

The Subversion of Propaganda

*A Political Ecology of Media Manipulation
and the Practice of Reinhabiting*

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Abstract

The stories told in media shape how we perceive of the world, and in doing so, they play a significant part in determining whose worlds are allowed to exist and expand (or "grow"), and whose are to be eradicated. The social division and ecological devastation this space of power produces becomes less abstract, when looking closer at the reporting of corporate media on spaces of socio-ecological conflict. On the cases of anti-mining struggles in Lützerath and anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen, this thesis presents a political ecology of media manipulation within the context of the German media landscape. Building on nearly five months of intensive on-site research and an analysis of 323 documents, 24 interviews I identify dominant narratives dispersed in two regional mass media newspapers and discuss them as social management technologies to legitimize lignite mining and gentrification. Moreover, I contrast dominant narratives to some on-the-ground realities emerging from within both struggles to illustrate the extent of distortion and demonstrate which worlds are systematically silenced. The analysis of empirical material is moreover embedded in a detailed exploration of social, economic, and political structures, as well as corporate and government intentions that constrain and shape news production according to corporate and government interests within both newspapers' publishers. Thereby, this thesis shines light on news producers' financial entanglements with (other) industries, instances of censorship, discrimination, and a structural dependency on copy-pasting statements of authorities and corporate leaders, among others. Besides finding that both newspapers systematically distort the socio-ecological conflicts they claim to report on neutrally, I argue that they do so through distractive and contradictory narratives which echo imperialist discourse and constitute a form of psychological violence by causing social conflict. Against this background, I moreover describe land-based struggles as decolonial practices through the act of 're-inhabiting' spaces and landscapes "as if" they mattered.

List of Acronyms

AB	Aachen Besetzen
ADB	Alle Dörfer Bleiben (local anti-mining initiative)
AZ	Aachener Zeitung (regional Aachen newspaper)
AZ Aachen	Autonomes Zentrum Aachen (autonomous center Aachen)
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
BUND	Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (Friends of the Earth Germany)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (German Christian Democratic Union)
cis	<i>If one's identifying with the gender assigned by society on one's birth</i>
CR	CR Investment Management
DMB	Deutscher Mieterbund (German Tenant Union)
DWE	Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen
EID	Energie Informationsdienst (Energy Information Service, trade journal)
FLINTA	Frauen, Lesben, Intergeschlechtliche, Nichtbinäre, Trans and Agender (Women, Lesbians, Intersex, Non-binary, Trans and Agender)
GPG	German Property Group
KIDL	Kirchen im Dorf lassen (local anti-mining initiative)
Küfa	Küche für alle (community kitchen)
LAM NRW	Landesanstalt für Medien Nord-Rhein-Westfalen (State Media Authority North-Rhine-Westphalia)
LGBTQI*	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, without category
LL	Lützerath lebt (Lützerath lives initiative)
MAWA	Mahnwache (Vigil)
MAPAs	Most Affected People and Areas
MHA	Medienhaus Aachen (news publisher of Aachener Zeitung, AZ)
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRW	Nordrhein-Westfalen (North Rhine-Westphalia)
PM	The Propaganda Model
RASA	Recht auf Stadt Aachen (Right to the City initiative Aachen)

RP	Rheinische Post (regional newspaper reporting on Lützerath)
RPM	Rheinische Post Mediengruppe (news publisher of Rheinische Post, RP)
RWE	Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk (Rhenish-Westphalian Power Plants)
RWTH	Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen (Rhenish-Westphalian Technical University Aachen)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
STAWAG	Stadtwerke Aachen AG (Aachen's public utility provider)
UAW	Unser aller Wald (little forest occupation in Keyenberg)
WDR	Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln (largest public service news broadcaster in Germany)
WEF	World Economic Forum
ZAD	Zone à défendre (Zone to Defend)
ZAD NDDL	ZAD in Notre-Dame-des-Landes
ZLG	Zweckverband Landfolge (special purpose association for land succession)

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"Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Es gibt eine andere Welt.
Sie ist größer als du denkst.
Und wenn du sie nicht finden kannst,
Verdammt, schnapp dir ein paar Leute
Und erfinde sie selbst!

There is another world
It is bigger than you think.
And if you can't find it,
Damn, grab some people
And invent it yourself

— Luis Diehl, inhabitant of Lützerath, "Neue Welt"

1 Introducing a village, a monastery, and corporate media

I look at reddit¹ and the top voted comment says that people are too emotional about Lützerath and we should look at facts and logic and that the coal is necessary in case of emergencies and that the 'empty' village is purely symbolic and that the activists shouldn't hurt themselves or others because the land is, and I quote, not worth it. [...] I haven't seen a single mainstream media talk of non-human lives in Lützerath. The hare doesn't get a vote on coal mining, the earthworms are not accounted for in the spreadsheets. You killed my friends and I will never forget this [...]. I became an anarchist from books [...]. But Lützerath brought the fire of anarchy to life, seared the experience into my flesh & bones. Everyone who lived in Lützi, however briefly, will talk to you about it with a spark in their eyes, struggle for words, 'you had to be there', 'it was something special'. [...] —many people have described life in Lützi as something like what a university should be, we learned so much in so little time; awareness groups and safe spaces² for neurodiverse people, BIPOC³, queer, women, accommodations for wheelchair occupiers; a skilled medic team; a savvy media team; an antifa skateboarding training hall which is probably the raddest thing I've ever seen; collective housing of all sorts [...]— All for free. Everything for everyone [...]. No one ever tells you what to do, no one tries to coerce, manipulate or guilt-trip you into being a productive worker, no one conditions your shelter or sustenance on labour, everybody talks things over together in assemblies, and together we build a good place to live in, a life worth living [...]. What a world that we could have and a world they impose onto us.

(anarcholatina in "*This land belongs to the meadow, or: Eulogy for the living utopia of Lützerath*". Published on 16.01.2023, the final day of Lützerath's eviction)

It is a grey afternoon in Lützerath, a squatted hamlet at the edge of a 35km² large hole in the ground, the opencast lignite mine Garzweiler II. Only a few days have passed since politicians and the mine's operator RWE announced the eviction of Lützerath to extract and combust yet another 130 million tons of lignite. While newspapers are full of disastrous pictures from global warming induced floods in Pakistan, "green" politicians call this decision "a really great deal for climate protection". The number of journalists in Lützerath had quadrupled since then. Encouraged by my friend Little Whale, I recently became part of Lützerath's media working group spending much time on collecting, summarizing, and analyzing newly published articles on Lützerath for communicating anti-capitalist content and mobilizing support for the upcoming eviction. Another media group plenary has just ended and Gentian, Dill, Asparagus, Sock, and me are up in "Abundance", the treehouse we inhabit. Everyone uses forest names instead of their real names out of solidarity, and to reduce the risk of collective and individual repression. You get used to calling each other like kitchen herbs

¹ Reddit is a social media news platform (see <https://www.reddit.com/>).

² Safe spaces, or *safer* spaces are rooms or areas dedicated to people subjected to specific forms of discrimination.

³ BIPOC is the acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color.

or animals. We hear and feel this year's first autumn storms. In mix of amusement and despair, I tell the others about a recent article published in a populist newspaper. Curiously they ask me to read it out loud: "The abandoned village [Lützerath] is growing every day. The protestors are coming." Almost every sentence is connotated with alerting messages, representing us as a growing threat to society. "But wait, is this not actually supposed to be about the climate?" The author warns readers about our only vegan kitchen, about hooded people reading books on racism, about transgender and Palestine flags, and walls covered in tags against the police, patriarchy, and capitalism, seemingly desperate to detach liberation struggles from climate justice. The story focuses on stacked stones. We laugh for a bit, and then we sigh (Fieldnotes, 03.11.2022).

Theoretical framework and arguments

As anarcholatina's (2023) *Eulogy for the living utopia of Lützerath* expresses, media of all sorts was rife with allegations and relativizations about people's wholehearted engagement in the over 2-year long reclamation and defense of Lützerath. In early January 2023, the squatted hamlet at the edge of an opencast coal mine in Germany was brutally evicted by thousands of police and private security forces to enable the continuation of lignite extraction, a highly inefficient, destructive, and polluting energy source (Brock, 2023b). Already in early autumn 2022, public debates around this conflict and the "necessity" of continued lignite extraction reached international levels and unfolded in parallel to news stories on global warming induced deadly floods, heatwaves, droughts, and wildfires across Europe. These intensifying global environmental and social catastrophes mark our time as one which scholars identify as 'the Necrocene': an overall "age of die-off and mass extinction" (Clark, 2020, p.10) of species, cultures, and peoples, intensifying this historical foundation of capital accumulation (McBrien, 2016).

Speaking to current debates within political ecology and degrowth literature regarding scholars' transformative ambitions (Varvarousis, 2019; Toro, 2021; Robbins; 2020; Walker, 2006; Blaikie, 2008; Benjaminsen & Svarstad, 2021), this research project explores anarchist tendencies and decolonial critiques within both fields, thereafter indicating how anarchist political ecology as an analytical lens can help to identify, understand, and support present struggles in line with decolonial degrowth. Through a *political ecology of media manipulation*, I explore dominant narratives dispersed through mass media as a social management technology. Hereby, I build on the theoretical framework provided by Edward S.

Herman and Noam Chomsky's (1988/2002) book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* to understand the role of corporate media in producing social conflict and ecological devastation. Known as the *Propaganda Model* (PM), the book's central theory describes and explains the tendency of mass media to function as a propagandistic tool which 'manufactures consent' to capitalist interests. Hereby, the theory analyzes news producers along a continuum of structural compulsion and elitist intention⁴ and operates at significant distance from the claim "Lügenpresse" (press of lies) which finds common use in populist and conspiracy circles in Germany and accuses journalists of despotism and intentional lies (MacLeod & Chomsky, 2019; Zollmann, 2019b; 2022; Krüger & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2017). Revising this theory more than 30 years after its first publication, Alan MacLeod (2019b, p.12) concludes that "the greatest achievement of modern propaganda is in persuading us of its non-existence. Propaganda is all around us, we simply use other names for it: advertising, marketing, branding, public relations." With this reflection in mind, I build this project on a theory that is near to absent in German communication research (Zollmann et al., 2018) to empirically analyze news dispersed by the regional newspapers *Rheinische Post* and *Aachener Zeitung* about anti-mining struggles in Lützerath, and anti-gentrification struggles in the squatted monastery in Aachen. Combined with intensive on-site research, this analysis and its discussion are embedded in debates on anarchist decolonization (Dunlap, 2021d; 2022) and lead me to make four arguments:

(1) The regional newspapers *Rheinische Post* and *Aachener Zeitung* systematically marginalize, distort, and silence realities from within anti-mining struggles in Lützerath and anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen. As outlets of corporate mass media, both newspapers reproduce, consolidate, and disseminate already dominant narratives which legitimate mining or gentrification. This is because both newspapers and their newsrooms are subject to institutionally secured social, economic, and political structures within the capitalist German media system, at the same time as representatives of government, corporations, and public institutions *intentionally* produce dominant narratives.

(2) Corporate media outlets such as *Rheinische Post* or *Aachener Zeitung* function as a propagandistic tool and social management technique that secures capitalist values and (neo) colonial relations. This is because governments, corporations, and their professionalized PR departments utilize mass media to 'manufacture consent' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002) to

⁴ This approach is based on Jaques Ellul's (1973) integrative propaganda (Zollmann, 2019a; 2019b; Krüger & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2017).

extractive projects by distorting the public perception of resistance. Hereby, mass media disseminates distractive and contradictory narratives which echo imperialist discourse through mechanisms of "othering", "dehumanizing", and "pacifying". These narratives prolong ecologically devastating development projects and constitute a form of psychological violence by causing social conflict.

(3) Land-based struggles such as Lützerath and the monastery are decolonizing practices through the act of 're-inhabiting' places previously emptied for capitalist accumulation. Based on the presupposition of radical non-anthropocentric equality, people reinhabit through the anarchist traditions of self-organization, mutual aid, solidarity, fee association, and direct action. "Acting as if" distant humans, land, and non-human beings mattered, people cultivate and defend spaces of collective belonging which make those beings excluded by "democracy" *sensible* and thus existent in the social imaginary.

(4) Given their explicitly transformative ambitions, a political ecology of media manipulation based on the PM as a theoretical framework contributes to both, political ecology and degrowth scholarship, as it helps to analyze the state and corporate induced creation of "needs" and capitalist values, the engineering of social conflict, and the legitimization of extractive projects. Combined with a partisan focus on socio-ecological conflicts, research can hereby generate knowledge that recognizes and supports people who struggle to disrupt capitalist expansion. This is because an anarchist view on the media system allows research to move beyond an analysis of dominant narratives or the envisioning of post-capitalist futures, towards unraveling structures and agents that presently enforce capitalist social organization and destruction under the imperative of economic growth.

General introduction to sites

I build these arguments and discussions on over five months of intensive on-site research alternately in Lützerath and the monastery in Aachen between early August 2022 and mid-January 2023. Both sites are located near Cologne in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in some of the most western parts of Germany. About 2-hours northeast of Aachen, the Lützerath is part of the Heinsberg district and situated at the edge of one of three opencast lignite mines operated by the Rhinean-Westphalian power plants ("Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke", RWE). I traveled back and forth between Lützerath and the monastery via public transport and hitchhiking to engage in participant observation and talk

with some of Lützerath's and the monastery's inhabitants, their neighbors, nearby villagers, and visitors about their experiences with and perceptions of the struggles.



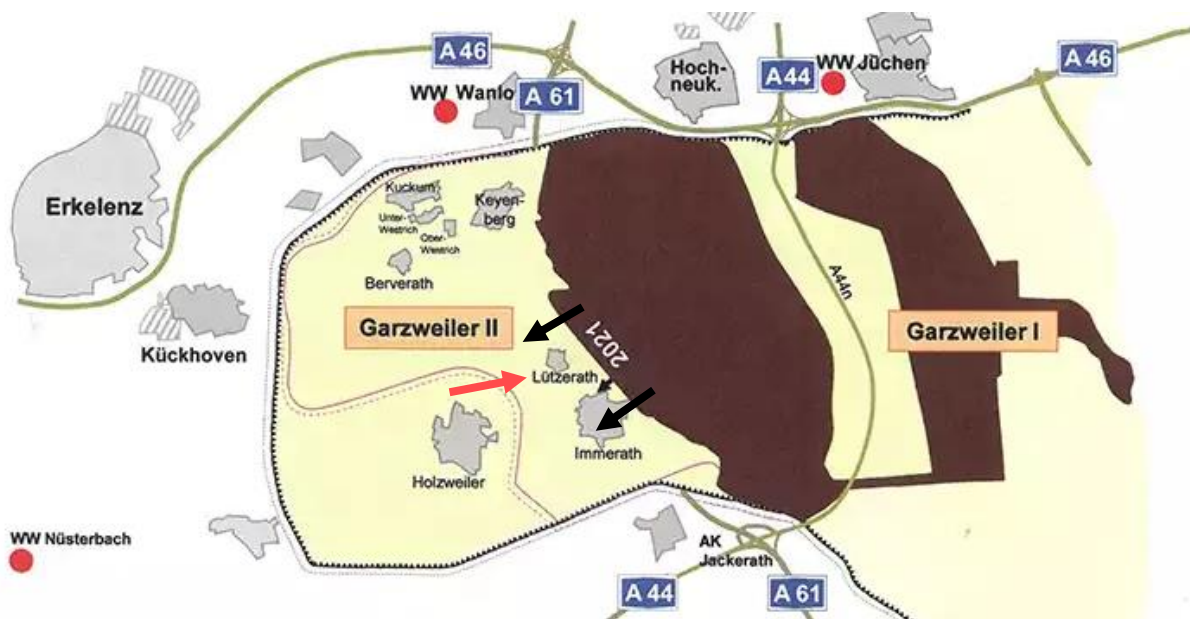
Map 1: The federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW): The arrows point out Heinsberg district and the metropolitan region of Aachen (arrows added by author). Source: Diercke, 2023.



Map 2: The city of Aachen and the approximate location of Lützerath at the edge of Garzweiler II (red arrows). The two other open cast lignite mines, Hambach and Inden (white arrows from top to bottom, all arrows added by author). Source: Google, n.d-a.

Anti-mining struggles in Lützerath, "Lützi", or: The ZAD Rhineland

Located in the eastern outskirts of the city of Erkelenz, Lützerath was part of a rural area, covered in fields, farms, villages, and opencast lignite mines, its horizons marked by windmills and coal fired power plants. Before its "deconstruction" began in 2013, Lützerath was comprised of three farms, several houses, forest patches, and a little pond, with at most 105 inhabitants in 1970. Named on maps for the first time in 1168 as "Lutzelenrode" (which means "the deforestation of Lutzelin"), Lützerath was surrounded by several villages, some of which still exist today (Holzweiler, Berverath, Oberwestrich, Unterwestrich, Kuckum, Keyenberg), and others already swallowed by Garzweiler II (Borschemich, Immerath, Pesch, Spenrath, Otzenrath) (Virtuelles Museum Erkelenz, n.d.). Until July 2020, Lützerath was connected to its neighboring villages via several farm roads and one main road called L277. This road also represented the last infrastructural barrier between the expanding coal mine and the six villages to the north-west that were then still under dispute of demolition (Lützerath, Keyenberg, Oberwestrich, Unterwestrich, Kuckum, and Berverath).



Map 3: Garzweiler II, 2021. The black arrows indicate the direction Garzweiler II is expanding in, with recultivated areas West of the mine and Lützerath (red arrow) at its Eastern edge (arrows added by the author). Source: Ministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Verkehr des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2021.

In July 2020, protests against RWE's efforts to demolish L277 sparked the occupation of Lützerath (Lützerath Lebt, n.d.). Local resistance against mining in the Rhineland dates back to the 1970s and focused mostly on local environmental degradation and displacement associated with the demolition of over 100 villages since 1926 (Jansen & Schubert, 2014). More recent manifestations of this conflict expand the focus to global climate justice and anti-capitalism, as manifested in the occupations of the Hambach Forest ("Hambi") and of the

lesser-known grove-occupation in Keyenberg ("Unser-aller-Wald/ Our common forest", "Wäldchen/ grove", UAW)⁵. Inspired by "Hambi" and supported by inhabitants of UAW, hundreds of people reclaimed the entire village by beginning to live there. Over the course of more than two years and despite several open conflicts with authorities, people self-organized a communal kitchen and vegetable garden, a skate-hall, an artist space, regular village and working group plenaries, a first aid hut, infrastructures, and libraries. A diversity of people, partly autonomous and partly associated with local and regional initiatives, turned Lützerath into an autonomous zone tenderly called "Lützi", or "the ZAD Rhineland". Hereby, "ZAD" is the acronym for "zone à défendre" (zone to defend), a concept inspired by combative struggles against the construction of a mega airport in Notre-Dames-des-Landes (ZAD NDDL), close to the city of Nantes, France.⁶

⁵ Occupied since 2012, Hambi was inspired by tactics of EarthFirst!, the ZAD NDDL (see next footnote), and previous land-based struggles connected to Germany's anti-nuclear movement (the latter is also the origin of the yellow X, the main symbol in the struggle for Lützerath). Thereafter, forest occupations became a widespread tactic for the German climate justice movement to resist mining, highways, and other forms of industrial development (Becker & Hofinger, 2022; ZimT, 2022, CrimethInc., 2021). In September 2020, people previously involved in the Hambach occupation started UAW, as Keyenberg was at that time still threatened with demolition (see <https://unserallerwald.noblogs.org/de/>).

⁶ What became the first of several ZADs across Europe was an association of farmers, villagers, environmental activists, and anarchists, that defended valuable wetlands (bocages), farmlands, and their homes against capitalist appropriation and industrial development since the 2000s (MTC, 2018). The French government cancelled the airport project in 2018 after people resisted for years by combining the self-organized living on the lands with active defense through occupations and sabotage, all under the anti-capitalist slogan "against the airport and it's world". Despite several violent police evictions, the *zadists* created an autonomous zone in an area which the French government declared as a "zone d'aménagement différé" (zone of differed management), a declaration that legalizes expropriations, enforced resettlements, ecosystem destruction and the expansion of industrial development. The acronym ZAD thus represents a cooptation of legalized land-theft of over 4000 acres of inhabited land, ecosystems, and livelihoods (MTC, 2018). While the cancellation of the airport can be seen as a success "ZAD-life" is often romanticized and there have been serious internal conflicts regarding divisive negotiations with the French government (CrimethInc., 2018; 2019; Dunlap, 2023a). Similarly, of course Lützerath was not a space free of conflict or reproduced discriminatory behavior. Living in Lützerath included several exhausting collective conflict resolution processes, all intensified by the external pressures posed by the eviction. Moreover, other forest occupations have criticized Lützerath for the concentration of resources (money, people, materials).



Image 1: The last mass demonstration inside Lützerath in November 2022. Source: Anonymous, 2022.



Image 2: One of the re-inhabited buildings in Lützerath called "Haus der Unbekannten" ("house of the unknown", HDU). With the name, HDU's inhabitants aimed to "give visibility and recognition not only to the well-known activists, fallen or imprisoned, but above all to the invisible and forgotten fighters". Source: Haus der Unbekannten, n.d.



Image 3: One of the village's central areas in autumn 2022. Treehouses, cabins and "the tower". In the "circus tent" underneath the tower, people regularly gathered for village plenaries, workshops, and lectures. Source: Author.

I first visited "Lützi" during one of the annual climate camps on a grey day in late August 2022, following my encounter with one of Lützerath's inhabitants a few days earlier (*see below*). Wandering around the village, one of the first tags I noticed said: "Green brother is washing you." Tired from my hitchhike, I sat down at the mine's edge, watching the warm late-summer wind strive through some flowerheads dangling over a 200m deep hole. During my time in Lützerath, the edge of Garzweiler II would come as close as 50m to the row of inhabited treehouses (Fieldnotes, 22.10.2022). Besides the obvious devastation associated with the mine which Lützerath's inhabitants also called "Mordor", RWE is among Europe's biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, thereby significantly contributing to the destruction of homes and livelihoods of MAPAs⁷ (Bukold, 2021). Additionally, mining entails far reaching socio-ecological consequences through water depletion, problematic residual lakes, radioactivity, fine dust, unsafe waste deposits, psychosocial pressures, the loss of home, financial burdens, and social conflict associated with "resettlements".

Nevertheless, and despite decades of resistance towards further mining, the German government announced its "deal" with RWE on October 4th, 2022, which provided the legal

⁷ MAPA is the acronym for "most affected people and areas" subjected to global warming induced displacement.

foundation for the expansion of Garzweiler II beyond Lützerath. After at least three months of preparations, hundreds and later thousands of private security and police forces ordered from nearly all German federal states brutally evicted the village from January 2nd, 2023. During an almost two-week long police occupation, Lützerath's inhabitants, as well as solidary anarchists and environmental activists from across Europe defended the village from within by building and occupying barricades, treehouses, houses, and a tunnel. In addition, people conducted countless solidary acts of sabotage, blockades, and demonstrations around Lützerath and across Europe. On January 14th, multiple groups from within a mass demonstration of around 35.000 people in front of Lützerath attempted to enter and re-occupy the village, unsuccessfully. On January 16th, Lützerath's last inhabitants left the tunnel, the village was evicted. While Garzweiler II has by now long swallowed Lützerath as a physical place, one may still speak of Lützi in the present tense, as the movement that built up around it, peoples' experiences, their pain, and memories still exist and continue to inspire and cultivate political struggles.



Image 4: A barricade blocking one of Lützerath's entrances in autumn 2022. The tags say, "free access for agricultural traffic", "paradise", and "RWE in the face". Source: Author.



Image 5: Remains of the "tower" after the raid in January 2023. Source: CrimethInc., 2023.

Lützerath is ideal to analyze media narratives on land-based struggles because of the scale and intensity of the conflict and consequentially, its extraordinarily high media attention long before I got there. Moreover, the openness and extent of horizontal self-organization allowed for seemingly endless conversations and encounters with participants, visitors, and villagers. Importantly, and in connection with the permanent presence of the excavator, being in Lützerath enabled me to *experience* the (to me) hitherto rather 'abstract concepts' of capitalist destruction⁸, solidarity, mutual aid, self-organization, and autonomy associated with living there, including the variety of emotions this involves. Additionally, the purpose of analyzing media narratives on Lützerath relates to the connections and differences of Lützerath to the second site under study, the squatted monastery in Aachen. While I will elaborate on the differences in the next section, mining around Lützerath is linked to energy demands of cities like Aachen, as they are boosted by gentrification, urban renewal, decaying vacancies, and energy-intensive urban lifestyles. Another central connection between both struggles are shareholder relations between the two newspaper publishers whose articles I analyzed. Finally, Lützerath and the monastery are solidary struggles, meaning that people moved in between and supported both spaces. Ultimately, this is a crucial link, as I only

⁸ My friend Rupi phrased this state of being and the excavator's permanent visual and audio presence as follows: "Every day, you hear the good life being dredged out from under your feet" (Fieldnotes, 29.10.2022).

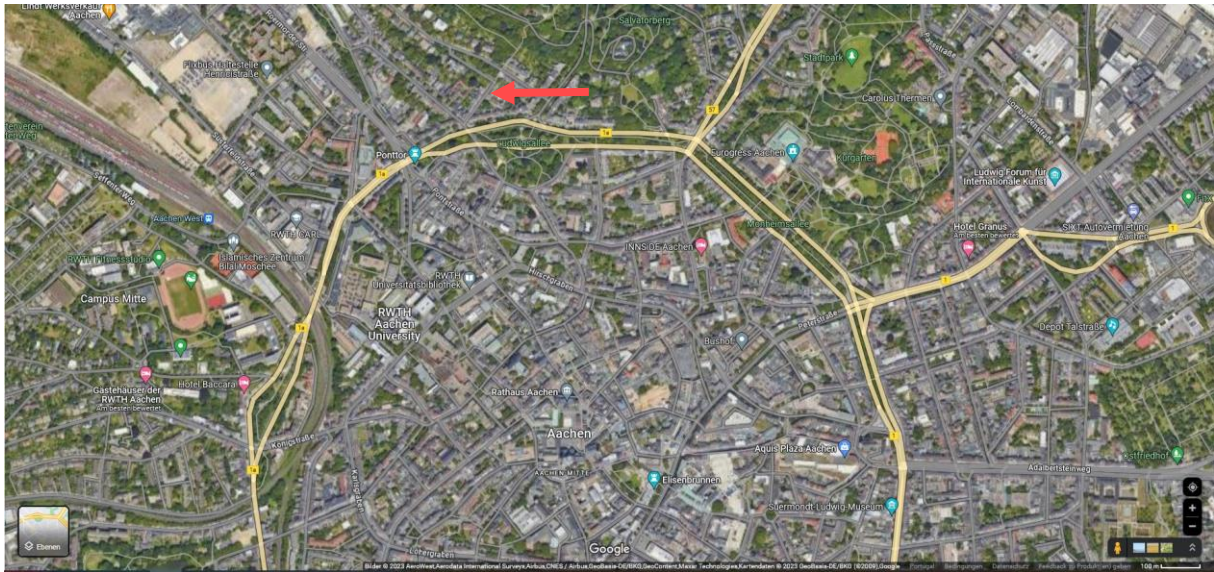
decided to visit Lützerath after meeting "Sock", one of Lützerath's inhabitants on their day trip to the monastery. After living in the monastery for about a month, often feeling stuck in my research process and at the same time overwhelmed by the thought of a second field site, Sock (now a dear friend and accomplice) greatly encouraged me to at least give Lützi a try. With sparkling eyes peeking through their mummery, they reassured me about Lützerath's openness to new and less involved people (as I was) and invited me to visit them in the treehouse they lived in (Fieldnotes, 21.08.2022). Together with an always changing group of friends, we would inhabit and share Abundance for the rest of the year.



Image 6: Lützerath's former bus stop called "Bussi" and its village sign "Lützerath stays!" in autumn 2022. Source: Author.

Anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen: The monastery

The second field site of this research project is the squatted monastery in Aachen ("Kloster"). The monastery is in Lousbergstraße 14, about a 15-minute walk north of Aachen's city center in a dense, green, and wealthy neighborhood called "Lousbergviertel". Built at the foot of "Lousberg" (Lou's mountain), the neighborhood is near one of Aachen's few recreational areas and marked among others, by several pompous student fraternity buildings. The monastery's almost 5000 m² large property stretches from Lousbergstraße in the southwest, to the corner of the streets Nizzaallee/ Weyherstrasse in the northeast.



Map 4: The monastery in the north-west of Aachen's city center. Source: Google, n.d.-c.



Map 5: The monastery and its direct neighborhood with Lousbergstraße in the southwest, and the corner of Nizzaallee/Weyerstrasse in the northeast. Source: Google, n.d.-b.

Considering its more than 260.000 inhabitants, the municipality's latest strategic action plan concerning housing in Aachen highlights the issues of gentrification and increasing pressures on Aachen's housing market as well as a lack of neighborhood meeting places (Stadt Aachen, 2015; 2022). Enclosed by about 2,5-meter-high stone walls, the monastery was secluded from the public, and even unnoticed by many of its neighbors during its 12-year vacancy, which subjected the old building to immense decay. In the face of rising rents, real-estate speculation, displacement processes, and a lack of non-commercial spaces, a group of people reclaimed the monastery in August 2021 by squatting it and creating a social center with non-commercial housing and a communal garden (ac-besetzen, 2021b).



Image 7: The monastery's main entrance seen from Lousbergstraße in August 2022. The banner to the right relates to EU border policies and says, "no pushback is legal". The yellow X symbolizes solidarity with anti-mining struggles. Source: Author.

I first visited the monastery on a warm and sunny Wednesday afternoon in early August 2022. After I heard about it from a close friend who lived in Aachen, I messaged the monastery on Instagram and followed their invitation to join for the weekly neighborhood café. On my arrival, the front gate in Lousbergstraße 14 was locked with a bike lock, keeping me from entering an overgrown front yard beneath the chorus. A chalk board behind the gate showed me how to walk around the monastery's walls and use the back entrance in Weyherstrasse to enter the enchanted garden. There, a tagged metal gate stood wide open and six people were sitting on chairs and on the grass, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and rolling a joint. I was welcomed in in a friendly and slightly shy way. A few meters behind them, a young family was picking black berries from the thorny shrubs covering the wall besides a path through the garden, past an old beech tree and towards what was used as an outdoor kitchen. Thanks to the shadow and natural air flow provided by a lush vegetation,

being in the monastery's garden felt refreshing compared to being on the streets (Fieldnotes, 03.08.2022).



Image 8: The metal gate at the monastery's back entrance to the garden in Weyherstraße in August 2022. Source: Author.



Image 9: The monastery's enchanted garden in August 2022. Here, the monastery's users regularly opened the gates for a neighborhood café. Source: Author.

By reinhabiting the over 150-year-old walls with more than 20 dorm rooms, the monastery's users connect to decades of anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen dating back to the 1980s. They turned several common spaces including the chorus into assembly rooms, a screen-printing workshop, kitchens, a free-shop, a library, an info-shop, safer spaces, and spaces for events. Some events organized by the monastery are queer festivals, political film nights, discussion rounds, yoga circles, concerts, bar evenings, and parties. After the last nuns left in 2009, the monastery stood empty and passed through the hands of several private real-estate developers, including those of *German Property Group* (also known as *Dolphin Trust* and *Dolphin Capital*) from 2015-2020, a corporation speculating with listed buildings. Together with about 200 other mostly listed buildings, the monastery became part of a well-documented international real-estate speculation scandal. Since then, the insolvency administration company *CR Investment Management* was responsible for the monastery.



Image 10: A banner on the entrance in Lousbergstraße saying "fight for free spaces" in August 2022. Source: Author.

In addition to the previously mentioned interesting connections between Lützerath, the monastery, and the newspaper publishers under study, analyzing mass media reports on the monastery is intriguing due the *contrasts* between both sites. First, gentrification is a much less visible destruction than mining. Moreover, neighbors of the monastery were relatively little personally affected by this slow and indirect destruction. Accordingly, while many neighbors supported the monastery, there was little long-term engagement in the monastery,

keeping the number of people actively involved in the struggle rather low. Moreover, other than in Lützerath, the monastery presents a (at the time of research), low-intensity struggle with little to no open conflict and no eviction in sight. Accordingly, news coverage and public debate are comparatively low. Hence, it is interesting to compare if, and if so, how media coverage is different when a struggle is not in a period in which authorities prepare for an eviction.



Image 11: Contrasts: The monastery's walls and its neighborhood in Nizzaallee/ Weyherstraße in August 2022. Source: Author.

[A few notes on terminology](#)

Given this project's focus on narratives and descriptions, it is necessary and natural to reflect around the language I prefer to use. These reflections concern the physical places of both

struggles, the struggles themselves, and their inhabitants, as well as relatedly, the concepts of 'activism' and 'frontline struggle'. The remains of this thesis will further substantiate these reflections. As many of their inhabitants do/ did, I mostly refer to Lützerath as "the village" or "Lützi", and to the monastery simply as "the monastery". In doing so I aim to refrain as much as possible from calling them "occupations" or "squats", which are commonly used, but potentially misleading descriptions. Occupying something means taking it away from someone or impeding the supposedly rightful owner from accessing their property. Labeling people as occupants or squatters thus obscures the fact that land or buildings have for decades been purposefully emptied, forcefully acquired, and finally *occupied* by corporations. People who "squat" on the other hand, dedicate tremendous parts of their lives to reclaiming and re-commoning land and buildings from private interests. In line with this train of thought, I mostly describe Lützerath and the monastery as land-based struggles, rather than land-reclamation, or ZADs, as their struggles entail the reclamation, the inhabitation, *and* defense of each space⁹.

