

Anarchist Resistance in the German Hambach Forest: Localising Climate Justice

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ABSTRACT

The Hambach forest occupation is the most important ecology-oriented anarchist resistance project in Germany and Europe. Anarchists in the Hambach forest are part of the national and transnational anti-coal and climate-justice movement. The forest occupation is the only direct strategic intervention for the transformation of the German energy system. The central principles of anarchist practice in the forest are decentralisation, voluntary association for direct action and a direct-democratic organisation. The success of the resistance has been enhanced by the occupiers' ability to connect forest occupation to societal goals and highlight the difference between sustainable and exploitative ways of producing and living.

Keywords: *Anarchism, climate justice movement, anti-coal movement, Hambach forest occupation, Germany*

1. INTRODUCTION

Hot Time or *Hothouse Earth Pathway* (Steffen/Rockström/Richardson et al., 2018, p2) are climate-scientific concepts which describe the potential effects of climate change. In 2018 both entered public discourse in Germany, not least because of the intense heat. There is now an ongoing scientific debate about the impact of anthropogenic or capitalogenic (see Moore 2016) changes in the Earth and the likelihood of climate system to promote and intensify political-economic conflicts (see Buhaug/Rudolfson 2015; Burke/Miguel/Satyanath et al. 2009; Hsiang/Burke/Miguel 2013). At the same time, the *Commission on Growth, Structural Change and*

Employment (German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety 2019) has been set up by the German Federal Government in 2018 to develop exit scenarios for electricity generation from lignite. Yet running parallel to these discourses and approaches, Rheinisch-Westphalian Power (RWE) continues to mine coal in the Hambach opencast mine. Coal mining, greenhouse gas emissions, changes in the earth and climate system and the resulting potential conflicts have thus become a central issue in recent years in scientific, state-centric and anarchist and left wing communities. In 2012, the Hambach forest occupation started as part of the political opposition to coal mining in the RWE-operated Hambach opencast mine. *Hambi bleibt!* – meaning ‘Hambi stays’ – is ongoing and it has been framed by anarchist and radical left publics. The occupation is currently the most important anarchist resistance project in Germany against climate change. Its success follows from the high levels of public support for the project. The forest occupation brings together environmental protection associations and non-governmental organisations, including the *Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* (BUND e.V.), (an associate member of Friends of the Earth) and *Buirer for Buir*, a citizen initiative. And as part of the German and transnational anti-lignite or anti-coal movement, the forest occupation calls for a range of widely supported and accepted policy goals. These include: the immediate termination of the fossil energy regime and the introduction of a renewable energy system. The dates for the phasing out of the production of electricity from lignite in Germany are highly contested at the national public policy level. Thus, the anarchists frame the Hambach forest occupation as a ‘frontline fight’ against the dominant, fossil-capitalist energy regime. Compared to other anarchist resistance projects (such as squatting, assistance to refugees, and support for anarchist prisoners) the Hambach resistance can easily frame RWE as an organisation that acts unsustainably, threatening global climate justice for the sake of short-term profit. Rejecting this profit orientation, the anarchists argue that sustaining the forest supports global climate justice and reduces Germany’s damaging climate footprint. The constellation in the Hambach Forest enables anarchists to frame RWE as the ‘evil’ party and paint anarchists as environmental and climate friendly actors.

We analyse the occupation as theorists, interested in the project both because of the status it has in Germany and because the occupation is a ground for the implementation of anarchist principles. Our research has two dimensions: the first focuses on the anarchists’ critique of the hegemonic capitalist relationship with nature (green anarchism); the second examines anarchist tactics. In sum, our aim is to analyse the anarchists’ attempt to block coal production and preserve the Hambach forest with a view to transforming the societal energy regime. In

addition, we try to classify the anarchist resistance in the Hambach forest in the context of contemporary anarchist movement activism. We ask three questions:

- How do anarchists organise their resistance against coal mining?
- Which policy goals do the anarchists pursue and how do they focus their critique?
- What is the relationship between the anarchists and the residents of the Hambach mine? Specifically, how do anarchists perceive their relation to state authorities?

Our research is informed by a group discussion, one-on-one interviews with forest occupiers and analysis of publicly-available information about the occupation and, in particular, on the forest occupation's blog.

In the following section, we discuss two broad theoretical perspectives (green anarchism and tactics of social change) relevant to the Hambach forest occupation. In section 3, we critically discuss our methodology. We present and analyse the results of our field trip in section 4 and outline our conclusions in section 5.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON *HAMBI BLEIBT!*: GREEN ANARCHISM AND THE ANARCHIST CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL CHANGE

To reflect on the resistance organised by the Hambach anarchists, we adopt two different perspectives: one focused on policy issues or issues of critique (2.1) and the second on forms of action or tactics (2.2). We develop these to analyse the praxis of *Hambi bleibt!* in section 4.

