the inside. During a community forest walk while leaving the final site, Pluto became convinced that two male participants were RWE security in plain clothes, trying to watch and spy on the occupation. Rumors of this being done are common and there were often small conversations about specific visitors occupants say on a given day- comparing observations and whether precautions needed to be made as a group. Such observations would also be brought up within plenary meetings and gatherings³⁹. All insider knowledge could potentially aid in a police eviction, like the one of fall 2018, so many activists are on edge. The occupation, itself, has been strengthened over eight years so far and solidified its place as a community if not just a physical area of protest. Because of this, there is a juxtaposition of people living in the present moment and accepting that the next day could come an eviction while also over time developing loyalty and relationships that bind them for the future. It is through the treatment of some new people or visitors that I saw how temporality played a role in respect or investment in the new people, as activists live in such precarity both in and out of the forest. Time becomes synonymous with trust and levels of acceptance or engagement; proving ironic in such fluid or unstable environments.

“If you have a chance, we definitely would love to have you in Belgium as we get going” a visitor mentions as they hand out stickers and write on the information board in Lluna for their occupation project. Visiting different political groups offers opportunities to both recruit for high-need projects and to learn from how other communities are structuring their occupation both in Germany and globally⁴⁰. The process and life of being an activist becomes fluid- going where projects appear and where there is need. Some participants argued that they did not know whether staying in the Hambach was achieving much because legally, the forest was saved from cutting. On other sides, people would leave to visit other projects to collect information and skills to then bring back to make Hambi better. In March, Hambi Bleibt hosted an informal Land Occupation Networking Weekend to connect different projects, share actions, and open up dialogues for what works and doesn't so people stay informed on similar movements. Access to those projects becomes easier as the Hambi communicates directly with fellow eco-activists who help provide resources and knowledge. Hambi becomes a product of many transnational

³⁹ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 6/2/2020

⁴⁰ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 28/2/2020

networks and skill-sharing over time and provides not only a hub of information, because of its relative stability over the years so activists can come and go, but also an opportunity for ideology to shift in real time.

Ultimately, the framework of an occupation such as Hambi Bleibt is developed through the globalization of larger anti-capitalist movements which spread networks of transnational activists who can share ideas and bring solidarity to small projects. By maintaining a direct democracy system and decentralizing power structures, the occupants move fluidly in and out of projects and mimic the same diversity within community building exercises in the Hambach Forest. With recognition of the past histories of movements from the Zapatistas or E.L.F, the community is able to reflect on various pasts to influence their present and future actions. Over time, the influence of transnational activism becomes ingrained in the physical and ideological structures in place; exemplifying the value of such encounters and knowledge sharing. Uniquely, Hambi Bleibt as an environmental justice movement has the opportunity to extend their beliefs to daily practice as they occupy a forest and engage with nonhumans- putting their ideas into practice and creating further examples of what capitalist alternative living can be now and in the future.

Chapter 3: Human and Nature Intertwined

Understanding and living amongst the meshwork of natural encounters marries the anthropocentric styles of politics and direct democracy with the nonhuman relations, notion of selves, and reorganization of hierarchical objectification. Just as each human is to be valued and recognized within a democratic system (Razsa, 2011), nonhumans are embraced by knowledge of and transformations through encounters (Tsing, 2017) within the spaces the Hambi Bleibt is attempting to occupy. The relation and interaction between humans and nonhumans by eco-activists, through daily life, future goals, and physical infrastructure, explains the foundation of their direct democratic thinking and opens up new hybrid encounters. The examples are explored both with relations to nonhumans such as fungi and the human participants, themselves. This chapter will highlight such naturecultures and how they are 1. Reshaping eco-activism in practice 2. Exemplified in Hambi Bleibt living structures and 3. The mission behind future planning on small and large scales.

3.1 Eco-Activism and Rethinking Ecosystems

As Hambi Bleibt has developed, the diversity and ecosystem of eco-activists intermingled with the literal ecosystem of the forest they occupy- mimicking the give and take of fungi. Just as fungi encounter different ecologies (i.e. nutrients, bacteria, trees) in order to survive, they do so in a reciprocal capture system. This “shimmer” as trademarked by Deborah Rose is the process of “encounter and transformation” and highlights organisms working together and emphasizes the reality that certain “selves” linked with nonhumans are always present and shared (Rose, 2017; Tsing, 2017). By breaking down the constructs of power that come from one human or nonhuman taking from another to be stronger, the more accurate reciprocal relationships come to light; sympoiesis or “making-with” debunks limited notions that each being is self-organizing entirely (Haraway, 2003) as shown through fungi studies (Tsing, 2017). As ideas of such hierarchies are deconstructed, communal living and deprivatization become the backbone and logical structure of the community in Hambi Bleibt- linking nonhuman living to human social structure. The eco-activists who were at first drawn to the call of occupying the trees, have an

unique role of fighting capitalism and hierarchy by “living as equals”⁴¹ with their surroundings in the context of activism in a land occupation. In contrast to urban demonstrations, protests, or projects which happen outside of the vulnerable areas people are fighting for, this occupation poses an opportunity for real time examples to be set for co-existing and evolving in alternative ways that replicate natural or nonhuman realities.