Further, I preferably refer to Lützerath's and the monastery's inhabitants as "inhabitants", "users", or simply as people. Thereby, I do not only refrain from calling them "occupants" or "squatters", but from assigning generalizing political categories, and from calling them "activists". This is because "activism" is an alienating, exclusive, and isolating category which constructs political struggle as something outside peoples' everyday life, as a nice-to-have "activity", or even a kind of repetitive job or duty, rather than a way of life based on creativity, love, and joy. Moreover, "activism" does not only label certain people, but predefines an us vs. them relation to "ordinary people" and asserts a form of expertism that reinforces a "hierarchy of suffering and selfrighteousness" (Andrew X, 2009, p.7; *see also* Dunlap, 2020c). This relates to how my friend *konkreteutopie22* pointed out during one of our shared writing sessions on the terrace of Abundance, that "activism" entails the "destructive question" of "[d]o I do something political in my free time or something for myself? How can I incorporate politics into my free time and not break myself?" Further, they concluded: "Here [in "Lützi"], life, everyday life itself is political and takes away the burden of deciding. We can simply dedicate ourselves completely" (Fieldnotes, 03.11.2022). Overall, these reflections present preferences, and I may not adhere to them where I deem it more useful to refer to "activists", "squatters", or "occupants" for clarity. Finally, and thanks to illuminating

⁹ Other than in the case of the ZAD NDDL, Lützerath almost entirely legally belonged to RWE before people reclaimed the hamlet. Similarly, the monastery belonged to the investment management company CR Invest before its reclamation.

discussions with my friend Gentian on a platform in the trees, I refer to Lützerath and the monastery as "struggles at the material frontlines of capitalist expansion", rather than simply "frontline struggles". This is to emphasize first, that frontline struggle includes sometimes *invisible* or less visible frontlines such as those of patriarchy, racism, or migration. Second, I refer to these struggles in their entirety, meaning not only "the front line", but also the (emotional) care, solidary, and less militant support they live through.

Outline

The remains of this thesis are structured as follows. The next chapter embeds the PM in concepts and discussions within anarchist political ecology and decolonial degrowth. For this I briefly outline both fields and their unmet transformative ambitions. Thereafter, I explore anarchist and decolonial critiques towards both fields and illustrate what an anarchist political ecology and a decolonial degrowth each might look like. Hereby I point towards how their convergence can form part of current debates on anarchist decolonization. Herein, I combine a counterinsurgency lens with a focus on land-based struggles, to finally outline and complement the PM as an analytical framework for analyzing the production of news on Lützerath and the monastery. After laying the theoretical foundations for this research project, chapter 3 takes the reader a few steps into the worlds of Lützerath and the monastery by providing detailed background knowledge about both struggles. While this walk continues throughout the entire thesis, this chapter explores the ecological destruction and social conflict entailed in mining and real-estate speculation, as well as early resistance to mining in the Rhineland and to gentrification in Aachen, and how both struggles manifest today. Thereafter, chapter 4 contextualizes the PM by embedding it into the German media landscape and investigating the political and economic structures of the two news publishers under study. Chapter 5 elaborates on the methodological approach I took to carry out this research project. Besides clarifying main objectives and research questions, I reflect on challenges and opportunities connected to research that participates in socio-ecological struggle. Moreover, this chapter elaborates on the specifics of collected and analyzed material, and the methods for doing so. Based on an analysis of empirical material, chapter 6 and 7, explore the origin, development, and expression of dominant narratives on Lützerath and the monastery dispersed by newspaper articles of *Rheinische Post* (RP) and *Aachener Zeitung* (AZ). Moreover, I contrast dominant narratives to counter narratives that emerge from within both struggles, thereby showing which realities are silenced. Building on findings of this chapter, chapter 8 discusses the social mechanisms through which dominant narratives on Lützerath and the monastery 'manufacture consent' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002) to

mining and real-estate speculation, at the same time as they 'manage resistance' (Brock & Dunlap, 2018). Herein, chapter 8 explores how dominant narratives reproduce and function according to imperialist discourse, based on which it closes by describing Lützerath's and the monastery's struggles as decolonial practices. The final chapter summarizes the findings of this research project, explores their usefulness, and points towards possibilities for further research.

Through a *political ecology of media manipulation* with decolonial ambitions this research project foregrounds the radical intellectual roots of political ecology and degrowth scholarship (Toro, 2017; Gregoratti & Raphael, 2019; Dunlap, 2021b; 2020c; Stepanic, 2021) and complements current research within these fields with a hitherto absent theory of media manipulation to understand power and power-making. Hereby, I take the transformative ambitions within both fields seriously by exposing the (psychological) violence and social engineering involved in material extraction (Conde, 2017; Dunlap, 2019a; Brock & Dunlap, 2018), gentrification, and the management of intensifying resistance to capitalist expansion. For this, I demonstrate how dominant narratives, and the stigmas, allegations, and contradictions they create about socio-ecological conflicts are not just distracting stories or mere words, but agents that co-produce reality through producing social division and legitimizing ecological devastation. Given that "the capitalist social formation shapes, distorts and damages our everyday life and everyday communication" (Fuchs in Knoche, 2021, p. 372), the intention of this project is ultimately to encourage people involved in socio-ecological conflict, whether they are the ones who struggle, or researchers, or journalists, or (involuntarily participating) loved ones, to not let their every-day communication be destroyed and instead listen closely to each other, rather than to trusting (media) corporations and authorities.

2 In pursuit of degrowth: A political ecology of media manipulation

The following anecdote illustrates two scenes I experienced during on site research in Lützerath. Together, they connect three concepts central to this thesis: extractivism, land-based struggle, and media manipulation. It is my first of many evenings in Abundance, a wonderful treehouse Sock and I inhabit together with some others. I am tired after spending almost the whole day talking to visitors about their perception of and experiences in Lützerath. Many were moved by the strong contrast between complete destruction through the mine and vibrant life inside the village. I also joined my first-ever plenary in which we

discussed how to defend the mine's runup, an area directly in front of Abundance and currently without any barricades. I was amazed by peoples' communication methods to show agreement, disagreement, or abstention with hand signs instead of interrupting each other. It was only early September, but we already began to prepare for the eviction, which we expected to come anytime. Wrapped up in blankets to keep us warm, Sock, Dill, Asparagus, Squirrel, Heckmeck, and I sit tightly on the old, broken and too short sleeping couch. Besides Sock, I had only met everyone within the last two days. We set up my computer to watch *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, an anime from 1984. Through the window, moonshine lets the shadows of birch and oak leaves dance on the wooden walls around us.

The movie begins. "1000 years after the collapse of industrial civilization, the Sea of Decay, a swamp exuding toxic vapors, covered an earth strewn with rusting ruins, threatening human survival." On a mostly dead planet marked by wastelands, illness, and decay, humans fight over the earth's last remaining life supporting ecosystems. Caught in the middle of a war between industrialized Pejite and the military state of Tolmekia, inhabitants of the rural valley of the wind face invasion, murder, and dispossession. Through embracing deep love for - and rage with - giant insects as embodiments of nature, Nausicaä, the princess of the valley of the wind, protects her village and the earth's last remaining healthy lands from ultimate destruction. Throughout the film, my gaze keeps wandering past the screen and through the window of our treehouse. Behind the leaves, I see the gigantic excavator, endlessly digging its shovels into the earth, like greedy teeth into a moist cake. I will hear its metallic rattling every day until I fall asleep and as soon as the pheasants wake me with their call, as the machine runs 24 hours a day, consuming the earth, water, and trees in the area. What do we even use all this energy for? (Fieldnotes, 04.09.2022)

Months later, Sock and I spend much our last night in Abundance on a night-watch up in the trees, hindering the destruction of our home. By now, police and RWE security forces have been invading Lützerath for over ten days, building a fence around us to cut off support and supplies. All too well, I remember how Tolmekian troops occupied the valley of the wind to gain control over it. Throughout these long and cold days and nights, many of our friends have been injured and arrested at the barricades. Other friends have simply been sawed off, killed. This night, Sock and I recap the most memorable moments of our time in Lützi, until a journalist team interrupts us around 2 am by sticking their microphones and camera up and in front of us, asking: "Do you also believe that most activists left Lützerath voluntarily because of the bad weather?"



Image 12: A confrontation in the mine's runup on January 3rd, 2023: While constructing roads, parking-lots, and a double-fence around Lützerath, the efforts of police and private security forces to destroy barricades lead to an hour-long confrontation until late in the night. This picture awakes a question: Whose interests do the police, as the 'executive force' of the state, protect? Source: Rüdiger, 2023a.

In Nausicaä's valley of the wind the militarized war around the planet's last healthy ecosystems is highly political, expressing a parallel with the interwoven struggles against lignite mining in the Rhineland and gentrification in Aachen. In all three cases, there are winners and losers of environmental conflict in times of death and extinction (Clark, 2020; McBrien, 2016). To better understand these links, this chapter first outlines political ecology¹⁰ and degrowth as two inspirational fields that make up the theoretical framework of this research project. After exploring their natural affinity and transformative ambitions, I build on anarchist tendencies¹¹ and decolonial critiques within both fields, to outline how anarchist political ecology as an analytical lens can help to acknowledge, understand, and support already practiced pathways in line with a decolonial degrowth project. Specifically, I focus on

¹⁰ Among general concepts, included are previous works done by political ecologists on anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland.

¹¹ Given the focus on socio-ecological struggles and transformation in both fields, these tendencies naturally fall within the eco-anarchist tradition which centers around the utmost urgency of direct action and regeneration characterized by two primary commitments: One is ecological, through promoting the flourishing of the human and non-human Earth community. The other is anarchic, through defending that flourishing from domination and destruction (Clark, 2020).

land-based struggles as emancipatory landscapes and their connection to social war discourse based on which this chapter finally introduces Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's (1988/2002) *Propaganda Model* (PM) as a theory for a political ecology of media manipulation.

Inspirational fields: Political ecology and degrowth

Currently, the *Environmental Justice Atlas* (EJA) maps over 3900 cases of environmental conflicts, mostly in rural settings (Temper et al., 2015)¹². However, while geographically separate, rural (e.g., anti-mining) and urban (e.g. anti-gentrification) struggles are linked through the uneven distribution of "goods" and "bads" of environmental governance. This distribution relates to the energy and material demands of cities on one hand, and to the displacement processes and psychological harm associated with rural and urban struggles on the other hand. Here, the political ecological metaphor of 'urban metabolism' reminds us that "cities are fundamentally natural, in that they are populated by human and non-human residents, formed from earth material, and supported by ecological processes" (Robbins, 2020b, p.75). Thereby, urban metabolism highlights the concentration of alienated urban lifeways (Kaika, 2004) which make cities the main consumers of energy and material and thus the source of socio-ecological conflict (Heynen et al., 2006; Ulgiati & Zucaro, 2019; Kaika et al., 2023). This alienation is based on the enclosure of previously common goods, artificial scarcity, and the endless creation of "needs", ultimately leading to ever-expanding material frontiers, as degrowth scholars elaborate (Hickel, 2019; D' Alisa et al., 2015a; Illich, 1978). Hence, the urban/rural divide dissolves, as cities and the countryside produce each other (Robbins, 2020b).

While the extractive character of opencast lignite mining in Lützerath is obvious, real-estate speculation and gentrification in Aachen can similarly be understood as extractive projects. This is because "sustainable", "smart", "creative", or "just" urban development perpetuates a relationship of domination (Jenkins, 2022) which maintains the extraction of surplus value from urban space by exacerbating displacement and destruction within and beyond cities (Peck, 2005; Sovacool, 2021; Sovacool et al., 2022; Anguelovski et al., 2018; Dooling, 2009; Davidson & Lees, 2005). With the EJA in mind, we can expand this understanding of socio-ecological conflict and the dissolution of the urban-rural divide from Aachen and Lützerath both temporally and spatially. Hereby, the recognition of similar

¹² Note that the atlas, while important in connecting and establishing solidarity among globally dispersed environmental justice struggles, excludes a variety of territorial assaults due to a focus on academically or corporate media documented struggles (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019).

dynamics towards extractivism in rural areas as "a mechanism of colonial and neocolonial plunder and appropriation" (Acosta, 2013, p.63) - through the high intensity, non-reciprocal, and export-oriented removal of "natural resources" for capital accumulation in metropolitan centers (Gudynas, 2020) – is increasingly in the name of "sustainability" (Shannon & Perez-Medina, 2022; Dunlap & Brock, 2022a; 2022b; Dunlap & Tornel, 2023). This discrepancy and the consequentially arising socio-ecological conflicts are the main concerns within degrowth and political ecology scholarship.

Re-politicizing "environmental problems"

Political ecologists understand all ecological conflicts as interwoven with power and "see[k] to unravel the political forces at work in environmental access, management, and transformation" (Robbins, 2020b, p.3)¹³. A central concept to highlight unequal power relations in socio-ecological conflicts is 'land grabbing' (Benjaminsen & Svarstad, 2021)¹⁴. While originally describing land enclosures in countries of the global South, land grabbing is today understood as a global problem (Borras et al., 2012; Van der Ploeg et al., 2015) and contrasts to "land-deals", a deceptive term employed by governments and corporations which claims consent to land acquisition even in face of open contestation (Dunlap, 2019a). Variations of land-grabbing include 'green grabbing' and 'blue grabbing' regarding land theft for terrestrial or marine conservation areas, as well as restoration or offset efforts (Fairhead et al., 2012; Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012; Siamanta, 2017), and 'bureaucratic land grabbing', where bureaucratic processes legalize land theft (Dunlap, 2020a). As such, land-grabbing describes the local (and global) displacement processes connected to lignite extraction in the German Rhineland and to gentrification processes in Aachen. Overall, political ecology challenges "win-win" discourses and re-politicizes "environmental problems" by examining power structures, displacement, and accumulation processes in environmental governance and takes an explicitly normative approach (Robbins, 2020b; Benjaminsen & Svarstad, 2021). Hereby, scholars emphasize, that political ecology aims to be not merely an analytical "hatchet", but also a constructive "seed" (Robbins, 2020b). However, scholars have pointed out that the seed element has been underemphasized, especially concerning intensifying

¹³ Hereby, political ecology situates itself in opposition to 'apolitical' ecology approaches. The latter build on Malthusian notions of finite resources, carrying capacities, and overpopulation, and lead to distractive and responsibility shifting racist, classist and patriarchal underpinnings of environmental governance (Robbins, 2020b; Benjaminsen & Svarstad, 2021; Gómez-Baggethun, 2020). Proposing transitions to industrial scale renewable energy, carbon offsetting and trading programs, population control, and nature conservation areas, they ignore the embeddedness of 'environmental problems' in systems of power and domination.

¹⁴ This term is borrowed from ecological distribution conflict studies (Martínez-Alier, 2002).

global crises (Walker, 2006; Blaikie, 2008; 2012; Benjaminsen & Svarstad, 2021), thus pointing towards unmet transformative ambitions within the field.

Envisioning a degrowth society

While political ecologists analyze the conditions of environmental conflict by contrasting dominant narratives on "environmental problems" to empirical research, degrowth scholars are mostly concerned with capitalist socio-economic organization as the root cause of uneven power relations and ecological devastation and envision a socio-ecological transformation towards more egalitarian, socially just, and ecologically sustainable societies (*overlaps exist, see Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2017*). Centrally, degrowth rejects (apolitical) "green growth" and "green capitalism" narratives (Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Burton & Somerville, 2019) which suggest that infinite economic growth is possible, sustainable, and the only way to tackle climate and ecological catastrophe through technological advancement (Asafu-Adyaye et al., 2015; Pollin, 2018). Ecomodernist solutions like "renewable" energy, biodiversity offsets, carbon capture, and trade systems dominate global conversations around climate crisis mitigation (e.g., IPCC, UNEP, Green New Deals, or the EU bioeconomy policies)¹⁵. Yet, reliance on controversial technologies and unrealistic expectations mitigates radical socio-ecological transformation and propagates de-politicized "solutions" which perpetuate vast energy and material extraction, legitimize (green) sacrifice zones, and intensify neo-colonial relations (Sullivan, 2013; Dunlap, 2017; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2023b; Dunlap & Laratte, 2022; Dunlap & Riquito, 2023; Keyßer & Lenzen, 2021; Hickel, 2020a). At its core, degrowth thus holds that the imperative of economic growth inevitably leads to the depletion and destruction of the earth as a closed system (Bonaiuti, 2015; Gómez-Baggethun, 2020; Hickel, 2020a; 2020b). Centrally, degrowth scholarship emphasizes that there is no empirical evidence suggesting that sufficient decoupling of economic growth from material use or emissions on a global scale is possible (Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Otero et al., 2020; Parrique et al., 2019; Tilsted et al., 2021; Dunlap & Marin, 2022; Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2022, Vadén et al., 2020).

To stay within biophysical boundaries, massive reductions in material and energy throughput thus require GDP to decrease up to 90% in high income countries (Trainer, 2021).

¹⁵ While accepting intensifying suffering and devastation as "inevitable costs", eco-modernists' faith in future human ingenuity remains powerful because it is apolitical and provides a 'post-environmentalist' and depoliticized discourse through which those in power can position themselves as environmentalists without compromises (Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo, 2015; Kallis & Bliss, 2019).

Rather than subjecting human life to renunciation, degrowth however aims to generate radical abundance through combining redistribution with the individual and collective transformation of values, relationships and what people perceive as "the good life" (Hickel, 2019; Demaria & Latouche, 2019). This transformation is referred to as 'the decolonization of the imaginary' (Latouche, 2015; Demaria & Latouche, 2019) and vaguely defined as the de-centering of expanding production and consumption from human life (Varvarousis, 2019). Hereby, frequent reference to Erik Olin Wright's (2010) three strategies of transformation (disruptive, interstitial, symbiotic) explicates degrowth's transformative ambitions (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020; Kallis et al. 2021). In short, these strategies describe pathways that confront and disrupt capitalism, build alternatives in its "cracks", or tame capitalism by advocating for reforms, aiming to jointly overcome 'the imperial mode of living' (Brand & Wissen, 2021). Considering the globally uneven distribution of wealth associated with this exploitative way of life conducive to societies of high-growth economies, degrowth is hereby understood as an anti-colonial project from and for the global North (Hickel, 2021)¹⁶. This project, as degrowth scholars envision, entails an anti-capitalist organization of society, based on concepts such as voluntary simplicity, care and feminist economics, autonomy, conviviality, and decentralized and horizontal self-organization (D'Alisa et al., 2015). However, degrowth scholars often neglect or postpone *disruptive* strategies of transformation in favor of reformative policy proposals and a hasty focus on interstitial "post-capitalist" alternatives, that skips the process of getting there (Stepanic, 2021; 2023; Dunlap, 2020b; Chertkovskaya, 2020; 2022; D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020; Van den Boom, 2021; Herbert et al., 2021;). In the face of power systems that work to marginalize 'degrowth imaginaries' and returning to vagueness around the "decolonization of the social imaginary", degrowth revolves around an underdeveloped theory of social change (Varvarousis, 2019; Trainer, 2020).

[Moving beyond critical analysis: Towards an anarchist decolonization](#)

While degrowth and political ecology approaches differ in their engagement with on-site research, they provide similar critiques towards dominant green growth and "win-win" discourses and express transformative ambitions (Dunlap, 2020c; Benjaminsen & Svarstad, 2021; Robbins, 2020b). However, as "transformation is not a metaphor", analysis "needs to go beyond questions and critiques of limits, technology, labor and growth (however illuminating

¹⁶ See also the debate between Paul Robbins (2020a) and Erik Gómez-Baggethun (2020; 2022) about natural limits and consequentially, degrowth's relationship to social realities from the global South and social movements worldwide.

they may be), and [engage] more directly with political strategy, organization and praxis in the here and now" (Bluwstein, 2021, p.1). Along this line, political ecology and degrowth encounter similar critiques from indigenous, anarchist, and feminist perspectives and experiences. These regard a shared tendency to superficially recognize radical intellectual roots by naming them as inspirational¹⁷, while retaining ambivalence towards or, in the case of degrowth, outright trust in governments as (the only) transformative agents.

Yet, this can lead to deceitful "transformative strategies", since, as 19th century anarchist Michael Bakunin (1873/2005, p.24) wrote

[...] no state, howsoever democratic its forms [...] is capable of giving the people what they need: the free organization of their own interests from below upward, without interference, tutelage or coercion from above. That is because no state [...] in essence represents anything but government of the masses from above downward, by an educated and thereby privileged minority [...].

While privileged experiences of life obstruct the elite's minority's ability to empathize with the struggles of the masses (human and non-human), economic growth, productivity, and efficiency remain central objectives of states (Toro, 2021). Against the background of Eurocentric global capitalism built on the enforcement of European culture (Quijano, 2000), these objectives imply the need to organize everyone into exploitable "resources", be that through jobs, consumption, education, corporate media, or industrial agriculture. With "public-private partnerships" and "lobbyism" as socially accepted forms of corruption, this "fiction of pseudo-popular representation" (Bakunin, 2005) claims that people cannot themselves know what is best for them, their community, or nearby forests, rivers, and mountains, hence coercively subjecting them to rules and alien (economic) objectives.

Alongside internal dynamics and struggles related to political parties or reforms, nation-states can thus be seen as assemblages¹⁸ of institutions and actors with the overall purpose of managing human and non-human populations and environments, at the same time as securing themselves. They do so through making beings legible (e.g., abstracting, registering, categorizing, quantifying, mapping, measuring, monitoring) and controllable

¹⁷ The intellectual roots of political ecology can be traced back to the 19th century anarchist philosophies of Élisée Reclus and Pëtr Kropotkin. Building on these, Murray Bookchin's (1996) social ecology centers around interdependent human-environment relations and scrutiny towards environmental determinism, human-nature dualisms, and social hierarchies (Robbins, 2020b; Clark, 2020). Likewise, Toro (2017) identifies degrowth discourse and ethos within Reclus' essays.

¹⁸ This is an abstraction which I will make more concrete over the course of this research project. For example, legal restoration requirements and RWE's response to that (corporate conservation and social responsibility efforts) demonstrate, how 'good governance' approaches despite emphasizing participation, transparency, and restoration, eventually enforce mining concessions (Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Brock, 2020).

subjects (Scott, 1998; 2021). Hence, from the enclosure of lands and peoples under early state formation (Wolfe, 2006; Moore, 2016; Gelderloos, 2017; Foucault, 2009; Scott, 1998), to recent commodification within neoliberal environmental governance (Dunlap & Sullivan, 2019), the politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2007; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2019), and "housing policies" that reproduce housing injustice (Madden & Marcuse, 2016): nation-states can be understood as co-constituted by and inseparable from capitalist accumulation, domination, and exploitation, as an "institution designed to concentrate power, not to redistribute it equitably" (Springer et al., 2021b, p.7). Despite internal disparities and different political theories behind this concentration of power, equality is never something given to, but fought for and created by people (Rancière, 1998 in Deranty, 2010). Public institutions, on the other hand, are pivotal in colonizing the social imaginary with capitalist values based on socio-ecological hierarchies (Toro, 2021), thereby securing industrial society, and ultimately not just accepting, but 'enforcing ecocide' (Dunlap & Brock, 2022a). Responding to scholars' transformative ambitions and also keeping in mind that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck and Yang, 2012)¹⁹, this section moves to the notion of anarchist decolonization by bridging anarchist political ecological analysis and a decolonial degrowth project (Dunlap, 2020c; 2021d; 2022). While there are important debates between eco-anarchist and decolonial theory towards each other²⁰, this thesis focuses on their complementarity.

Political ecology generally supports indigenous²¹ and peasant struggles against state violence. However, solidarity with anti-authoritarian struggles remain under-emphasized (Tornel, 2023; Geist, 2022; Dunlap, 2020c; *for exceptions see* Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Brock, 2020; Brock et al. 2022; Trainer, 2019a; 2019b; Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). Moreover, political ecology scholars' support for political struggles, whether anarchist or indigenous, often remains a descriptive mapping thereof²². This risks to *improve*, rather than challenge, state

¹⁹ Tuck & Yang (2012) argue that the lavish use of decolonization discourse upholds and reinforces systems of domination (*see also* Wolfe, 2006; Coulthard, 2007).

²⁰ Decolonial theory challenges various strands within anarchism for being Eurocentric, anthropocentric, romanticizing 'primitive' ways of life and being focused on class (*see* Barker & Pickerill, 2012; Ciccariello-Maher, 2011; Lewis, 2017). Anarchist critique holds that rather than recognizing affinities, academic decolonial scholarship ignores the solidarity cultivated between many indigenous and anarchist struggles since the 1970s (*see for recent publications* Aragorn!, 2018; or *Black Seed: A Journal of Indigenous Anarchy*), as well as developments and discussions in anarchist circles outside the academy (e.g. regarding eco-centrism, privilege, and racism) and makes conclusions based on superficial anarchist stereotypes. Moreover, anarchist approaches scrutinize decolonial scholarship's ambiguity towards states and technology, tendencies of authoritarianism, and for being numbing rather than encouraging by centering peoples' supposedly irrevocable guilt and complicity in 'the colonial project' (Dunlap, 2021d; 2022).

²¹ With 'indigenous' I refer to a diversity of communities with reciprocal relationships to the land they live on and with (Amanda Lickers in Exalt Helsinki, 2023).

²² See for example Venes et al. (2023), Geschewski & Islar (2022), and Apostolopoulou et al. (2022).

control and management through exposing marginalized populations and political struggles to governments by making internal dynamics, weaknesses, and strategies legible (Dunlap, 2017; 2020c; Seigel, 2018; Jasanoff, 2004; Batel, 2020; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008). Scholars thus risk the co-optation of research by performing cognitive or epistemic extractivism, where ideas of those in struggle are non-reciprocally appropriated into Western (academic) institutions to acquire symbolic or economic capital (Grosfoguel, 2020; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2019; Zanotti et al, 2010; Leyva Solano & Rappaport, 2011).

Here, the emerging sub-field of anarchist political ecology (Springer et al., 2021a; Locret-Collet et al., 2021; Mateer et al., 2022) moves beyond critical analysis by following the "anarchistic categorical imperative" (Clark, 2022, p.viii) to produce knowledge that dismantles systems of domination rather than improving them (Mateer et al., 2022b). As an inspiring example specifically in the context of lignite mining in the Rhineland, Brock & Dunlap (2018) unravel corporate strategies of 'sustainable mining' (Kirsch, 2010), an oxymoron and illusion emptied of any reference to the environment as it promotes mining and neutralizes critique. Along this line, Huff & Brock (2017), as well as Brock (2020) link the political ecological concept of accumulation by dispossession and green grabbing and identify RWE's compensation efforts as 'accumulation by restoration'. These generate new business opportunities through "green" investments and eco-tourism, whereby restoration projects such as "Sophienhöhe"²³ make sustainability a 'spectacle' worth visiting (Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Sullivan, 2012). Along this line, the 'renewable-energy-extraction-nexus' (Dunlap & Brock, 2022b) describes how RWE's 'renewable' energy investments legitimize its mining operations and create multiple globally dispersed and unaccounted for (green) 'sacrifice zones' for the production and operation of solar panels, windmills, and dams (see also Leifsen, 2017; Brock et al., 2021).

As these examples illustrate, anarchist political ecology seeks to strengthen the emancipatory, deeply non-anthropocentric, and insurrectionary tendencies within political ecology and strives for the total liberation of all beings in nature (Springer et al., 2021b). Following Dunlap's (2020c) proposal for insurrectionary political ecology, scholars can build on political ecology's sensitivity towards power relations to support decolonial degrowth. While experimental, insurrectionary political ecology is careful to research *with* people engaged in political struggles, *not on* them (Zanotti et al., 2010) and aims to generate

²³ "Sophienhöhe" is one of RWE's most known recultivation projects promoted as a "nature discovery trail" ("Naturerlebnispfad") built on the "overburden" left after lignite mining in the Hambach mine (RWE Power, n.d.)

'insurrectionary knowledge' which unravels the forces that seek to manage resistance and anti-authoritarian struggles. Seeking "to encourage self-reflection, embodiment, individual and collective practices, encouraging a sensitivity to power relationships and historical place within our respective circumstances" (Dunlap, 2020c, p.992), this approach represents an intersectional and anti-hierarchical practice.

As pointed out by decolonial and anarchist scholars²⁴, degrowth tends to make anthropocentric, universal claims, and abstract policy proposals (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Trainer, 2020) suggesting 'a la anarchist reforms' (Toro, 2021) and possibly leading to the (well-intentioned) appropriation of indigenous life ways (Altmann, 2019). While degrowth recognizes the colonial nature of economic growth and aims to *end* exploitative relations through reduced consumption in the global North (Hickel, 2021), scholars neglect the need for reparations, restoration, and resistance (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Escobar, 2015; *see for example* Kallis et al., 2021). Instead of recognizing affinity to militant (Stepanic, 2021) and autonomous political struggles, scholars only selectively support them based on their "lived practices of degrowth" (Dunlap, 2020b, p.4). That is, degrowth support is conditioned on the 'pre-figurative' politics (when means unite with ends) of struggle concerning non-violence, effectiveness, or scalability. For example, Claudio Cattaneo²⁵ (2013; 2019) asks how squatting contributes to degrowth, and answers by limiting degrowth's support to legalized "housing-type squats" based on their measurable 'practical effect' of reducing energy and material consumption. Rather than acknowledging the political and cultural effects originating in radical spaces such as squats, or the ambition of for example autonomous zones to contest extractive or development projects, degrowth's main concern seems to stop at the consumption habits of a few individuals (Salmansperger, 2023). Suggesting that the virtue of political practice depends on its ecological footprint and moral purity, this sanitation of political struggle (Dunlap, 2020b; Sovacool & Dunlap, 2022) ignores the political context of, for example, anti-gentrification struggle. This alienates degrowth from on-the-ground experiences, needs, and knowledges, risking the de-politicization, appropriation, and tokenization of those that already practice degrowth as a way of life by confronting industrial development (Temper et al., 2020; *see* MTC, 2018). While slowly gaining a foothold in international conferences (e.g., the European Parliament's Beyond Growth Conference in May

²⁴ See the recent call for papers titled *Anarchy & Degrowth: Towards Rebellious, Prefigurative & Insurrectionary Degrowth Ecologies* (Dunlap & Becker, 2023).

²⁵ This reference is not meant to discredit individual researchers like Cattaneo (2013; 2019), who in fact greatly inspired me to better understand the connection between degrowth and (different forms of) squatting, as well as not to fear diving into unknown methodological approaches and intellectual environments for this undertaking (*see* Cattaneo, 2006).

2023) degrowth's politeness thereby risks its own co-optation by mainstream environmental discourse (Trantas, 2021; Toro, 2021; Dunlap, 2020b; Bluwstein, 2021; Altmann, 2019; Salmansperger, 2020).

Here, a decolonial degrowth moves "beyond critiques of consumption to critiques of domination" (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019, p.470) and embraces rather than silences its conflictive nature (Demaria et al., 2019), cultivating solidarity with present struggles against (green-) growth-based development (Dunlap, 2020b). In companion with anarchist critiques, a decolonial degrowth aims to "dismantle structures of violence, debt and death" (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019, p.481) through resurgence and the enduring and confrontative practices of 're-rooting' in and 're-commoning' abandoned territories previously enclosed for capitalist accumulation. By recentring disruptive strategies of socio-ecological transformation (Chertkovskaya, 2020; 2022; Herbert et al., 2021), degrowth connects to 'territorial struggle' and 'inhabiting' as similar concepts central to anarchist political ecology literature (Locret-Collet et al., 2021) and texts evolving out of the ZAD NDDL struggles. Hereby 'inhabiting' can mean

[...] belonging to places as much as they belong to us. It is not being indifferent to the things that surround us, but being attached to them: to the people, the ambiances, the fields, the hedges, the woods, the houses, the plant that sprouts again and again in the same spot, the animal that shows up in the same area. It's to be taken, powerfully, by our spaces. (MTC, 2018, p. 122; *see also* Fremeaux & Jordan, 2021)

Likewise, 'territoriality' describes "a relationship to the specific local territory" (Gelderloos, 2022, p.148). Inspired by and combining these concepts, this research project focuses on the practice of *re-inhabiting* spaces like the monastery and Lützerath, with the prefix to emphasize how both were actively and intentionally emptied or tried to keep empty. By ideationally revolving around these practices, the next section connects land-based struggles with social war discourse, ultimately outlining a theoretical framework through which researchers in search of decolonial degrowth can avoid to reinforce existing relations of domination "liv[ing] their life through the lives or struggles of others" (Dunlap & Tornel, 2023, p.4), and instead try to "give back" to those they (seek to) struggle *with* (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008; Zanotti et al. 2020; Leyva Solano & Rappaport, 2011).

Emancipatory landscapes, social war discourse, and counterinsurgency

Growing economies inevitably increase emissions and material use, continuously expand material and immaterial (*see* Duffy, 2015) extractive frontiers, and prolong state and corporate territorialization of life in all its forms, ultimately leading to socio-ecological devastation. Hereby, land-based struggles at the material frontlines of capitalist expansion expose the failure of institutions and "participatory" governance (Pélenc et al., 2021) as they make the slow violence (Nixon, 2011), in the form of displacement, pollution, and drained groundwater inherent in (green) economic growth, *sensible* (Rancière, 2015). Through the anarchist practices of direct action, self-organization, solidarity, and mutual aid, land-based struggles such as ZADs, forest occupations, or squats, offer 'objects of focus' and 'subjects of change' (Pélenc et al., 2021), and present 'emancipatory landscapes' that enable real democratic participation through dissent with established power (Rancière, 2015; Dunlap, 2020b; Aedo, 2019).



Image 13: Emancipation through dissent: A scene from Lützerath's eviction on January 3rd, 2023. Source: Rüdiger, 2023b.