2.1 Green Anarchism

We use green anarchism¹ as a point of departure to explore the critique and the policy goals of the Hambach resistance. We ask: what problems and policy issues do the Hambach anarchists deal with? Can we include this critique in existing anarchist literature on the multiple ecological crises following from the capitalist modernity? From the statements on the *Hambi bleibt!* blog!,² we can see that climate change is the most salient issue for the activists in the forest. The anarchists tell us that:

Environmental destruction is clearly connected to the ruling of power. Capitalism is a system in which those few, who have the power, can outsource the negative effects of their actions onto others. Very few profit from the

exploitation and destruction of the earth, yet many have to carry the consequences: A change of climate, the destruction of habitats of humans and other animals, the pollution of the air and the sea ... If those, who are evicted from their homes, or people living in the global south with their birthplaces flooded through climate change or being devastated, would have to be asked about the burning of lignite coal, it would never had happened. This destruction is possible because some few use violence for their own profit. Therefore the fight for climate justice is also a fight for a world without rulers and freedom from capitalistic forces (Hambi bleibt! (2019), What we fight for).

Clearly, the activists identify capitalist exploitation at the root of the climate crisis and use this as the main frame for their activism. While this critique places *Hambi bleibt!* in the ambit of green anarchism, (Price 2019) it also chimes with Eliséé Reclus's theoretical reflections on the ecological crises of capitalist modernity (cf. Clark 1997; Clark/Martin 2013, p163; Purchase 1997, p11; Reclus 1871; 1895; 1905) To give an example, in 1871, Reclus wrote in *The Earth* (1871):

Among the causes in human history that have led to the disappearance of many civilizations we ought to mention the brutal violence with which the majority of people related to the land they lived on. They cut trees, dried up springs, flooded rivers, damaged the climate and surrounded cities with swampy and pestilential zones; then when profaned nature became hostile to them they hated it and, not being able to retreat like savages to the woods, they let themselves be more and more brutal in their despotism.

It also resonates with Murray Bookchin's social ecology (1982; 1995), notably, his idea that 'the natural world and the social are interlinked by evolution into one nature that consists of two differentiations: first, or biotic nature, and second or social nature' (Bookchin 2009, p29). In sum: the green anarchist strand of social theory is an important intellectual tool for understanding the contemporary ecological crises under the capitalocene's regime. This theoretical underpinning helps us appreciate the critique of Hambach anarchists and see it as a comprehensive critique of hegemonic social and ecological relationships.

2.2 Tactics and conceptions of social change: self-government within the forest

The second approach comes from a social movement analysis and an anarchist perspective in which direct action and self-rule is central. Taking this approach, we

ask: what specific anarchist tactics for social change and conceptions of anarchist organisation can we find when we analyse the forest occupation? We use Dana Williams' work to help us answer these questions. Looking at anarchist conceptions and tactics for social change, Williams argues:

Anarchist tactics aim to accomplish two things simultaneously. First, they oppose things that anarchists consider to be bad, such as hierarchy, repression, and inequality. In this respect, tactics serve a diagnostic function that negatively frames societal characteristics with an anarchist analysis. Second, anarchist tactics promote things that anarchists consider to be good, like horizontal relationships, liberation, and egalitarianism. Thus, tactics are also prognostic frames that suggest better, more positive forms of social organisation (Williams 2019, p107).

According to Williams, anarchist tactics are *destructive* in the sense that they are directed against authoritarian and exploitative phenomena, institutions and practices and *constructive* because they are also directed towards the design of institutions and organisations that 'live up to anarchist values' (p108). These include self-rule, non-hierarchy and free association for collective action. As we will see in section 4.2 both dimensions are evident: the first in the action against RWE Power AG and the second in the organisation of every-day life. Furthermore, we can classify anarchist tactics in terms of their *revolutionary* or *evolutionary* potential (p108). We can also distinguish between *direct* and *representative action*. A central tenet of the anarchist idea of social change is that individuals act on their behalf and take an active role.³ Williams adds that principles of *anti-authoritarianism*, *horizontalism* and *self-management* are guiding principles for developing anarchist tactics (cf. Williams 2019, p109). The choice of tactics depends on the socio-political and economic context in which action takes place. As Williams explains:

Anarchist tactics vary depending on the era in which they were used. The two main periods of modern anarchist history can be crudely split by the interwar period. Prior to World War I, the societal context in which anarchism survived was noticeably different than later periods. While this is not a clean delineation, the world wars serve to separate contemporary anarchism from its 'classical age', which can be said to have begun with the First International, as anarchists broke free of their Marxist brethren. During this earlier era, anarchist movements were more heavily synonymous with revolutionary workers movements, especially via the tendency eventually known as anarcho-

syndicalism. After 1945 and especially after the defeat of the Spanish anarchists in 1939, anarcho-syndicalism became less of a prominent feature of anarchist movements (p112).

The anarchist resistance in the Hambach forest does not have a strong class character but in keeping with historic anarchist struggles, the main enemy of *Hambi bleibt!* is a corporation, namely, RWE Power AG. Moreover, capitalism is identified as the overarching socio-economic structure causing climate change. Thus the anarchists choose tactics that undermine the operations of RWE Power AG, notably disturbing hoisting machines. Scientists and activists have studied similar tactics used by the Earth Liberation Front's (ELF) fight against environmental degradation (cf. Buell 2009; Cooke 2013; Joosse 2012; Loadenthal 2013, 2014; Molland 2006). Besides the ELF, (which started in 1992 on the back of British Earth First! (Taylor 1998, p304)), the tactics of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) run parallel with those of *Hambi bleibt!* Loadenthal reports that ELF guidelines include the provision that actions taken in the group's name should cause economic harm and educate the public without endangering human life (Loadenthal 2014, p17). In the Hambach forest, land occupation is used as a specific tactic. Here, there is a long-standing anarchist tradition. The land occupations in Andalusia are an example (Kaplan 2015). What all these groups have in common is the two-pronged strategy. In this instance, the specific aims are: to destroy the technical infrastructure for raw material extraction or animal exploitation and educate and enlighten the wider public by publishing statements and analyses on the causes of environmental and human degradation.