From the day to day, the reliance and arguably the health of the occupation works much like the fungi- passing resources from the strong to weak in order to ensure overall success between camps and spaces. In the vital example of food, there are certain days or times when supporters donate food, eco-activists use dumpster diving and actions to acquire food, or it is foraged within the forest depending on the season. On Sundays, I would walk out to the entrance of the forest with my barrio-mate and we would meet a supporter who would bring baked goods and fresh produce. Taking the necessities of what we would need for the upcoming week, we would also take more to drop off at surrounding barrios who may not have the same relationship or access to this person. This same ideology behind “food solidarity” (everyone deserves access to food as a basic human right) applies when entering any barrio or camp within Hambí⁴². Food is typically offered or it is normal to just take because it is not privatized. For many this resource sharing became a crucial part of why they came to Hambí as strength and resources are for all here and are crucial, for obvious reasons, for survival of the human comrades and subsequently the survival of the occupation they populate. The constructs of commodified nature makes food a valued object within the capitalist system (Descola, 1996)- whereas by using communal food sources and deprivatizing it, there is more resemblance to the natural ecology of energy give and take.

To combat capitalism is to live for necessity and not accumulation, or better yet to recognize and respect the ecology of persons making up the Earth. The shift from viewing resources to viewing persons or selves (Kohn, 2013, 17) changes how nonhumans are engaged with. To accurately match the systems of the nonhuman, “we have to consider that the collective is made up of humans and nonhumans capable of being seated as citizens” (Latour, 2017, 232). When humans are lowered from the totem and nonhumans are raised to equilibrium, there would

⁴¹ Fieldnotes, Hambí Camp Diary, 8/2/2020

⁴² Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 4/2/2020

be subsequent cultural shifts. While such shifts are already practiced around the world (Tsing, 2017; Latour, 2017; Kohn, 2013; Descola, 1996), the purpose in the context of Hambi Bleibt is to do so within an aggressively “Western” state and inadvertently grow within the system’s cracks by developing such a strong new structure. Whether it is only taking the logs from the dead monoculture trees, eating for health and not surplus hoarding, or acquiring knowledge to better expand the social life of the resources at hand locally, the occupation is creative and innovative in how they realize the impacts of their consumption and use of other nonhumans. Such a lifestyle trickles down to the small moments of engagement with the different “persons” of the forest; having encounters and nostalgia with nonhumans that are otherwise in relatively “soulless” (Kohn, 2013) areas used for logging or in RWE mine territory. The contrast to doing a “scout walk” where our small group has trekked through parts of the forest to check for new cutting of trees, equipment, security stationed at certain parts, and potential risks for the forest at that time so the information can be relayed back to the occupation, while observing the activists in such spaces is enlightening to see. During those walks, the RWE objectified forest is given a soul by the eco-activists.

“Ahhh I love this smell” Thistle says to the group, stopping to smell the sap from the trees in the Western part of the Hambach that was disconnected from the eastern portion decades before. We all take a whiff and it is these small moments of connecting and staying present that are constantly sprinkled in each day which I have grown to expect and participate in. Walking amongst newly cut trees, Thistle points out the age and beauty of some of the fallen Oaks, giving them a life beyond what they are now and reminding me of the sadness that comes with their death.⁴³

Even during the moments of monitoring the injustices of taking trees from the forest and the disregard for the environment in the sake of capital, appreciation is intertwined with the mission of stopping resource misuse. There was the dual purpose of information gain and engagement with the nonhuman souls (Kohn, 2013) of the forest that provided a reality check of anthropocentric politics and emotion.

⁴³ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 22/2/2020

Aside from the communal resource sharing and releveling of nonhuman persons in relation to outside resource grabbing, the reengagement and subsequent “hybrid relationships” with nonhumans are also highlighted in small moments and spontaneous workshops within the forest. Each season, there are “herba walks” where plant enthusiasts walk together throughout parts of the forest exploring the new blooms and growth of plants and do a skillshare on information about what they see, i.e. what is edible, what can be used as medicine, fun facts about the family and species, and personal anecdotes that result in a pleasant but focused trek.

While being shown a peculiar flower that was the subject of a debate on identification, gradually over half the group had removed their shoes and was walking in the dirt and mud-noticeably feeling more connected as we went on for a few hours. One by one people went barefoot, with a person even dreamily saying how good it felt to get a bit dirtier.⁴⁴

There are different engagement styles with the forest as seen with the appreciation and recognition with walking on the dirt paths barefoot. The appreciation also creates a distinction between using the forest for resources for survival versus objectified capitalism. One person, Harper, was excited for the upcoming summer so they could make their meals just from the forest- a time they relished because it was so self-sufficient without the time and commitment of gardening in such an unstable habitat. Living and sustaining solely from the forest seemed to be the pinnacle of their happiness and goal to separate from mainstream society⁴⁵. The connectivity and “soul awareness,” in contrast to blindness, is a way for the occupants to skill-share and serves as a reminder of the smallest parts of the forest. With the exploration and discussions, the forest becomes even more alive and worth saving for the activists as it holds “so many treasures”⁴⁶. Such small moments are for the community, itself, serving the social and cultural attitudes and foundation to engage closer with the space they cohabit.

The recognition of selves throughout the Hambach Forest drives not only the empathy with actions performed or witnessed but also how the evolution is developed. Within the smallest actions of relocating ants that invade a kitchen carefully and humanely, handling toxic caterpillar infestations, and looking out for sick trees, the health and safety of the nature that is being lived

⁴⁴ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, vignette from 16/3/2020

⁴⁵ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 20/3/2020

⁴⁶ Informal conversation with Thistle logged in fieldnotes, 20/3/2020

in by humans is constantly considered. Daily life consisted of casual conversations around different living styles with nature or theories like biomimeticism⁴⁷. In many ways the continual education and attention to current radical ideology driving the occupation appeared to be fundamental to participating amongst the occupation. With exceptions in different spaces or social groups of course, the majority of lunch drop-ins, breakfast discussions, events, or casual chats consisted of relevant topics that were intentional and forward thinking. By sharing information and acting to coexist and engage meaningfully with other nonhumans and humans within the occupation, it translates to crushing the hierarchy that is a result of anthropocentric objectification (Descola, 1996, 82). The actions become a result of activists and eco-activists reaching to the root of the problems and letting their reaction to, and relationship with, other selves drive their physical movements and community organization that goes beyond ideology.