Hereby, these landscapes can be understood as a contestation of what Jaques Rancière (2015) understands as 'polis' which encompasses everything that works to maintain "the fiction that no one of any significance has been prevented from taking part in the

determination of the common life" (Tanke 2011, p.45). Thus, 'polis' enforces a certain distribution of who is sensible (perceivable through senses) and worth considering. In tension with this societal definition of who "exists", 'demos' on the other hand, is the process of political partaking, the struggle for equality derived from one's exclusion. As "[t]he essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus" (Rancière, 2015, p. 45), political emancipation occurs when those deemed insensible dissent with their "non-existence" and physically (aesthetically) disrupt the governing political order. This manifestation of dissent rearticulates what is commonly sensible, thinkable, and possible - based on the presupposition of radical equality²⁶ (Rancière, 2015; Tanke, 2011). In degrowth words, emancipatory landscapes thus 'decolonize the social imaginary' by challenging society's 'fundamental fantasy' expressed through dominant self-images and dominant narratives (Clark, 2020). By openly detesting and deconstructing the (anthropocentric) 'truths' that normalize destruction and displacement associated with mining and gentrification, Lützerath and the monastery employ a 'politics of presence' which have 'the radical potential' to disrupt and break common sense²⁷ (Aedo, 2019). To generate knowledge that might strengthen this potential of disruption, a deeper engagement with how 'polis' enforces a certain distribution of the sensible becomes useful.

While Rancière explicates that 'polis' is not a repressive or controlling instance (Rancière, 2001), Foucault's (2009) analysis of power and oppression can help to understand how certain beings are made insensible in the social imaginary²⁸. This is because Foucault's interrelated concepts of 'discursive power', 'governmentality', and 'biopower'²⁹ analyze how

²⁶ This claim articulates Rancière's sharp critique of Althusser's distinction between those who think and those who act (Tanke 2011). Echoing insurrectionary ambitions, Rancière contends that the oppressed know and understand the domination they experience, and that philosophy (or in our case, scholars in general) must not continue to announce this reality but instead become engaged themselves and subvert domination. Hereby, Rancière takes an anthropocentric approach which this thesis extends to the radical equality of all beings and land.

²⁷ Known for his writings on common sense, Antonio Gramsci defines it as the taken-for-granted, self-contradictory, and conservative 'knowledge' which stabilizes hegemony through normalizing certain forms of domination (Gramsci & Forgacs, 1988; Brand & Wissen, 2021; Crehan, 2016). Hereby, Gramsci holds a similar view on oppressed people as Rancière, as not merely a passive mass, but philosophers themselves.

²⁸ I do not intend to say that Rancière's 'polis' is the same as Foucault's 'biopower/ biopolitics' (Rancière himself would reject this understanding), but that their analyses center around different yet complementary concerns. In my understanding, Foucault focuses more on the mechanisms of oppression and on how people are governed, while Rancière writes about emancipation and how people disrupt structures of oppression.

²⁹ As part of a "synergy" of perspectives on power in political ecology *discursive power* describes the production, adoption, and utilization of dominant discourses and narratives by governments, corporations, and NGOs (Svarstad et al., 2018). Secured by the production of powerful discourses, *governmentality* is a condition between governments and people "where consent of the governed is obtained through social technologies [...] and rule is self-imposed by individuals through methods of social institutions" (Robbins, 2020b, p.170). Hereby, subjectivation refers to peoples' internalization of state disciplining mechanisms, established truths, and neo-

states administer bodies, populations, and environments, which links land-based struggles, political emancipation, and insurrection to social war discourse (Dunlap, 2014). As Dunlap (2019b, p.13) points out, social war discourse "views the Political system, its economy, divisions of labor and hierarchy as a system of subjugation", which "serve[s] as an instrument of social pacification and ecological exploitation, despite widespread ecological and climate concerns". Illustrative of this, the creation of 'extractive subjects' enables resource extraction by reworking forms of exclusion (through compensation, resettlement, and marginalizing dissent), integrating social realities in the extractive process (by enabling survival/ improving living standards through the generation of employment and infrastructure), and the adoption of state-functions by corporations (Frederiksen & Himley, 2019). Accordingly, social warfare in connection to land-based struggles in opposition to extractive projects, describes "the social engineering of extraction" (Dunlap, 2019b, p.22), or the means that produce certain lands and inhabitants as *non-existent* in the social imaginary. In tension with emancipatory landscapes in which people's dissent cultivates "new forms of subjectivity" that liberate us "both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state" (Foucault, 1982, p.785), social war discourse reveals the ordinary violence within states by acknowledging the use of militaristic tactics aiming to pacify people, control environments, manage resistance, and perpetuate capitalist accumulation.

Known as such, military discourse and counterinsurgency tactics against dissenting people and places prove the theory of social war. Counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen (2006, p.1) defines counterinsurgency as "a competition with the insurgent for the right and the ability to win the hearts, minds and acquiescence of the population". In the words of military theorist Frank Kitson (1991), counterinsurgency is a 'low intensity war' for popular support through fighting by civil means and building 'trusted networks' (Kilcullen, 2006) to local populations, authorities, community leaders, and NGOs³⁰. To make mechanisms of social fragmentation, pacification, and inclusionary control legible, Dunlap (2019a) proposes a typology of six 'soft' counterinsurgency tactics based on empirical research with anti-mining struggles in Mexico, Germany, and Peru. He identifies social development, PR departments, knowledge production (*see* Kienscherf, 2011; Kirsch, 2010; 2014), counter-mobilization,

liberal rationality (Koch, 2022; Svarstad et al., 2018). Contributing to the condition of governmentality, biopower centers around environmental 'problems', where governmental concerns about populations' life quality come to "normatively prescribe how both individuals and populations should behave" (Svarstad et al., 2018, p. 358), as presently regarding the global carbon cycle.

³⁰ Instead of simplifying reality into a black and white picture, a counter insurgency lens helps to acknowledge and comprehend the complexity of socio-ecological struggles by recognizing the engineering of social conflict and internal divisions in the interest of governments and corporations.

green-washing (*see* Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Brock, 2020), and physical and bureaucratic infrastructures (*see* Dunlap, 2020a) as efforts to pre-empt opposition and gain the 'social license' for extraction³¹. Relying on 'the critical stamp' of large and often corporate funded NGOs, RWE's offsetting efforts mitigate protest "by co-opt[ing] critics and divide-and-conquer[ing] resistance" (Brock, 2020, p.19). The role of NGOs in counterinsurgency is hereby foundational for divisive discourses, as they define acceptable and unacceptable forms of protest and perpetuate anthropocentric conceptions of 'nature' and conservation (Gelderloos, 2013). Ultimately, soft counterinsurgency tactics legitimize 'hard' tactics like criminalization, repression, militarization, physical violence, and punishment (Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Frederiksen & Himley, 2019)³². In sum, land-based struggles like Lützerath or the monastery are at the same time spaces of emancipation, as they are the materialization of permanent social war, especially in times of open conflict. Hereby, social war discourse *recognizes* the use of military counterinsurgency tactics against civilians, while political ecologies of counterinsurgency "*dissec[t]* the socio-ecological warfare techniques employed" in the enforcement of extraction (Dunlap, 2019b, p.13, *emphasis added*).

Mass media, or: A weapon in the battle for your mind

According to Kitson (1991, p.78) "wars of subversion and counter subversion are fought [...] in the minds of the people". Hereby, "popular perceptions and rumor are more influential than the facts and more powerful than a hundred tanks" (Kilcullen, 2006, p.1) and those seeking to impose an extractive project need to "[g]et the press onside" (Kilcullen, 2006, p.7) by providing free information and utilizing media as a tool to persuade people of its benefits. Media is thus a central space of power-making through shaping the public opinion (Castells, 2013). In other words, media is politics³³, and following Foucault (1975/2003, p.15) "politics is the continuation of war by other means". Thus, we can conceptualize the manipulation of mainstream media as a soft counterinsurgency tactic to manage people and land, in which news stories are "systematically distort[ed] to reflect the interests of state and corporate

³¹ Here, one could add a seventh tactic of soft counterinsurgency, which is the granting of concessions. Kitson (1991, p.86) defines non-violent protest as 'a phase of insurgence' which "carries the seeds of its own destruction within it". Because non-violent protest is dependent on large amounts of people, most of which are not interested in wider political changes, but settle with deals or higher wages, protest is likely to dissolve after legal concessions are granted, isolating those that fight for systemic change as 'extremists' (Gelderloos, 2013).

³² Forest and land defenders in the Rhineland faced intimidation, beatings and attacks with batons, rocks, pepper spray, tear gas, water cannons, tanks and police dogs, threats of rape, surveillance by helicopters and drones, arrests, fines, and imprisonment (Brock, 2018; 2023a; 2023b; CrimethInc., 2023).

³³ Note that Foucault's understanding of politics thus contrasts to Rancière's, where politics occur through manifestations of dissent.

power" (MacLeod 2019a, p.47), ultimately cultivating a 'common sense' of mining or real-estate companies as a 'good corporate citizen' (Brock & Dunlap, 2018). Hereby, exploiting a single, simple, and unifying narrative is the most powerful³⁴ and may well be nationalist (Kilcullen, 2006), as fears about national (energy) security enable 'external provocateur' accusations (Gelderloos, 2013) and other discursive exclusions³⁵. As division is a technique of subjectivation and domination (Foucault, 1982), distinctions between good/bad squatters (Martínez, 2019), renewable energy/fossil fuels (Dunlap, 2021a), violent/non-violent protest (Gelderloos, 2013), and effective/ineffective alternatives (Salmansperger, 2023), enable categorization, stigmatization (*see* Brock et al. 2022), and alienation. Hereby, fear inducing narratives about terrorism, energy blackouts (Kutzner, 2022), or a Green Scare (Fischer, 2021), and associated enthusiasm regarding techno-utopian and economic growth fixated "solutions" increase political control by decreasing public tolerance for dissent and strengthening trust in law-and-order policies, especially when governments and corporations seemingly agree, as in the case of "land deals" (Dunlap, 2023; Castells, 2013; Beck & Wesel, 2022; Martínez, 2019; Gelderloos, 2022). Additionally, the imperial logic of under-utilized space continues to legitimize enforced resource extraction (Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2017; Geisler, 2012; Law, 2015). Thus, some "stories" are "all too real in their modes of industrial production, their social force, political effects and cultural power" (Hartley, 1992, p.2). The objective of a political ecology of media manipulation is thus not to ask which story is real or "true". Rather, it is to analyze how some distorted truths become dominant enough to enforce an exclusive distribution of the sensible (that is, a distribution that denies some beings' existence) (Rancière, 2015) by making people accept, consent to, and even support mining and real-estate speculation through dominant narratives.

The Propaganda Model

Even during the Necrocene (McBrien, 2016; Clark, 2020), people engaged in land-based struggles and the defense of life against capitalist destruction are depicted as (partly) extremist. To understand better, why this is the case, research into the 'political reactions from above' that makes "the social engineering of extraction" legible (Verweijen & Dunlap, 2021)

³⁴ Narratives are constructed through metaphors, which connect frames (emotions associated with certain images, specifically fear and enthusiasm) to language based on prior experiences (Castells, 2013; Lakoff, 2008). Such frames structure daily life, social interactions, and social relations to the extent that they can determine over life and death (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Lakoff, 2009).

³⁵ For example ideology (Eagleton, 1991), anti-growthism (Akbulut, 2019), anti-progressivism, anti-modernism, terrorism, extremism, irrationality, or spoiled attitudes (Frederiksen & Himley, 2019; Brock, et al. 2022).

remains an area deserving greater attention. Hereby, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's (2002) book *Manufacturing Consent* can provide a useful analytical tool for a political ecology of media manipulation. Based on their observations of US media behavior during the Cold War, Herman and Chomsky (2002) established the *Propaganda Model* (PM) which scrutinizes the role of mass media as neutral dispersers of information. As an analysis of how desires, "needs", and consent to growth-driven extraction are manufactured, this analysis in turn contributes to a decolonial and emancipatory degrowth, focused on power relations and manipulation, rather than blaming individuals for their consumption and consent. This section revises and complements the PM with current research from critical media and communication studies, largely based on analyses of the media system in Germany. At its core, the PM asks if and how the institutional structures of mainstream media and its links to power affect the production of news stories, holding that news undergo five filters before they reach their recipients:

1. **Size/ Ownership:** The larger a media company is, the more it operates as a private business susceptible to intensifying market pressures, which produces, sells, and seeks to profit on news stories as a product (MacLeod, 2019b). Constant economic growth in the media market across all Western societies and a steady increase of elite ownership concentrates power, reach, and resources (Riegert, 2022; Baron, 2018; Shaller, 2023), whereby a decreasing number of news producing companies leads to fewer opinions, fewer critical voices, and less political diversity (MacLeod et al. 2019a; Richeri, 2011). Hereby, media concentration is an essential feature of capitalism (Knoche, 2021) and public and private media monitoring efforts perform symbolic politics that paradoxically secure concentration³⁶.
2. **Funding:** Given the commercialization³⁷ of media (Plank & Schopf, 2012; Gadringer & Vieth, 2012; Özbicerler & Öztürk, 2012), media bias ("Gefälligkeitsjournalismus")

³⁶ Knoche (2021) distinguishes two approaches to concentration research. Hereby, 'apologetic-normative' competition theories inform media concentration monitoring institutions and treat concentration as mitigable. In contrast, 'critical-empirical' concentration theories argue from a political-economic perspective and understand concentration as *systematic*. The conclusion from 'critical-empirical' concentration research is thus, that 'apologetic-normative' approaches as found in public and private monitoring institutions secure concentration by distracting from and normalizing its inevitability. In the context of the German media landscape monitoring reports as those published by the EU co-financed Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) and the German Commission for Determining Concentration in the Media Sector (KEK), use ideologically-loaden language which plays down state intervention, while 'allowing' media concentration up to 30%.

³⁷ Commercialization refers to the *incompatibility* of economic goals and public responsibility, present among all media companies (even initially non-commercial ones) that seek to establish themselves (Gadringer & Vieth,

describes a general positive attitude towards companies, corporations, and the economic system at large, as well as the waiving of critical reporting in favor of financial gains (Siegert & Von Rimscha, 2016; Kolb & Woelke, 2010). Media companies face the 'double expectation' (Altmeyden, 1996) to simultaneously enable free opinion-building and sell industrially produced news. Hereby, they operate on a 'dual-product-market', attempting to sell two entirely different products (information and media consumers' attention) to two different customers with sometimes contradicting interests (e.g., an environmentally concerned reader and a company working within extractive industries). In competition for readers' attention, large news producers produce mainly entertainment instead of distributing information that encourages critical thinking. Hereby, reports on 'spectacular' and commodifiable (Debord, 2014) events like social unrest or environmental catastrophes sideline political positions that critique a socio-ecologically devastating economic system to not interfere with profit interests of corporations (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; MacLeod, 2019a; Gadringer & Vieth, 2012).

3. **Sourcing:** Economic compulsion and time constraints moreover lead to media's increasing dependence on subsidies in form of daily free information provided by "experts" or government and corporate PR departments. This structurally determined reliance on official sources³⁸ secures capitalist interests because presumably neutral statements reproduce dominant narratives and silence critical voices. Hereby, "[m]odern journalism enforces a hierarchy on who is considered a credible, legitimate source in reporting, with high government officials and representatives from big business and think tanks at the top as 'primary definers', with union officials, activists and members of the public far below" (MacLeod, 2019a, p.55). News producers uphold and reinforce these hierarchies if they merely copy-paste or cut official statements, rather than using them for inspiration to further investigate a theme. Hereby, the contested practice of 'journalistic balance' of showing arguments from 'both sides' simulates neutral reporting while ignoring power relations³⁹. Moreover, less explicitly positive or biased reports on corporate or government activities can have even stronger ef-

2012). Hereby, the digitalization of media and of advertisement increased competition for and dependence on ever more inconspicuous advertisement (MacLeod 2019a; Angerer et al., 2012).

³⁸ Lance Bennet's (1990) indexing norm already described this issue. However, his approach becomes more analytically useful by being embedded in the PM (Zollmann, 2019a).

³⁹ This practice can artificially create doubt where there is none, as during the 2000s when US mainstream media ignored scientific consent on climate change by 'also hearing' oil companies' perspective (Castells, 2013; Krüger, 2015a). Moreover 'neutral reporting' resembles approaches to 'objective research' (see the methods chapter for reflections around objectivity).

fects as they are not perceived as PR or advertisement, but as facts presented by supposedly neutral and rational "experts" (Özbicerler & Plank, 2012).

4. **Flak:** As part of corporate and government PR strategies, and resulting from economic pressures, flak (negative feedback to previous reporting) disciplines media because news companies operate "notoriously risk-averse" (MacLeod, 2019a, p.58) regarding the possibility of costly legal cases. Flak influences further reporting or excludes certain narratives altogether by silencing or censoring critical voices. Everyone can produce flak, yet "[t]he ability to produce flak [...] that is costly and threatening, is related to power" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.84)⁴⁰. With digitalization the risk of fast, extensive, and anonymous dispersion of potentially image-damaging information increases, which is why flak has become ever more preventative: While being subjected to a new market for legislative consulting⁴¹ (Gostomzyk & Moßbrucker, 2019), media companies produce flak themselves not just by publicly criticizing each other, but through pre-emptive self-censorship (MacLeod 2019a; Siegert & Von Rimscha, 2016). Moreover, governments and corporate-sponsored monitoring institutions are among the biggest producers of flak (Richeri, 2011; Herman & Chomsky, 2002).
5. **Ideology:** Through producing "commonsensical" meanings, symbols, values, strong beliefs, and self-affirming discourses, capitalist ideology functions as an instrument of discipline and control⁴² by obscuring and naturalizing unjust social conditions, while simultaneously eliminating political alternatives (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; MacLeod, 2019a; 2019b; Eagleton, 1991; Bookchin, 2017; Golubchikov, 2016) all the while pertaining objectivity (Clark, 2020). Hereby, capitalist ideology and its metamorphoses⁴³ is not a mere fantasy or an abstract set of ideas. Rather, it has 'material

⁴⁰ Punishment through cancelled abonnements or individual complaints is relatively ineffective, while speeches, smear campaigns, and lawsuits against critical journalists, or the removal of funding pose a direct and indirect threat (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

⁴¹ The production of flak under the robe of monitoring or legal consultation extends Fairhead et al.'s (2012) 'economy of repair' from claims to "repair nature" to claims to "repair the media system".

⁴² Neo-liberal, green growth, and "the global war on terror" narratives create a dichotomized world divided into good and evil (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Zollmann, 2019b). Hereby, concepts like violence, democracy, sustainability, or communism remain fuzzy (MacLeod, 2019a; Gelderloos, 2013) and can be "used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.29) as the main pillar of capitalism. Thus, ideology fragments the left and labor movements, putting them into a permanent defensive position (MacLeod, 2019a; Zollmann, 2019a).

⁴³ Considering the dissolution of the Soviet Union briefly after the PM's publication, the ideological or anti-communist filter might be among the most debated ones and unsurprisingly, manifests in critiques towards the PM itself (Herman, 2018). However, "dominant ideology is constantly shedding its skin in order to continue defending capitalism as the best form of organization" (Pedro, 2011, p.1889). By advocating for de-regulation, privatization, and "public-private partnerships" in the name of efficiency, individual freedom, wealth, and progress, neoliberalism secures capitalist accumulation through "almost religious faith in the market" (Herman,

existence' by shaping policies and public debate, and in less abstract terms, influencing everyday social interactions, relationships, and social realities (Althusser, 2014; Debord, 2014; Hartley, 1992). While not explicated by the PM, this filter includes anthropocentrism as part and parcel of capitalist ideology, pertaining the unquestioned superiority of humans over non-human beings and land.

Additional filters

The PM's focus on class neglects other forms of structural marginalization and ignores that "[p]ower is not only a function of wealth (i.e., class) but also of gender and race" (Zollmann, 2019a, p.38). Sensitive towards a male and white bias in the production of news, Zollman's (2019a) intersectional approach thus adds two more filters to the PM:

6. **Sexism:** Gendered bias in access, story subjects, content, and sourcing as well as occupational categories of sources, among others as effects of journalists' gender-related experiences of intimidation, threats, violence, and abuse of authority in workplace or on-site.
7. **Racism:** Underrepresentation of ethnic and religious minority groups in production of mainstream media content, reproduction of prejudices, and a lack of anti-racist sources and opinions.

Finally, and related to (bureaucratic) infrastructural counterinsurgency tactics (Dunlap, 2020a), authorities and/or private security forces may break press rights by physically or bureaucratically restricting journalists from accessing specific situations or areas. These restrictions can take different forms, leading me to propose another filter:

8. **Restricted physical access:** Special requirements or subsequent withdrawal of permits to enter a site, demands to delete already recorded materials, confiscation or damage of material and equipment, arrests, evictions, intimidation, and physical assault.

By identifying these filters, the PM describes a general behavior, without forecasting effects (Herman, 2018). Therefore, the PM does not claim the omnipotence of corporate media or

2018, section 4) and suspicion towards non-market mechanisms. Most recently, green capitalism extends this faith to "sustainable" technology by upholding the idea that climate catastrophe and socio-ecological crises can be solved through continued economic growth and the technological domination of nature (Althusser, 2014; Larsen, 2019; Sullivan, 2017; Dunlap, 2023).

governing bodies but provides a tool to analyze if and to what extent information is systematically distorted. As the extent of manipulation is context-specific, the PM is thus sensitive to "the contesting forces both within and outside the media" (Herman, 2018, p.13), and does not deny the possibility of, but explicitly encourages resistance and the production of counter-narratives. Although the PM therefore either unravels manipulation or not, its basic theory is nevertheless likely dismissed as deterministic or conspirative, because "truth [...] heightens the enormity of the crime of calling authority into disrepute" (Chomsky, 1999 in MacLeod, 2019b, p.13). Against the background of media manipulation as a tool for social management and in pursuit of (decolonial) degrowth, the next two chapters provide the background knowledge for a subsequent political ecology of media manipulation. Hereby, chapter 3 elaborates on the political and historical contexts of struggles surrounding Lützerath and the monastery, while chapter 4 embeds the PM in the German media landscape and explores its 'filters' in the context of the two newspapers under study.

3 Background: Why do some people struggle for "empty" spaces?

This chapter provides detailed insights into the political and historical context of struggles around Lützerath and the monastery. Starting with Lützerath, I elaborate on the ecologically devastating impacts of corporate mining in the Rhineland, greening attempts, and local resistance, before exploring recent culminations of resistance in form of Lützerath's reclamation. Thereafter, I elaborate on housing issues in Aachen, as well as early and recent anti-gentrification struggles, which include the monastery's reclamation.

Lützerath lives! Lignite extraction and anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland

With the three still operating open cast mines Inden, Hambach, and Garzweiler II, the Rhineland in Western Germany is viewed as Europe's biggest lignite mining area. In up to 450 m under the earth, it held nearly 55 billion tons of "economically feasible" lignite (Jansen, 2017). All mines in the Rhineland are operated by the Rhinean-Westphalian power plants ("Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke", RWE), one of Germany's main energy providers and among Europe's biggest greenhouse gas emitters (Bukold, 2021). Since industrial mining in the Rhineland began in the early 19th century, RWE concentrated its power by monopolizing the extraction and electrification of lignite in the region. While the destruction of villages for mining continues in Germany's East (e.g., Mühlrose in Lausatia), Lützerath was the last village demolished for the expansion of Garzweiler II. Despite decades

of local resistance, Garzweiler II was approved by the federal government in 1995 (Jansen & Schubert, 2014). Until today, this single mine annually extracts around 30 million tons of lignite and 100-120 million cubic meters of rocks, sands, and soils, which RWE considers as "overburden" (RWE, 2022). Lignite is transported to the nearby power plants Neurath and Niederaußem, both considered as highly modern despite being only about 40% efficient ("Braunkohlekraftwerk mit optimierter Anlagentechnik"). Thus, roughly a quarter of Germany's gross power generation is dependent on one of the most polluting and destructive energy sources (Jansen, 2017; Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung [DIW], 2019). What remains most visibly from mining in Garzweiler II is an about 200m deep and 35 km² wide hole in the earth. The total mining area Garzweiler II, however, stretches over 78,5 km² as it includes 43,5 km² of previously destroyed and now recultivated forests, fields, meadows, and villages (RWE, 2022). Yet, the socio-ecological consequences of lignite extraction and combustion reach much further and deeper in space and time.



Image 14: One of Lützerath's inhabitants sitting at the edge of Garzweiler II in autumn 2022. Source: Bastian Betz, 2022.

Recultivation, offsetting, and social development: Legitimizing the continuation of socio-ecological devastation

Mining companies are by the *German Nature Protection Law* ("Naturschutzgesetz") and the *European Habitats Directive* legally obliged to re-habilitate and re-cultivate formerly mined areas, and to compensate pollution and destruction through additional offsetting efforts (Brock & Dunlap, 2018). Besides investments in local and international "green energy" development projects (RWE, 2023; RWE AG, 2022a; 2022b) and CO₂ certificates⁴⁴, RWE ostensibly adheres to these legal requirements by re-filling residual holes with disposing of "overburden" and by touting the creation of artificial lakes as future attractions for tourists and residents (RWE AG, 2022a; 2022b). While the feasibility of such lakes is highly questionable due to decades of (subsidized) ground water depletion⁴⁵, the approved construction of a 45km long pipeline necessary to redirect more than 6.3 billion m³ of water from the Rhine River into the remaining residual holes of Garzweiler II and Hambach entails further destruction, dispossession, and water depletion (Jansen, 2017; RWE Power AG, n.d). Extreme weather events and suddenly rising groundwater levels moreover increase the risk of possibly fatal landslides, as happened in the Lusatian mining region in 2009 and 2010 (Bartsch, 2012). The chemical mixture of various minerals and residuals of mining wastes in residual lakes creates further unpredictable hazards, including the acidification and eutrophication within the lakes and in downstream waterbodies. Finally, hazards going beyond obvious destruction include psychosocial pressures, air and water pollution through increased radioactive radiation, fine dust concentration, and unsafe waste deposits, as well as significant contributions to global warming, already threatening lives and livelihoods across

⁴⁴ RWE consults other companies in investing in *Voluntary Emission Certificates* (VERs), among others through financing controversial *REDD+* programs and wind park development (RWE Supply & Trading GmbH, n.d). Hereby, RWE is a member of the *International Emissions Trading Association* (IETA) which, together with the world economic forum, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (*WBCSD*), and *Climate Group* have established the CO₂ certificate distributor *VERRA* in 2007. *VERRA* supervises the *Verified Carbon Standard* (VCS) Program which "is the world's most widely used greenhouse gas (GHG) crediting program" (VERRA, 2023) and has recently been scrutinized for manipulating the emissions trading market and selling non-existent certificates worth of more than 89 million tons of CO₂ (Fischer & Knuth, 2023).

⁴⁵ To keep the mines from filling up with ground water, RWE annually drains about 1.4 billion m³ of water in the entire Rhineland. By being exempted from paying taxes for water withdrawal until 2011, RWE received indirect governmental subsidies of about €20 million *each year* for depleting high-quality drinking water and draining local and regional ecosystems. While wetlands (e.g., Maas-Schwalm-Nette) and farmlands become dependent on costly artificial watering systems, water drainage also increased the mineral concentration in remaining water reserves and lead to sinking ground levels up to 4 m, entailing damaged buildings and local infrastructures. Ground water depletion for lignite extraction affected 10% of the total area in North Rhine-Westphalia already in 1983. Nowadays, these effects extend beyond national borders, causing sinking water tables in the Netherlands. Moreover, holding the lakes' desirable water levels (predicted to be achieved earliest in 2080), demands an additional supply of 25-30 million m³ of water annually *into the undetermined future* to compensate for steady outflows (Jansen, 2005; 2017).

the world today (Europe Beyond Coal, 2018; Jansen, 2019). Thus, while adhering to compensation and recultivation efforts grants RWE the legal license to operate, these efforts are easily manipulated, highly optimistic, and entail unpredictable risks as well as further displacement. This manifests among others in RWE's role as a co-founder of the international thinktank and pro-mining lobby group *Bettercoal Initiative* (Brock & Dunlap, 2018).

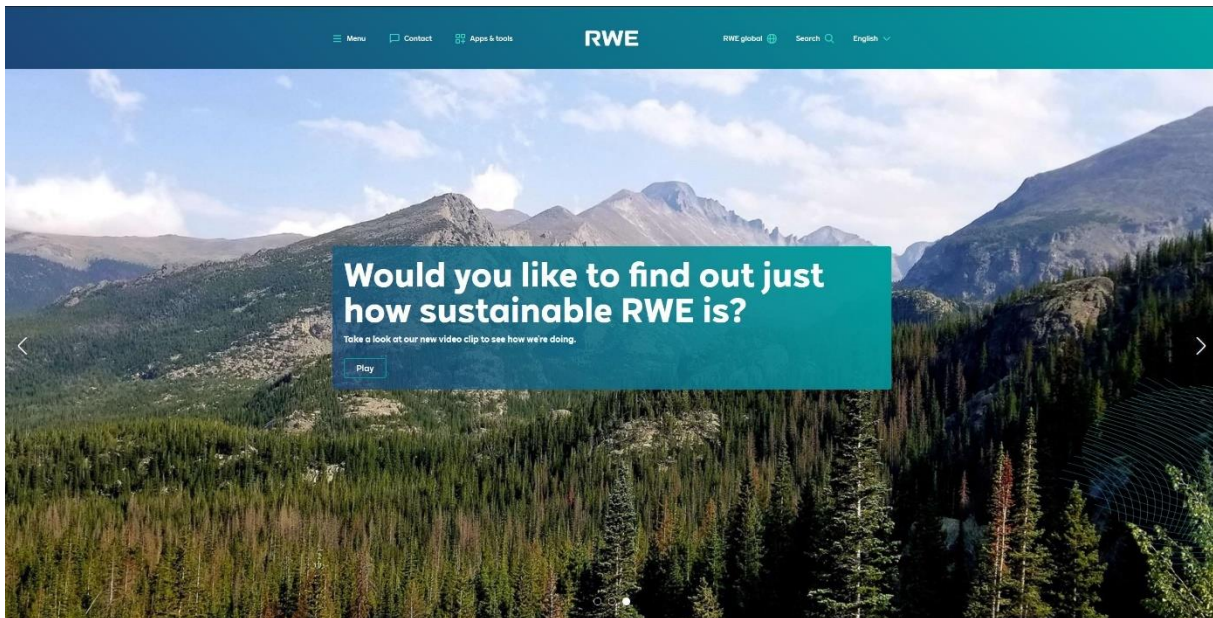


Image 15: A screenshot of RWE's website: Embracing Kirsch's (2010) 'sustainable mining'. Source: RWE, n.d.-c.

To ensure not only its legal but also its 'social license to operate' (Brock, 2020; Dunlap, 2019a), RWE emerges as a self-proclaimed promoter of biodiversity, "renewable energy" development, and social development at the forefront of climate change mitigation (see Image 15) despite leaving behind socially and ecologically scarred landscapes. Around Garzweiler II, RWE sufficiently succeeds in promoting itself as 'a good corporate citizen' (see Brock & Dunlap, 2018), among others by holding an advisory membership in a regional public-private institution or "special-purpose association" for (re)developing villages and land around Garzweiler II ("Zweckverband Landfolge Garzweiler", ZLG). Here, RWE consults affected municipalities, resulting in greening activities such as the *Green Belt* (see Image 16) and attractions like the planned Garzweiler documentation and information center in Holzweiler (see Image 17). Moreover, the initiative plans social development projects like *Innovation Valley*, a "future oriented innovation-ecosystem" assuring the commercial development of the area around Garzweiler II (ZLG, 2021). Thus, RWE has co-opted legal obligations and social needs created by mining through strategically embracing 'sustainable mining', thereby concealing and prolonging destruction in the present, while ensuring economic gains in the future (Kirsch, 2010; see also Brock, 2020). Hereby, research into

producing "desirable" environments (*such as* Nixdorf, 2012; Sakellari et al. 2021; Fleischhammel et al. 2010) is crucial for legitimizing mining activities by claiming to improve, for example, residual lake creation (see Kirsch, 2014).



Image 16: Plans for the 70km long Green Belt, a recultivated area around Garzweiler II comprised among others of bike and walking trails, a Garzweiler documentation center (see below), and flower meadows to "make up" for the mine's ecological devastation and social fragmentation. The first section of the Green Belt was celebrated as completed in 2019. Source: ZLG, 2022b.



Image 17: Shaped like Garzweiler II, the documentation center in Holzweiler (threatened with demolition until 2016) is planned to document lignite extraction in the Rhineland, supposedly centering local perspectives. Decades of resistance and global consequences are likely neglected, if not silenced topics. Source: ZLG, 2022a.

Enforced resettlements and local resistance

Since the Rhineland's first of around 100 villages was demolished for lignite in 1926, about 40.000 people⁴⁶ faced forced resettlements, the loss of home, community, and extraordinarily fertile soils, as well as social conflict, financial losses, and psychological violence. Hereby, the legal possibility to expropriation is based on the 1935 national socialist German mining act which defined mining as a military security. Despite its revision in 1980, the general mining act still holds the right to mining superior to individuals' rights to private property and to nature protection laws based on a one-sided definition of the 'common good' (BUND NRW, n.d-b.; Jansen & Schubert, 2014; Michel, 2008). Yet, and inspired by early protest against the Hambach mine, local resistance against Garzweiler II formed in several villages around Erkelenz already in the 1980s. Hereby, citizen initiatives engaged in bike demonstrations, torchlight parades, and public consultations, demanding thorough environmental and social impact assessments, the conservation of their homes, and genuine local participation (Jansen & Schubert, 2014).



Image 18: A demonstration against Garzweiler II in 1988, people symbolically entombing their villages. Source: Erkelenzer Volkszeitung, 28.03.1988 in Jansen & Schubert, 2014.