3. METHODOLOGY

The topic of our research, to examine the anarchist endeavour to stop the extraction of coal, preserve the Hambach forest and bring about a transformation of the energy regime, has enormous socio-political relevance. By explaining the perspectives of the occupiers, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of contemporary green anarchism in Germany and its tactics. Most facts about the connection between RWE, economic development in Rhineland, (especially in the surrounding area of the Hambach opencast mine), climate change and the government policy are already public. Yet political action against climate change has until now appeared to be ineffective. Whether the anarchist occupation can help reduce greenhouse gases depends on factors beyond the scope of action described here.

3.1 DISCUSSION OF METHODS

We decided that a group discussion with as many of the Hambacher anarchists as possible offered the best method to understand their motivations, their basic ideological convictions, their ideas of the democratisation of social and environmental conditions, their understanding of practice, their assessments of likely success and the conditions for the success of the anti-carbon movement. Although, as Geiges (2014) shows, group discussion has been marginalised as method in social movement research, it is well known and frequently applied in research into anarchist and other radical political movements (cf. Jackson/Gilmore/Monk 2019; Maeckelbergh 2012, 2012a; Graeber 2012). The advantage of group discussions, especially in the case of the Hambach forest, is that the method is very similar to the 'plenary meeting' familiar to anarchist activists. During the performance of group discussions, the participants move in a known space, and this promotes spontaneous conversations. Group discussions are designed to generate a particular dynamic and atmosphere for conversation. It worked well with group members who already knew each other. The collective production of 'responses' overcomes the unwillingness of individuals to participate and helps alleviate suspicions linked to the intrusions of investigating bodies. Nevertheless, attracting participants was very difficult. Trial and error showed that participants would not respond to mail invitations and that recruitment required personal approaches to individual activists. We explained our motivations and sentiments and this prevented categorical rejection. We planned to use questionnaires and sent them to the activists, but we failed to get a response. During our stay in the Hambach forest, we learned that only one person dealt with the PR of the occupation, so getting responses to our questions took a lot of time.

3.2 Criticism of Methods

Although we set out to go to the Hambach forest to conduct a group discussion, we were unable to implement this as we had planned. Having established personal contact before the visit, we found that individual anarchists were willing to participate, but not as we suggested, so that we included spontaneous single interviews. Another adjustment was made with the technology. We had had doubts about the acceptability of audio recordings and the activists indeed mostly rejected recording. One of the single interviews developed into a group discussion, as other squatters joined us and took part in the discussion. We documented this by hand. In the end, it included five participants. We were surprised by the

willingness of participants to speak with us as researchers. The lessons we learned are as follows:

- a) even the most careful plan may have to be adjusted to suit changing circumstances and interactions with participants,
- b) establishing contact with a specific person is essential for success and
- c) the very real threat to activists from hostile authorities may cause activists to object to recordings and necessitate alternative methods of documentation.

We were able to collect useful information and develop insights that we would not have otherwise detected. We discuss these in the following section. The range of the finding seems limited, since the activists emphasised that none speaks for the whole group and only as individuals. This statement is congruent with the occupation blog: 'Everyone speaks for themselves' (Hambi bleibt! 2019, *What we fight for*). It is possible that other activists would have expressed different ideas and arguments. For example, there are disagreements about veganism and some anarchists were stricter about this than others. However, we controlled for the likelihood of deviations from the common ideology by triangulation: comparing interviewees' assertions with blog statements. Additionally, it is implausible that the squatters would diverge on central ideological issues and goals, as they operate in a hostile environment (police repression and the danger of persecution) and therefore require strong group coherence. The anarchists framing of the RWE Power AG as an enemy to the climate, supports this idea of group and ideological coherence. This friend-enemy-scheme strengthens group coherence of Hambi bleibt!

While the anarchists strongly reject the idea of representation, forcing us to handle their statements very carefully, we were also interested in seeing how the common ideology and the action against a common enemy bound the group. In other words, to consider how every-day life and the fight against the corporation homogenised the ideological positions. Finally, the anarchists engaged in many activities to develop the trust and build social capital for acting together (cf. for social bonding within anarchist networks Williams 2019, p110). These collective actions also contributed to ideological cohesion. This strong interconnection by collective activities makes it less probable that we would find significant deviations about the central elements of the occupation and the influence of the Capitalocene.