3.2 Ideals and Infrastructure

Just as action based resistance and democratic ideology are pillars of the occupation, the physical and tangible actions of the eco-activists speaks just as loud as they do. When constructing the treehouses and camps based in and around the forest, the materials, structures, and sustainability are factored in with hopes to do more good than harm. Looking at the destruction and invasion humans have done historically- destroying natural environments instead of building in cohesion- the occupation attempts to take nonhuman voices into account (Descola, 1996, 84). As a result, just as the barrios are divided with different ideologies within the radical left movement, the ways in which infrastructure is engaged varies amongst such a diverse occupation space. From waste management to cooking methods, the everyday actions provide additional examples of how to find alternatives to methods based within the capitalist system. By giving agency to the forest and better identifying the value of the nonhuman selves that make it up, infrastructure and materials are chosen to respect the impact they will have on those agents.

In one example of cohesion, there are weekly health and wellness workshops that take place within the forest that stretch the idea of wellness along the spectrum of human and nonhuman. During one session, a conversation began about cleaning up past materials on trees

⁴⁷ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 23/2/2020

that had been evicted. The idea to “let them breathe” again and release them from the ropes so that they may grow freely without human intervention⁴⁸. While this notion does apply humanistic traits to nonhuman trees, it does so with the intent of bridging the gap of understanding amongst the group. While narrow-minded to limit a tree’s expression, health, or wellness to “breathing” (Kohn, 2013, 7), because of the diverse spectrum of activists, the language mimics more mainstream references during group events with the understanding of many that they are limited in nonhuman descriptions. As a result of the workshop and understanding of how the trees may “feel,” a group then formed and began doing walks through the forest to find loose materials that they can take off of those trees. Those materials could also gain an additional social life by being used in other projects instead of being wasted. Along the same light, in the past there have been ongoing groups that monitor the Bechstein’s bat nests which are believed to be filled with plastics by RWE in order to prove that they are not endangering the rare species (Dirk, 2008) (because their habitats are no longer accessible). As part of my first “tour” of the forest, my gatekeeper, Tucker spoke with pride to let me know that all of the plastics were removed from the trees besides one that was in an area that was too risky to do⁴⁹. In turn, the activists work to maintain the “rightful” home of the bats which in many pieces of art and magazines is highlighted as a character comrade fighting with the occupation. This “protector” attitude (Descola, 1996, 91) inadvertently creates a hierarchy for the activists helping to “save” the bats’ habitats as they flex their human savior status on the nonhumans. Whether this ironic attitude or model creates harm is subject to criticism as it perpetuates anthropocentric agendas (Descola, 1996, 19). A question it raises is: does the scale of one group’s well intentioned intervention create a subculture of lower degree, but still hierarchical, conservation saviorism? In many ways their actions can be interpreted as a well-intentioned middle ground between the ability to live off the capitalist grid while still participating in politics to enact large scale change.

⁴⁸ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 16/3/2020

⁴⁹ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 10/2/2020



Source: Occupation marketing

The relationship between animals and humans is also fluid and harmonious on many levels. Within the non-hierarchical living, there is a range from democratic human relations to radical anti-speciesism, where activists fall within. In one interview with Mouny, they mention their own positionality and how they can't speak for the animals in the forest, just their human perspective⁵⁰. Animals within the forest are seen as “fellow comrades” and are revered for their positionality amongst nature and disproportionate power struggles against human intervention in habitats and use of their bodies. But in turn, as humans negotiate with other capitalist humans, they feel it is more fair to speak for their animal comrades almost as translators. This recognition of souls maintains the relationships between human and non human to stop objectification and power dynamics over both kinds (Kohn, 2013, 17). As part of “on-boarding” Thistle prepared me for the wildlife of the forest and introduced wild boar relationships to me. They explained the encounters are mutual and common, saying, “it helps to talk to them, let them feel your energy and know you are there amongst them. Do not try to be sneaky and quiet as that is how the hunters act and they may see you as a threat. Sometimes I even sing to them while walking

⁵⁰ Interview, Mouny, 24/3/2020

through”⁵¹. Kohn (2013) describes similar experiences with a community in Ecuador and their attention to making eye contact with jaguars, highlighting Haraway’s theory on engagements with nonhumans opening up new ways of relations (Haraway, 2008). Thistle explained the energy and unity they felt when they interacted with the boar and how they reached their own understanding using senses like smell and sincerity of intentions⁵². As a norm, walking through the forest at night is typically done without a light, using one's own night vision or the light of the moon to guide. With the wild boar being quite active and nocturnal, there is a trust of engaging in the dark despite both posing threats to the other. In situations where humans may feel more connected to the large, powerful mammals based on past taxonomy (Descola, 1996, 86), it was important to note the care also taken with the smaller bugs, dirt, and plants. By embracing each of the selves around them, humans say “yes” to allowing the diversity to thrive and work to understand their own place within that realm (Tsing, 2017, 61). Activists educated others often and led by example to ensure the premise of equality across all living beings in the forest was supported.