⁴⁶ Initially lignite extraction in the Rhineland entailed the displacement of more than 45.000 people of at least 130 villages until 2045. Garzweiler II was then supposed to cover an area of 66 km², stretching from the edges of Garzweiler I (also known as Frimmersdorf) to the city of Erkelenz, destroying 18 villages and displacing nearly 12.000 people. After decades of local resistance, Garzweiler II was limited to 48 km² in 1991, and again in 2016 to spare the village Holzweiler. Local resistance, however, did not abate (Jansen & Schubert, 2014).

Although local and regional initiatives like *Alle Dörfer bleiben* ("All Villages will stay", ADB), *Kirchen im Dorf lassen* ("Leave the Churches in the Village", KIDL), and *Friends of the Earth Germany* ("Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland", BUND), carry this early local resistance into the present, the destruction of villages continued. Among them, Lützerath had its "deconstruction" scheduled in 2019, after its "resettlement" started in 2006 and was celebrated complete by RWE in 2017. Lützerath, its neighboring villages Immerath, Pesch, and their about 1.500 inhabitants were conflated and displaced to "Immerath (neu)", about 8km West of the old villages on the south-eastern fringe of Erkelenz (RWE, n.d.-a). While RWE prides itself for its "socially compatible joint resettlements"⁴⁷ (RWE Power, 2019), the corporation moreover commonly starts to demolish houses, crucial infrastructures, ecosystems, and cultural monuments⁴⁸ long before all inhabitants left their homes, causing physical and mental harm alongside ecological destruction. Along this line, RWE began to dismantle Lützerath already in 2013 despite its more than 30 official inhabitants (Keller, 2023a; Virtuelles Museum Erkelenz, n.d). Among them was farmer Eckhardt Heukamp⁴⁹, who together with two of his tenants appealed in two courts against RWE's attempt to expropriate him. In March 2022, the higher administrative court of the city of Münster denied Eckhardt's appeal, forcing him to officially leave his farm in Lützerath in October 2022 (Schwarz, 2022; Müllender, 2022). Overall, the duration and consistence of local resistance to Garzweiler II exposes the forceful character of lignite extraction.

Another episode of NRWE: The Green(s') New RWE Deal

Historically, RWE holds immense political power through lobby organizations like *Better Coal* alongside financial entanglements and personal ties with public actors and institutions. While several municipalities, cities, banks, and the North Rhine-Westphalian (NRW) Chamber of Agriculture are shareholders of RWE, several regional and national (former) politicians hold leading positions in RWE boards (*see* Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Neubauer, 2013; Zeising, 2022; LobbyControl, n.d. -a; Jansen & Schubert, 2014). People engaged in anti-mining struggles sarcastically refer to these links as "NRWE", the infiltration of public actors and institutions in NRW with RWE's profit-seeking interests. Recent examples of these countless financial entanglements are supplementary incomes for Gregor Golland (regional

⁴⁷ RWE's claims to preserve the original social fabric of "resettled" villages (RWE Power, 2019).

⁴⁸ Despite strong protest and although Immerath was inhabited until 2022, its cathedral was demolished already in January 2018 (Keller, 2023b; Müller, 2018).

⁴⁹ Eckhardt moved to his family's farm in Lützerath after being displaced from the neighboring village of Borschemisch in 2015 (Schnell, 2022).

parliament member for inner affairs) from 2015-2020 and withheld documents concerning the preservation of villages by Peter Altmaier (then economic minister) in 2020 (Schwarz, 2020). Moreover, both Armin Laschet (then prime minister) and Herbert Reul (minister for inner affairs until today) engaged in a row of informal meetings with RWE, among others leading to the illegal eviction of the Hambacher Forest in 2018 (Wyputta, 2019; Löffelbein, 2021; Müllender, 2021). In parallel to financial ties and informal meetings, Golland and Reul strongly supported the increased authorization of police in NRW by promoting the use of tasers as a "de-escalative" tool since 2017 (Golland, 2021). Today, 18 police departments in NRW are equipped with the potentially lethal weapon (Auster, 2023; Tomerius, 2019; Wyputta, 2022). Ties between RWE and the police transpired (again) during Lützerath's eviction in January 2023, when, financed by public funds, RWE provided the prisoner transporters (Krause, 2023). Thus, the financial and personal entanglements between RWE and public institutions and individual politicians exemplify powerful public-private-partnerships. Environmental organizations and local initiatives ever since criticized the general mining frameworks ("Leitentscheidung")⁵⁰ for being arbitrary, untransparent, and insufficient. As these elements of *NRWE* are locally well-known and well-documented, Jansen & Schubert (2014, p.57), conclude that "[t]he making of Garzweiler is an object lesson in how a project was pushed through under the guise of democratic and supposedly open-ended approval procedures." Describing recent public consultation events as "simulated democracy" (BUND NRW, 2023) they emphasize the lack of an option to say 'no' to Garzweiler ("Nulloption"), again pointing out the forceful character of mining.

Along this line, Lützerath's eviction in January 2023 and the demolition of Immerath in autumn 2022 were enforced based on the general mining framework from 2021, despite legal demands for a new general mining framework since autumn 2021 (BUND NRW, n.d. - a)⁵¹. On October 4th, 2022, Robert Habeck (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Green Party) and Mona Neubaur (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Industry, Climate Action, and Energy NRW, Green Party) announced the results of their "negotiations"

⁵⁰ Since 1987, four general mining frameworks determined requirements concerning energy security, environmental protection, and social compatibility, legally defining the spatial boundaries for mining in the Rhineland (BUND NRW, n.d. -a). While the current general mining framework restricts the expansion of the Hambach mine, limitations for Garzweiler II remain vague and take as a reference point Germany's 2020 law to phase out coal until 2038 ("Kohleverstromungsbeendigungsgesetz"), which faced partly recognized constitutional complaints regarding insufficient climate change mitigation attempts and restricted freedoms of future generations (Bundes Verfassungsgericht, 2021; Rieve et al., 2021).

⁵¹ Following the parliamentary elections in September 2021, the new coalition agreement between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Green Party (2021-2025) decided to phase out coal by 2030 instead of 2038, hereby creating the legal demands for the revision of the 2021 general mining framework.

with RWE. This corporate-state agreement known as the "RWE- deal"⁵² claims that "the coal under the former settlement of Lützerath [...] will soon be needed to make optimal use of the lignite fleet during the energy crisis and sufficient earth must be excavated for recultivating areas previously used for opencast mining" (RWE, n.d.-b). Based on a law that enables the short-term increased capacity of power plants in the face of energy security concerns ("Ersatzkraftwerkebereithaltungsgesetz", EKBG), the continuation of destructive and energy intense lignite extraction and combustion are thus paradoxically justified with recultivation and energy security concerns.

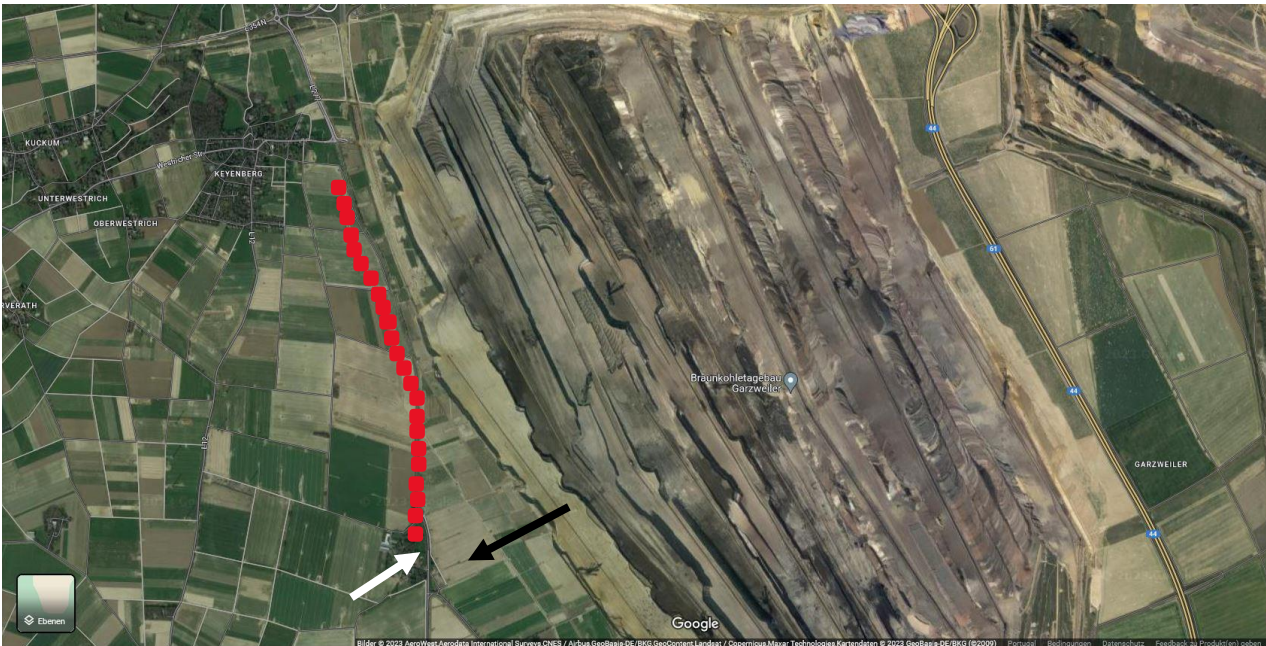
Recent culminations of resistance: Lützi lives, Lützi stays!

Albeit local resistance already highlighted the German lignite industry's role in accelerating global warming in the 1990s, struggles were mainly concerned with local and immediate social and environmental consequences (Jansen & Schubert, 2014). In recent years this focus shifted to global climate justice and demands for systemic change, also among the local initiatives ADB and KIDL (Becker & Hofinger, 2022, ADB, n.d.; KIDL, n.d.). As an expression of the social division caused by mining and provoked among others through astrourfing activities⁵³, other local initiatives continue to focus exclusively on local aspects and explicitly distance themselves from Lützerath's reclamation and the climate justice movement (*see* Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Müllender, 2023; LobbyControl, n.d. -b; Fieldnotes, 02.12.2022). Still, the German climate justice movement organized annual climate camps in the Rhineland since 2010, initiating among others *Ende Gelände's* first mass action in 2015 where around 1000 people entered and blocked Garzweiler II, starting from a climate camp in Lützerath. In 2020 then, protest against RWE's efforts to demolish the road L277 (the last

⁵² Presenting themselves as the pioneers of an earlier coal exit and celebrating their tremendous efforts for climate change mitigation, politicians and the CEO of a transnational corporation claim that their decision to continue mining until 2030/33 is based on three independent and separate studies. However, these were based on data provided by RWE assuming high uses of energy, and high prices for gas and CO2 certificates. Moreover, these studies were created under extreme time pressure and partly referred to each other's vague results as facts (Eberle & Müller-Arnold, 2022; Götze, 2022). In contrast, studies from the *German Institute for Economic Research* (DIW) and *Europe beyond Coal* urge for a coal phase out latest in 2028 to reach a 50% chance of adhering to 1.5° global warming limit as agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement. Accordingly, the demolition and excavation of Lützerath is superfluous and unjustifiable, despite possible energy shortages following the war in Ukraine, as combusting the lignite already exposed in Garzweiler II, Hambach, and Inden exceeds Germany's remaining carbon budget and the amount needed to secure Germany's energy provision (Rieve et al., 2021; Herpich et al., 2022). Yet, while appealing to larger environmental organizations and NGO's, even the latter reports continue to view lignite and carbon emissions as resources to be exploited by humans.

⁵³ Astrourfing is the imitation of and influence over grassroot civil society organizations initiated by corporations to lobby and shape public opinion. Examples regarding RWE are the financing of anti-wind energy development initiatives in the 1990s and the initiative called "Unser Revier" ("Our Revier") (Brock & Dunlap, 2018).

road connecting Lützerath to its neighboring villages) led people to set up Lützerath's vigil ("Mahnwache", MaWa, *see* Image 19) and sparked the occupation of the entire hamlet (Lützerath Lebt, n.d.).



Map 6: The road L277 represents "the red line" between the villages and Garzweiler II. The white arrow points out the location of Lützerath's vigil since July 2020, the black arrow indicates the direction in which Garzweiler II expands. Note that the mine's edge has moved considerably closer to Lützerath since this picture was taken (dotted line and arrows added by author). Source: Google, n.d.-d.



Image 19: Lützerath's vigil in October 2021: A permanent (24h) legal demonstration positioned in between the village and the mine's edge embodying "a point of arrival and encounter in the region" (Mahnwache Lützerath, n.d.). Source: Gábor Fekete, 2021.

People engaged in the occupation formed the initiative *Lützerath lebt* ("Lützerath lives", LL) and built an action-oriented alliance together with local initiatives (ADB, KIDL) and political groups like *Ende Gelände*, *ausgeCO2hlt*, *Zucker im Tank*, *Ums Ganze*, *Fridays for Future*, *Letzte Generation*, *RWE & Co. Enteignen*, *Extinction Rebellion*, *Scientists Rebellion*, and *End Fossil Occupy*. Gradually, hundreds of people reclaimed the entire village, first by putting up tents and caravans on the meadows legally belonging to Eckhardt, then also by inhabiting the preempted buildings and storage halls, as well as self-built treehouses and cabins. Each structure had a name given to it by its inhabitants, and groups of treehouses, cabins, trailers, and buildings formed autonomous "barrios", named for example "Wäldchen" (little forest), "Reihenhaussiedlung" (estate of terraced houses), "Hüttendorf" (village of cabins), "Auenland" (meadowland), or "Phantasialand". This process of reclamation included several open conflicts of different intensity, among them the blockade of RWE's demolition efforts on buildings opposite of Eckhardt's farm in January 2021 (Weiermann, 2021), the occupation of "Paula"⁵⁴ on January 8th, 2022 (Weiermann, 2022), and an attempted eviction of ground structures on February 24th, 2022 (Lützerath Lebt, 2022b). As this broad alliance and connection to local resistance expresses, and as is common among land-based struggles, the tactics and political positions involved in the reclamation and defense of Lützerath represent different 'political reactions from below', and include resistant, acquiescent, reformist, and insurrectionary tendencies (Borras et al., 2012; Borras & Franco, 2013; Dunlap, 2019a).

⁵⁴ An emptied farm previously called "Paulshof", which its new inhabitants turned into queer and BIPOC safer spaces, as well as a space for political film nights, lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and discussion rounds. Themes of these were for example critical masculinity, critical whiteness, work-fetishism & anti-semitism, petro-modernity, and other land-based struggles (Fieldnotes, 23.-26.09.22; 26.10.2022; see <https://twitter.com/queerepaula?lang=de>).



Image 20: Homes with a view: Treehouses in the barrio called "Reihenhaussiedlung" directly facing Garzweiler II in autumn 2022. Source: Author.

Resistant and insurrectionary tendencies dominated among those who reinhabited and physically defended Lützerath. With the reclamation of the entire village people took an intersectional approach⁵⁵ aspiring to "build an organization free of domination, in which the needs of people are central, and the individual is supported by the collective" and gradually built an autonomous zone aiming to be "able to live an autonomy that, unlike the liberal autonomy of the individual in capitalism, is not at the expense of others" (Lützerath Lebt, n.d.)⁵⁶. Hereby, self-organization took the form of regular and consensus-oriented village and working group assemblies, self-built infrastructures, safer spaces, and spaces dedicated to certain activities like sports, concerts and parties, a paramedic hut, a media-team hut, a free-shop, an awareness hut⁵⁷, a common food storage⁵⁸, and a community kitchen ("Küche für alle", KüFa). Besides the weekly village walk demonstrations, there were several mass demonstrations in and around Lützerath to mobilize for support, as well as calls for

⁵⁵ This means that people recognize the intersections of oppression for example related to gender, ethnicity, age, knowledge, or class.

⁵⁶ Lützerath lebt's main communication channels for mobilizing support were their website <https://luetzerathlebt.info/en/>, Instagram (@luetzi bleibt), twitter (@LuetziBleibt), a YouTube channel (@LuetziBleibt), and several Telegram channels (<https://t.me/luetzerathlebt>).

⁵⁷ A social structure for conflict prevention and resolution, as well as for emotional first aid.

⁵⁸ Everything was free to take for everyone until a few weeks prior to the eviction where food reserves needed to be rationed and planned with.

nationwide action days, in part initiating actions in over 40 cities across Germany (Lützerath Lebt, 2022a). Expressive of its solidarity with struggles across the world, Lützerath became the site of multiple encounters, announcements, and events of solidarity. Among these were for example the *Internationalist Youth Festival* in May 2022, co-organized with *Make Rojava Green Again* in solidarity with the Kurdish liberation movement (Lützerath Lebt, 2022c). Likewise, there were countless events in which people from other struggles shared their experiences with Lützerath's inhabitants, as visitors from Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador did in October 2022 (Fieldnotes, 26.10.2022).



Image 21: "From Lützi to Rojava, climate protection means antifa". A picture taken in solidarity with the Kurdish liberation movement in front of "Paula". Source: catwithacamera, 2022a.



Image 22: One of many dance-evenings in Lützerath's skate hall in November 2022. Source: *catwithacamera*, 2022b.

After at least three months of preparations starting latest with the announcement of Lützerath's eviction in October 2022, hundreds of private security and police forces brutally entered the village by destroying the wooden gate at Lützerath's main entrance early on January 2nd, 2023. They began the construction of roads, a parking lot, and a double fence around Lützerath and prohibited people from entering the village by any other means than foot. On January 3rd, LL announced "day X" to mobilize people from all over Germany and Europe for support during the eviction⁵⁹. Throughout the following days people defended Lützerath through barricades, hourlong blockades, confrontations with the police, and solidary, decentralized, and autonomously coordinated acts of sabotage like burning pump-stations, burning police cars, and arson attacks on *Strabag* or *Lücker* vehicles (two companies providing equipment for the eviction) (Militante Klimabewegung, 2023; chronic, 2023). Solidarity actions continued weeks after the eviction⁶⁰ and international solidarity statements reached Lützerath among others from Chiapas (Mexico), from Yupka territory (Colombia),

⁵⁹ See Non. Media (2022) for a German/ English mobilization video.

⁶⁰ For example, burning charging stations for electric vehicles in Toulouse and Berlin on January 19th, 2023 (Greta, 2023; Anonym, 2023), a burning Siemens vehicle in Wuppertal on 26th of January, 2023 (anonym, 2023b), the burning vehicle fleet of an Amazon in Berlin on 17th of January 2023 (anonym, 2023a), and arson attacks on RWE's power lines in July 2023. For more examples see (Anarchistische Föderation, n.d.).

and from Kemerowo (Russia) (LL, 2023d; 2023p; 2023q). Throughout the eviction, police made use of several military tactics like cutting off food supplies, 24h evictions, surveillance, intimidation, pacification⁶¹, and physical attacks. This militaristic defense of corporate interests also materialized during the mass demonstration on January 14th, where 35.000 demonstrators faced around 4.000 police ordered from nearly every federal state, as well as water cannons, helicopters, dogs, horses, pepper spray, teargas, batons, and fists, causing hundreds of injuries (Brock, 2023; Keller et al. 2023; *own accounts*). Parallell to the eviction, people recovered in the after-eviction camp in Keyenberg, organizing countless demonstrations, road and rail blockades, sabotage, an excavator blockade in the Inden mine, and a blockade of the interior ministry in Düsseldorf on January 17th. On January 16th, Lützerath's last inhabitants "Pinky & Brain" left the tunnel with which they blocked the eviction. While RWE rushed to remove the first layer of soil under Lützerath within a few weeks, the alliance around LL held several organizing calls, continuing to support ongoing and building new political struggles across the world.



Image 23: During the eviction. Police evict people from "Denkmal" in January 2023. Source: Crimethinc, 2023.

⁶¹ For example, police frequently voiced their respect towards those blocking the eviction and offered to refrain from identity assessments given that they leave Lützerath without further resistance. This tactic convinced several hundred people to leave, many of whom had to disclose their identity nevertheless (*own accounts*).



Image 24: The police using water cannons people in their attempt to re-occupy Lützerath on January 14th, 2023. Source: moritz v:3rës, 2023a.



Image 25: A few days before the eviction: With the help of supporters, Lützerath's inhabitants constructed among other things monopods and nets to defend the treehouse they inhabited. These function as creative barricades to blockade demolition works, since special equipment and police forces trained for climbing are required to evict people from them. Source: moritz v:3rës, 2023b.

The monastery lives!

Real-estate speculation and anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen

In March 2022, the city of Aachen published its new strategic action plan concerning housing politics in Aachen (Stadt Aachen, 2022). The plan highlights the issues of gentrification and increasing pressures on Aachen's housing market, especially regarding its public and social housing sector. It locates the origin of these pressures in a steady population increase⁶², the expiration of public housing regulations, and increased investments of international real-estate funds and developers. Consequently, and despite more than 5.000⁶³ vacant residential units (2022), average rents increased drastically (+50,25%/ m²) and the lower price housing sector decreased from 70% to 12% between 2009-2019 (while high priced options cover almost one third of the entire rental market), causing displacement, social segregation, and material, energy, and space intensive new housing constructions. Moreover, the action plan points towards a lack of community and neighborhood meeting spaces.

While the municipality's plans propose temporary use concepts, more efficient use of space, and the rehabilitation and modernization of existing housing, about 95% of Aachen's residential units are in private hands, leaving little leeway for implementing these ambitions (Stadt Aachen, 2015; 2022). Among the most influential real-estate developers in Aachen are *LEG* and *Vonovia*, both highly controversial and among Germany's largest transnational private real-estate corporations (see Unger, 2022; DMB, 2020; Maurin, 2023; DWE, n.d.; RASA, 2022c; 2022d). Moreover, and following investigations of the local right to the city initiative ("Recht auf Stadt Aachen", RASA), *Landmarken AG* and *AC-Immobilien* are two influential but less publicly debated real-estate developers in Aachen. Both developers have been involved in real-estate speculation, deliberate decay, tax evasion, urban renewal, and the prioritization of luxury apartments and offices over affordable housing on several occasions. As a member of the citizens' association *Initiative Aachen*, *Landmarken AG* is moreover able to influence Aachen's rent index (RASA, 2022a; 2022b). Yet, these developments are of no surprise, considering that inhabitants have criticized and openly opposed the privatization and commodification of housing, increasing rents, and accompanying displacement processes in Aachen at least since the 1980's.

⁶² This is likely owed to Aachen's status as a university city. Aachen's urban development strongly builds on the notion of "the entrepreneurial city", which, like the creative, sustainable, or smart city, attracts not just people, but also companies and investors, thereby playing a significant role in fostering gentrification (Peck, 2005).

⁶³ According to Holm et al. (2021) more than 8.500 apartments in Aachen have been vacant in 2014.

Anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen

As cumulations of early resistance against housing shortages and profit-oriented urban development, Aachen witnessed several squats especially around 1981⁶⁴. Among these reclamations of urban space was the five-month occupation of a former monastery with more than 100 bedrooms, also known as *Johannes-Höver Haus*. In the face of severe housing shortages, students first blocked the building's demolition to then reinhabit it under the name of *Café Murks*. After about three months, a private commando hired by the owner *Consulting AG* brutally evicted Café Murks to make space for luxurious residencies (Spiegel, 1981; Hautermans, 2021). Today, these early squats are still known for their central role in the struggle not just for housing, but also for non-commercial cultural spaces, leading to the formation of Aachen's first autonomous center⁶⁵ in January 1993 (AZ Aachen, n.d.; Hänel, 2012).

While there have been several occupations since then⁶⁶, "Muffi 5" and "Bastei" are among the more recent ones. In June 2018, people squatted a yearlong vacant university building and the associated greenhouse in Muffeter Weg 5, criticizing not only the steady decrease of affordable housing related to privatization, but also the vast number of vacancies owned by the federal construction and public real-estate association ("Bundesliegenschaftsverband"). Further, "Muffi 5" criticized Aachen's university RWTH for being elitist and conducting research for the arms industry. After about three weeks of communal gardening, food sharing, and political discussions, "Muffi 5" was forcefully evicted on 20th of July 2018 by hundreds of police (Aachen Besetzen, n.d.). One year later during the international FFF mass demonstration on June 21st, 2019, people squatted "Bastei", a building previously decaying for several years. Despite being forcefully evicted the same day, the occupation of "Bastei" drew the connection between the financialization of real-estate⁶⁷, associated energy and material use, and global climate justice. Moreover, "Bastei", which is still decaying four years later, came to become a prime example for Aachen's failed housing politics (Knit & agitate, 2020). In connection with previous struggles for housing,

⁶⁴ Aachen's first squats were likely the occupations in Beeckstraße and Vincenzstraße in 1972 (Kesten, n.d.).

⁶⁵ Autonomous centers (AZ) are non-commercial cultural spaces common in larger German cities. Usually based on voluntary engagement and donations, AZ's organize concerts, open kitchens, discussion rounds, and lectures, while explicitly condoning sexist, fascist, and/ or racist behavior.

⁶⁶ Among others Goethestraße 3 in 2002, a building in Lochnerstraße in 2002, a restaurant in Ottostraße in 2003, a villa in Schildstraße in 2004, a fallow near Drosselweg in 2005, and a building in Kasinostraße in 2011/2012 (Klarmann, 2018).

⁶⁷ Marcuse and Madden (2016, p.20) define this as "the increasing power and prominence of [transnational] actors and firms that engage in profit accumulation through the servicing and exchanging of money and financial instruments", expressed for example by *Blackrock* as one of the largest shareholders of *Vonovia* (Unger, 2022).

recent squats thus unravel, publicize, and oppose concrete examples of private and public real-estate speculation and manifest local discontent with Aachen's housing policies.



Image 26: The occupation of Johannes-Höver-Haus in 1981. Tags on the walls say: "It goes on" and "This is our house". Source: Achim Ferrari, 2021.



Image 27: Inside the squatted monastery Johannes-Höver-Haus, now called "Café Murks" in 1981. Source: Achim Ferrari, 2021.

Oops, we squatted again!

Aachen's most recent and still active squat continues this tradition. After an almost 12-year vacancy in the middle of a densely built, green, and wealthy neighborhood close to Aachen's city center, people reclaimed the monastery in Lousbergstraße 14 on August 20th, 2021 (ac-besetzen, 2021b). Referring to the municipality's report, an early press release states: "Rallies, protests and campaigns have achieved nothing. On the contrary, for decades the issue of housing has been simultaneously becoming more and more precarious and less and less respected. Therefore, our means is direct action" (ac-besetzen, 2021d). On the day of the occupation, the monastery invited neighbors and other interested people to ask questions during a press conference the next day (ac-besetzen, 2021c; *see* attachment 1). While being explicitly anti-discriminatory, the monastery's 20 dorm rooms and several community rooms offer space for non-commercial housing (one corridor was for FLINTAs⁶⁸ only), a communal garden, a free-shop, a sports room, safer spaces, a screen-printing workshop, and several open events on an almost 5000 m² larger property⁶⁹. Among these are queer festivals, queer feminist weekends, political film nights⁷⁰, discussion rounds, yoga circles, concerts, parties, and weekly neighborhood cafes. The monastery festival in October 2021 for example, celebrated the monastery's 8-week reclamation with hosting workshops on acronyms like LGBTQ*⁷¹, discussions around strategies against increasing rents, workshops on self-defense, and lectures on 'relationship anarchy' and self-organization (aachen_besetzen, 2021a; 2021b).

⁶⁸ FLINTA is the acronym for "Frauen, Lesben, Inter, Trans, und A-gender" (women, lesbian, inter, trans, and a-gender).

⁶⁹ Main communication channels for mobilizing support and sharing ambitions was their blog <https://aachenbesetzen.noblogs.org/>, twitter (@aachen_besetzen), Instagram (@aachen_besetzen) and close connections to the local news collective *Tacheles*.

⁷⁰ Among others there were a screening about Lützerath, the imprisonment of "Ella" (a defender of the Dannenröder Forest), and the scandal around *German Property Group* (see below).

⁷¹ LGBTQ* is the acronym for Lesbian, Gay-, Bi-, Transsexual, queer and uncategorizable sexual orientations.



Image 28: The monastery's screen-printing workshop in August 2022: Printing flyers and patches for an anarchist festival.
Source: Author.



Image 29: Via social media the monastery invited to regular yoga sessions with Frank, heating, and corona regulations.
Source: aachen_besetzen, 2021c.

The monastery's new inhabitants reclaimed desirable space in the middle of Aachen and made it accessible. Built in 1869, the last nuns had to leave the monastery in 2009 due to economic inefficiency. The diocese sold the monastery to a catholic housing association called *Petruswerk*, itself part of the real-estate corporation *AVILA Group*. Together with architects from *Kada & Wittfeld*, *Petruswerk/ AVILA* planned to turn the monastery into a high-end senior center by constructing three additional buildings with 45 rental flats in the garden (Esser, 2009). While they informed the neighborhood about these plans in December 2009, many neighbors mentioned their general reluctance towards additional buildings in our interviews⁷². In 2015, another architectural bureau called *Montagarchitekten* planned additional constructions in the monastery's garden (Montagarchitekten, 2015) based on which the private investor *German Property Group* (GPG) took over the monastery via *Aventura Capital Partners LOUSBERG PALAIS GmbH & Co. KG*, one of its 200 subsidiaries. Founded in 2008, and previously known as *Dolphin Trust* and *Dolphin Capital*, the snowball system (or 'pyramid scheme') around GPG paid back earlier investors with new investments based on claims of restoring and selling listed buildings. Hereby, GPG promised ~15% profit margins to their (international) investors (Orosz, 2021). However, GPG never renovated these buildings. Instead, it sold some properties multiple times and created an unsolvable web of property relations, meanwhile leaving the buildings to decay. After not attaining enough new investors, GPG and its subsidiaries went bankrupt in 2020, owing 15.-20.000 investors a total of over €1.2 billion. With this fraud comparable to that of *Wirecard*, GPG left about 65 properties and among them, the monastery with €17 million debt to the insolvency administration company *CR Investment Management* (CR) (CR Investment, 2021).

Overall, real-estate speculation can be seen as another, less visible form of mining, where corporations mine profits out of urban space by fostering gentrification and consequentially, displacement as well as unnecessary urban renewal. Shortly after the reclamation of the monastery from these activities, the bidding process under CR ended on August 31st, 2021. A few months later, in December 2021, CR ended another round of bids in which Aachen municipality participated. The official reason for this was because bids were too low due to the occupation (Eimer, 2021). Consequentially, the monastery stood under threat of an eviction in Winter 2021/22. However, it was not evicted as neither the municipality nor the police had the legal basis for pursuing the eviction (Esser, 2022). In

⁷² Despite local discontent, I am unsure about what kept *Petruswerk/ AVILA* from implementing their plans. Barriers could have been that most of the monastery, including the stonewall surrounding the entire property, has been landmarked since 1985. However, Aachen's planning committee only officially prohibited further construction in the monastery's garden briefly after its occupation in August 2021 (Franchy, 2021).

response, CR sued Aachen municipality for inaction in October 2023. While this might only be the beginning of a long lasting and complicated court case, it also could be steps in the preparation for an eviction (Kasties, 2023; Aachener Zeitung, 2023).



Image 30: Monastery stays! The monastery responds to the threat of an eviction in Winter 2021/22 with banners saying: "housing for all, build the city from below", "get out of the defensive #squat aachen", and "The monastery stays alive". Source: ac-besetzen, 2021a.

Since there was only one article (Eimer, 2020) in local news about GPG and the decaying monastery before its reclamation as opposed to more than 20 articles until today, the occupation brought the issue into public debate. Besides experiencing verbal threats and the removal of posters in the early days of the reclamation (ac-besetzen, 2021e), many neighbors and other inhabitants of Aachen support the monastery, among others with furniture and food donations, or supplying them with electricity and waste collection (Fieldnotes 01.08.2022;

02.08.2022; 10.08.2022, Interview #6, 08.09.2022; Interview #8, 14.09.2022). As attempted negotiations with the municipality, internal debates about legalization and bureaucracy (anonym und MK, 2022; Anonym, n.d.), and the active support of neighbors, students, and a housekeeper⁷³ show, the 'political reactions from below' against real-estate speculation and gentrification in Aachen are again diverse. They include resistant, acquiescent, reformist, and insurrectionary tendencies (Borras et al., 2012; Borras & Franco, 2013; Dunlap, 2019). Overall, several informants described the monastery's reclamation in two phases (Fieldnotes, 02.08.2022; Interview #7, 08.09.2022; Interview #8, 14.09.2022), whereby the first phase focused more on making the monastery accessible to the neighborhood. The second phase was characterized by a greater focus on solidarity within the climate justice movement, like housing former inhabitants of "Hambi" and Lützerath. Due to changing priorities, higher security needs, and generally increasing concerns of getting evicted, the second phase entailed an often-locked front gate, thereby making the monastery less inviting and accessible than in the beginning. Yet, recent dynamics concerning open plenaries, regular bar evenings, and solidarity events among others related to Lützerath could be the beginning of "a third phase". Against the background of these two interwoven struggles, the next chapter embeds the PM in the context of the German media landscape, the two news publishers under study, and previous reporting on socio-ecological conflict in Germany.