4. HAMBİ BLEIBT!

The objectives of the occupants go beyond the preservation of the Hambach forest as a conservation-relevant ecosystem. As a tool to prevent the deforestation, the occupation is a tactical element of the struggle against brown coal extraction. From the perspective of one interviewee, the occupation aims to disrupt the coal extraction, to overcome capitalism and to build social equality (Interview). In other words, the occupation contributes to the transformation of the fossil energy regime. In what follows, we will analyse the structures, aims and motivations, internal organisation and means of resistance as well as the relationship with residents, allies and state authorities of the forest occupation.

4.1 Structures

Hereafter, we will depict the structures on the meadow as well as on the forest occupation. The occupation project *Hambi bleibt!* is characterised by a spatial division, which is induced physiographically (meadow and forest) and organisationally (possibility for setup of infrastructure on the meadow).⁴ The meadow is utilised as a camp and space for residence, information, assemblies and living, while the forest is the place of occupation and the daily routines associated with it.

The tree houses within the forest served as obstacles to clearing operations as well as lodgings for the anarchists (cf. *Hambi bleibt!* 2019, *Forest occupation*). The community facilities included a greenhouse, a gallery, community kitchens, gardens, an assembly hall (able to accommodate at least eighty activists), a bicycle repair shop, a workshop, a library, an info shop and a free shop (cf. *Hambi bleibt!* 2019, *Meadow camp*). Environmentalists in strategic alliance with the anarchists, regularly offer public forest strolls and guided tours through the Hambach forest to raise awareness of the ecological-anarchist resistance. Anarchists in the forest also organise skill-sharing events, where people can learn relevant skills for living in the forest, e.g. climbing training (cf. *Hambi bleibt!* 2019, *Skillshare camp, spring 2019*). The forest occupants built the infrastructures themselves, following DIY principles. The buildings were constructed gradually to suit the needs of the activists who live in the forest. In common with urban autonomous centres, the buildings, caravans and cars are covered with graffiti: political messages and the like. In the forest, the activists divide themselves into Barrios or neighbourhoods. These are called Oaktown, Beachtown, Gallien or Lothringen and are organised to surround the occupied trees. Information is on the forest floor and the self-built facilities.

4.2 Aims and motivations

The main goal of the occupation, as a collective project, is the prevention of the clearing of the Hambach forest. This is an element of the broader political struggle against coal extraction by RWE Power AG (Hambi bleibt! 2019, *What's all this about?*). Thus, the Hambach forest occupation is part of the transnational climate justice movement (Görg/Bedall 2013; Guerrero 2011; Shepard/Corbin-Mark 2009), which campaigns as a heterogeneous network of activists for climate justice and fights against climate change and government handling by the adoption of diverse strategies and tactics. One interviewee told us that ecological modernisation, for example, greening the economy, is directed by government and is therefore inadequate from a transformative perspective (Interview). Establishing a clear counter position to RWE as a non-sustainable actor is an important part of the strategy to politicise the occupation as resistance. This discursive representation of RWE as an unsustainable and unjust enemy (Interview; cf. also Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Resistance*) facilitates the presentation of the activists' goals as reasonable, even if the illegal status of occupation has caused disquiet in some part of the public and dismissal by the authorities.

One participant told us that *Hambi bleibt!* strives to use the conflict about the coal mine to unite actors on the radical left (Interview). In addition, the group discussion revealed that resistance to RWE, which was built on an anti-coal agenda, was extended to include a policy on social and ecological transformation (cf. Hambi bleibt! 2019, *What we fight for*). This implied a commitment to transform individual and collective relationships towards 'nature' and introduce non-hierarchical organisation in every-day-life. Here, we see the resonance with green anarchist theories on exploitative societal relationships with nature.

To return to Williams' framework, the activists' motivations are partly destructive, directed against RWE Power AG, as a player within the capitalist global economy and as a material destroyer of the environment. At the same time, they are oriented towards the construction of a new reality on site. In the first case, RWE is viewed as a 'doable enemy' because the public accepts the argument against coal and for climate protection. The occupiers stand on the 'winning side' (Group discussion; cf. also Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Resistance*). Although RWE operates within the law, the activists frame RWE's course of action as a violation of global justice norms and reject it. They argue: 'what they [RWE] do is simply criminal' (Interview). Indeed, RWE is understood as part of the neo-colonial politics of the Global North, that 'cause people to drown in the Mediterranean' (Interview). Global warming and refugee movements are connected; the combi-

nation is thought to have the potential to ‘create a radical change within the world’ (Interview; cf. Hambi bleibt! 2019, *What we fight for*). On the blog, similarly, the anarchists frame their resistance to RWE Power AG and the coal industry as a global political act intended to transform relationships between industrialised and less or unindustrialised countries and regions (cf. Hambi bleibt! 2019, *What we fight for*).