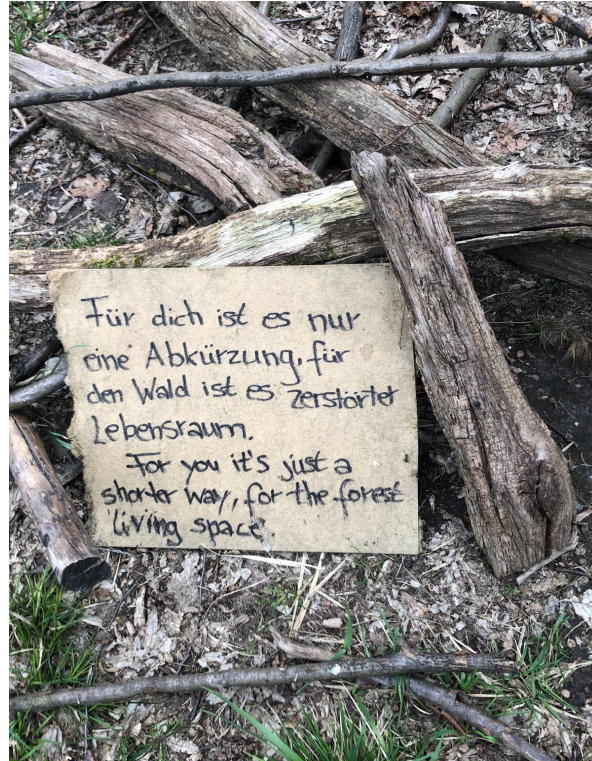
With each night and day, values of all forest ecology were considered when constructing projects, making actions towards expansion or down-sizing, and/or evaluating forest health to counteract the damage being done by RWE. During the rainy season, water channels were created to help bridge access between the pooling water and other parts of the forest. Water infrastructure changed the paths of forest, but was decided to be the best solution while counteracting the pumping from RWE that was taking from the water table below. Cleared pathways are also criticized and considered periodically, with signs placed around to close certain walkways in order to let the budding nature “grow and heal.” Messaging also stated “for you it's just a shorter way, for the forest it is life”⁵³. Housing projects or structures were also part of a strict evaluation process to ensure animal habitats were not disturbed; often leading to inconvenient accessibility from the human perspective. Subsequently, by striving for limited impact on the forest, mobility, living shelters, and timelines are adjusted and reimagined to fit the environment and create new ways of living and value systems regarding time, energy, and space.

⁵¹ Informal conversation logged in fieldnotes, 16/2/2020

⁵² Informal conversation logged in fieldnotes, 16/2/2020

⁵³ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 20/3/2020

The management of the forest becomes a project in itself for many who occupy Hambi Bleibt. Nonhumans are entangled with the community organization and as the occupation stabilizes over time this thinking becomes more ingrained in future development.



Source: Taken by me

3.3 One Step Further

While individual ideology is radical and active, in some spaces and conversations the purpose of the occupation seemed to dwindle or lose clarity- creating opportunities to re-engage and open up discussions on how to make palpable change. Just as the mission is intertwined with nature relations in construction and lifestyles, putting words into practice, the occupation holds greater meaning and purpose when looking for the future. During the Land Occupation Networking weekend, two major questions were raised: “Why?” and “What is our goal?” This networking event filled with discussions and skillsharing provided a forum for understanding the purposes of such direct action tactics while also creating clarity for participants of all experience levels. “We provide alternatives based on ethical living styles for communities. Just how we live with such good food and places to sleep. Maybe that is a goal.. to spread” a workshopper from an

occupation in Belgium chimed in⁵⁴. Such alternatives are naturally created when self-organizing in the forest as active participation in infrastructure connects humans with the structures and systems they may be otherwise blind to (Schelly, 2017, 122). Constructing the occupation structure within a natural environment long-term offers the opportunity to share such skills and lessons from self-organizing food, shelter, education, healthcare, and more⁵⁵. Subsequently, confidence grows in decentralized systems (like diverse Hambi Bleibt barrio communities) that fulfill basic human needs.

By fighting against the mainstream capitalist and centralized way of life as pushed by Western forces, it leaves precarious options for the radical anarchist eco-activists. Their trust in the current systems and governments are tainted and for the sake of their own survival through believed oppression, they begin depending on themselves as individuals and small communities to survive and provide well-being for themselves and future generations. With such distrust in the government there is a rise in individuals claiming agency in not only their health but that of the planet and therefore seek out alternative channels to provide necessities (Sternsdorff-Cisterna, 2015). Occupations such as Hambi Bleibt take on that new responsibility as they provide alternative examples to capitalist based structures as seen with the examples of infrastructure. This task and feat comes with contestation not only from RWE, the police, government, and skeptics of radical left anarchism, but can be even highlighted with the evicted residents of Morschenich. When discussing the new versions of the evicted towns (bought out by RWE to originally expand the Hambach mine), eco-activists shared that despite the trouble, pain, and protest the forced evictions caused, townspeople were constructing a tree-less new town alternative. Townspeople were said to have voted to not include as many, or any, trees within the landscape of the newly constructed town just a few kilometers away from the old⁵⁶. With the opportunity to build their own ideal version, in an ironic twist, they scaled back the greenery to save money on maintenance. It creates a unique opportunity to compare the self organized community of Hambi Bleibt and how they choose to live with their ideals against the odds, and

⁵⁴ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 21/3/2020

⁵⁵ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 21/3/2020

⁵⁶ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 23/2/2020

the townspeople who lost their homes to capitalist powerhouse RWE and yet are seemingly not using their agency to change or stop the cycle.