4 Contextualizing the Propaganda Model: Media Manipulation in the Rhineland today

Since the publication of *Manufacturing consent* (Herman & Chomsky, 1998/2002), online news outlets and social media replaced most traditional means of producing, disseminating, and consuming news. Thus, some claim the obsolescence of the *Propaganda Model* (PM), arguing, that the digitalization of media diversified and de-centralized news production (MacLeod, 2019a). While it is essential to adapt the PM according to spatial and temporal contexts, Alan MacLeod *and colleagues* (2019) argue that "the propaganda model is still an indispensable method of understanding not just how corporate American, but global, media function and that the central theory of the propaganda model is perhaps more relevant today as it was in 1988" (MacLeod, 2019b, p. 16). While new technologies might enable the spreading of counter-narratives to some degree (Castells, 2013), digitalization has not led to

⁷³ See the interview with the housekeeper (Tacheles, 2021). Without receiving payments from GPG, he has taken care of the monastery for several years thereby significantly contributing to preventing the monastery's decay.

the democratization of news production, but to further monopolization. This is because most online news sites are "simply the online arm of old, established news media" (MacLeod, 2019a, p.48) owned by multinational media corporations. Moreover, Facebook, Twitter, and Google use algorithms to de-rank alternative media sites, while independent and critical journalists continue to have little reach and tend to represent privileged perspectives, even if they become influential. To contextualize Mac Leod *and colleagues'* (2019) claim and substantiate what is meant by 'corporate media', this section explores corporate and government links of the two newspaper publishers under study: *Rheinische Post Mediengruppe* (RPM) and *Medienhaus Aachen GmbH* (MHA). Interestingly in the context of counterinsurgency tactics, both newspapers under study (*Rheinische Post* and *Aachener Zeitung*) are hereby among the first newspapers after Germany's national socialist regime, licensed by the British military government in 1946. These licenses were granted based on the expectation that both newspapers contribute to Germany's material and mental reconstruction as "a press that secures democracy and gives people orientation" (Thoren, 2016) and highlight the historic utilization of both newspapers as tools of governance (see also MHA, n. d.-c).

Ownership structures and "the media crisis"

The PM's first filter holds that the size and ownership structures of news producers determine their susceptibility to market pressures, whereby large news companies turn news stories into industrial products, rather than results of careful and critical investigation. As a report of North Rhine-Westphalia's (NRW) *State Media Authority* ("Landesanstalt für Medien NRW", LAM NRW) (2020) concludes, diversity among newspaper publishers in NRW continues to decrease significantly, since ever more and ever larger publishers continue to "cooperate" internally and among each other. On the examples of RPM and MHA, Figure 1 illustrates how intensifying market pressures lead to the concentration of news production through the fusion of newspapers (to the left of each publisher), and how these pressures strengthen relations to politically influential industries through the diversification of investments (to the right of each publisher)⁷⁴. The next paragraph focuses on the ownership structures of both publishers, while the following section on "Funding" will elaborate on the diversification of investments and consequentially, publishers' ties to industry.

⁷⁴ Figure 1 is incomplete as it not near to depicting all newspapers, subsidiaries, and shares of both publishers. This is because connections between the two publishers and other corporations, events, and personas are dynamic and untransparent (e.g., frequently changing names of subsidiaries and sub-subsidiaries). To attempt a complete map of past and present connections goes beyond the scope of this research project. However, Figure 1 is sufficient to support the argument of this thesis, as it demonstrates thematically relevant entanglements of news publishers with the energy and real-estate sector, thereby hopefully inspiring further research.

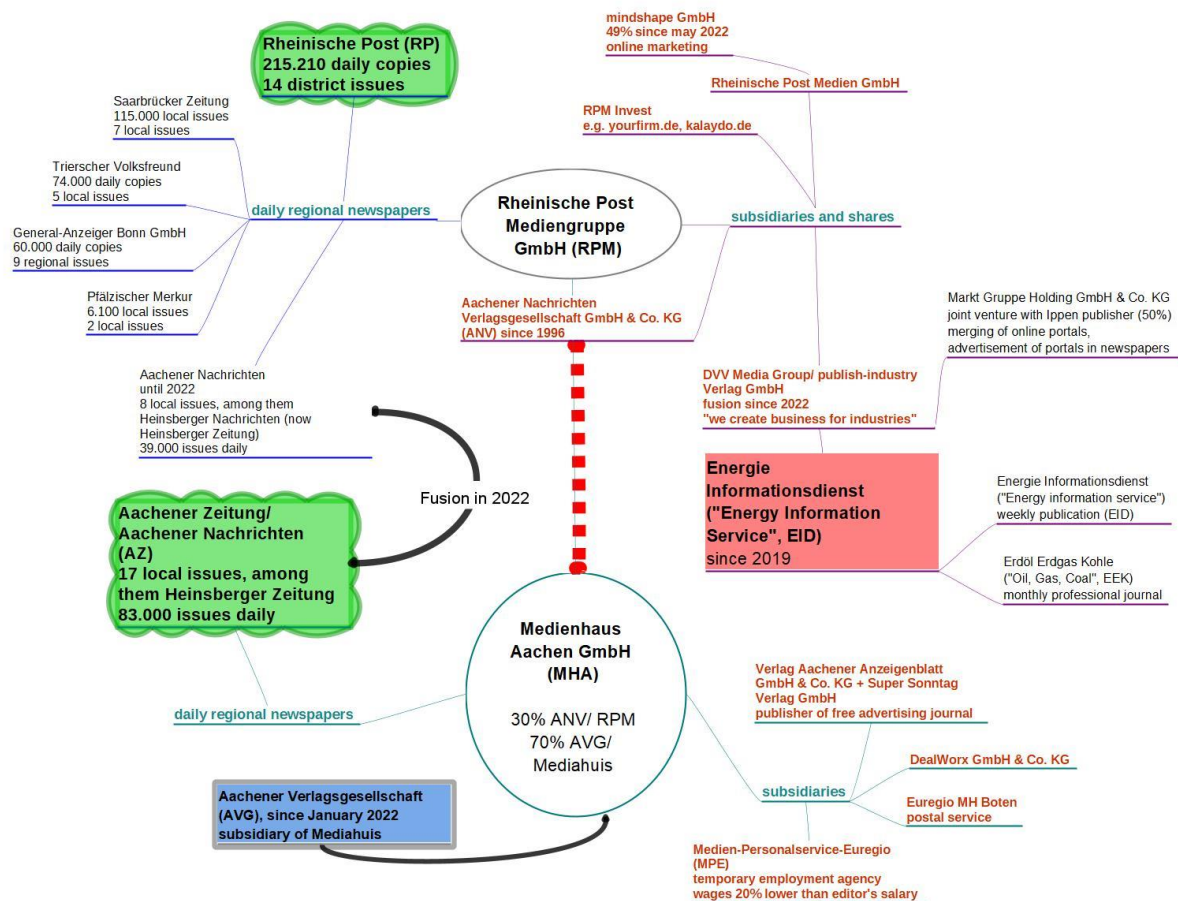


Figure 1: Ownership structures of RPM and MHA: Entanglements with each other, politics, and industry. Source: Author.

Overall, concentration in the German daily news market increases drastically and continuously (Röper, 2018; 2022). Hereby, RPM is Germany's seventh biggest publisher of daily newspapers⁷⁵ and increased its market share among local/ regional abonnement newspapers in NRW to 17,4% in 2020, ranking second in NRW (LAM NRW, 2020). RPM publishes six regional newspapers (*Rheinische Post*, *General-Anzeiger Bonn*, *Pfälzischer Merkur*, *Trierscher Volksfreund*, *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, and until 2022 *Aachener Nachrichten*) each of which distributes several regional and local issues (RPM, n.d.-c). Some of the newspapers (co-) owned by RPM hereby hold a monopoly in their respective region, reflecting an increase of areas with only one local newspaper ("Einzeitungskreise") in Germany (Hartung, 2019; Röper, 2022)⁷⁶. Among these, RPM's regional newspaper *Rheinische Post* (RP; see top green cloud) is the leading daily newspaper in the Rhineland

⁷⁵ In more recent statements, RPM asserts that it is among Germany's five largest publishers in terms of circulation (RPM, n.d.-d). Other major regional publishers in NRW are *DuMont*, *Verlagsgruppe Aschendorff*, and *Mediahuis*.

⁷⁶ For example, RPM owns 56% of *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, which is the only daily newspaper in the city of Saarbrücken and in the entire federal state of Saarland (LAM NRW, 2020).

with more than 215.000 circulating copies reaching 759.000 readers every day (RPM, n.d.-c). Hereby, *Rheinische Post* is one of only two daily newspapers with local issues on the Heinsberg district/ the city of Erkelenz. The other newspaper with local issues on the Heinsberg district is *Heinsberger Zeitung* under the regional newspaper *Aachener Zeitung* (AZ; see bottom green cloud), whose publisher is *Medienhaus Aachen GmbH* (MHA)⁷⁷. Through its subsidiary *Aachener Nachrichten Verlagsgesellschaft GmbH & Co. KG*, RPM holds 30% of MHA (see red dotted line) (RPM, n.d.-a), the remains of which are now owned by *Mediahuis*⁷⁸ via their subsidiary *Aachener Verlagsgesellschaft* since January 2022 (see blue box). Connected to this takeover, the German Union for Journalists (DJU) scrutinized the fusion of Aachen's only two local newspapers (*Aachener Zeitung* and *Aachener Nachrichten*) in 2022, as well as RPM's and MHA's founding of several subsidiaries as flight from wage agreements (Verdi, n.d.; 2014; 2022). This prioritization of profit generation is further indicated in RPM's subsidiary and "strategic investment unit" *RPM Invest*, which invests in large technology and media companies, job platforms, and online shops, for example *yourfirm.de* and *kalaydo.de* (RPM Invest, n.d.). As Figure 1 demonstrates, both publishers of the two newspapers under study are influential news producers as they (co-) own multiple regional and local newspapers, and in part, each other. Moreover, they both have multiple (transnational) subsidiaries and are shareholders of various corporations. As manifestations of increasing market pressures, these dynamics demonstrate how news producers function as profit-seeking corporations themselves, which causes more stress on journalists (Schmidt et al., 2022) and leads to lower quality journalism. As Knoche (2021) elaborates, this condition of continuous market concentration and economic pressures, referred to as the "media crisis" (Hänel, 2021), is institutionally maintained and inevitably exposes news producers to interests of industry and state.

Funding: Who would bite a feeding hand?

According to the PM's funding filter, the extent to which news producers are dependent on income from advertisement shapes their reporting along the lines of corporate interests. Considering the size and reach of RPM and MHA, their low-priced abonnements (4€/month), steadily decreasing amounts of copies, and increasing market pressures, these incomes are essential. An untransparent web of subsidiaries hereby serves as a functioning business

⁷⁷ Besides *Aachener Zeitung* (AZ), MHA is also the publisher of Aachen's second regional newspaper *Aachener Nachrichten* (AN), and thus of both newspapers' 17 local issues.

⁷⁸ Mediahuis is among the leading media corporations in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg with a turnover of €1.2 billion and highly diversified investments, among others in the real-estate and automobile market (Steylemans, 2023).

model, in which losses from news production and revenues from subsidiaries balance each other in terms of revenue and (not) paying taxes. As is common in the German media landscape, mayor newspapers for example co-organize and advertise for tourism, armor, and national security conferences (Krüger, 2015b; Opong, 2016). Vested (trans-) national political and corporate interests have articulated newspapers' reporting, accordingly, like on the controversial deployment of the German army in Afghanistan (Krüger, 2015a). Likewise, company sponsored luxury trips (e.g., Volkswagen AG, Thyssenkrupp AG) have influenced reporting of major German newspapers (among others RP) in the past (Wüst, 2009; Tillack, 2009; Kartheuser, 2013)⁷⁹, even though the German press council urges journalists to strictly separate between advertisers' interests and editorial content (Deutscher Presserat, n.d.). However, especially large online news publishers like RPM and MHA increasingly rely on revenue from advertisement, as they must report on current and dynamic political, economic, and social events timely and in high quantities (Seufert, 2016). The numerous and diversified subsidiaries and shareholder activities of RPM and MHA, some of which are illustrated on the right-hand side in Figure 1, illuminate the financial entanglements between news producers and politically influential industries.

RPM's subsidiary *Rheinische Post Medien GmbH*⁸⁰ for example promotes RPM's media outlets towards advertisers with the following statement: "Our media are quality media. That's why your advertising, whether in the area of image or sales, benefits from our credibility, the high cross-media reach - and the intensive user contact" (RP Media, n.d.). Besides selling advertisement-placements, *Rheinische Post Medien GmbH* organizes quarterly gala dinners with politicians and corporate leaders ("Ständehaustreff") and annual economic forums ("RP Forum"), for example themed "Security in Germany" with Interior Minister Herbert Reul (CDU)⁸¹ as an expert, consulting corporations on security issues in 2018 and 2019 (RPM, n.d.-e; RP Medien GmbH, 2018; 2019). Moreover, *Rheinische Post Medien GmbH* holds 49% of the online marketing company *mindshape GmbH*, as well as shares of several publishers of free advertising journals, which obtained revenues of €50 million in 2016 (Röper, 2018; Rheinische Post Medien GmbH, n.d.). Via its subsidiary *ProServ – Medien Service Gesellschaft mbH* RPM holds 50% of *Markt Gruppe Holding GmbH & Co. KG* which operates several online marketplaces for real-estate, tourism, career, construction,

⁷⁹ Subsequent or occasional critical reports about the same company do not disprove this effect (see Özbicerler & Plank, 2012; Lagetar & Mühlbauer, 2012).

⁸⁰ DJU scrutinized the founding of this company as RPM's flight from wage agreements (Verdi, n.d.).

⁸¹ See chapter 3 under *Another Episode of NRW: The Green(s)' New RWE Deal* for entanglements between Herbert Reul and RWE.

funeral services, and automobile services, among others, which find advertisement platforms RPM's newspapers (RPM, n.d.-b). However, most interestingly in the context of anti-mining struggles, RPM's subsidiary *DVV Media Group* (which fused with *ProServ – Medien Service Gesellschaft mbH* in 2022) owns the *Energy Information Service* ("Energie Informationsdienst", EID) since 2019 (RPM, 2019; *see red box*). EID publishes trade journals like the homonymous weekly journal, whose target groups are "[d]ecision-makers from the mineral oil and natural gas sector, the electricity sector, their suppliers, the wind industry, financial and consulting institutes, energy consumers within industry and commerce, as well as decision-makers in administration and politics" (DVV Media Group GmbH, 2023). While EID mostly monitors the energy market for its <1000 paying readers and claims to "inform" among others, politicians, EID is likely dependent on the sale of pricy (up to 2.890€/ page) advertisement-placements to energy producers like RWE. As Jürgen Döschner, a journalist well known in the Rhineland for his supportive and investigative journalism on the Hambach Forest occupation, remarks:

[...] here in the Rhineland, you have to know that RWE does not only appear as RWE but they themselves have several subsidiaries and they have many supplier companies. And when lignite mining [...] is questioned, like it was with Garzweiler or with the Hambach Forest, they naturally try as a company to get their supplier companies etc. under one roof and they also have a very strong lever via the ads. (Interview #15, 19.06.2023)

While RWE's subsidiaries and their entanglement with local media could be further investigated, the mission statement of *publish-industry Verlag GmbH* "We create business for industries" (Publish Industry, n.d.), clearly articulates RPM's ambitions with publishing trade journals for automation, digitalization, electrical engineering, energy technology, and process industry.

Like RPM, MHA organizes several trade fairs, among them the yearly *Aachener Real-estate Trade Fair* (Aachener Immobilienmesse, n.d.). Via its subsidiaries *Verlag Aachener Anzeigenblatt GmbH & Co. KG* and *Super Sonntag Verlag GmbH*, MHA publishes free digital Sunday newspapers, in addition to other advertisement-financed magazines (MHA, n.d.-a; n.d.-b). Moreover, MHA places advertisements for electric cars and heating technology, among others, in Aachen university's journal "RWTH Themen": Around the time of Lützerath's eviction in January 2023, the journal's 1/2023 issue focused exclusively on "green" technological solutions to climate catastrophe, presenting articles (and advertisement)

around the topic of energy supply and energy security (RWTH Aachen, 2023)⁸². Finally, MHA's subsidiary *DealWorx GmbH & Co. KG* operates several "special offer" websites in addition to its own postal service *Euregio MH Boten*, thereby simultaneously fostering and profiting from mass-consumption and online shopping (DealWorx GmbH & Co. KG, n.d.; Euregio MH Boten GmbH, n.d.). As figure 1 illustrates, RPM, MHA, and their various subsidiaries are entangled with revenues from advertisement and events like trade fairs (among others, from energy corporations and real-estate agencies), as well as their readers' consumption habits. As MacLeod (2019b, p.12) concludes, "media can not bite the hand it feeds", and these entanglements structurally prevent independent and critical journalism.

Sourcing, or: "Hearing all sides"

As the PM's sourcing filter points towards, the largely unfiltered takeover of official information in the German media landscape strengthens the image of corporations and the government, by sowing fear, arousing techno-utopian enthusiasm, and by legitimizing authoritarian government responses to protest. This was the case with distorted media coverage based on unproven police reports regarding the G20 protests in Hamburg in 2017 (Thomson, 2022; Mullis, 2018; Sommer et al., 2018). Along this line, guest commentaries of controversial right-wing and neoliberal politicians or heads of corporations are a debated but common journalistic practice. While providing cost-effective content, securing media attention, and establishing networks of sources, this epitome of the PM's sourcing filter tends towards unfiltered, non-contextualized, and one-sided reporting around controversial themes like military operations (Oppong, 2021). Like guest commentaries, interviews with ministers, corporate leaders, and heads of police are common practice. RP and AZ both published interviews with RWE CEO Markus Krebber, among others a few weeks before Lützerath's eviction (Döbler & Höning, 2021; Höning, 2022c⁸³). Without any filter, these interviews delegitimized resistance around Lützerath and emphasized the importance of continued mine expansion. During and shortly after the eviction, RP and AZ published several fear-inducing interviews with Interior Minister Herbert Reul (CDU) which legitimized police brutality (Schwerdtfeger, 2023b; 2023c; Thelen et al. 2023)⁸⁴. While corporate media may occasionally

⁸² While RWE is known for lobbying in schools (Brock & Dunlap, 2018), further research could investigate entanglements between research at RWTH university and RWE (or other corporations).

⁸³ The article published by RP is no longer available their website. However, the article found in AZ (Höning, 2020c) and the original interview available on RWE's website (Höning & Krebber, 2022) are close to identical.

⁸⁴ Remember: Reul has close relations to RWE and pushed through the brutal and illegal eviction of the Hambacher Forest occupation in 2018 (Wyputta, 2019).

publish interviews with a selection of activists, local inhabitants, and climate scientists, the sourcing filter's effect is apparent in non-interview articles which claim to "hear all sides": Whose statements are continuously repeated and ultimately taken as facts? Whose realities are silenced, reframed, or juxtaposed with delegitimizations? These questions are the substance of the two analysis chapters, which explore dominant narratives on Lützerath and the monastery within selected newspaper articles of RP and AZ.

Flak and self-censorship

Negative feedback, or flak, produced by corporations⁸⁵, the German government⁸⁶, and hierarchically organized newsrooms themselves (Sachse, 2021), is not an exception in the German media landscape and ultimately leads to self-censorship among journalists. With regard to anti-authoritarian struggles, the controversial ban of *indymedia.linksunten.org* (Reuter, 2017), and in connection to this, the recent raids and legal investigations against *Radio Dreyeckland* (Reuter, 2023) are examples of state censorship regarding radical alternative networks and investigative collectives. The de facto suspension of Jürgen Döschner by his employer WDR (the largest public service news broadcaster in Germany) is of central importance in the context of the anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland. Following his reporting on lignite mining in the Rhineland in 2015, in which Döschner commented positively on the protest actions in the Garzweiler opencast mine, a Facebook group called "RWE employees against WDR" was formed on the initiative of RWE. WDR then apparently issued a rule that Döschner was no longer allowed on air without also allowing the "opposing position" to have its say in the same contribution (Joeres & Burgmer, 2022). In 2019, shortly after the brutal and unlawful eviction of Hambach Forest in which Steffen Meyn died, WDR also deleted a report by Jürgen Döschner in which NRW Minister President and CDU candidate for chancellor Armin Laschet admitted that the fire safety regulations were just a pretext to enforce the eviction of Hambach Forest (Spiegel, 2022). Along this line, Brock and Dunlap (2018) document threats, intimidation, and court cases filed by RWE against

⁸⁵ Volkswagen and Daimler threatened investigators of manipulated Diesel emission values in 2015 with legal consequences (Kreutzfeldt, 2016) leading to a smear campaign since 2017 including death threats against the head of the German environmental organization *Deutsche Umwelthilfe*, reports of which remain widely ignored by authorities (Resch, 2022).

⁸⁶ In 2018, *Correctiv* (a collective for investigative journalism) head editor Oliver Schröm faced legal investigations related to the network's investigative research on *Cum-Ex* tax frauds through which investors appropriated more than €150 billion of public funds worldwide. German authorities were aware of systematic fraud since 2009 but remained inactive (Argüeso Pérez & Seufert, 2021; Lange, 2018; Gostomzyk & Moßbrucker, 2019).

journalists reporting on the conflict around the Hambach Forest (*see also* Von Brackel, 2019). However, as "Nellie Bly" an independent filmmaker who documented the struggle for Lützerath, remarked in our conversation, Döschner's case is

[...] a specific case because he was a permanent employee at WDR [...] and in the newspaper business [...] there are only a few people permanently employed [...] and those who write are mostly free authors, which means if [...] a writer is too critical she is simply no longer employed [...] I think most [journalists] are then able to be flexible also out of existential fears. (Interview #14, 01.05.2023)

Thus, legal threats, lawsuits, raids, and even death threats against investigators and critics of corporate activities make flak is a highly relevant filter in the German media landscape which has affected environmental, anti-capitalist and specifically, anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland in the past. This is especially the case in an increasingly concentrated media market, in which large corporate media refrain from hiring journalists in permanent positions, making them ever more vulnerable to self-censorship.

Ideology: A neoliberal "green" transition

In Germany, neoliberal ideology disseminated by the thinktank *Initiative New Social Market Economy* ("Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft")⁸⁷ materialized in the austerity and privatization policies of *Agenda 2010* which traded social welfare for economic growth (Zollmann, 2019b). More recently, green growth discourse ensures the reproduction of capitalist relations as the depoliticized discourse around the German energy transition ("Energiewende") within its national parliament demonstrates (Amri-Henkel, 2021). This depoliticization culminates with chancellor Olaf Scholz's proud announcement in Davos, that Germany will accelerate the energy transition despite tripling energy demands until the 2030s due to its 'need' to re-establish industrial competitiveness (Escande, 2023). Emphasizing the role of corporations in the "green transition", Scholz announced:

[...] If I may make a prediction, my successor [...] will present Germany as one of the world's first climate neutral industrial nations. Energy supplies in Germany and Europe will then be sourced almost exclusively from green electricity, heat, and hydrogen. We will be moving emission free on our roads and railroads. Our buildings will be energy efficient. Our businesses will be producing on a climate neutral basis. And what is more, they are the ones who will have driven this transition [and] will continue to drive it. So, if you ask me today, where you can invest in the future sustainably with a high return, my answer is: Don't look any further. Come to us, to Germany and to Europe, thank you very much [...]. (WEF, 2023)

Besides these clear manifestations of neoliberal and green growth ideology, anti-communism is currently reinstalled through anti-Russian attitudes (MacLeod, 2019a). Moreover, the

⁸⁷ RWE plays a leading role in this thinktank (Brock & Dunlap, 2018).

German term and associated industry of "Ostalgia" (nostalgia for the East) describes a general derogative attitude towards a "romanticized" soviet past of the GDR, a sentiment reverberating through the mainly Western German mass media (Golubchikov, 2016; Boyer, 2006). Lastly, authorization in "the war against terror" increases in Germany and Europe, making ideology a highly relevant constraint on news producers especially considering coverage on political struggles (Krüger, 2018; MacLeod, 2019a; European Parliament, 2022).

Specifically, the European police office is concerned about left-wing and anarchist terrorism (Europol, 2022). Similarly, recent reports by the European Commission's *Radicalisation Awareness Network* (RAN) warn about underestimating the threat of both and alert government institutions to implement prevention measures (RAN, 2021). Along this line, Germany's *Federal Agency for State Protection* ("Verfassungsschutz") observes initiatives such as *Rote Hilfe e. V.*⁸⁸, *de.indymedia*⁸⁹, and monitors 36.500 "left extremists", meanwhile describing anti-gentrification, anti-imperial, anti-militarization, or in other words, anti-capitalist values as ideological (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2022). In this vein, the report warns about anarchists' and communists' involvement in climate justice struggles as propagandistic, supposedly radicalizing the otherwise "democratic" and "peaceful" climate justice movement. Additionally, *Ende Gelände* (EG) is described as a threatening and "potentially violent" group, specifically concerning its role in supporting the defense of Lützerath. Such warnings manifest in the further tightening of NRW's already controversial assembly law in January 2022, which directly represses anarchist tactics like anonymity and blockades⁹⁰. While, as argued earlier, anarchism can be understood not as an ideology but a tension and way of life, the ideology filter includes anti-anarchist sentiments to reinvent and secure capitalism, especially in the context of political struggles in Germany.

Sexism & Racism: The white male bias

When proposing sexism and racism as additional filters to the PM, Zollmann (2019a) emphasizes a male bias in who can access leading positions in the news industry, in who reports on political subjects, and in who is reported on in which role. Hereby, men are more

⁸⁸ Rote Hilfe e.V. provides legal and financial support to politically engaged people.

⁸⁹ Successor of the banned indymedia.linksunten.org.

⁹⁰ §7 VersG prohibits trainings for blockades and civil disobedience. On the way to and during demonstrations, §17(1) prohibits the possession of items that enable the concealment of identity (e.g., facemasks), of "paramilitary" or uniform-like clothes (like EG's white painting suits or the black bloc's clothes), and of items that offer protection from pepper spray, batons, and the like (e.g., eye or head protection). §15(1) moreover authorizes police to conduct identity controls where they *suspect* the violation of §17(1) (Selinger, n.d.).

likely to be considered as experts, while women are more likely to represent the voices of parents, residents, or students. Zollmann (2019a, p.40) concludes, that "a male-dominated culture is enforced via hierarchical socialisation in newsrooms" and that "this process can be accompanied by coercion in the form of intimidation, violence and sexual harassment" leading to the systematic exclusion of female perspectives in the news industry. Of course, these tendencies are even stronger considering non-binary people, who are often not even mentioned in monitoring reports on gender equality. Moreover, and mostly drawing on van Dijk (2012), Zollmann (2019a) points towards an absence of minority journalists and consequentially, a "white perspective" leading to a lack of anti-racist content. As a result, news about minorities are based on racist prejudices and center around problems and threats to the welfare system associated with (certain) immigrants.

Regarding the two newspapers under study, trends in the German media system reaffirm these general statements. In their study on the gender distribution in leading journalistic positions, Anna von Garmissen and Hanna Biresch (2019) find that among leading regional newspapers in Germany⁹¹, only 22% employ women in the two top positions (editor-in-chief and deputy editor-in-chief). Among these, only 7,4% of editor-in-chief positions are occupied by women, a number close to identical with studies from 2016. Likewise, *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen* ("New German Mediaproducers", an NGO for diversity in media) (2020) find that only 6% of chief editors of leading media producers in Germany have a migratory background, and those who do are either from neighboring countries of Germany or from other EU-member states, thereby not representing especially discriminated people. This is not to say that "white men" and privileged positions in general are incapable of critical reporting, or that a quota would automatically lead to "unbiased" reporting. However, pointing out these numbers helps to understand tendencies within media, such as publisher restrictions on anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-sexist, and anti-police violence content among local newspapers, as reported on by Sachse (2021)⁹². Overall, corporate media is subjected to and reproduces structural sexism and racism by being built on social

⁹¹ Rheinische Post and Aachener Zeitung were part of this study.

⁹² Other examples include the depoliticized news coverage on the 2015 "refugee crisis", which turned asylum into an abstract question debatable on the institutional level (Haller, 2017). Similarly, German distracted from government failure concerning the murder of nine people with migratory background around 1999 by neo-Nazi association NSU ("Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund"). For over a decade, news depicted affected family members and friends not as victims, but as potential culprits, while sidelining the potential of right-wing terrorism (Virchow et al., 2015). Finally, sexism and racism interact, as German news tend to detach violence against women from their structural conditions by depicting them as isolated incidents, unless they were committed by a non-national perpetrator although "statistically, a German man is still the most dangerous contact for a German woman" (Meltzer, 2023, p.3).

hierarchies. While this section contextualized these additional filters of the PM within the wider German media landscape, the next chapters will explore the role of sexism and racism within news coverage of RP and AZ specifically.

Restricted access: Special permits, assault, and deception

Lastly, I propose to add "restricted physical access" as another filter to the PM, as there are several instances in which journalists working in Germany have previously been obstructed from reporting from within areas of conflict. For example, in the context of G20 protests in Hamburg in 2017, 32 journalists had their accreditation withdrawn, which authorities justified with claims of journalists' contact to activist groups (Schipkowski, 2019). Specifically in the context of anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland, severe restrictions on journalistic freedom have been documented regarding protests around the Hambach Forest (Brock & Dunlap, 2018; Lüdke & Große, 2018; Lüdke, 2019; von Brackel, 2019), and most recently, regarding Lützerath's eviction (Fauth, 2023; Malkovski, 2023; Verdi, 2023). Hereby, DJU summarizes Lützerath's eviction as marked by physical and sexual assaults, police measures, special accreditation, and their withdrawal, demands to delete recorded material, a supposedly mandatory liability agreement, and background checks on journalists by police and private security forces. The union further notes:

[...] At times, there was no access for press representatives to the halls and a barn in the village during ongoing police measures, where, according to the available information, police committed bodily harm in office and dangerous behavior towards protesters during the eviction [...].⁹³

When I asked Nellie Bly, who documented the eviction from within Lützerath, whether they felt obstructed in their work, they recounted:

[...] yes, I have been impaired three times [...] twice by uh security people from RWE [...] I have been actively approached and [...] detained and grabbed [...] then immediately after the eviction of the tree house I [...] got into a punitive measure of the police [...] also with a [...] pain grip and was prevented from making a phone call to my advisor from the union [...] then [...] a security person [...] pushed me really badly when I wanted to go back [...] to [the village] to meet my colleague [...] even though I had my press card in my hand. That means the security people were not informed about their limits [...].

Besides uninformed security forces, journalists were explicitly asked to attain an extra accreditation in addition to their official press ID to enter Lützerath during the eviction. This accreditation was accompanied by an "information brochure" provided by the Aachen police

⁹³ Even parliamentary observers have been prevented from accessing this situation, among others. Nevertheless, parliamentary observers reported about numerous life-threatening situations in which police evicted people near to demolition works, as well as the overall denial of basic needs during the eviction (Keller et al., 2023).

and RWE urging journalists to adhere to safety distances from demolitions and to a code of conduct, and to spatial as well as temporal restrictions (see attachment 2, translation included). Nellie Bly evaluates this practice:

[...] I refused [...]. According to the press law of North Rhine-Westphalia, it is not permissible to issue such special orders as this accreditation [...] I also communicated this with the press office of the police in Aachen, and I was on their toes because they [...] suggested [...] it was obligatory and when I then inquired them and referred to the press law [...], they then said yes, it was a recommendation [...].

Similarly, RWE pretended that journalists were obliged to sign a liability agreement ("Haftungsvereinbarung"), which claims that

[...] entering the company site [Lützerath] is only permitted after handing over this signed liability agreement and in compliance with the instructions of the police and the security service as well as the information letter. The company site may only be entered in daylight and in the company of an escort accompanied by a person designated by us. (see attachment 3)

Again, Nellie Bly condemns this attempt of restricting journalists' access to Lützerath, saying that "[...] DJU people [...] doubted that [RWE] had the right to do so and could otherwise deny people access [...] access was also not denied but [RWE] tried it." Further complicating the work of journalists, RWE and the police confused people by handing out similar looking safety vests. Nellie Bly remembers this:

[...] RWE then also issued press vests for members of the press and they had an RWE logo on the bottom, you were practically a running advertisement for RWE [...] the [press vests] issued by the police were blue, they made it a bit difficult to distinguish between communications officers and the press [...].

Given that, as Jürgen Döschner emphasized in our conversation months after Lützerath's eviction, the restriction of journalistic freedom by security and police forces in conflict situations is "an old pattern" (Interview #15, 19.06.2023), this additional filter is highly relevant in the context of anti-mining struggles in Lützerath, but also in the context of open confrontations related to anti-gentrification struggles. Building on the background chapter on both struggles, as well as the relevance of the PM in the German media landscape, the next chapter provides insights into the methods used during the research of this project.

5 Methods when bearing witness to the complexities of frontline struggle

During onsite research in Lützerath, the following situation and the challenges it describes was central to embracing the methodological approach of this research project. It is the last

Friday evening in October. The autumn winds blow strong but warm, making it comfortable to sit outside on the straw in front of the big hall that we usually share our meals in. After another long village plenary, we eat dinner and talk about the upcoming eviction, when someone with a Spanish sounding accent announces a theater play happening later tonight. The person adds that the theatre is in Argentinian, but that we will still enjoy it, whether we understand the language or not. We finish our meal, until people slowly move towards the hall right next to the shared kitchen. The night is pitch-dark, but candles light the way. Inside, we find a half circle of straw balls, matrasses, and pillows in front of a stage made of a dusty old rug and a chair, surrounded by another, smaller half circle of straw bales. Half emptied bottles of red wine stand on the floor and a guitar lies on a little desk in the middle of the stage, along with different versions of light sources: candles, torches, headlights, and spotlights.

Without a word of introduction, the two artists begin their show. While energetically playing the guitar and singing with temper, they alternate lights and shadows on the walls and in peoples' faces. Some scenes are rather obscure with the artists opening their throats to consume wine during hysteric Argentinian dialogues. Knowing less than ten words in Spanish, I feel confused. Several times I am about to leave, not seeing why I should stay in a situation I do not understand. I wanted to leave even more thinking about my never-ending task of writing field notes and preparing interviews. But soon I notice, how everyone else seems to enjoy the play no matter if they understand Spanish or not. Inspired by the people around me, I relax and feel present. I am watching a 45-minute theater in a foreign language. But instead of only sitting through it, I find joy and creativity in it. I accept rather than dread uncertainty, acknowledging confusion as part of a process that allows me to interpret what I hear and observe. I am free to discover and break out of presupposed thought patterns. And I understand that my everyday research can become free and creative: Through *living* in Lützi I experience, ask questions, and collect puzzle pieces, which put together become an interpretation of events. If each of us lives through different versions of this theatre, and by live through I mean that our version of the story *really* makes us laugh, or cry, or shiver, how then could anyone's experience be less real than any other's?⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Fieldnotes, 28.10.2022.