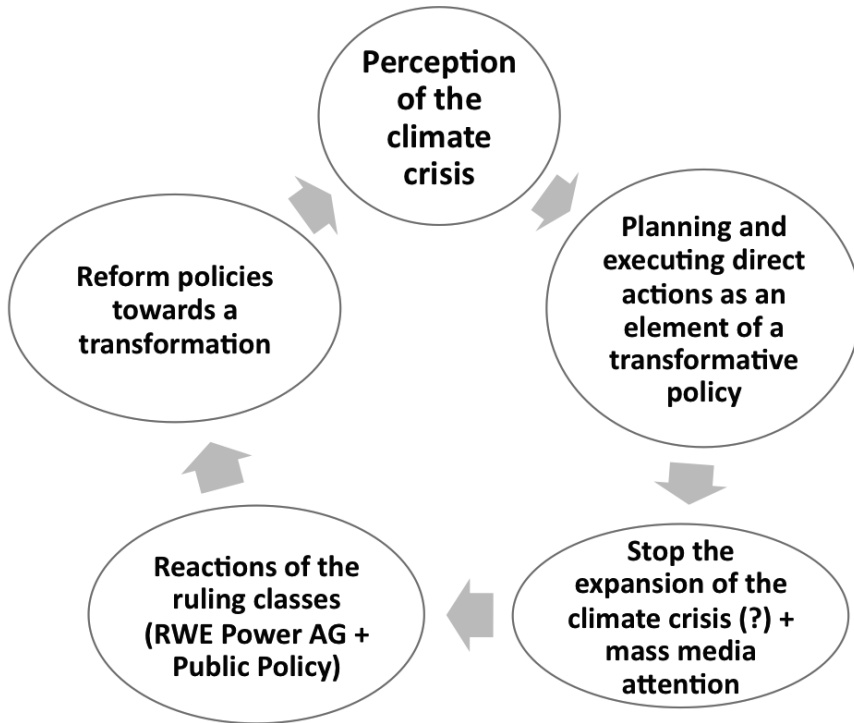
The fluent transition between destructive and productive motivations shows itself in the wish for grass-root organisation to strengthen the bottom-up-movement against climate change (anarchist tactics for social change), which should draw from these aforementioned problems. A social mind set against inequality and injustice plays an important motivational role (cf. section 2.1 Green Anarchism). One participant pointed out that people should consider the needs of the ‘bereaved within this system’ (Interview). This anarchist was not referring to the occupants or activists, but to those in precarious situations both in Germany and around the world: ‘When there’s a three month shortage in the job centre, people think “oh shit, how will I bring my kids through?”’ (Interview).

The constructive aspect of the forest occupation derives from the practical use of the forest and meadow occupation, namely the idea of communal living and learning. The mobilisation is designed to pass on of specific knowledge and skills deemed essential for a long-term engagement in social movements. By living in a society organised along anarchist principles, individuals develop their own political ideals. The occupation also allows for the possibility of living ‘without money’ (Group discussion; Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Skillshare camp, spring 2019*). Activists describe the experience as empowering (Interview). In the words of one interviewee, the occupation creates ‘a kind of freedom [...] which people maybe don’t have anywhere else’ (Interview).

Adapting Williams’ work, our research suggests that the motivations of the anarchists involved in the occupation can be classed in four ways: (cf. section 2.2):

- *Destructive*: to stop RWE Power AG continue its activities
- *Strategic-productive*: to treat RWE Power AG as a ‘doable enemy’ and build a broad consensus on climate protection
- *Solidaristic*: to raise awareness of the consequences of the fossil-capitalist economy for the global’s poorest inhabitants and regions
- *Countercultural*: occupiers are able to experiment in a non-hierarchical living.

Figure 1: Analysis of the interplay between anarchist direct actions and public policy



Source: author's diagram

4.3 Internal organisation and forms of resistance

How do the Hambach anarchists organise their resistance and how do they attempt to prevent forest clearing? The anarchists we spoke to explained that the barricades (consisting of deadwood) play a central role in preventing clearing by RWE Power AG. Nevertheless, with the support of the police, RWE-security has been able to remove some barricades. Apart from the barricades, the tree houses are enormously significant for the occupants as living spaces and obstacles to clearing. Because they are difficult to evict, they serve as blockades (Group discussion; cf. also Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Forest occupation*).

The activists develop and execute decentralised, clandestine direct actions to stop the clearing and prevent the police and RWE security forces disrupting them (cf. section 2.2). One interviewee described direct action as a 'grit in the gears' (Interview). While the activists believed that probability of stopping the clear-

ance was low, they also thought that they could increase the costs of clearance and complicate the process:

We probably can't stop the machinery, but to scatter something here and there doesn't hurt and it lets them know that they can't do anything they want, and that there is a defence. If for example, the levers from two cogwheels are accidentally removed, and the power plant is brought to a standstill, activists can tether themselves there. They are frightened of that (Interview; cf. section 2.2).

As described in section 2.2, *Hambi bleibt!* aims to increase the economic costs of infrastructure and energy projects. In the context of the occupation, the activists use sit-ins, sabotage and militant actions: the chosen forms of resistance depend on the individuals and are therefore diverse and wide-ranging (Interview; cf. *Hambi bleibt!* 2019, *Actions ...*).

Decision-making in the Hambach forest is organised in peer, affinity and living groups. The group discussion made clear that the basic principles are to let 'those affected [...] decide by themselves' and to ensure that 'organisational structures [...] don't overwhelm the people'. These are kept as simple as possible (Group discussion). Structures were described as 'weaknesses', reflecting the anarchists' awareness of the surveillance organised by the authorities. However, communication in the camp is uneven communication, and cliques that have a more intensive contact, are forming: those outside these groups 'are only seen once a week' (Group discussion). Notably, the anarchists recognised emerging 'hierarchies of knowledge'. As a whole, *Hambi bleibt!* is a 'network of decentralised solutions' without decision-making structures and it is shaped by its heterogeneity. Here, it is important to note that the degree of ideological congruence is very high, despite the decentralised organisation. This is true for the importance of certain forms of direct action.