The juxtaposition of future planning for the town and the alternative nature-entangled lifestyle being chosen by those in the forest highlights the different views of what the future can look like. In short, wanting to keep or get rid of the trees in a space for personal benefit becomes a simplified, but clear, divide of future goals. While many of the supporters and forest walk attendees, who had also been displaced, are against the expansions of the mine and support the “forest people,” the actions and ideology of incorporating the land and nature native to the new town did not translate⁵⁷. From the foundation, constructions of taxonomy are negotiated by culture and the relationships individuals have with nonhumans in their environment and beyond (Descola, 1996). The hybrid relationships and soul recognition of nonhumans becomes fundamental to Hambi Bleibt and their reasons for occupying the space. This ideology is taught and workshopped throughout the occupation and ultimately ingrains itself into the culture of the community spaces. By unlearning past evolutionary categorization systems, the activists use their resources and each other to develop alternative, less anthropocentric ways of viewing natural spaces and their roles within or rights to it. While deconstructing ecological ordering systems, the activists then reconstruct a culture that acts with intentionality to save the well-being of the nonhumans in the Hambach and hopefully beyond.

By creating parallels between human and fungi functions, this chapter introduced the recognition and cohesion between human and nonhuman relationships and how this can restructure the culture of a community. Examining the various “encounters” and relations between human and human and human and nonhuman that occur in educational on-boarding and physical infrastructure of the occupation, enables a new understanding of how Hambi Bleibt offers alternative lifestyle structures that combat capitalism. As a result of recognizing nonhumans as persons, fellow comrades, and having souls, the ecoactivists build an alternative community within their political occupation that is meant to last for the future. The investment and critical approach to resources, attention to workshops and skill-sharing, and exemplary

⁵⁷ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 23/2/2020

behavior towards nonhumans in daily life perpetuates the idea that members will continue such practices to sustain a more environmentally minded future.

Chapter 4: Planning for the Future with Hope

In the sense of temporality, the past, present, and future play integrate roles in daily life of activists within Hambi Bleibt. Just as the occupants developed cohesion and education focused around human and nonhuman unity, how they lived this ideology gives the implication of a future they would like to experience. Actions, reactions, and future planning are interwoven in a meshwork of time and are negotiated within spaces of political and environmental movements. Ideas of the future and nostalgia or trauma of the past are embedded and nurtured within a culture (Appadurai, 2013), as exemplified in the Hambi community. By exploring the ebb and flow of timelines within conversations and occupation goals, it becomes apparent how important that fluidity is to understanding the structure of the community and the point of moving forward. Furthermore, despite instability or the daunting conclusion that the forest will die, the actions of the activists highlights their strongest tool for creating their future; hope. Hope becomes the unifying force even within “hopeless times” and ultimately highlights the greatest purpose and achievements of Hambi Bleibt and the future of the earth.

4.1 Integration of Past, Present, and Future

Whether it be nonchalant daily conversations or the framework for projects, time was always in flux from the past historical occupation experiences, present instability and actions, and future planning both on a small and large scale. Woven within simple chats, the notion and experience of time serves as the backbone to understanding why and how eco-activists are living in the occupation. When discussing a project with Pluto, I was initially impressed by the timeframe they expected to have it done. “It is never done quick enough” they responded. Pluto had lived through the eviction of 2018 and knew how quickly police could come and destroy all of their hard work, but still took great care to ensure the quality of the project each day⁵⁸. The trauma of losing projects and history of the occupation gives life to the past and enables its “presence” within the present (Chamberlain, 2017). The future is manipulated through personal experiences with such a presence and results in short term goals and long term futures for the project’s purpose. The past presence was re-lived through daily potential “battles” such as the two ground evictions during my 9 weeks within the Hambach, both destroying barricades,

⁵⁸ Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 19/2/2020

underground structures, and infrastructure built by the occupants. The fragility of physical structures (and subsequently future plans) made the integration of history and time very important to daily life and understanding of activist motivations. The future becomes blurry and unstable as it is experienced parallel to an omnipresent past and yet is ultimately the focus of the occupation and larger systems.

In her texts on environmental futures, Jessica Barnes (2016) highlights how such integration of temporality is experienced by humans as climate concerns and contestation come to the forefront of conversations in the last fifty years, especially. Visions of different futures and the relationship between present and future are central to political parties both by environmental planners and states, and by counter-movements that might oppose their politics. As she clearly states, “the present can also be known as an effect of the future,” (Barnes, 2016, 16) which rang true through observations of the Hambi Bleibt occupation. Eco-activists such as Pluto, work with the knowledge of long term goals and short term realities that they must prepare for. The development of this mindset occurs quickly as occupants experience the wide range of emotions linked with injustice of the larger system along with small acts of removing projects that were invested in. At first, it seemed almost pointless- why do so much manual labor and use time and energy from sun up to sun down when it will just be destroyed? But during those emotions and realizations, the greatest insights into the occupation become clear- there are greater tools at play that the occupation depends on. The resilience, courage, and hope came through over time (and my own progression of understanding) and the occupation took on a different meaning for my research. The use of time in crux with the spatial diversity of participants created a system for eco-activists to persevere and made their methods make sense. Such “living-future logic” or determining one’s future through recognition of the past and daily acts and lifestyle (Kohn, 2013) curate how the community functions and how future influences what is recognized from the past. Whether taught or experienced first hand, the forest engaged with this type of structure daily and the cycle, or meshwork, of temporality became the foundation of Hambi Blebit.