Image 31: One of the halls next to the "Küfa" (community kitchen) called "Atelier" in September 2022. Here, people gathered at least twice a day to share meals with each other. Other times, people used this space for painting banners, signs, or other art. Source: Author.

Main objective and research questions

As the theory chapter explored, this research draws on and contributes to debates in anarchist political ecology, decolonial degrowth and critical communication studies by building on the fields' common sensitivity towards uneven power dynamics and unsatisfied ambitions of socio-ecological transformation. In the context of two contrasting but connected struggles, this project explores how government and corporations might 'manufacture consent' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002) to displacement, social conflict, ecological destruction, and global warming through media manipulation. The main objective of this thesis is not, to fill gaps in research. Instead, I hope to aid honest journalists who take their publicist demands seriously, academics, who are genuinely concerned with socio-ecological transformation, and dedicated land-defenders confronted with stereotypes and accusations, to navigate between some of the stories told about socio-ecological struggle. By contrasting dominant narratives to lived experiences and analyzing their disparity against the background of political and corporate intentions, as well as political-economic structures, this project hopefully nurtures our ability to identify dominant narratives not just as exaggerated, distorted, uncomfortable, or refutable *stories*, but as powerful co-producers of ecological destruction and social conflict. Most

importantly, identifying dominant narratives as systematically distorted disseminators of capitalist values hopefully contributes to reducing divisions between land-defenders and their relatives, friends, and each other. Along this line, this thesis answers the following research questions:

- How do the realities of people engaged in land-based struggles deviate from dominant narratives dispersed through the regional newspapers of *Rheinische Post Mediengruppe* (RPM) and *Medienhaus Aachen GmbH* (MHA)?
- Which are the dominant narratives about anti-mining struggles in Lützerath and anti-gentrification struggles in the monastery in Aachen dispersed by the local newspapers *Rheinische Post* (RP) and *Aachener Zeitung* (AZ)?
- How are these narratives crafted and how are they expressed?
- How might they ‘manufacture consent’ to ecological devastation, displacement, and social conflict by undermining public support for resistance through de-legitimizing or co-opting struggles/ through legitimizing corporate mining activities and real-estate speculation?
- What are some of the realities of people engaged in both struggles, either as inhabitants, or as solidary neighbors, journalists, or collectively, as local initiatives?
- How can land-based struggle be understood as a transformative practice?

The development of these questions is based on three assumptions: First, that opposition to anti-mining and anti-gentrification struggle is manufactured by government and corporations, while genuine interest and a deeper engagement with the struggles leads to solidarity. Second, that a legalized or tolerated project is more likely to be perceived as legitimate, than illegal occupations and open conflict are. This may be connected to aesthetics and overall fewer reports on tolerated projects and to the reports’ less de-legitimizing tone. Lastly, research questions derive from the assumption that autonomous zones are crucial spaces for socio-ecological transformation, because of their ability to disrupt capitalist expansion physically and culturally by reclaiming space, politicizing people, and disseminating counter-narratives.

Two sites, home, and the in between

Lützerath and the monastery in Aachen are two geographically separate, but theoretically, and in their solidarity with each other closely connected political struggles. Both sites are in Germany, the country I grew up in. Hereby, most research was carried out in the research participants’ and my first language. Reducing language barriers proved important especially considering the project’s focus on stories, perceptions, motivations, and experiences, but also

for understanding the socio-political and historical contexts. While locating this project in Germany was purposive, Lützerath and the monastery only crystallized as sites after my initial attempts throughout July 2022 to study the public perception on anarchist spaces in Frankfurt, Germany's financial center. Accepting that I could not find two contrasting but connected, active, and publicly discussed projects in Frankfurt, I followed an intuitive approach to casing this study (Soss, 2018, p.29), in which I "embrace[d] generative doubt and ma[de] casing into an ongoing subject of reflexive critique." Following hints from friends, I visited the monastery in Aachen in early August 2022. After a few weeks in the monastery, I took my first trip to Lützerath based on my supervisor's encouragement, but mostly following my intuition after encountering Sock. Thereafter, the geographic proximity of Lützerath and the monastery enabled me to travel back and forth between both places to explore their differences, commonalities, and connections, which the rest of this section elaborates on.

Moving from generative doubt to Lützerath...

Lützerath is ideal to analyze governmental and corporate influence on media narratives about socio-ecological struggles because, as a central and active conflict, it was much reported on during the time of research. Political and public debates about Lützerath reached national levels since its occupation in 2021 (Eckardt, 2022; Goldmann, 2021) and coverage reached international levels latest with the government's declaration of Lützerath's eviction on October 4th, 2023 (Schuetze & Solomon, 2022; Nolting, 2023). The media attention given to Lützerath is likely due to the area's long history of local resistance. Additionally, Lützerath's location at the edge of Garzweiler II provides powerful, spectacular, and thus profitable images to press (Debord, 2014). High media attention and the size of the struggle reinforced each other, as the visibility and relatability of the threat engaged a diversity of people, even those not directly affected by resettlements or local environmental destruction. Especially in the case of mass events like demonstrations, de-centralized actions, festivals, and the forceful eviction, the size of Lützerath in turn contributed to increased media attention.

In addition, more than two years of reinhabiting Lützerath cultivated a strongly self-organized, large-scale, and open autonomous community, enabling diverse people and tactics to take part. This diversity, size, degree of self-organization, rootedness, and the strong sense of community result from and build on previous struggles but are exacerbated by Lützerath's geographic conditions. Besides the effects of the immanent, visible, and constant threat of the mine, already existing village infrastructure like roads and houses freed resources for mobilization, actions, and building resilient social structures. Moreover, existing infrastructures allowed inhabitants to live in houses, caravans, and trailers, which increased

the degree of comfort and accessibility to some extent and enabled people with different needs to participate. Lützerath's ability to build an anti-capitalist space and community while retaining openness to a diversity of people, especially through its vigil, village walk demonstrations, open village plenaries, welcoming inhabitants, and connections to local initiatives, makes it a relevant case for examining diverse on-the-ground experiences and contrasting them to dominant narratives.

Lützerath ultimately became the analytical focus of this project, as I spent about twice as much time in Lützerath than in the monastery. Given the urgency of the upcoming eviction, Lützerath was an overall more dynamic space than the monastery. Talking to visitors and journalists and participating in common activities was part of daily life in Lützerath, whereas the monastery's gates through the physically isolating 2-meter-high stone walls opened for the neighborhood café about once a week during my time there. While there were seemingly endless different stories to be told about and from within Lützerath, I reached a point of saturation with speaking to neighbors and visitors of the monastery who largely tolerated its new inhabitants. These different dynamics also materialized in the extent to which both places were publicly debated. While there was a total amount of 14 articles on the monastery in *Aachener Zeitung* between its reclamation in August 2021 and my last visit there in January 2023, Lützerath was mentioned in more than 600 articles on the online portal of *Rheinische Post* until the end of January 2023, with over 200 articles since October 4th. Hereby, news coverage on the monastery might change with an advancing sales process and could thus present an opportunity for further research about how dominant narratives change. Nevertheless, for the time of research, the absence of an immediate and spectacular threat, as well as for the most part, absence even of public scrutiny, meant there was no urgent need to organize, mobilize, or prepare a defense of the monastery.

...and to the monastery

Despite being much less publicly discussed, the monastery an essential part of this research project. Initially, my research question centered the politicizing and cultural effects ("the radical potential", Aedo, 2019) of squats on their immediate neighbors, giving less attention to media narratives. Given the cultural contrast between a squatted monastery and its densely populated, wealthy neighborhood, exploring encounters and relationships between the monastery's inhabitants and their neighbors seemed interesting. Moreover, the monastery's reclamation was rather recent, so I expected some curiosity and engagement among its neighbors. Finally, while "creative", "sustainable", or "green" city strategies increase the

repression and incorporation of squats into capitalist development (Mayer, 2013), the monastery represents one of few autonomous spaces across Germany. As the focus of this research project developed, the potentially successive character of the monastery and Lützerath in terms their struggles' intensity, became ever more interesting (understanding the monastery at a potentially "earlier stage" of conflict). Moreover, I experienced increasing openness and organizational strength of the monastery alongside its evolving solidarity with Lützerath. As for former inhabitants of "Hambi", the monastery offered space to people from Lützerath for permanent or temporary accommodation and events. While the monastery was also the space for my crucial encounter with Sock, Lützerath and the monastery ultimately conflated during my last visit in early February 2023 during Lützerath's after eviction gathering held in the monastery. Besides being solidary struggles, the monastery represents the start and the end of this research project and removing it would be disrespectful to the people who welcomed, trusted, and shared their knowledge with me, and would downplay their significance for anti-capitalist struggles in Germany.

Lastly, the monastery is an excellent second example to strengthen an analysis of media manipulation, as MHA is financially entangled with RPM (*see* chapter 4, figure 1). In sum, the differences between the monastery and Lützerath in terms of urban/rural, (temporarily) tolerated/ acutely under threat of eviction, and visible/(almost) invisible threat, play out in contrasts regarding the extent of media coverage and the struggles' degree of self-organization, but do not obscure but strengthen both places' interconnectedness in terms of solidarity and analytical complimentary. These contrasts and connections make it interesting to look at both places, not with the aim of comparing one to the other, but to see them as potentially successive (discursive) struggles, each (en)countering differently expressed but similarly de-legitimizing narratives about them.

[Taking a side: Methodological approach](#)

Through the theoretical lens of Herman and Chomsky's (1988/2002) *Propaganda Model* (PM) this project simultaneously follows and reaffirms Danny Hoffman's (2003) call for more frontline anthropology. Hoffman emphasizes the structural difficulties for journalists to report critically in zones of violent conflict and, in some instances, the instrumentalization of media to normalize and intensify social war. However, while similar in their kind of knowledge, ethnographies do not simply replace the work of journalists. Instead, "[a]nthropologists working in frontline zones are [...] in a crucial position to bear witness to the complex dynamics of that space, and to incorporate into that 'witnessing' a knowledge of cause and implication unavailable to a less integrated observer" (Hoffman 2003, p.10). In addition to

witnessing, frontline anthropology moreover demands taking a side because "if truth is indeed the first casualty of war, then the collection of narratives, the act of description and the process of analysis automatically raise issues of power and agency" (Hoffman 2003, p.10). Said otherwise and connecting back to Dunlap's (2020c) 'insurrectionary knowledge', generating knowledge is connected to power (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2008; Blaser & de la Cadena, 2018; Foucault, 1977), and researchers must decide which narratives matter within their research to not reproduce but challenge existing power structures, and to avoid engagement in epistemic extractivism (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2019; Smith & Klein, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2020).

Taking explicit partisanship within research, especially when engaging in socio-ecological conflicts or in the context of "activism", merits debates about objectivity and ethical concerns (Dunlap et al., 2021; Dunlap, 2023c; Wilson, 2018)⁹⁵. This research project builds on the understanding, that a universal objective knowledge is not possible. For example, according to Donna Haraway's (1988) work on 'situated knowledges', all knowledge is partial and inevitably shaped by the position of the researcher. There is no 'gaze from nowhere' and knowledge can only come closer to objectivity if it acknowledges its embodied nature, which means researchers must openly connect the knowledge they generate to their subjective position. Thus, multiple different ontologies (knowledges about the nature of reality) exist, and they enact multiple different realities through "the ways that the world is understood and encountered to be" (Sullivan, 2017, p.222). Any claim of universal objective knowledge is thus an illusionary, yet powerful pretension that Haraway (1988) calls 'the god trick'.

In the context of anti-mining and anti-gentrification struggles, green growth narratives and the research they build on to legitimize corporate mining (Brock, 2020; Kirsch, 2010; 2014), urban renewal, and gentrification (Peck, 2005). As such, the world enacted by "green" capitalism through universal, abstract, and dis-embodied knowledge claims is based on and reproduces a particular Western and foundationally dualist (Moore, 2016) hierarchical ontology⁹⁶. Aggregate rules (e.g., carbon neutrality), offsetting procedures, and decoupling ambitions enact a particular reality in line with a white, male, and techno-utopian gaze, where certain entities become categorizable, calculatable, measurable, and endlessly exchangeable,

⁹⁵ For example, the *European Union's Radicalization Awareness Network* draws on findings of a master's thesis titled *Trajectories to Radical Anarchist Activism. A qualitative study on the motivations to join and stay involved in the Dutch anarchist movement* (Krübelmann, 2020) to inform policies for "preventing and countering violent extremism" (RAN, 2021, p.12).

⁹⁶ Expressed for example through sexism, classism, racism, sexism, ableism, and speciesism.

thereby ignoring complexity, relationality, and the unpredictability of socio-ecological processes (Sullivan, 2017). Neoliberal hierarchical valuations of "nature" define global environmental governance and subjugate but *cannot exclude* the existence of divergent (anti-capitalist) ontologies (Sullivan, 2017). The anti-capitalist worlds enacted for example in Lützerath and the monastery are just as real. Research with these worlds, as Hoffman (2003, p.10) asserts, "implies no preordained set of answers to questions about how one understands 'participation' or what kind of activism should arise from one's partisanship. It does, however, demand that these be addressed". Along this line, this project treats objectivity not as the 'discovery of truth', but as a continuum along which researchers can accurately describe an observable phenomenon through honesty and self-reflection about the project's means and ends (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) and about their embodied, partial, and situated position (Haraway, 1988).

Hence, this project prioritizes positionality and transparency. Overall, I conducted on-site research largely following an intuitive approach (Cattaneo, 2006) based on a constructivist epistemology⁹⁷ and complemented this intuitive approach with theoretical considerations and practical guidelines mainly offered by Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt (2011) in *Participant Observation. A Guide for Fieldworkers*. During on-site research, I avoided encountering people based on a researcher-researched dichotomy and instead emphasized power dynamics between us. This is because strict separation downplays the issue of 'ontological difference', which can be described as the effect that research has on the phenomenon it seeks to observe (Law, 2004; 2015; Cattaneo, 2006; Stengers, 2018). As complex and self-conscious beings, all research participants (including the 'researcher') understand that they are part of a research project. This knowledge impacts what can be observed as it affects all participants, their conversations, and how they relate to each other. When the researcher describes the research project and its objectives, and when she asks or responds to questions, research becomes performative through the way she encounters other participants, or how she is perceived by them. Especially in the context of emotionally charged and polarized social conflicts, participants might wonder if the researcher is on "their side". Accordingly, conversations and interviews unfold depending on whether they are based on degrees of trust, skepticism, or even accusations of conducting "non-neutral" research in

⁹⁷ Epistemology refers to one's theory of how to attain knowledge. The focus of this project is not to explore a "universal truth" by "testing" individual accounts of "reality", but to investigate the structural conditions that *construct* dominant media narratives and hence, peoples' understanding of a situation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

favor of "the other/wrong side"⁹⁸. 'Ontological difference' can also describe the process in which new knowledge from early encounters with other research participants informs further research. Accordingly, and with immense gratitude towards all other research participants, this thesis is largely the result of collective knowledge generation through sharing, reflecting on, and co-interpreting experiences, stories, and emotions (Leyva Solano, 2011; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). I tried to overcome divisions and hierarchies between all research participants through strong and mostly complete participation, by being sensitive to different subjectivities of participants and by avoiding making them uncomfortable (Dunlap, 2017; Scheyvens et al., 2003). While my participative approach enabled in-depth conversations and interviews, the friendships and affinities to many participants did not arise as a mere consequence of or tool for investigation, but rather because of shared values and objectives (Cattaneo, 2006).

Similarly, I avoided the home-field dichotomy, especially regarding Lützerath, where "the field" became inseparable from home or the desk. Throughout my long-term stays, Lützerath became home, not only temporarily and not only in the sense of a geographically determined area but as a place of belonging (chapter 7b elaborates on what this means). Moreover, while I wrote fieldnotes, prepared interviews, and interpreted data in Lützerath which blurs the line between desk and field, research did not end with leaving the sites either, as written texts result from reflections, (recorded) memories and post-hoc readings (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003). Moreover, I conducted the last two interviews while I was already writing chapters in April and June 2023 via Zoom. Consequentially, visits to the monastery and to Lützerath did not only serve the purpose of conducting ethnographic work, but as dedicating time and learning from the struggles of people whose values I share, as visits to friends and accomplices, and not least, as an experience of learning by living (or walking, *see* Solano, 2011) that I have not yet found in institutionalized education.

⁹⁸ I encountered several situations like this. Among them was one conversation with a former inhabitant of Keyenberg on my way home from a visit to the little forest occupation. I spontaneously asked them about how they perceived of Lützerath and they immediately associated me with the struggle, which heated the conversation. Annoyed, they said things like "people are not fighting für Lützerath, but for their egos" and that we should just "accept that the fight is over", and that "the struggle for Lützerath is 10 years too late". Intuitively, I tried to explain that Lützi was not just about the villages, but climate justice. Their angry response to this attempt was, that this was "ridiculous" and that "Lützerath is not going to change anything about the climate". After just a few minutes, neither of us seemed interested in continuing this conversation (Fieldnotes, 11.10.2022).



Image 32: Learning by living and walking in the permanent presence of destruction. Source: catwithacamera, 2022c.

Learning through participating

In total, I engaged in over five months of on-site research. This includes four visits to the monastery in Aachen, each from four to nine days in the period from August 3rd - September 9th, 2022. These visits were partly split up by visits to Lützerath, of which there were six with durations from two days to 4,5 weeks (with two visits of that length) in the time between 13th of September and mid-January 2023. Visits to Lützerath ended with the eviction from January 2nd - January 16th, 2023, but were extended by a one week stay in the after-eviction camp in Keyenberg and the after-eviction gathering in the monastery in early February 2023. I chose to travel by public transport, bike, skateboard, and hitchhiking, to increase the likelihood of meeting and talking to people (Dunlap, 2017). Overall, I combined several qualitative data collection methods to maximize the validity of my findings (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; O'Leary, 2021), namely participant observation, semi-structured interviews and collecting data from documents.

Although most of the data I analyzed is derived from newspaper articles, press releases, blogs, interviews, websites, and official documents, participant observation constitutes the main data collection method of this thesis, as it serves as an invaluable 'backdrop' for conducting further research (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Besides presenting a

sampling strategy for semi-structured interviews and informal conversations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), participant observation allowed me to engage with relevant readings recommended to me by research participants. Moreover, the personal experiences of (discursive) struggle and everyday life in the monastery and in Lützerath enable me to offer detailed and vivid descriptions of places and situations, as well as the physical and social structures of self-organization, the care one cultivates to people and place, and the psychological and physical violence with which especially Lützerath was met. While participant observation generally entailed simple and unstructured observations and countless informal conversations (Bryman, 2016), the activities through which I participated, as well as the degree of participation differed significantly between the monastery and Lützerath.

Participant Observation in the monastery

In Aachen, I engaged in moderate to active participation (Spradley in DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). I lived at the monastery and was identifiable as a researcher, but only sometimes participated in everyday activities like shared meals, cleaning, screen-printing flyers, and dumpster-diving. Besides providing the space to share this project's objective with other inhabitants or supporters of the monastery, I attained background knowledge about the struggle and reflected about the purpose of this research project during these activities. As I had barely engaged in autonomous or anarchist spaces prior to this project, informal conversations with the monastery's inhabitants about repression and previous struggles such as "Hambi" became crucial for developing strong partisanship and further my understanding of and sensitivity to participants' skepticism regarding research, questions about personal information, and documentation.

While living at the monastery, I engaged in informal conversations with direct neighbors and visitors to explore their perception of the monastery and their relationship to its inhabitants. I hereby sat in different spots in Weyherstraße, Nizzaalle, and Lousbergstraße on eight occasions at various daytimes between August 1st and September 1st. I asked people that passed by whether they lived in the neighborhood, if and how they heard about the squatted monastery, whether they had been there and what they associate with the occupation and its inhabitants. Finally, I handed them an information letter (*see attachment 4*) about the research project and invited them to an interview. I proceeded similarly during the weekly neighborhood cafés in the monastery's garden of which I attended and helped to prepare four, including the one I was invited to on my first visit. During the cafés I observed interactions between the monastery's inhabitants and visitors and engaged in informal conversations with

visitors. Through having lunch with friends at the university campus in Aachen, I moreover had an unexpected informal conversation with a local Green Party politician. While most informal conversations in and around the monastery did not lead to interviews, they helped me to get a general understanding of the struggle and an impression of the public debate around the monastery. The degree and nature of participation in the monastery contrasts to the approach I took in Lützerath.

Participant Observation in Lützerath

Following my encounter with Sock in the monastery's garden, I engaged in complete participation in Lützerath (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) by moving into a treehouse together with Sock and 3-6 others—who also became close friends—for the next four months. I participated in daily life which included village and working group plenaries, reproductive activities, skill-shares, lectures, building physical structures like barricades, and night watches. We moreover spent countless shared meals and evenings in our treehouse, reading to each other, making music, or writing poems, and drinking coffee at the vigil or the mine's edge, as well as collective visits to solidary spaces nearby. The latter helped me to grasp the network of solidarity that extends far beyond the physical space of Lützerath. More importantly, however, (sometimes pure) participation in Lützerath enabled moments of sharing feelings, thoughts, doubts, and ideas regarding the struggle, but also related to research methods and ethics. These moments established strong rapport, "a state of interaction, achieved when the participants come to share the same goals, at least to some extent" (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, p.47) between me and other research participants. Some of these moments led to informal conversations and in-depth interviews about participants' learning experiences, their motivations for supporting the struggle and their relationships to place and people. Ultimately, these moments made me reflect heavily on my research process and prioritize the generation of knowledge that can be useful to struggles, rather than merely help me getting through my education.

Crucially, and in accordance with my research interest in the public perception of anti-capitalist struggles, I participated in Lützerath's media working group from mid-September on. Following intuition, curiosity, and my friend Little Whale's encouragement and company, I joined countless, often hour-long, and horizontally organized plenaries where we discussed how to respond to journalists' interview questions, how to continue media work throughout the eviction, as well as about media strategies of RWE and authorities. These plenaries were complemented by several skill-shares on being a press liaison, held in part by independent

journalists and press liaisons of other organizations like *Ende Gelände* (Fieldnotes, 20.10.2022; 22.10.2022; 01.11.2022). Moreover, I participated in gathering, summarizing, and analyzing recently published articles on Lützerath in a collective document, where we identified reoccurring themes, talked about how they might de-legitimize our struggle, and highlighted quotes of our own that "made it through".

By joining public and 'spectacular' events like two village walk demonstrations, four mass demonstrations (two in and around Lützerath, one in Cologne and the 35.000 people demonstration on January 14th, 2023) and a festival ("Unräumbar-Festival") from September 23rd – September 27th 2022, I established contact to interviewees, attained background knowledge by listening to speeches, and observed how visitors, journalists, and authorities engaged with the demonstrations. While these experiences allowed me to contrast media representations to my own observations and experiences, I also tried out being a press liaison. I hereby exposed myself to the difficulties of conveying Lützerath as a place of hope, autonomy, anti-capitalist values, diverse tactics to resist, and solidarity with century-old struggles against (neo)colonialism (Fieldnotes, 22.10.2022). For example, like many other inhabitants of Lützerath, I was asked if I "would consider the use of violence" to defend Lützerath. This question carries a certain narrative within it and pre-empties any conversation of its political content by presuming the involvement of 'good' and 'bad' protestors (Martínez López, 2019; Gelderloos, 2013) and distracting from the everyday structural violence embedded in mining and Western standards of living (Nixon, 2011; Kirsch, 2014; 2010; Brand & Wissen, 2021). Together, complete participation in Lützerath's daily activities and those of the media working group were essential for this research project. It enabled me to identify and analyze dominant media narratives about Lützerath, connect to and establish rapport with other research participants, understand Lützerath's counter narratives, and engage myself in physical and the discursive struggle.

Research participants, friends, and accomplices

Like with choosing Lützerath and the monastery as sites, I approached criteria for whom I considered as research participants in an intuitive and iterative way, as part of the research process, rather than determined before (Beuving & DeVries, 2015; Soss, 2018). As I moved from the monastery to Lützerath, the "objectives of investigation matured" (Cattaneo 2006, p.31) and I widened the scope of whose reflections I was interested in. While I lived at the monastery, I considered direct neighbors and visitors of the monastery as main research participants. As there were no direct neighbors to Lützerath, I adapted my approach and considered visitors and inhabitants of the neighboring villages or the nearby city of Erkelenz

as main participants for this site. After a few early informal conversations in Erkelenz and during the demonstrations I however expanded my focus again, as I noticed my growing interest for the reflections of Lützerath's inhabitants. While I expected those conversations to be more genuine and in-depth than with visitors or villagers, this decision was also a result of my participation in Lützerath's media working group. By closely following media reporting on Lützerath, I recognized dominant media narratives within some villagers' or visitors' descriptions of Lützerath. As I was interested in experiences that contrasted from dominant narratives, I decided to spend the remainder of my limited time on experiences and reflections of people with a deeper relationship to the struggle. I hereby decided against conducting interviews specifically with members of media working group⁹⁹, as many of them were deeply embedded in relentless efforts of dispersing counter-narratives in media, that they spent much of their time in plenaries, conferences, and working on the computer. Thus, I assumed they would be at a relative distance from everyday life, relations, and experiences at Lützerath, which was what I hoped to talk about.

Interviews

I conducted a total of 24 interviews, eight with neighbors of the monastery, 14 with visitors and inhabitants of Lützerath, and two with journalists that supported or reported positively on anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland in the past. Depending on the situation, I handed out information sheets physically, sent them via email or summarized them orally before each interview. The 10-12 interview questions were flexible but generally focused on how participants describe each struggle the people involved. Moreover, I asked what research participants perceive as "the good life", which questions arise from their visits to Lützerath or the monastery, and whether they had learning experiences from spending time there. In interviews with visitors and inhabitants of Lützerath I added questions on their personal motivation for coming to or staying there. After I chose the PM as a theoretical lens for this analysis, I adjusted my interview guides to ask the two journalists about experiences of being restricted in reporting on anti-mining struggles in the Rhineland, as well on background knowledge regarding the media system in Germany.

Interview guides were comprised of a mix of non-leading introductory, and direct and indirect follow-up questions (Bryman, 2016). The order of questions was flexible (Bryman, 2016) and I adapted questions to the research participants' responses (*see* attachment 5 for a rough interview guide). Besides four interviews which I recorded on Zoom, I recorded every

⁹⁹ There was one exception to this.

interview with the secure audio recording app Nettskjema Dictaphone and took handwritten notes to reflect on non-verbal communication after each interview (Bryman, 2016).

Concerning my 'skills inventory' (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), I was confident with my active listening skills (Rogers & Farson, 1987), but worked to improve self-confidence through accepting that I will learn from and with the other participants. Hereby, I tried to embrace curiosity and ask even seemingly obvious or naïve questions (while respecting peoples' privacy), and to view this project as an opportunity for personal development in which I expected to make mistakes and learn from them (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011).

Fieldnotes

To record observations and to improve my observational skills and focus, I occasionally mapped physical spaces and social interactions. Mainly, however, I jotted descriptive field notes in a pocket-sized notebook to later expand and complement them in a digital document. For greater reflexivity, I recorded personal reactions and feelings in a digital diary. I kept an extra file with meta-notes in which I recorded preliminary interpretations and summaries, for example observations regarding repetitive themes in media. For clarity, I ran a separate handwritten log/calendar, which included notes on research methods. Overall, I re-read field notes to continuously inform subsequent steps (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Documents

I collected a total of 323 documents to gain background knowledge of and analyze dominant media narratives on anti-mining struggles in Lützerath and anti-gentrification struggles in Aachen. Those include 13 academic articles or texts published on academic blogs, 160 newspaper articles, 14 official documents, reports and articles published by public institutions, and 27 corporate press releases, brochures, or public statements by RWE, *CR Investment Management*, and various companies associated with the two corporate news publishers RPM and MHA. Included here are also publications of the public-private institution *Zweckverband Landfolge*. Moreover, I base much background knowledge on 8 reports published by the environmental organizations Greenpeace and *Friends of the Earth Germany* ("Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz", BUND) on local resistance, as well as local and global social-ecological consequences of lignite mining. Considering background knowledge on the German media landscape, I drew on 7 reports from the online investigative media collectives *CORRECTIV*, *Netzwerk Recherche*, and *netzpolitik.org*, on 8 reports from several foundations (Otto-Brenner, Hans Böckler, and Rosa Luxemburg), on 4 publications by the German journalist union ("Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten- Union", DJU), and

on one publication by the German tenant union ("Deutscher Mieterschutzverband", DMB). Considering Lützerath's eviction, one report from the civil society organization basic rights committee ("Grundrechtekommittee") and one from the online news portal *klimareporter*^o provided additional information. Finally, I consider anonymously and/ or collectively written publications as relevant and valid sources regarding both struggles (Mullenite, 2021; Martínez López, 2019). Among them are 26 press releases and 5 instagram posts published by *Lützerath Lebt*, 13 press releases/ statements and 3 social media posts published by the monastery's inhabitants, 3 texts published by the local news collective Tacheles, 8 texts published by the local right to the city initiative ("Recht auf Stadt Aachen", RASA), 9 pamphlets and statements anonymously published on alternative media websites or found in-print on site, and a total of 12 posts derived from three blogs written by the Anarchists in Lützerath collective, my friend konkreteutopie22, and anarcholatina. Given the context, many sources are only fully published in German, and I had to translate the parts relevant for this thesis, a potential limitation which I will come back to towards the end of this chapter.

Included in the 160 newspaper articles are the results of a search with the keywords "Kloster Lousberg" and "Karmelitinnen Aachen"¹⁰⁰ on the website of AZ (<https://www.aachener-zeitung.de/>) in July 2023. Here, I found 14 articles that reported on the monastery between its reclamation and November 8th, 2022. Two additional articles were published later this year and are thus not included in the analysis of dominant narratives but provide additional background knowledge. A search with the keyword "Lützerath" on RP's website (<https://rp-online.de/>) resulted in 692 articles, podcasts, blogs, and picture series until mid-July 2023. To limit the number of articles under study, I first chose to analyze only articles published between October 4th, 2022, and January 31st, 2023. This period roughly correlates to my time of on-site research in Lützerath and begins with the announcement of the "RWE-deal" declaring Lützerath's eviction and ends roughly 3 weeks after the eviction. Thereafter, I limited the number of publications to only include articles from local issues in Erkelenz, from regional issues in Kreis Heinsberg, as well as those about developments on the federal and national level. Thereby, I excluded podcasts, picture series, local issues from neighboring municipalities, and blogs. I also excluded some RP+ articles from January, which were behind an extra paywall in July 2023 and repeated what I already assumed where dominant narratives (e.g., the publication of "secret" police protocols during the eviction or headings such as "The uncomfortable truth about Lützerath"). Based on these limitations, I

¹⁰⁰ The nuns who inhabited the monastery until 2009 belonged to the Carmelites religious order ("Karmelitinnen Orden").

reached a total number of 214 articles, of which I created an overview to sort out overly repetitive ones and mark those in which counter-narratives were presented to a relatively high degree. Finally, I thematically analyzed 94 articles published in RP on Lützerath.

Research Ethics

I attained oral informed consent based on information letters or oral summaries thereof from everyone I conducted informal conversations and recorded interviews with. I considered observations during events and outside of Lützerath or the monastery as 'observation in public places' which do not necessitate informed consent (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Although I tried to uncover my role as a researcher as early as possible especially during informal conversations, I was sometimes reluctant to talk about this project especially on days where I planned to take a break from research. While I sometimes ended up in inspiring conversations in which I unraveled my position as a researcher retroactively, the final text exclusively refers to quotes or personal information from people of whom I attained oral informed consent from. Throughout the entire research process, I prioritized a maximum of confidentiality and ensured participants' anonymity, especially regarding the repression and smear some of them could become subject to. I used pseudonyms to refer to participants throughout the final text and when referring to observations, conversations, and interviews in my field notes, with the exception of Jürgen Döschner who agreed to being named. Moreover, I stored the scrambling key on a separate encrypted storage device to ensure that no content can be traced back to personal data and that private information is used only for the purpose of this research. Lastly, I reminded participants of their right to withdraw from this project at any time (Scheyvens et al., 2003; Bryman, 2016).

Analysis

As I collected various kinds of data (interviews, conversations, documents, observations), I turned to different types of analysis. For official documents, reports, academic articles, and some newspaper articles I used content analysis. Building on some of this knowledge, and the collective knowledge generated through living in Lützerath and the monastery, I revised and complemented the PM to thereafter analyze the socio-economic and political structures that shape news stories on land-based struggles. While we collectively identified dominant narratives, interpreted their functions, and developed counter-narratives, we did not analyze in detail where dominant narratives come from, how they are expressed, how they develop, and why they become dominant. I thus decided to complement collective knowledge on dominant narratives with an individual analysis focused on the reporting of one newspaper on each site

over a longer period. Besides the possibility of a more systematic analysis from a desk that does not face an eviction (chapter 6 and 7), an analysis of the PM's filters, especially ownership structures and funding, as well as restricted physical access, (chapter 4) and finally, a discussion of media narratives as social technologies (chapter 8) can become useful.