There is a general assembly but the 'barrios' or villages are organised independently to take everyday decisions for themselves. The composition and degree of openness is shaped by the needs of the residents (Interview). One activist said that s/he would not describe this as direct democracy, but a looser arrangement. Yet the same interviewee told us that decisions reached by consensus are binding decisions which indicates that the process is both direct and democratic. The occupiers use the general assembly to agree upon important issues such as finance. Since the occupation now has a lot of people, it is impossible to decide everything within the general assembly. This reinforces the idea that those affected by decisions should take them autonomously:

If you want to do something, then do it. We provide a platform, but you have to show initiative. Of course it may be that two groups go to the same container, that's too bad. But the forest is now too big to decide everything together. We have 60-200 people living here, so you can't agree upon everything. Do it and don't get caught (Interview).

In cases of conflict in the general assembly, the anarchists use returning consensus as a resolution mechanism. According to those involved, using consensus for everything would be problematic, since everybody would contribute different views as a result of the ideological heterogeneity of the occupants. We have doubts about the degree of ideological heterogeneity. Yet consensus-building processes regularly ended with extensive discussions, with the possibility that blocks would be used to veto decisions. In general, however, the participants used the idea of reflexivity and constant deliberation:

Someone proposes something, for example they need 600 Euros for a car for the occupation. Then this someone goes to the general assembly: What do you think? Someone else says: No, I think cars are stupid. Block. Then someone else asks: Why the veto? Are there no compromises? On the basis of the veto another person asks: Are there no alternatives? Instead of paying 600 Euros, we can rent a car. This way, you find different ways of getting a compromise. In theory, if the veto is not withdrawn, the task of finding a compromise is impossible (Interview).

Despite these difficulties, the occupation is an example of anarchist community (cf. section 2.2). The anarchists take very seriously the principles of consensus-based decision-making, horizontality and free association for collective action. There are key actors and hierarchies of knowledge; this isn't an exception, but is rather a recurring phenomenon because some activists have spent more time in the forest than others. The organisation of everyday-life and the execution of ideas is left to individuals and is supported by the collective. One interviewee told us: 'I would say if you want to do a project, then you either do it by yourself or, if you need more people then you just search for them and then you just simply do it. I think that is a concept which the police isn't really able to deal with' (Interview).

We identify three central organisational principles from the occupation:

- decentralised organisation allowing the design of direct actions in the 'barrios'
- consensus-based decision making in the general assembly
- production of needs in community structures.

The occupation serves as a 'point of crystallisation' for the anti-coal movement. Our material leads us to conclude, that the anarchists in the Hambach forest view their chosen form of radical resistance against the clearing as a long-term, direct and therefore sustainable alternative to normatively accepted classic forms of democratic protest – petitions or peaceful demonstrations, (cf. section 2.2). The anarchists view the occupation as a meaningful part of the radical German speaking eco-movement. This is demonstrated by the media attention the activists have generated and the wider public attention which has reduced conflicts within the radical left and strengthened anarchists place within it. They value the alliances that have been built in the Hambach forest (Interview; cf. Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Who we are*).

The activists are aware of their historic contexts as well as of their significance for the left-wing environmental-political motivated movement. They see themselves as a part of historic milestones of the German speaking ecological movement like Wackersdorf, Wyhl or Gorleben, which were central places of the protest against nuclear energy. The forest occupation is viewed as an 'anarchist environmental protection in a mode of anarchist self-organisation' (Interview). The occupation has not been idealised, and is analysed critically. For example, activists considered whether their actions were themselves disturbing the ecosystem. Similarly, occasionally militant direct actions taken by those outside the occupation, are described by occupiers as independent and disconnected from the occupation, even if they refer to it (Interview; cf. Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Actions*).

To sum up: the occupation locates itself within the anti-coal and climate-justice-movement, through which different struggles may be connected. The practical experience of anarchist collective living and learning, as well as the appreciation of sustainable and intervening forms of resistance characterises the action for those involved. In all this, there is substantial room for self-criticism.

4.4 Relationship with residents, alliance partners and authorities

In the group discussion it became clear that some, although not many, residents gave their support to the resistance. Some residents told the anarchists that they 'should have come earlier' (Group discussion). One interviewee thought that interaction with residents was rare. The communities around the Hambach forest were divided into supporters of RWE, workers finding jobs, and supporters of the forest occupiers. Residents who used to own land where opencast mining takes place, now cooperate with RWE and treat 'five burning cars as a scandal' (Group discussion). The anarchists argued that RWE paid the residents of the towns around the forest

to accept the clearings. RWE beats down the already low property prices so that the residents accrue 'debts at the bank again and therefore do not have the guts to speak up' (Interview). This is just one strategy used against the residents. RWE 'disrupts entire communities' which 'existed within the villages' (Interview). The villages have been resettled, social cohesion is undermined and this would lead to demoralisation. Elderly people have trouble accepting 'that their home [...] is being completely destroyed, their original village structure in which they have sometimes lived for sixty or eighty years is completely destroyed' (Interview). Residents know, too, that 'before your village has its turn, three others have gone and they put up resistance and it didn't achieve anything' (Interview). Nevertheless, some residents joined the resistance and for example stayed in their houses until forcibly removed. Likewise, supporters lend practical aid in forms of providing infrastructure like water, showers or cars (Interview). These supporters are unable to join the occupation themselves, but help in their own way:

I'd say the supporters, mostly families etc, here in the area believe our struggle to be important and resist on their own level the way they can, they support the occupation since they like what happens here ideologically, although they aren't in accord with everything that happens here, certainly not [...] but they say they think it's cool, that people, young people are engaged in direct actions against RWE and they do support us there. They themselves are active in some citizen initiatives and so on and so forth (Interview).

Some groups give financial support for the forest occupation and help deal with the legal consequences of their activism. Anarchist Black Cross (ABC),⁵ supports detainees through the management of letters and the organisation of translators and lawyers. The group ANTIRRR originating from Rhineland is engaged in the absorption of charges and they offer a committee of inquiry, too (Ermittlungsausschuss):

This means, of course we want to enable people to take action who don't take into consideration to get a declaration of assets, so to say, who want to participate in direct actions but who don't want to sign their personal bankruptcy, so that they don't get their social demands (Sozialforderung) [...] in other words, if I've blockaded a rail and I'll have to pay 600 Euros, then ANTIRR would absorb the costs and plan events of solidarity (Interview).

The aims are solidaristic, and this helps sustain action in the long-term: ‘At the same time it’s important to show that we treat each other with solidarity and we don’t just talk about solidarity, but that they can experience this solidarity in practice [...] then it empowers the people to stay with it anyway’ (Interview)

Similarly, groups that surround the forest occupation provide a home base and infrastructure. Some doctors and lawyers show solidarity with the activists and farmers in the neighbourhood donate groceries (Interview). Other allies identified by the squatters include:

- the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (*Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V.*; NABU),
- the German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation (*Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland*; BUND),
- local citizen initiatives like *Buier für Buir*,
- the civil disobedience protest movement *Ende Gelände*,
- the German radical-left organisation *Interventionistische Linke* (IL),
- *ausgeco²hlt* (open group which takes direct actions against the fossilist capitalist regime),
- *Zucker im Tank* (group which takes direct actions against the fossilist capitalist regime).

Instead of relying on legislative reforms to prevent the clearing, the occupants avoid cooperating with the authorities. The group told us that the police have developed a counter-strategy (Group discussion): ‘we have the fondly called EK-Hambach here [...] which is a 16-headed team of the police Aachen’ (Interview). ‘These are responsible for the anticipation of our actions and the investigation of our structures. They are present at rail blockades, barricade and occupation evictions’ (Interview). Since the Hambach forest belongs to RWE and not the state, RWE requests police support to protect its workers:

Since the occupation exists and resists, RWE has to ensure the safety of their workers, which means [...] if they just drive in with their diggers, in all likelihood it will have some broken windows and be ablaze, so they can’t just come into the forest, but rather need the security provided by the police [...]. The police is in actuality just the executive safety body in all this’ (Interview).

In Germany, the Hambach forest is the area most affected by state-run repression. The activists respond to this by refusing to give their personal data. This principle is based on the supposition that individuals possess their personal data (Interview). Activists protect their information by making their fingerprints unrecognisable: 'For example you scrape away your finger prints using a razor blade and then applying instant glue or whatever else you want to put on, so that they are unable to get your data and thus cannot make an assessment of your identity' (Interview).

The downside of this response is that it leads to an elongated stay in custody. Some anarchists suspect that new police powers in North Rhine-Westphalia will probably deter protest, even though committed anarchists will continue to take part in the occupation (Interview). Yet the encounter with state-run repression has caused some of the participants to feel optimistic:

If people somewhere, who haven't had any contact to the police before, who might have been to a demonstration and have seen the police there, but if they get taken into custody, and when they get out have five people waiting for them with tea and everything, cooked food, and if they say: Hey, if you need someone to talk to, I'm always there for you, I've had crazy experiences like that as well, etc., that's what empowers people to stay with their political activism anyway (Interview).

5. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

In this paper, we showed that the anarchist occupation in the Hambach forest contributed to the existing green anarchist tradition. Furthermore, we examined specific anarchist tactics for social change within the occupational project. To conclude, we believe that *Hambi bleibt!* is rightly considered to be part of the green anarchist movement because it aims at a transformation of social relationships with nature. The activists take the exploitative and oppressive societal relationships with nature as their analytical starting point, developing green anarchist perspectives. The Hambach resistance project is a typically diverse anarchist form of intervention in the capitalocene's energy and production regime. When it comes to tactics, we argue that for the anarchists in the forest, direct action and self-government are central. After studying the structures, motives, aims and practices of *Hambi bleibt!* we conclude that the forest occupation has increased public awareness of climate change, mobilised broad political support and successfully conducted resistance according to the anarchist principles of anti-authoritarianism, horizontalism and self-management. The anarchists repeatedly argued for a mode of activism