Along with conversational and ideological ways of thinking about purpose and the future of the occupation, physically there were also constant reminders of where the occupation stood within time and space. Various occupants often talked fondly of waking up amongst the trees and

branches but one of the first things I noticed when living in a treehouse was the presence of human-made construction. Views of tarps, building materials, tools, or projects in the works became part of the natural scenery. This created an environment of perceived constant change- in the future it would be complete but as Thistle put it.. “There is always something to work on and create here,” the work is never done and the occupation is always evolving⁵⁹. The visual cues of time are not only from eco-activists but the police, as many of the trees throughout the forest are spray painted from eviction plans. Scattered around the barrios are bright markings from trees that have been evicted and trees that are currently hosting a treehouse and will be evicted in the future (according to police). As an effect, the visual cues surround occupiers with constant reminders of the past and what could become the future at any time. And of course, there is the presence of the mine- which works to both motivate and intimidate activists and visitors. The 24/7 noise, scene of diggers, and the massive hole is always present and becomes a fixture in time as occupiers are surrounded by their past and future. Time is crucial to understanding why the eco-activists face the odds and continue working to build their community within the forest and surrounding areas.

4.2 “But What’s the Point?”

Sitting within the treehouse with pasta boiling on the stove and twinkle lights strung around the cozy nook of pillows and literature, Mouny and I talked about the status of the forest. Over dinner, the conversation turned bleak when looking at the occupation as a whole.

Mouny- “Soo they are killing the forest and it will die. Umm like you will have more storms.. Super powerful storms and trees will like suffer and the water will not come back and they will not be able to reinforce themself and they will get sick and die. Soo like I'm not saying that like in two years this forest is dead but I don't see this forest in like fifteen years more. It's just not realistic.”

Me- “.. then what is the point of doing all of these things?”

Mouny went on to describe Hambi Bleibt as a home. The dark conversation was replaced with levity quite quickly as I watched the nostalgia and passion return to their eyes. The first point of the occupation is to have a home and a safe place to be away from RWE and the cops for a bit so “you can go and fight or do what you want to do and then come back to food and a bed and

⁵⁹ Interview, Thistle, 26/3/2020

friends”⁶⁰. Despite the many obstacles and instability, the occupation still serves as a place that is vital to so many activists’ lives. From the welcoming attitude that every person has a place to sleep, food solidarity, and communal living- Hambi Bleibt fills a role and provides the foundation for living a relatively secure life in an alternative setting. During some points, ironically, the conversation turned to how pointless things were and how negative the outcomes would be, and yet each day people still continued on to build and work and develop as a community. Their actions seemingly went against everything they were saying, but with the knowledge of their greater goals and placement within the action, it developed meaning and sense.

It was not only me who was asking “what is the point?” to participants and myself at times, the future was also a major topic discussed privately and in workshops. Early on, as I met with my original gatekeeper, Thistle, once they returned to the forest after being away, I was included in a “Future Project” they were working on with other activists. Within a popular gathering barrio, a script was being written with questions to pose to the occupation participants asking about the future of Hambi. The project asked questions such as: Why are you here? WHAT potential do you see for Hambi? How do you dream of Hambi? And What future do you see for Hambi?⁶¹ The topic was something I was keen to focus my research on but it was more interesting to see it develop organically as a main concern within the occupation and something activists felt needed to be addressed in order to progress. The goal was to collect as many answers and then have a plenary about the topics, providing a space to discuss the direction of Hambi Bleibt. Around the same time, Hambi Camp, my home base at the time, was hosting a special “future” based plenary to share personal plans and goals. Enabled by the current low risk of police threat and limited actions taking place, the future was a main focus in skill sharing and workshops⁶². Referring back to Mouny’s opinion of the forest dying and the cause being hopeless, there was a lot of foundational work being done and self-critique on future based topics that were integrated in daily assemblies, workshops, and even drama. Such assemblies and discussions showed a constant desire to work towards a better future even as the ideology and

⁶⁰ Interview, Mouny, 24/3/2020

⁶¹ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 24/2/2020

⁶² Fieldnotes, Hambi Camp Diary, 13/2/2020

pathways were still being developed on how to communicate such goals. During a weekly general assembly, a gender relation disagreement was brought up to the representatives from different areas of the occupation. What started as a sharing of opinions and heated debate concluded with a cis-man building up a network to re-ignite the “toxic masculinity” workshop and lead the next meeting. “We are constantly working to improve and learn,” Thistle said to me one day while walking through the forest as I expressed how impressed I was at both the humility and direct action taking place to create a safer and better community⁶³. If there wasn’t intent for a future that is better than the present, there wouldn’t need to be more workshops and skill-sharing. There would not need to be as much accountability and progress- but aligned with a common occupation phrase “is *that* revolutionary?” the idea to always push oneself to turn beliefs into actions within the revolutionary goals becomes a driving force.

On different sides, the temporality of the occupation and participants reaches outside of just those spaces of plenaries and forest life; they are complemented by supplemental social media posts and documentaries that transcend time and space. Calls for activists to come and support are ever present and constant- placing the need and importance at the forefront symbolizing the same for the cause. While documentaries and content has been made since early 2012 at the beginning of the occupation, some are used as tools today, nearly a decade later, in education as I learned through recommendations. Some of the recommendations relate to the relationships people had with the creators, who or what is highlighted, and overall accuracy that matches the person’s view on the occupation. Those resources become the way to on-board new visitors making the history a part of future education, and ultimately choosing the history that individuals want represented. Analyzing the Hambach Forest blog and social media, which has proven to be a successful tool within German activism in reaching greater audiences that go beyond mainstream media portrayals (Brand, 1999), there is consistency and intent on building a future in the interwoven timeframes⁶⁴. Many posts on twitter happen in real time, Facebook and the blog work to develop statements about past and future events to put them into context, and the documentaries build an archive of the occupation’s past and voices how it may move forward. This creates an interplay of “timescapes” which transforms the sense of time from the

⁶³ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 22/2/2020

⁶⁴ @Hambachforest, Hambi Camp 2.0 Facebook page, Hambachforest.org

occupation (Barnes, 2016) and the integrated mixed media that make up the whole space of Hambi Bleibt. The use of these technological outlets in conjunction with the work being done among the eco-activists creates a fluid system of information past and future integrating themselves in the reader's present.