Hereby, the dominance of some narratives is not determined by prevalence (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but by the extent to which some narratives are established as "facts" through steady repetition, through presenting them in "background information boxes", and finally, through stating them without their sources for example in opinion pieces. In parallel to identifying dominant narratives in newspaper articles, I thematically analyzed semi-structured interviews, notes from conversations, blog entries, and press releases that respond to the themes I identified in articles of RP and AZ. I illustrate both, dominant and counter-narratives with quotes from interviews and conversations with inhabitants, neighbors, visitors, journalists, and politicians. Ultimately, this analysis is data driven as my approach is informed by countless informal conversations, observations, experiences, and collectively generated knowledge from living in Lützerath and the monastery, as well as by empirical material from articles published in RP and AZ (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Codes, Themes, Narratives, and Transcriptions

Partly informed by my fieldnotes and experiences, I generated initial codes to start the thematic analysis of newspaper articles. I digitally marked initial codes by highlighting extracts and writing code names in comments. Afterwards, I collected all initial codes in a document and collated them based on the delegitimizing function they might have (isolating, pacifying, dividing, co-opting, criminalizing, stigmatizing) and how their underlying assumptions or expectations overlap. At every stage I used visual representations to help sorting codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hereby, I identified 18 initial codes in articles on Lützerath published by RP from October 4th, 2022, to the end of January 2023. These codes were "exploring the alternative lifestyles of activists", "the symbol", "the empty village/ nobody's home", "violence/ extremism", "peaceful protest", "police and security", "the deal", "the energy crisis", "the saved villages vs. Lützerath", "sustainable mining", "energy transition", "the climate justice movement vs. the Green Party", "earlier coal exit", "solidarity with Ukraine", "compensation", "dialogue", "participation", "fears or concerns of villagers". I collated these initial codes into six overarching and interrelated themes. I called those "the symbol", "the nice but naïve alternative", "violent and non-violent activists", "professional/ de-escalative authorities", "the energy crisis", and "energy transition".

Likewise, I identified 17 initial codes in articles on the monastery published by AZ from August 2021 to November 2022. These were "the housing debate", "age", "attention-seeking", "the social center", "activist culture", "single-issue campaign", "the anti-social squatter", "the ambition to negotiate", "the potential threat", "the protective police", "unrealistic", "illegality", "monument and environmental protection", "public participation", "obstructiveness", "the nice alternative", and "the refugee accommodation". I collated these initial codes into six overarching, but overlapping themes, which were "the social center", "activist culture", "the anti-social squat(ter)", "single issue campaign", "the potential threat", and "public participation".

While exploring the different expressions, developments, and functions of each of these overarching themes in both places, I collated them yet again depending on how they inform each other. Based on this, I identified three self-coherent and clearly distinguishable final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which constitute interrelated narratives. The final themes or dominant narratives I identified in reports on Lützerath are "the symbol", "left extremism", and "the deal". The final themes I identified in reports on the monastery were "activist culture", "the social center", and "the potential threat". Throughout this last step, I added or rearticulated codes as I saw fit. For example, I added "the effectively regulating municipality" and "the responsible private owner" to "the potential threat" narrative on the monastery, and "scared refugees" to the "left extremism" narrative on Lützerath.

After identifying dominant narratives within newspaper articles, I coded press releases, blog posts, and texts published in Tacheles on some of the realities from within the struggles. Hereby, I marked excerpts that relate to final themes or their codes accordingly and, by contrasting them to the dominant narratives, formulated the respective counter narratives. In parallel, I manually transcribed selected parts of interviews with neighbors, villagers, visitors, and inhabitants, depending on whether they spoke to codes or themes of either dominant or counter-narratives. For the remains of each interview, I generated an overview of interview questions and summaries of my interview partners' answers. Hereby, I tried to make sure that transcriptions carry the original meanings and are not altered by wrong punctuations, ignorance of thinking-breaks, or inadequate translation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Overall, by asking how dominant narratives undermine public support for protest by either delegitimizing resistance, co-opting struggle, or legitimizing and normalizing corporate mining and real estate speculation, this approach is interpretative and aims to "identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies - that are theorised as

shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 13) rather than just collecting and describing narratives.

Challenges

Given my partisanship in a polarized conflict, a central challenge during on-site research was to enable genuine conversations and deconstruct (perceived) separations or hierarchies between myself and all other research participants. Language and my appearance were hereby relevant aspects. Against the backdrop of my conscious effort to find sites in Germany, I was aware of and tried to overcome potential language barriers related to local language specificities or the use of slang (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Especially relevant in the context of anarchist spaces and the climate justice movement, is hereby a language based on relationships, rather than possessions, and high sensitivity to pronouns. While I happily adopted a gender-sensitive and non-possessive language to most of my speaking, writing, and thinking, I continued to use "normal" pronouns in my conversations and interviews with neighbors, villagers, and visitors who might oppose the struggles. Hereby, I hoped participants would not immediately associate me with Lützerath or the monastery, as this could create a (latent) barrier between us if they were not supporting it. Moreover, adapting my language was an attempt to avoid any pretension of higher knowledge or moral superiority to not make participants feel uncomfortable for 'political incorrectness', a (perceived)¹⁰¹ 'lack of theoretical understanding', or ignorance of their preferred pronouns.

While a friend's collective in Aachen enabled me to attend to interviews with neighbors with clean clothes, it proved difficult to not look like I belonged to Lützerath after living there for several weeks. Yet, in both cases, my mere interest in conducting research on these two struggles led to several uncomfortable, tense, and superficial conversations, where neighbors, villagers, and visitors reproduced dominant media narratives and projected them on to me¹⁰². Hereby, I was torn between defending the protest or continuing to ask questions, especially if participants' perspectives were based on personal encounters with people engaged in the struggles. However, as the focus of this project is not to investigate the complexities behind such encounters, I made the subjective judgement to refrain from deeper engagement in these conversations (Overton & Dierman, 2003).

¹⁰¹ With this I mean to emphasize, that I do not think people in Lützi or the monastery lacked any understanding of their struggles, but that I did not want to make them *feel* like they did by using academic language.

¹⁰² See footnote 96.

Moreover, while I now consider the retroactive development of most reflections and much of the project's focus on media as an immense strength, the uncertainty involved in such an intuitive and flexible approach often left me doubting this project and my methods. As a result, poor attempts to be more rigorous, more precise, and more 'objective' were limiting factors. Leaving open until I left both sides, what exactly Lützerath and the monastery may be 'a case of' (Soss, 2018), led me to spend a disproportional amount of time working on my computer, constantly revising interview guides, information sheets, field notes, background information and the project's theoretical framing instead of participating, observing, and being on site. Besides struggling with balancing desk work and participation, taking breaks, and remaining confident about this project, it was moreover challenging to accept and embrace that even if intended as descriptive, my fieldnotes carried analytical value and were always incomplete as they are a personal selection of the most interesting observations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Yet, the more I got involved in everyday life and press work in Lützerath, the more I let go of any attempt of "gathering representative data" and instead built on the most interesting and genuine conversations (Overton & Dierman, 2003). As my focus on media narratives only evolved through participation in Lützerath's media working group, I moreover did not engage much with people who wrote the monastery's press releases, blogposts, and social-media posts. Finally, given my decision to study socio-ecological struggles in Germany, I had to translate almost all empirical material. While I did my best to be conscious about language specifics (for example the different meanings of "home" in German, see chapter 7, p.11) this is still a possible limitation.

Conclusion

Based on intensive and extensive participative local research from August 2022 to and beyond early February 2023, this project analyses how and why dominant narratives about two interwoven place-based and anti-capitalist struggles deviate from on-the-ground experiences. I approached research with a highly flexible methodology mostly guided by intuition, curiosity, and honesty. Based on an understanding of objectivity as a continuum, this thesis represents a partisan and personalized version of frontline anthropology (Dunlap, 2017), aiming to generate reciprocal (Grosfoguel, 2020) and 'insurrectionary knowledge' (Dunlap, 2020c). Along this line, I sought to overcome dichotomies between sites, homes, and research participants, whose anonymity is a priority of this project. Moreover, I experienced several challenges associated with the uncertainty and flexibility of my approach, which turned out to become either negligible limitations, or even strengths. The following two

chapters demonstrate the effects of the PM's filters on news stories told about the monastery and Lützerath in AZ and RP. Their objective is to draw out, whose realities journalists hear, whose they silence, and how those that are heard become "facts" that legitimize mining and real-estate speculation. Hereby, these chapters also delineate some of the worlds emerging from dissent and demonstrate, how they are systematically marginalized and even silenced.

6 Corporate media reporting on the monastery and systematically marginalized or silenced realities

I identified three dominant narratives about the monastery in articles of *Aachener Zeitung* (AZ) between the monastery's reclamation in August 2021 and my last visit there in February 2023. I call these narratives "activist culture", "the social center", and "the potential threat" and traced them back to official statements quoted in the first articles. Over time journalists and editors establish these narratives as "facts" through steady repetition. They juxtapose reworded and fragmented counter narratives with quoted official statements of politicians, public institutions, and CR Investment (CR), present dominant narratives in background information boxes, and state them without their sources. Keeping in mind the structural constraints of Germany's media landscape elaborated on in chapter 4, this chapter explores how journalists express dominant narratives, how these "facts" are produced¹⁰³, and which realities they silence or marginalize. For the last part, I contrast dominant narratives to statements, experiences, and investigations of the monastery's users public statements (AB and ac-besetzen)¹⁰⁴, some of their neighbors¹⁰⁵, and publications of the local right to the city initiative "Recht auf Stadt Aachen" (RASA).

"Activist culture"

Journalists express the narrative of "activist culture" by ascribing alienating designations to the monastery's users and by presenting counter-narratives as one opinion in "the housing debate". The main characters of this narrative are the young "squatters", "occupants", or "activists", who hold exceptionally strong opinions in "the housing debate". To voice these opinions, they act in the realm of a spectacular but isolated case of real-estate speculation. Their opinions and willingness to act on them make them fundamentally different from "normal" citizens. Overly politically engaged, they live a distinctive lifestyle, whereby they

¹⁰³ The order in which I present them is not successive, as narratives build upon and reinforce each other (consider this also for the next chapter).

¹⁰⁴ Note that some press releases of AB are published on their blog, while others are not accessible online. For clarity, I reference those available online as authored by the blogs author (ac-besetzen), and those offline as authored by AB. In the main text I refer to the monastery's inhabitants as AB.

¹⁰⁵ Note that peoples' opinions are not always coherent or homogenous. Thus, I occasionally reference neighbors' statements to illustrate both, the dominant narrative, and the counter-narrative.

mainly follow their own radical goals, rather than speaking to local concerns or providing realistic solutions for larger societal issues. I encountered this dominant narrative in one of my first conversations about the monastery with a local Green Party politician. By laughing about their solar panels, they appeared to make fun of the monastery's ambitions to live self-sufficiently (Fieldnotes, 02.08.2022). Similarly, a neighbor, whom I asked about her first thoughts when she heard about the monastery's reclamation, wondered first about who the people living in "such places" are and if they have jobs. Thereafter, she described her abstention towards this "quite left" space as the result of not being able to identify with this "very free life" since she has too much to do already (Fieldnotes, 16.08.2022).

Youth and fundamental difference

All articles almost exclusively refer to the monastery's inhabitants as "squatters", "activists", or "occupants", and occasionally as "young people". As the first article on the monastery's reclamation illustrates, these designations and their emphasis on age likely originate from statements of politicians and CR. According to journalists, Michael Rau (Green Party)

[...] lauds the young people's engagement [...]: "The squatters show what a beautiful place it is, [...]." (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

Likewise, another journalist quotes CR's first reaction and designation for the monastery's inhabitants: "Yesterday, unfortunately, the occupants untruthfully claimed that [...]" (Gombert, 2021d). These designations imply a distinctive identity by pointing out the monastery's users' age, illegality, and extraordinary engagement. Following their first three visits to the monastery, journalists emphasize youth and distinctiveness by describing the monastery as follows:

[...] Blues music plays softly from a small jukebox, freshly printed T-shirts hang from a clothesline [...] "we've set up a screen-printing workshop here and print T-shirts. We even have our own logo", [the young woman] says and laughs [...]. Marketing-ready squat: The group of young people who moved into the [monastery] has even developed its own logo [...]. (Gombert, 2021a)

[...] Where there used to be prayers, there is now a foosball table. There is a "free store" where consumption critics can "shop" donated clothing for free, a sports room, and a "drug-free living room" one is only allowed to enter soberly. In short, there's life in the hut again. [...] How realistic is the monastery squatters' idea [...] to develop the monastery into a social center for all Aacheners? [...]. There had also been a "bureaucracy working group," in which [the squatters] had argued about whether they needed to organize themselves as an association or otherwise institutionalize themselves in some way to be able to express their demands - more affordable housing, more public space for everyone - more strongly. "But that was too stressful for some of us. We are currently more anarchistic." (Gombert, 2021c)

As these excerpts exemplify, early articles portray the politically engaged, playful, creative, cozy, and lively youth, distinctive through living with less money and more common spaces.

Repeated reference to "their own logo" supports this distinctiveness. Similarly, the journalist's brief reference to anarchism after questioning how realistic the monastery's idea is, presents its reclamation as an exclusive and naïve temporary solution, thereby upholding prejudices about anarchist as chaotic, unrealistic, and isolated. Later, journalists omit their previous emphasis on age and refer to the monastery's users simply as "squatters" or "occupants". After another visit on the day of the electricity cut, a journalist suddenly refers to them as "activists" again¹⁰⁶:

[...] The activists call the electricity cut a turning point. "We will be self-sufficient in energy from now on," the activists announce in their letter. Some "concrete approaches" already exist, they say, and more ideas, especially sustainable ones, are to be collected [...]. The activists are inventive. Warm water can be obtained [...] for example, by placing water in a black container in the sun [...]. (Kasties, 2022a)

Again, the journalist describes the monastery's users through portraying them as distinct: with the electricity cut, their idea of the social center seems to prove unrealistic. To adhere to their cause, they live in frugality by becoming resilient, innovative, and self-sufficient. Yet, their attempts to live "sustainably" are unappealing and unrealistic compared to "normal" living standards and reaffirm their failed ambitions. In connection to this "repulsiveness", another article published on the same day claims to remove clichés around squatting by highlighting the monastery's unexpected "neatness":

[...] The squatter scene tidies up, literally: With prejudices. A look into the monastery on the Lousberg, built in 1869 and occupied – mind you, illegally - since August 2021, disproves many clichés. Dirty, destroyed, run-down? No way! The church interior is clean, a plush horse dangles from the top of the sanctuary, and a neat secondhand seating group in front of it. A well-maintained kitchen, fine graffiti on some walls, the dormitories are in good shape. The highlight of the tour through the former monastery is the garden. A blooming delight, worth protecting [...]. (Esser, 2022)

Yet, the author paves the way for subsequent associations of darkness, cold, discomfort, and emptiness, with which a journalist describes the monastery after the electricity cut *on the same day*:

On this morning, these many small elements are well visible. Still. A few hours later, the colorful rainbow flag in the air and the fire extinguisher on the ground will disappear in the darkness [...]. There are certainly more cozy places to spend the evening [...]. A socio-cultural place should be created at the Lousbergstraße in Aachen, a place of encounter. Several events have already taken place [...]. Recently, however, the calendar was much emptier [...]. (Kasties, 2022a)

¹⁰⁶ Journalists used "activists" in the first article's title.



Image 33: The monastery's chorus, neat and clean. This picture was published together with Gombert's (2021c; 2021d) articles which report on the monastery festival and thereafter, CR's first official reaction. Source: Andreas Herrmann, 2021.

The housing debate

Besides emphasizing youth and difference, journalists embed articles in "the housing debate" by (partially) quoting politicians' comments on the monastery. These refrain entirely from mentioning official reports on gentrification, displacement, and segregation in Aachen, hence Rau's "concerns" are as such:

[...] The former monastery is a "prime example of terrible speculation" that, after several owners in London, has ended up with a company that speculates in real-estate worldwide [...]. (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

Thereafter, a journalist describes the monastery as a "true real-estate crime":

[...] Abandoned as a monastery, the listed building was sold on again and again. The last owner, the "German Property Group," is suspected of having collected money from international investors for the renovation of historic buildings without having invested this money into buildings. According to industry insiders, the [monastery] in Aachen is encumbered with 17 million euros. This is a sum that likely far exceeds the real value of the old building, and this is thus just one of many examples [...]. (Gombert, 2021a)

Based on Rau's statement, journalists scandalize the monastery as an isolated case of "terrible" real-estate speculation and one immoral private investor. While journalists quote and build on Rau's statement, they reword the monastery's users:

[...] Affordable housing and meeting places would be pushed back further to make way for more lucrative projects [...]. (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

[...] It would be clear that a use as a social center and for affordable housing is not compatible with profit interests [...]. (Gombert, 2021b)

As these excerpts illustrate, journalists portray the monastery as a causality by juxtaposing official statements with the monastery's statements in the subjunctive form. Displacement appears as an accident, the fear of a few, and the "activists" who care appear as overly empathic. Based on the same mechanism, journalists nearly ignore the monastery's anti-discriminatory efforts of providing safer spaces for FLINTA and BIPOC. While official statements on "the housing debate" lack any reference to gender- or ethnicity-based discrimination, journalists only briefly mention the monastery's anti-discriminatory efforts once and only in connection to amusement:

[...] Several events have already taken place. Readings, workshops, a queer festival with art, music and literature [...]. (Kasties, 2022b)¹⁰⁷

Without further elaboration on gender-based discrimination regarding access to socio-cultural spaces *and* housing, FLINTA and queer struggles appear alien, too radical, and as a "nice to have" that concerns only a small number of people with strong opinions. Similarly, journalists refrain entirely from mentioning the monastery's BIPOC safer space and ethnicity-based discrimination related to housing, although Aachen's "Action Concept for Housing" (Stadt Aachen, 2022) explicitly aims to reduce segregation¹⁰⁸. Consequentially, and likely influenced by their positionalities as binary Western Europeans with academic backgrounds (AZ, 2022), journalists neglects if not silence Aachen's housing shortage, gentrification, and discrimination throughout their entire reporting on the monastery. Instead, they scandalize vacancies and individualizes people's struggles for access to urban as personal failures in a "naturally" competitive market. Demands for non-commercial housing, inclusive spaces, and the expropriation of those that speculate with urban space become one overly empathic and strong opinion from the "far left" corner of "the debate". Along this line, the monastery's reclamation is portrayed as a single-issue campaign that follows certain interests associated with a minority's concerns and their distinctive culture but remains inherently irrelevant and unrealistic on a larger societal scale. Illustrative of this narrative, a neighbor expressed that

¹⁰⁷ Thereby journalists ignore AB's announcement that "[t]he part of housing for women, lesbians, inter, non-binary, trans and agender people was already inaugurated today." (ac-besetzen, 2021f)

¹⁰⁸ Note, that Aachen's "Action Concept for Housing" (2022) only specifically aims to reduce socio-economic segregation and is less specific about ethnicity-based segregation. However, as socio-economic, and ethnicity-based discrimination intersect, both forms of segregation are also connected.

anarchist communities isolate themselves from society. When I asked him about associations with anarchism, he responded:

[...] Well, I can't imagine total anarchism, it doesn't work at all. There can't be a society completely without rules [...] so I think for many people who say ok I'm an anarchist [...], that maybe they did not think the concept through [...] we still live in a social context. So of course, I can still build up my anarchist Lenin camp somewhere nice, but at some point, I must deal with the fact that 200 meters behind the camp there is still a society somewhere where people go to work and where people pay for their gas prices that are way too high and I just can't get out of this context [...]. (Interview #5, 08.09.2022)

More offensively, another neighbor described the monastery as exclusive and discriminatory. Based on his friends' descriptions about the FLINTA hallway and a tag saying, "no entrance for capitalist pigs" he contended that these "different zones", some of which were "man free", discriminated him (Fieldnotes, 10.08.2022).

Which debate?

In contrast, AB, RASA, and some neighbors use less identity-focused (self-) designations that emphasize what the monastery's users do and why, instead of who they are. Concomitantly, they embed the monastery's reclamation in a wider political context and emphasize that gentrification, displacement, real-estate speculation, and systemic discrimination are real, intensifying, and well-known issues. These continue to be structurally produced through hierarchies and the commodification of space and housing. Accordingly, the monastery's 12-year vacancy is not a causality, but the consequence of a larger historical political-economic process. Thus, the monastery's reclamation is not motivated by extreme opinions and self-interest in a debate about *whether* affordable housing and gender- or ethnicity-based discrimination are issues in Aachen. Instead, AB, RASA, and neighbors explain *why* these issues continue to intensify and describe the monastery's reclamation as a non-debatable, logical, and emancipatory response to systemic injustice and oppression. The monastery's reclamation is not a minority's desire but speaks to the majority's realities. Accordingly, self-designations such as "users", "(monastery) inhabitants", or simply "the monastery" emphasize people's "normal" activity of using and inhabiting a space, rather than emphasizing their illegal, or "overly active", and distinctive identity. Further, "inhabiting" describes people's relation to the monastery, while "occupying" emphasizes their non-ownership and illegality¹⁰⁹. Moreover, while journalists' designations include female "occupants" or

¹⁰⁹ Occasionally used self-designations like "occupying person(s)" still emphasize peoples' activity over their identity.

"activists" at most, the monastery includes non-binary people¹¹⁰ by spelling all self-designations with a *¹¹¹. Moreover, AB never mention their age but elaborate on anarchism in a press release published on their blog titled *One week of the squatted monastery*:

[...] We are thrilled about how the monastery becomes more beautiful every day. Everything was organized by ourselves without hierarchies or a master plan. Many people simply came along with their ideas, their initiative, their knowledge and together they implemented many projects" says one occupying person [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021f)

In addition to gender and ageism sensitive self-designations that focus on relations and practices, this statement scrutinizes social organization that builds on discrimination and exclusion, and instead celebrates openness and inclusivity. Likewise, the monastery's efforts to offer housing for FLINTAs expresses and opposes a lack of such spaces in Aachen. Illustrating the inclusionary potential of opposing hierarchies, a direct neighbor of the monastery who visited its 8-week celebration responded to my question, whether he had learned any new words through his encounters:

[...] I definitely got to know new words. I [...] was [...] not familiar with all the terms, that was definitely horizon-expanding [...], for example I didn't know what FLINTA was, I couldn't do anything with cis¹¹² man either, somehow this all passed by me, but... I know that there are these terms now [this has] perhaps created more awareness for it [...]. (Interview #2, 30.08.2022)

In addition to the monastery's intersectional and liberatory approach, RASA investigates the political context of housing shortages in Aachen¹¹³. In their contribution *Housing shortage during Corona* (2020) they inform:

[...] The black/yellow state government in North Rhine-Westphalia [has] slashed the rent law. As a result, landlords can increase the rent more, demand a higher rent when moving in, and terminate tenancies more easily [...]. In Aachen, 105,000 of all 140,000 households are affected by the changes. The consequences will therefore be felt by the entire population of Aachen [...].

Further they add, that under the local government of CDU and SPD, Aachen

[became] a business. Enormous rent increases were tolerated. In part, they were triggered by image campaigns for the "science city" and upgrading programs such as in Aachen East or North. As a result, there is now a strong tendency toward gentrification and segregation between rich and poor. Nevertheless, the city has allowed investors to build new residential

¹¹⁰ One journalist mentions that "the monastery occupants, [call] themselves "Besetzies"" (Gombert, 2021c), which can be understood as a non-binary form of "occupant". However, complete reluctance to use this designation in later articles illustrates the extent to which journalists marginalize AB's self-designations rather than accidentally overlooking them.

¹¹¹ This is specific to the German language.

¹¹² "Cisgender" describes people, who identify with the gender they have been assigned with at their birth.

¹¹³ Journalists entirely ignore these investigations, although the first article published on the monastery's reclamation was titled "Debate about housing: Activists occupy monastery on Lousbergstrasse".

buildings without a single affordable apartment. Examples are the Schwedenpark, the Mephisto-Höfe or the planned new building in Augustastraße.

By connecting increasing rents, tenants' limited rights, and segregation in Aachen to recent federal policies and local urban development, RASA embed individuals' housing struggles in a wider political context. Similarly, RASA's contribution *On the subject of re-densification* (2021a), published shortly prior to the monastery's reclamation, criticizes the municipality for assisting private interests:

[...] Under the CDU government, the city of Aachen has made clear what re-densification and top-down neoliberal urban planning mean. In many cases, investors were allowed to build exclusively high-priced housing under the guise of the "necessity of re-densification". These include the Mephisto-Höfe or the Schweden-Park in the Frankenberger Viertel, Karlsgraben 12, or the Benediktinerhöfe in Burtscheid etc. The list of luxury building projects is long. In addition, the city allowed 40% of the new construction to consist of micro apartments. For these 26 m² small cells, which are mainly rented to students, the highest rents can be demanded [...].

By referring to Aachen's *Housing Market Report* (2020), RASA continue, that

[...] in recent years the share of apartments with rents above €10 per m² has increased the most [...]. The consequence of this development is that today 46% of all households in Aachen have to spend more than the recommended 30% of their income on rent - which puts Aachen in 4th place nationwide in terms of the rent burden ratio [...].¹¹⁴

In their later contribution *Vacancy in Aachen*, RASA (2021b) moreover criticize the same report for allowing and downplaying vacancy:

[...] About 5000 apartments are vacant while people cannot find affordable housing, are housed in cramped collective accommodations, locked up in camps or sleeping on the streets. Recent projections say it could be as many as 8,559 empty apartments¹¹⁵ [...]. In a city where the housing shortage is so severe and displacement so obvious, 5,000 apartments is a lot. Just as many social housing units will fall out of their price control in the coming years. This number of apartments would accommodate about half of the East Quarter. Since there is hardly any space left for new construction in Aachen, solutions are urgently needed in the housing stock. Putting an end to speculative vacancies is an important contribution to providing more affordable housing [...].

Subsequently, RASA's (2022) text series called *The most influential real-estate companies in Aachen* shows on the examples of *Landmarken AG*, *AC-Immobilien*, *Vonovia*, and *LEG*

[how] strongly these companies influence and exploit urban development for their profits. [...] Whether it's rising rents, the trend toward overpriced micro-apartments, the vacancy rate of downtown stores, or the burgeoning start-up culture or gentrification in Aachen-Nord: these four companies have their fingers in the pie everywhere.

¹¹⁴ According to Aachen's more recent *Action plan for housing* (2022) this number increased again as now "57% of households in Aachen pay more than 30 % of their income on rent" (Stadt Aachen, 2022, p.32).

¹¹⁵ See Holm et al. (2021, p.172).

Similarly, a neighbor who lived next to the monastery since 1976 voiced her frustration about this concentration of power in Aachen. In our interview, she said about the monastery, that it

[...] is a shame that it is vacant, it was totally fine when the nuns moved out. There are certain investors who [...] deal speculatively with things here [...] our great Herrmann¹¹⁶ maybe he was already interested in the monastery, he buys and sells and develops as much as possible around here and then sells it to others, yes, he bought this bunker in Förster street, and then developed it and sold it on, and yes, the tower up there belongs to his son [...] he promises the city great things [until] someone jumps off and then they approve things that they didn't want to approve in the beginning [...] I think that he has way too much power and also way too many connections to the building department [...]. (Interview #7, 08.09.2022)

During our interview N5 who understood anarchism as isolated earlier but generally supported the monastery's cause, described the housing situation in Aachen as follows:

[...] Hmm yes for me it's ok [...], now I'm just a white hetero cis man with studies and [...] my mother was always willing to sign some parental guarantee [...] some absolutely wild things I've already experienced is just how you can be treated as an international and how many requests you have to send off for an apartment inspection up to 100 just for an appointment just because you have a name that doesn't sound German enough [...]. (Interview #5, 08.09.2022)

In response to my question, how he would describe Aachen's housing market, he moreover recounted a situation from his work for the general student committee:

[...] a student called me and asked what she could do, because she had a cat hair allergy and her [neighbor's cat] would constantly come into her house [...] I was first surprised [...] whether she could not just throw the [cat] out [...] then I asked further [...] she was a student from China and lived [...] with some guy [...] who just rents rooms in his house to students but takes away their keys. So, they have no keys to their rooms [...] that's why the cat always comes in. And she has just not questioned this because she comes from a completely different country [...] she just thought yes, it is just this way here [...] internationals who have then sent ten thousand uh inquiries [...] and then have someone who says hey with me you can live cheap... I have already heard [...] of people who live in some garages for €400 a month.

"The social center"

In parallel to the "activist culture" narrative's emphasis on youth and distinctiveness, journalists emphasize the monastery's unachieved ambitions and accordingly, portray their presence as ultimately anti-social. Within this narrative, journalists portray the initially well-intended "activists" whose ambitions of a social center are publicly supported. However, because they fail to get a use-agreement and reject to pay their electricity bills, their "plans" and "demands" become unachievable "wishes". Instead of admitting their failure, the "squatters" begin to accommodate only themselves and live a lazy life in the monastery.

¹¹⁶ Norbert Hermanns is the founder of *Landmarken AG*.

Ignorantly, they do so at the cost of potential investors and society: they do not pay taxes, electricity bills, or rent, and ignore environmental and historical monument concerns. Ultimately, they block the sales process and any further development or use of the monastery. I encountered this narrative in a conversation right before my first visit to the monastery. On this warm and sunny day a few weeks after the electricity cut, I attempted to enter the monastery through its front gate in Lousbergstraße, but it was locked. Although there was a sign saying to go around the corner to find the café, I asked a man waiting next to a post box for directions to start a conversation. When I asked him for the way he became visibly upset and described the monastery's users as "ticks"¹¹⁷ and "eco-pigs" who do not sort their waste and are motivated by some kind of "pseudo-ecology" leading him to conclude that "[...] the occupants take away from society." (Fieldnotes, 03.08.2022)

Unachieved ambitions

Journalists emphasize the monastery's unachieved ambitions by describing their activities not just as "squatting" or "occupying", but through highlighting "ambitious plans" to "use" and "contribute":

[...] They have occupied the abandoned abbey and want to put ambitious plans into action [...]. They want to use the former monastery as a neighborhood meeting place and thus contribute to ensuring that the old building does not deteriorate any further [...]. (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

As well as to "create", "inspire", "maintain", and "cooperate":

[...] Anyone who talks to the squatters quickly realizes that good cooperation with the neighborhood and all other interest groups around the monastery is important to them. "We have contacted the responsible insolvency administrator and want to talk about toleration until it is certain what will happen to this area," they say. They have also already spoken with the office of Mayor Sibylle Keupen [...]. A large "to do" list for the workmen hangs in the nave. Mold is to be fought and the wall of the garden repaired [...]. The occupation should be a first impulse for what could be created "in cooperation with the neighborhood" [...]. (Gombert, 2021a)

Alongside these positively connotated descriptions, early articles highlight public support to the monastery's "commitment" and "demands":

[...] Some neighbors have already paid a visit to the monastery and seem to be quite in agreement with the squatters' plans [...]. Michael Rau of the Green Party praises the commitment of the young people [...]. (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

¹¹⁷ Common negative designation for "squatters" co-opted by some who call themselves ticks with pride as they "suck blood" from a sick and destructive system.

[...] In any case, the green areas surrounding the approximately 150-year-old building ensemble are to be secured and further developed in the future "in harmony with climate and environmental concerns" to preserve existing open spaces in the city center [says Michael Rau]. As is well known, this is also demanded by a group of squatters who took up residence on Lousbergstrasse a few days ago in order to create a kind of meeting and cultural center there [...]. (Hinrichs, 2021)

Neighbors too, welcome this "temporary solution":

[...] "I think it's important what the young people are doing here," says another visitor to the monastery festival [...]. But - let's be honest - this is not a permanent state!" [...]. (Gombert, 2021c)

As these excerpts of early articles indicate, journalists describe the monastery's users' ambitions as generally welcomed but unachieved, temporary, or mere demands. A subsequent statement perpetuates this assertion by extending the monastery's vacancy into the present:

[...] Now that the bidding process for the monastery on Lousbergstrasse has been halted, it remains unclear what will happen to the property, which has been vacant for twelve years [...]. (Eimer, 2021)

Likewise, one of the final articles ultimately declares the social center as a mere "wish":

[...] For more than a year, activists have been occupying the listed building in Aachen. They wish for a place of encounter, a cultural site [...]. (Kasties, 2022c)

The ignorant and anti-social squat

Building on these unmet expectations, journalists replace ambitiousness with negatively connotated descriptions for inhabiting the monastery after the condemning statements of CR and in parallel to the municipality's gradual disassociation. After the monastery rejected guided tours for potential investors, one journalist contends:

[...] The sale of the former monastery on Lousbergstrasse continues to drag on. Meanwhile, the squatters declare that their stay is tolerated until August 2022 [...]. (Gombert, 2021d)

Based on the "fact", that the monastery's users "declared that their stay is tolerated", the same journalist continues with a reworded version of AB's press release:

[...] This press release made people sit up and take notice: "Prospect of agreement on the use of the monastery" was the subject line of an e-mail sent by the squatters of the former monastery on Aachen's Lousbergstraße [...]. It said that one was in a "friendly conversation" with the responsible real-estate company about how to proceed with the sale despite the squat. Until August next year the use should be tolerated, wrote the squatters [...].

She then juxtaposes it with CR's quoted response:

[...] "Yesterday, unfortunately, the squatters untruthfully claimed to have reached a usage agreement with the insolvency administrator. This claim is untrue. No occupancy agreement has been reached." And it continues: "The occupation of the property is and remains illegal. Investors who have already suffered losses are being deprived of their money by the illegal measures taken by the occupiers [...]."