without speakers and without a coherent ideology. We found counter-evidence of an overarching ideology consisting of a critique of the destructive effects of capitalism, the anti-ecological despotism of contemporary societal relationships with nature and a critique of representative state politics based on a bias towards interests of capital. It is evident that the constellation of fighting against a very powerful social organisation strengthens the internal ideological coherence of the anarchist squatters. Building on the green anarchist tradition, we conclude that *Hambi bleibt!* aligns to other environmental anarchist networks such as ELF. The forest occupation started in 2012 but only gained broader public attention in 2017, after the BUND filed a lawsuit before the Cologne administrative court against the operating plan of the RWE Power AG, and in 2018 when the protests before and within the forest increased. In September and October 2018, the police evicted the occupation. Mass media reports of the evictions, environmental activists, e.g. the German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation (BUND), the demonstrations, blockades and other actions supported the forest occupation and the policy goals of energy transformation. In August 2018, BUND filed another suit against the operating plan of RWE Power AG for the Hambach forest at the Higher Administrative Court of Northrhine-Westphalia in Münster. The Higher Administrative Court of Northrhine-Westphalia in Münster ordered in October 2018, to stop the forest clearing to test the legality of RWE's operating plan 2018-2020 and to examine the question whether the Hambach forest should be classified as a protected area under the European Fauna-Flora-Habitat Directive (FFH). The forest clearing was stopped by the decision of the Higher Administrative Court of Northrhine-Westphalia in Münster in October 2018. In August 2019, the Administrative Court of Aachen ordered that the meadow camp in front of the Hambach forest had to be cleared due to ongoing criminal acts. Meanwhile, the RWE Power AG declared to wait with the forest clearing until autumn 2020. The juridical approach of BUND in conjunction with the Higher Administrative Court's decision to test the legality of RWE's operating plan, the direct actions of *Hambi bleibt!* and the mass media reporting on the forest occupation seem to have halted further clearing of the Hambacher forest (see Figure 1). The involvement of institutionalised state-political processes, such as the court cases within the German constitutional state, makes it difficult to estimate how effective the forest occupation was. Yet even though the court has stopped the clearing, the anarchist practice within the Hambach Forest was consistent: *horizontal*, *decentralised* and focused on *direct action*. Moreover, the anarchist rejection of representative politics is borne out by the public policy of North-Rhine Westphalia, which seems to have unilaterally enforced the interests and goals of RWE Power AG. The anar-

chists of *Hambi bleibt!* supported their theoretical criticism of hierarchical public policy making with a practical model of decentralised decision-making and a form of assembly democracy. We observed that the *Hambi bleibt!* activists organised everyday life within the forest and planned and executed actions against the clearing activities of RWE Power AG in a decentralised and democratic assembly. The anarchists believe that this organisational pattern has a strategic advantage over public mobilisations directed by the *Ende Gelände* campaign towards civil disobedience.⁶ An activist concluded that the police and other investigating authorities were unable to operate against a network that lacked central control and avoided public modes of organising. Overall, the activists' aim to preserve the forest and transform societal relations with nature by ending coal mining, which is the overriding goal of the global anti-coal movement, was pushed forward. It is clear that the fight for the preservation of the forest is only one element of a broad ranging transformative policy.

As to further research into anarchism in Germany, we estimate that access to movements will become more difficult in the near future. Our view is borne out by the advice given by the prisoner support and legal aid group *Red Aid* (Rote Hilfe), warning activists against participating in scientific surveys or interviews.⁷ This advice has been prompted by the possibility that state authorities will use results for prosecution. Researchers might circumvent this threat by participating for a longer period in the resistance projects.

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NOTES

1. Green Anarchism can be understood as a theoretical concept, which focuses on the crisis of the societal nature relationship, and as a part of the global anarchist movement (see for a portrayal of Green Anarchism Price 2019).
2. *Hambi bleibt!*, <https://hambacherforst.org/blog/>; especially the self-portrayal of the anarchist forest occupiers.
3. An important theory for political science is the principal agent theory, which conceptualises the people as the principal within parliamentary and presidential systems

of government that give mandates to elected parliamentarians and executives as their agents (cf. Saalfeld 2000; Strøm 2000). For some political scientists direct democracy might increase the participatory element within parliamentary and presidential systems of government.

4. This was true until July and August of 2018 and before. In September and October, the police destroyed the tree houses and the material infrastructure on the meadow. After the destruction of the infrastructure, in October 2018 the anarchists re-installed tree houses in the forest (cf. Hambi bleibt! 2019, *Forest occupation*, https://hambach-forest.org/squat/treehouses/?noredirect=en_US). In August 2019, the administrative court of Aachen decided that the meadow occupation has to end, because the police argued that crimes were committed from the camp on the meadow.
5. The Anarchist Black Cross is an anarchist organisation to support prisoners. In the declaration of principles it is formulated that '*purpose within this federation is to build an organization capable of offering long-term, non-partisan support to class war prisoners*' (Anarchist Black Cross Federation: Principles, <http://www.abcf.net/abcf-constitution-principles/>).
6. *Ende Gelände* 2018 – Stop coal. Protect the climate!, <https://www.ende-gelaende.org/en/>
7. <https://de.indymedia.org/node/23520> (last accessed 22 September 2018).

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