4.3 Using Hope to Build a Future

The future the eco-activists are trying to create is deeply motivated by past experiences and through day to day actions, both in and out of the occupation. As occupants negotiate their spaces in the Hambach and navigate the systems of security and capitalism that marginalize them, they are also living in “an ideal” community structure and environment⁶⁵. They are the “lucky ones” who are able to see the world for what it is and make changes in themselves and their community, as another FLINT member explained⁶⁶. This positive spin on their way of life is not discussed too frequently but is very much apparent by the commitment and time spent by people living in the occupation long term. What started as “just a visit to see what it was about” turns into months, years, and even eight years for some such as Thistle⁶⁷. The initial questions asked about “how long are you intending to stay?” or “what are your plans” are met with answers of indefinite nature or as Mounty put it, “this is where I intend to be for the future, I can't imagine living anywhere else, so I fight for that and cause trouble but this is my home”⁶⁸. What originally appears as a movement turns into a stable structure where people can build their lives and work towards creating a permanent forest community. The future in those moments may be unclear because of the instability, but the intention to maintain the occupation and the work that has been done amongst the activists speaks for what they want.

Within such future making for their own lives and the fate of the Hambach Forest, as a symbol of the greater environmental justice cause, eco-activists use an important tool to maintain the community; hope. Within the spaces of the “war-zone,” legal threats, or knowledge that the forest is dying, the Hambi Bleibt activists use hope each day when making decisions for the future, whether that be the next hour, day, year, or fifty years. Sitting around the discussion of

⁶⁵ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 21/2/2020

⁶⁶ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 21/2/2020

⁶⁷ Interview, Thistle, 26/3/2020

⁶⁸ Interview, Mounty, 24/3/2020

“what is the future of Hambi?” the second question being asked to the occupants was “What do you hope for Hambi?”⁶⁹. The word hope is engaged with and used by eco-activists in Hambi Bleibt as a tool to develop future plans and understanding personal motivations. Throughout environmental movements and settings, “hope” has been seen as a catalyst for social change (Lueck, 2007) and within this context a bridge between the timescapes of a seemingly hopeless forest revival and the ultimate status of life for generations to come. Hope is a form of “futural momentum” known to emerge between the “potential” and the “actual” (Bryant, 2019, 134) and this is exemplified with the actions taken on a day to day basis within an unstable environment. While in the “actual” present, ecoactivists face a plethora of challenges to their physical and ideological structures they maintain driven to develop future plans and narratives for the “potential” success or after effects in relation to larger systems.

Ultimately, it is the weaving of temporalities experienced by ecoactivists that highlights the movement’s greatest strength of harnessing hope in a proactive way that results in direct action and alternative solutions. While the goals may appear lofty to “end capitalism, fight all oppression, and stop injustices” as Mounty so nonchalantly explained⁷⁰, hope becomes the silent force of solidarity and aids in future making. It explains the under-explained and unspoken energy that lingers between Pluto rushing a project knowing it may be destroyed by police and assembly discussions on feminism within the community. Hope in this case is functional and not just linked to emotions (Courville and Piper, 2004) as it drives the forward thinking of ecoactivists, whether in short term or long term future development. An additional function is to mediate fear that is interwoven in the past traumas, present insecurity, and future “doom” (Kleresa and Wettergren, 2017) because of the climate crisis and injustices capitalism and hierarchy have created. Hope becomes an unspoken comrade within the Hambi Bleibt community and the flame that continues to ignite the diverse humans that build and develop a future through their alternative systems and harsh realities. Just as the human and nonhuman ecologies intermingle and create futures based on their relations and encounters, the same is being done by the big or small influence of Hambi Bleibt on the rest of the world.

⁶⁹ Fieldnotes, Forest Diary, 9/3/2020

⁷⁰ Interview, Mounty, 24/3/2020

Conclusion:

The goal of this thesis is to both develop an understanding of the human and nonhuman relations that serve as the foundation of larger systems of capitalism through commodification and objectification while also highlighting the reality of ecoactivist contestation and alternative methods within the Hambi Bleibt occupation as part of a transnational discourse on anticapitalist societies. By understanding how humans and nature are intertwined, the development of western capitalist states, as critically perceived through the lens of climate justice, becomes a system of oppression and hierarchy leading humans to take agency through direct democratic models and reimagined relationships with the spaces they occupy. The goals of ecoactivist movements such as Hambi Bleibt result in a juxtaposition of fighting against systems of capitalism, facsism, and patriarchy to make a better future yet living in insecure environments focusing mainly on present day actions. This interplay of past histories, present actions, and the spectrum of future goals exposes the tool of hope; an integral part of why Hambi Bleibt is a successful alternative example and model for future initiatives. Hope is both the explanation and motivator behind ecoactivism in the Hambach Forest and the future impact the movement will have.

Through ethnographic research and active participation within the Hambach Forest, a bottom up approach through daily actions and conversations has uncovered the complex interplay between understanding a past of tension and the motivations to put in the work anyway. Within my first two chapters, I bring life to how the effects of the anthropocene and human-centric ideology create marketized and militarized nature and subsequent “resources” aka the lignite coal. Nature is an economic resource within capitalist systems and within the German state, large corporations such as RWE hold power and influence because of their economic agenda- thus linking with political powers to perpetuate resource control. The question arises of “who has the right?” to view and use nature as a resource, which is resulting in irreversible damage to the earth, as eco-activists argue. With new extensions of private security (RWE) and state supported police, the forest becomes a battlespace of continuous contention - originally based on ideals but escalating to state of exception style responses and media frenzies around “eco-terrorism” further justifying the amplified force. Ultimately this dynamic results in

“security culture” which goes on to define ecoactivists' complex behavior within the Hambi Bleibt occupation and how they perceive the future as both pointless and important.

Within the eight year long occupation, the meshwork of time and experiences are interwoven in education, assemblies, and direct actions. The focus on a direct democratic model is seen on both a global scale with the influence of transnational activism in and out of the first and locally with skillsharing and workshops on community behaviors. The encounters of human activists and their representation in Hambi Bleibt is equal to those of human and nonhuman relations and effects. Through exploration of objectification of nonhumans and the influence of natural ecologies and naturecultures, Hambi Bleibt provides an example of humans both unlearning anthropocentric ideals and building (physically and ideologically) a community that breaks down hierarchical species narratives and looks for cohesion. This interplay in practice uniquely makes Hambi Bleibt a working example of what the future could look like when nonhumans are valued and integrated in community organization. Ultimately, it is the mix of diversity with actions, represented voices, and anti-oppression of the Hambach Forest environment that is key to the future making of anti-capitalist ideals and alternative community projects.

By exploring the flux of timespaces and how individuals, and the collective community in the occupation, experience histories of eco-activism and perform present actions against the militarization and commodification of nature, future goals are subsequently able to be realized. There is an unconscious “hope” that fuels the feelings of home within the community and on-going efforts, despite contradictory claims of hopelessness and the forest’s imminent death. Hope becomes the key motivator that turns the past into actionable change and ultimately justifies the energy and persistence of ecoactivism. With the use of hope, Hambi Bleibt demonstrates an alternative “ideal” community model that may be replicated through transnational networks and should be considered in future considerations of human and nature worldviews.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Aerial view of forest and Hambach mine



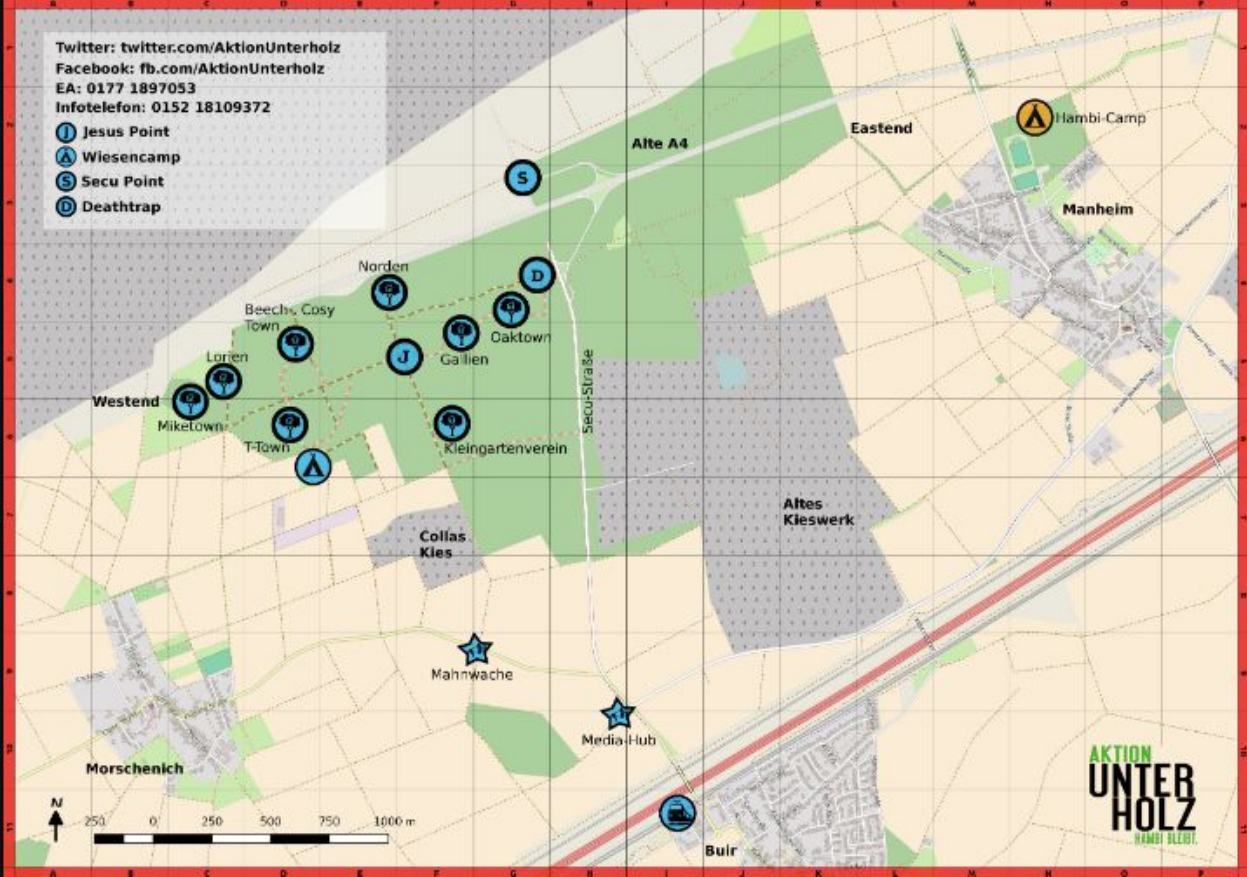
Source: <https://aktion-unterholz.org/>

Figure 2: Poster on the value of anonymity



Source: Taken by me

Figure 3: Map of occupation



Source: <https://aktion-unterholz.org/>