While claiming to "hear all sides", the journalist portrays the dishonest, illegal, and money-depriving squatter by treating CR's statement as a fact¹¹⁸. Accordingly, a subsequent article characterizes inhabiting the monastery as "support-seeking" and "still planning":

[...] Meanwhile, the squatters are looking for supporters for their plan to turn the listed building into a meeting place for culture, social affairs, and politics [...]. (AZ, 2021)

While emphasizing the monastery's need for support, journalists "prove" the social center's non-existence by emphasizing the monastery's status as a monument and quoting the municipality's additional requirements for a desirable future:

[...] In any case, a conversion of the former monastery buildings could only take place in a harmonious relationship with the existing environment, "in order to complement its existing infrastructure, for example in cultural, economic, [social] or educational terms, or to support its further development as a residential district [...]. (Hinrichs, 2021)

And according to the municipal press office,

[...] [t]he monastery is a valuable urban building block that should be put to public welfare-oriented use [...]. (Gombert, 2021d)

Based on the social center's "non-existence", the monastery's user' "dishonesty", and further statements of CR, journalists describe the monastery as "obstructive" and "illegal":

[...] It is currently difficult for potential buyers to gain access to the historic facility because it has been occupied by predominantly young people for almost four months [...] the bidding process recently initiated was stopped by the company in charge of the sale [...]. The intention now is first to end the illegal occupation and then to start a new sales process, it is said [...]. (Eimer, 2021)

[...] the exclusive marketer of the properties, the "CR Investment Group", is now to make money for the creditors on behalf of the insolvency administrator. This is said to have already succeeded with many recently sold GPG properties [...]. However, from the point of view of the "CR Investment Group", this seems to be even more difficult in Aachen, as long as the property is occupied. (Esser, 2022)

One of the last articles treats the "obstructive occupation" as neutral information by including CR's statement in its "background information box":

[...] The illegal occupation of the monastery in Aachen has made an orderly bidding process impossible," a spokeswoman for CR Investment Management [...] said [...]. For that reason, she said, CR Investment Management, in consultation with the insolvency administration,

¹¹⁸ I will come back to this instance under "the social center's" counter narratives.

decided to halt the bidding process until the illegal occupation was resolved [...]. (Kasties, 2022b)

Meanwhile, journalists describe inhabiting the monastery as "taking over", "persevering", and "self-accommodating":

[...] In August last year, the monastery was taken over by squatters, some of whom persevere there to this day. The extent to which they have accommodated themselves there is unclear. According to their own statements, they are aiming for a longer-term use, the talk is of a social and cultural meeting place in the Lousberg district [...]. (Eimer, 2022)

While denouncing the social center as "mere talk", the same journalist attaches further anti-social characteristics to the monastery. His article ends with juxtaposing SPD politician Michael Servos' suggestion that "[t]here should be enough rooms" for a refugee accommodation with the monastery's "abstention" to this proposal, as "[n]one of the occupants, however, wanted to comment on this idea spontaneously." Apparently, the "self-accommodating", "persevering", and "illegal occupants" hesitate to offer the monastery to those displaced by war. In a similar tone, reports on the electricity cut present the monastery's users as money-depriving and anti-social by explaining that the electricity was turned off due to €15.000 debt in unpaid electricity bills based on statements of the public utility provider STAWAG. One author rewords AB's statements saying:

[...] For the squatters, the demands of STAWAG were not fully known, for some the immediate disconnection of the power was therefore a surprise [...]. (Kasties, 2022a)

Thereafter, she quotes STAWAG:

[...] All in all, we are adhering to our procedure for comparable business transactions with payment defaults in this case as well," informs press spokeswoman Eva Wußing. "In recent months, [...] there have been several requests for payment of energy and water costs - this was also known to the occupants [...].

As with statements of CR and a politician, journalists treat STAWAG's comments about the "indebted and incapable squatter" as a fact that contradicts and discredits "the squatters' claims". One of the final articles illustrates this credibility hierarchy:

[...] For a few months now, however, meetings [at the monastery] have not been going very well. When there is no electricity - because bills have not been paid for - and it gets dark earlier, understandably not too many people want to dance salsa or listen to readings in an illegally occupied building with thick walls [...]. (Kasties, 2022c)

While almost sarcastically emphasizing the social centers' "failure", the same journalist reuses an earlier quoted statement of CR:

[...] "The illegal occupation of the monastery in Aachen has made an orderly bidding process impossible," a spokeswoman for CR Investment Management told our newspaper last week -

and in the same breath accused the city and security authorities of "tolerating and apparently approving" the occupation [...].

After highlighting the monastery's "obstructiveness" yet again, she quotes the municipality: "The occupation of the monastery is neither tolerated nor approved by the city of Aachen [...]." In a later article, the same journalist reuses CR's quote again, in addition to rewording it in the same article without reference to CR as the source, stating that "[t]he ongoing occupation of the property since August 2021 does not make its sale any easier" (Kasties, 2022d). While treating "the obstructive occupation" as a fact, she moreover describes the monastery as exclusive:

[...] The bicycle lock blocks the entrance. The striking entrance gate is secured with a massive chain. Without a suitable key and without the squatters' consent, no one can enter the monastery [...]. The fact that the Aachen monastery is not one of [the already sold properties] is also due to the men and women, who currently stay in the building [...].

By blaming the stagnating sales process on the now grown up "men and women", the journalist builds on the age-related expectations created through the "activist culture" narrative and creates the image of the ignorant and irresponsible squatter. Like statements of CR, politicians, and STAWAG, journalists generally describe the monastery as initially ambitious, but ultimately exclusive, obstructive, and anti-social. I encountered these sentiments on several occasions during on site research. In a conversation with direct neighbors of the monastery, one of them said that it was not fair that taxpayers pay for the squatters' electricity and water, after all the help the squatters already received from the neighborhood (Fieldnotes, 10.08.2022). Similarly, another neighbor who lived next to the monastery since 2015 stated in our interview, that "[i]t is a pity that [the monastery] is not used [optimally by the squatters]¹¹⁹" and that "[t]hings that are borne by the general public, [...] they would have to be paid for." (Interview #1, 30.08.2022)

Both informants tolerated the monastery but seemed disappointed by "the failed social center" and the monastery's users' "anti-social behavior". Similarly, another neighbor who said he was not curious about the monastery still wondered during our interview,

[w]hether [the occupation] is simply to set a sign, which for me would probably not be thought far enough, because somehow I would then also want that there is a goal that it can be rebuilt, or that one tries to enter into talks with the sponsor of the monastery, because only occupy and then the situation drags on for years [...] I think I would find it difficult to see that as a permanent solution, because then one has also not progressed in the sense that the property is [still not purposefully used in relation to its surrounding area]. (Interview #3, 01.09.2022)

¹¹⁹ Another translation of could be that it is not "needed".

Concluding that "the occupation" could only be temporary, he pointed out the monastery's potential obstructiveness in his response to my question about a potential eviction. Expecting its users to "return the building to society", he said:

[...] That would be the logical consequence [...] I don't know what the goals of the squatters are, but for me at least I assume or hope that the goal is to continue using the site, so I wouldn't really believe that it comes to an eviction, but rather hope that the squatters leave voluntarily because the goal has perhaps been achieved. Otherwise, I would also agree to an eviction [...] if a new use is found for the site and the squatters [...] stand in the way of progress [...].

The social center already exists

In contrast to emphasizing unachieved ambitions, the monastery's unknown future, and its ultimate dependency on "being sponsored by society", AB, RASA, and some neighbors stress the monastery's present use. Instead of emphasizing imperfection and unfulfilled plans, they highlight real encounters, appreciation, and solidarity, as the monastery's reclamation and the subsequent months of living there already make it more accessible. While affirming the social center's existence, they scrutinize the municipality's and CR's disinterest and explicate their conditions for further negotiations. Shortly after the monastery's reclamation, AB highlight the monastery's liveliness in their invitation to their press conference on August 31st, 2021:

[...] Hundreds of people have already been here, especially from the neighborhood. We have gardened together and on Saturday there will be a concert [...] this would never be implemented by profit-oriented investors [...]. (AB, 2021a)

In their previous press release published on their blog, a visiting neighbor describes the monastery as a valuable place of encounter:

[...] "At an open garden meeting I got into conversation for the first time with people with whom I have lived on the same street for years. After only one week, the open monastery is already enriching the neighborhood on the Lousberg. I wish that this place will be preserved!" [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021f)

Later, AB continue to highlight common activities and the involvement of neighbors in a press release regarding the monastery festival, a celebration of 8 weeks of occupation:

[...] For the festival, 30 people from the monastery have prepared a diverse cultural and musical program: from information lectures and guided tours of the monastery, dance workshops and concerts to the Küfa, a "kitchen for all" - everything without admission and on a donation basis [...]. While the insolvency administration is still busy trying to shed light on the adventurous ownership of the building, the monastery rooms are already filling with life - and thanks to several donations from the neighborhood, also with furniture. In the meantime, there are various living rooms, a kitchen, a sports room, workrooms, a screening workshop [...]. (AB, 2021b)

AB further emphasize neighbors' solidarity with sharing a solidarity picture taken during the first monastery festival:

[...] During a concert in the church of the occupied monastery, neighbors took this solidarity photo to demand the use of the monastery as a social center. What a great support for our project! [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021g)



Image 34: Neighbors supporting the monastery with a solidarity photo in autumn 2021. The banner on the top says: "housing for all, build the city from below". Source: ac-besetzen, 2021g.

As AB and their neighbors' response emphasize, inhabiting the monastery itself creates a social center. The existence and importance of this uncommercial meeting place is further

stressed through references to the open intent letter¹²⁰ after CR ended the bidding process in December 2021:

[...] We already use the monastery for the common good in cooperation with various Aachen groups [...]. Among the projects and events in the squatted monastery that have already been realized and will continue to be organized - regardless of the outcome of a bidding process - are the Küfa (kitchen for all), social counseling, concerts, a repair workshop, jam sessions, dance and sports groups, and the use of the plenary rooms. On Monday, Dec. 12, 2021, a broad alliance of Aachen actors, associations and groups published a declaration of intent to express interest in and solidarity with the monastery project. The alliance plans to use the former monastery as a social and cultural meeting place as well as for the non-commercial, self-managed use of existing living space and strives for the realization of many other projects and events for the public [...]. (AB, 2021c)

[...] To signal how serious the demand for self-administration is, the squatters, together with us and over 25 other initiatives, have sent a letter of intent to the city with concept ideas for a long-term use of the monastery. So, there are use-concepts and the will to develop and implement them [...]. (RASA, 2021c)¹²¹

Besides emphasizing local solidarity, rather than their "need for support", AB's press release about the temporary use agreement with CR deconstructs the "dishonest squatter". Rather than asserting a successful agreement, AB merely announced hopes about a prospective one. They outlined transparency, the active involvement of neighbors, and a temporary use contract as conditions for further negotiations in a press release on the investor tour published on their blog:

[...] 1. The events surrounding the building and its owners have been opaque and a source of uncertainty for the neighborhood and the rest of the public. We therefore demand that potential investors disclose their plans for the building before a possible inspection, so that public discourse can happen.

2. The monastery has already been transformed into a cultural and social meeting place in the past two months, which has proven to be valuable and necessary for the whole neighborhood and beyond. For this reason, it is necessary to prevent the building from becoming vacant again in the period until a possible new use is found [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021i)

AB continue, that they

[...] drafted a temporary use agreement. In this way, the insolvency administrators and future owners can prove that they are also interested in taking responsibility towards the people of Aachen and in the meaningful use of the monastery. The squatters hope to maintain friendly and open communication with the administrators of the building and find a way for the future use of the monastery together [...].

¹²⁰ Journalists refer to this letter, but sideline that many local groups signed it in explicit solidarity with the monastery, and that ideas for a use concept exist.

¹²¹ Note, that RASA's (2021c) solidarity statement was published one day after the respective article in AZ. However, closer investigation into the letter could have resulted in a stronger emphasis local solidarity with the monastery's current use.

Rather than blocking the monastery's future, AB frequently emphasize their openness to negotiate with the municipality and under certain conditions with potential investors:

[...] Of course, we are interested in public discussions about the future of the monastery. We are ready to listen to the ideas of prospective buyers. They are welcome to contact us directly. But the priority is that the monastery does not become a profit-oriented place [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2022h)

[...] In the event of a sale, we believe that the city would be better suited to fulfill these conditions than Landmarken AG or investors from Munich. We would therefore like to ask you, if you are still interested in an inspection, to contact us directly [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021i)

Accordingly, AB's conditions for negotiations contrast CR's and journalists' depiction of the "dishonest and obstructive squatters" by demanding transparency and involvement, while continuing to use the monastery. Similarly, I encountered a father from Ukraine during my stay in the monastery, who visited us to seek help with documents. Contrary to the journalists' description of the monastery's "abstention" regarding accommodating refugees, one of the monastery's inhabitants explained to me, that they lived with the man and his family for several months last winter. However, the monastery concluded, that they could not provide enough stability or decent living conditions for people in such difficult life situations (Fieldnotes, 07.09.2022). Besides these practical concerns, the politician's idea of the refugee accommodation carries xenophobic sentiments in form of spatially separating refugees from "citizens", as well as subjugating refugees to discriminatory official asylum acceptance procedures. Additionally, politicians only discuss this option as a last resort after the municipality has already declared the lack of an official use concept, sufficient resources, and knowledge about the building's condition.¹²² Henceforth, an official refugee accommodation would merely "dispense of the leftovers no one wants anyways", while the monastery's users' "abstention" actually derives from respect towards refugees. AB's later press release considering the electricity cut similarly scrutinize STAWAG's reluctance to negotiate with or support the monastery. While condemning the untransparent sales process, AB reject any responsibility for the costs piled up through living in the monastery as they already dedicate their time and energy to oppose real-estate speculation and making the monastery more accessible. As they write in a press release on July 14th, 2022:

¹²² See in Eimer (2022): "Now everything indicates that the city will not participate in a new round of sales. One reason is the continued lack of information about the need for renovation, but another is the limited municipal capacities to create a use concept demanded by the SPD. [...] Under these circumstances, the monastery complex could perhaps still be used meaningfully at present as accommodation for war refugees, muses SPD politician Michael Servos."

[...] Due to the non-transparent behavior of the insolvency administration, debts of more than 15,000€ have accumulated with STAWAG in the last months. A request for payment by 15.06.2022 was not complied with [...]. Since it is impossible to meet these demands and since STAWAG has informed us that it will not enter into a business relationship with us under any circumstances, there was no more room for negotiation and at 10:30 a.m. we were finally cut off from the electricity [...]. (AB, 2022)

"The potential threat"

While the "activist culture" and "social center" narratives portray the monastery as the project of a few individuals with extreme opinions, whose ambitious plans fail and burden society, a third narrative additionally portrays them as a potential threat. Journalists describe the caring and effectively regulating municipality, whose democratically elected politicians are eagerly engaged in the decision-making process about the monastery. Hereby, "large-scale public participation", "the common good", and "environmental protection" are already uttermost priorities and diminish the need for protest. A "sustainable" future, however, can only be ensured by a responsible and competent private developer. Squatting, on the other side, is a crime. It is inherently illegal, undemocratic, and illegitimate, and squatters are always a potential threat to certain individuals, their right to private property, and even to the public, as adhering to the rule of law will sooner or later entail a potentially violent eviction. Until now, however, Aachen's attentive police have everything under control and ensure the public's safety. While people I spoke with did not seem scared of the monastery, N44's unquestioned trust in laws, the municipality's responsibility, and private property illustrate this narrative's echo in public opinion. Describing himself as naive, he responded to my question about his thoughts on a potential eviction:

[...] if it is justified, well ... what I don't [...] doubt is property [...] if someone else owns something, then of course he should also have the right to have access it [...] I don't know who the owner of this monastery is [...]. So, if there really is a legal owner who has bought it and can prove that he wants to use it in some way [...] then I think the laws should probably apply [...]. (Interview #2, 30.08.2022)

Similarly, N39 did not know about the monastery's property relations despite living next to it for 7 years and still contended on my question, whether he feels heard in decision-making processes in Aachen, that "[y]es, [...] if you have connections [...] to an area you can participate." (Interview #1, 30.08.2022). Yet, he said he has not been consulted about monastery.

The caring municipality

Until the bidding process ended in December 2021, the "potential threat" narrative develops around the caring municipality¹²³. Embedded in "the housing debate"¹²⁴, journalists' consistent reference to and quoting of politicians' statements on the municipality's new development plan portray them as intensively caring about the monastery and local concerns. The following excerpts illustrate this:

[According to] Michael Rau from the Green Party [the] former monastery is a "prime example of terrible speculation" [...]. Everything must now be done to remove the building from speculation, he said. On Thursday, the planning committee will deal with the monastery in a non-public session - but this was already clear before the squat [...]. (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

[...] The municipal planning committee has dealt with the Lousbergviertel in October 2020 and passed the resolution for the preparation of a development plan for the area [...]. A renewed consultation, focused on the monastery, is scheduled for the meeting on Thursday. Just in time, because on Tuesday, August 31, the bidding process of CR Investment ends [...]. (Gombert, 2021b)

Accordingly, the municipality is "just in time" and did not need "the activists" to become aware of the "terrible" issue of real-estate speculation. This care mounts in an unisono development plan announced about one week after the monastery's reclamation, paying special attention to local and environmental concerns:

[...] In any case, the green areas surrounding the approximately 150-year-old building ensemble are to be secured and further developed in the future "in harmony with climate and environmental concerns [...]," the politicians in the committee now also emphasized [...]. (Hinrichs, 2021)

Based on Rau's quotes, the same journalist writes that the municipality will ensure responsible development

[...] "through a suitable qualification procedure", for example during a design competition and broad-based citizen participation, as well as with intensive support from the responsible municipal departments and politicians [...]. Of course, the preservation of the listed properties must also be guaranteed [...].

The subsequent article underpins the municipality's efforts to ensure local participation:

[...] When talking to neighbors of the monastery, one quickly understands that people have one thing in mind: "We simply don't want another monstrosity like the one currently being built on Nizzaallee to come here," says one resident of the neighborhood. She follows what is reported around the monastery and is very annoyed by the intransparency of the whole process. "Who owns this place, and what is to become of it?" she wonders - and she is not the only one [...]. (Gombert, 2021c)

¹²³ This character also accompanies the "activist culture" narrative and "the social center" narrative, as official statements cover up structural housing issues with superficially supporting the monastery's users' ambitions.

¹²⁴ See under "activist culture".

Further, and based on the municipality's statements, journalists emphasize how the new development plan effectively restricts private developers:

[...] In any case, the new owner does not have a completely free hand in the development of the site: the monastery has been a registered architectural monument since 1985 [...]. "The monastery garden underlies the site's environmental protection regulations," says the city administration [...]. (Gombert, 2021b)

[...] Similarly, Mayor Sibylle Keupen underlined on Friday again that a crucial basis was created, "so that the entire area is led responsibly into the future." In particular, the rich stock of old trees in the monastery garden should not be touched [...]. (Hinrichs, 2021)

Based on politicians' statements journalists further portray the caring and effectively regulating municipality by referring to other controversial development projects nearby:

[...] On Thursday, the latest plans of a Dutch company for the construction of luxury apartments and student accommodation between Roermonder Strasse and Rütcher Strasse were also temporarily halted. Several objections [...], were not sufficiently considered by the investor despite repeated intervention also by parliamentary groups, noted the politicians in unison and visibly annoyed: The planned building ensemble was planned far too densely and was also visually unattractive [...]. (Hinrichs, 2021)

A later article continues to ensure the municipality's good will:

[...] The city has already submitted a purchase offer by emergency resolution [and] continues to strive for a "public welfare-oriented use" and the preservation of the monastery garden [...]. (AZ, 2021)

Thereafter, the same article explains the municipality's resignation as an investor based on official statements:

[...] How things will proceed now [...] does not seem to be clear to the city either. "We can only wait and see," [said] Manfred Sicking, the department head responsible for housing and real-estate [...].

After pointing towards the municipality's "tied hands", frequent and extensive reference to disagreeing political parties portray the inevitably slow nature of "democratic decisions":

[...] Whether there would have been a majority in favor of the municipal bid in the closed session of the council is thus completely uncertain. Only the factions of Green, Left and Future spoke out clearly in favor of purchasing the monastery [...]. Within CDU and SPD, however, skepticism seems to prevail. So far there is no use-concept for the listed building, criticizes the SPD. The CDU also says that it is not known what condition the building is in and what renovation costs will be incurred on the city [...]. (Eimer, 2021)

While further justifying the municipality's inaction the same journalist portrays the caring municipality in a later article by emphasizing that other socially valuable projects

[...] are currently in progress and tie up the resources of numerous municipal departments. In addition to Büchel, these include the plans for the Aachen Theater, the bus terminal, Campus

West, the Soers Sports Park, Aachen-North and the "Conti site" in Rothe Erde [...]. (Eimer, 2022)

The responsible and rightful owner

Alongside "the caring and regulating municipality", journalists render private property inviolable. While describing the monastery's users as young and unrealistic, journalists rely on statements from CR's website and the municipality to portray CR as trustworthy and responsible. Initially, they seemingly scrutinize CR's secrecy about the sales process:

[...] The website makes it clear who the sales campaign is aimed at: It is - understandably - about investors with the necessary coins. [...], the purchase price expectations and background information on the properties cannot be viewed [...]. (Gombert, 2021b)

[...] At the end of August, a bidding process that was barely accessible to the public apparently came to an end. The company prefers not to reveal the outcome, and is being cagey: "Due to regulations, we are currently unable to provide you with any further details on interested parties and bidders. Please understand that we will only be able to communicate detailed information once the process has been completed," [...]. (Gombert, 2021c)

Yet, the following article quotes the municipality which portrays the untransparent sales process orderly, rightful, and inevitable:

[...] It has now been confirmed that the interested buyers named by CR Management include the city of Aachen itself. When asked, however, the city's press office says that the bidding process has not yet been fully completed and that nothing further can therefore be said about the sale. Why the city wants to buy the monastery, [...], is answered thus: "The monastery [...] should be put to a public welfare-oriented use." What this might be [...] would be developed in an "orderly process and on the basis of a fundamentally political decision" [...]. (Gombert, 2021d)

As these excerpts illustrate, the journalist's reliance on official statements normalizes and strengthens trust in CR as the rightful and responsible owner of the monastery by depicting a fair and legitimate sales process. While journalists scandalize real-estate speculation around the monastery and present the monastery's users as ignorant, they repeatedly emphasize CR's competence based on CR's own statements:

[...] The Berlin-based company CR Investment Management is responsible for the sale of the monastery. The company is not only selling the Aachen monastery, but also an entire portfolio of the insolvent German Property Group. A total of 20 properties, most of which are listed, are involved, including such prominent properties as Dwasieden Castle on the island of Rügen [...]. (Gombert, 2021b)

[...] Now the Berlin-based company CR Investment Management has taken charge of selling the insolvent estate, including the monastery in Aachen [...]. (Gombert, 2021c)

The same journalist quotes mayor Keupen, who

[...] expressly desires "a quality, monument-friendly and creative development that does justice to the facility and its surroundings." However, the responsibility for the future of the

monastery lies first and foremost with the owner of the property, current and future. It is to be hoped that he will be aware of this responsibility [...]. (Gombert, 2021b)

About one year later, another journalist reasserts that private ownership is the only possibility to use the monastery:

[...] Either way, whether and what the future of the Lousberg monastery will look like is presently uncertain. The only thing that is certain is that shaping the future of the listed property in the long term can only be done with the insolvency administrator, who will eventually have to fulfill his legal "obligations," as the saying goes [...]. (Esser, 2022)

Thereafter, and in parallel to the monastery's "illegality" and "obstructiveness", a journalist quotes CR's emphasis on their rightful ownership, commitment, care, selflessness, and responsibility in the article's "background information box":

[...] In the interest of GPG's creditors, we are committed to starting a new bidding process as soon as possible [...], to ensure the preservation of the historic building complex. [...] "We would like to emphasize once again at this point: The occupation of the monastery in Aachen is still illegal [...]." [...]. In the interest of the GPG creditors, they therefore feel "compelled to exhaust all legal means and to take administrative action against the city of Aachen [...]. (Kasties, 2022b)

The ominous squatter and the vigilant police

In parallel to trust in private ownership and the municipality, journalists create a tension between the initially peaceful but ominous squatters, and the vigilant police. The first article published after the monastery's reclamation emphasizes the illegality of squatting:

[...] Legally, a squat constitutes trespassing. "We think it is morally more reprehensible to let such a beautiful and old house [...] fall into disrepair [...]," say the squatters [...]. (Stöhr & Kasties, 2021)

This nod to the potential moral rightfulness of squatting vanishes in the subsequent article, where the author highlights illegality and potential for tumult by quoting police statements in its "background information box":

[...] As the Aachen police explained [...], there had not yet been any complaints about the activities of the squatters [...]. Also, the owner of the area had not yet approached the police. If [...] there is no imminent danger, they will not intervene, explains police spokesman Frank Plum. Nevertheless, patrol cars of the Aachen police are regularly on the road to Lousbergstraße to see what's going on [...]. (Gombert, 2021a)

Hereby, journalists portray the attentive police who ensure the public's safety. Subsequently a journalist contrasts this role to the illegal and potentially disturbing squatters, based on police statements and fragmented quotes from AB:

[...] And the squatters? The at least temporary conversion of the building [...] does not seem to please those responsible in the background. Someone who considers himself responsible

for the building has contacted the police, confirms police spokesman Frank Plum [...]. "It is currently being checked whether the person who has contacted us is also the owner of the building," says Plum. [...] there are also signs that not everyone in Aachen is enthusiastic about the action either. "Our banners were torn down," reports one of the squatters. In addition, a man drove up in a car and threatened that "a squad of people" would come by next Tuesday at the latest to clear the monastery [...]. Despite all the positive feedback, there seem to be interest groups "that don't want to see us here." That a use as a social center and for affordable housing is not compatible with profit interests is clear, [the squatter] says. "But we will not allow ourselves to be driven out just so that others can maximize their profits with the sale of the monastery! (Gombert, 2021b)

After presenting these "early warnings", the same journalist categorizes the monastery as "peaceful" through quoting a neighbor during the monastery's 8-week celebration, who says

[...] as long as everything is quiet and peaceful here, I think the occupation of the monastery is perfectly fine [...]. (Gombert, 2021c)

At the end of this article, the journalist underlines peacefulness:

[...] While neighbors peacefully exchange ideas about the future of the Lousberg neighborhood over coffee and cake in the chapel aisle [...].

By asserting peacefulness, the author categorizes the monastery as non-violent. As this category inevitably bears in it the *potential* for violence, the dispute with CR about the temporary use contract seemingly confirms the anticipated tumult. By quoting CR, the journalist does not just condemn the monastery's users as liars, but also highlights illegality, harmfulness, and violence:

[...] The occupation of the property remains illegal. Investors who have already been harmed are being deprived of their money by the illegal actions of the squatters." On Thursday there should have been an inspection of the property at the Lousberg [...]. According to the report, the squatters, "who sometimes mask their faces," violently prevented entry. "This applies even to designated representatives of the city of Aachen," writes a spokesman for CR Management. Therefore, the local authorities have been asked for police protection [...]. (Gombert, 2021d)

Later, a journalist turns CR's "fears" and the monastery's "obstructiveness" and "dangerousness" into "facts" by stating them without their source:

[...] These are difficult conditions for potential buyers, as access to the site is not readily possible and can probably only be enforced under police protection [...]. (Eimer, 2022)

Besides describing the monastery's users as potentially violent, another journalist quotes the local building inspection and characterizes the act of inhabiting the monastery as potentially dangerous:

[...] Some experts from the building inspectorate have now visited the listed property [...]. The purpose of this unusual on-site visit is to avert danger [...]. "We are obliged to be certain about the structural condition. The walls are old. We must be sure that nothing here is in

danger of collapsing, that, for example, no power lines have been dangerously manipulated or are simply overloaded," explains the head of the legal department Annekathrin Grehling [...]. [...] an eviction is therefore "not imminent". The reason: "There is no acute danger here that would justify urgent intervention under building regulations," Grehling states. The building fabric is solid, the conditions on site do not appear to be a source of danger [...]. (Esser, 2022)

In combination with the journalists' subsequent nods to the number of squatters, the same article construes a luring threat:

[...] Ten to 20 people probably belong to the "regular cadre" of squatters here. On Saturdays, when parties are held in the garden - sometimes unmistakable to the neighborhood - there can be considerably more [...].

In sum, journalists verify private ownership as unimpeachable based on politicians' and CR's statements, who highlight their responsibility and relentless efforts to use the monastery for "the common good". They present the municipality as caring and concerned about public participation. In addition to portraying the monastery's users as inherently different and anti-social, journalists describe "their dangerous nature".



Image 35: In the face of a potential eviction in Winter 2021/22, the monastery's inhabitants show that "The monastery stays alive", humorous, and anonymous. Source: Anonymous, 2021.

Illusionary democracy, the burden of private property, and solidarity instead of fear

In contrast, AB, RASA, and some neighbors scrutinize the municipality's "participation" procedures as insufficient, distractive, and discriminatory. Moreover, they anticipate and invalidate police investigations, denounce the sales process as untransparent, and encourage solidarity and political emancipation among local inhabitants. Accordingly, they condemn the municipality's indirect and gradual withdrawal of support for the monastery against the background of massive investments in prestige objects. Moreover, they express the harmfulness of private investors, as well as authorities and politicians that protect profit-oriented interests, due to monetary, physical, and psychological damages associated with gentrification, discrimination, and real-estate speculation. Accordingly, AB, RASA, and some neighbors scrutinize, and even oppose the concept of private property, and portray the courageous, rather than overambitious, ignorant or threatful squatter. Rather than sowing fear, they appreciate solidary neighbors, wish for more social cohesion, and encourage political emancipation. Shortly after the monastery's reclamation, AB and RASA scrutinize the discrepancy between the municipality's inaction and its "action plan":

[...] At the beginning of the year, the city stated in its "Action Concept for Housing" that there is a great need for more neighborhood meeting places. One of the squatters says: "We are the only public actors who have already implemented such a project [...]. (AB, 2021a)

[T]he monastery [became] a [social] center amid the pandemic, allowing everyone to experiment and flourish. A self-determined, uncommercial place, as has long been demanded in Aachen by those involved in culture. [...] In the "Action Concept for Housing" of 2021, the city then determined that there is a great need for neighborhood meeting places. Even analyses of the attractiveness of Aachen confirm that there is a lack of diverse culture [...]. Since the monastery passed from hand to hand as an object of speculation, it was not accessible to the public for years. It was only through the squatters that an alternative use became thinkable [...]. (RASA, 2021c)

Besides scrutinizing that after 12 years of ignorance, public actors suddenly present themselves as caring, RASA (2020) criticize the municipality's efforts as inconsequent and insufficient in an earlier publication:

[...] Major construction projects, such as Campus Melaten, were planned without any housing at all. RWTH was not made responsible for providing sufficient dormitories. In addition, options for rent regulation, such as protected areas or a cap on rents were not consistently implemented. While some resolutions have also been passed to ease the housing market, none go far enough [...].

And later as counter-productive:

[...] In 2019, the city has approved an incredible sum of €50 million for the prestigious "New Spa" project. It would be a shame if the city council had now rejected the creation of an uncommercial cultural center [...]. (RASA, 2021c)

Similarly, the husband of N45a offered to help the monastery out with electricity and said during our interview, that the municipality's inaction might be

[...] on purpose [...]. I currently have the feeling that they just want to let it die, according to the motto "we're not doing anything, neither evicting them nor anything else", at some point they'll go away on their own, yes, the property has been empty for 10 years, if it's empty for 12 years it doesn't matter. So, I don't want to accuse the city of that, but [apparently] nobody wants to burn their fingers on it [...]. (Interview #6, 01.09.2022)

Another solidary neighbor, who lived next to the monastery since 1986, expressed that she thinks there are many lonely people who would appreciate to have more meeting places. On my question about her thoughts on an eviction, she responded similarly to N45:

[...] Yes, that would really be a pity. [...] why doesn't the city buy it, we have a green-red municipal government [...] I don't understand [...] I also found [the electricity cut] a bad action [...] that is also a form of violence [...] so much money is spent, I don't even want to know for what, it's a trifle [...]. In summer it was quite pleasant in there, yes...I feel really sorry about that [...] that's also a kind of "let's see if we can get you out of there, if you'll still be able to get through the winter" [...]. (Interview #8, 14.09.2022)

In addition to blatant and counterproductive inaction, RASA (2021a) condemns the municipality's alleged efforts of ensuring public participation as stalling:

[...] Where residents have resisted the construction of new speculative properties, the city and the investors have jointly stalled them with a "participation program" until the excitement had dissipated. This strategy was almost always successful. In the case of the Luisenhöfe [...], however, the residents have organized themselves for the long term [...]. Despite great support and solidarity from the population, their request met with little sympathy from the city and the investors. During the last talks, the tenor was: If the residents want to participate, they should buy a piece of the area. Since then, the administration has not disclosed any more information. Those who can't afford it can't have a say in Aachen [...].

Besides stressing untransparent participation efforts, they moreover refer to controversial developments in Aachen, where local inhabitants did not voice concerns:

[...] This is not because the residents don't care, but because an above-average number of people in these neighborhoods struggle with social problems. Those who have to struggle with poverty, debts, poor working conditions, racism or difficult family relationships seldom have the strength to stand up for a just neighborhood development [...].

Finally, and responding to previous articles of AZ, RASA (2021a) condemn attempts of presenting the "heard concerns" of Aachen's most wealthy inhabitants (among them the monastery's neighborhood) as "successful public participation". Referring to an example, where neighbors' concerns regarding aesthetics blocked the construction of distinctively looking housing collective, RASA (2021a) concludes:

[...] Petty bourgeois egoism seems to be greater than awareness of solidarity, one's own privileges and social problems in the city. However, since wealthy people have enough time

and capacity to found associations and commit themselves for years, their voice is heard. Even the AZ/AN newspapers pay much more attention to such citizens initiatives than to the problems of marginalized groups. After all, most of their readers probably come from the same middle-class milieu. [...] Since the citizens' initiatives do not show solidarity with [marginalized] groups, even their protests often fade away without success, despite all the advantages [...].

While scrutinizing the municipality's "participatory" efforts, AB and RASA reject the inviolability of private property. Besides the monastery's relation-based, rather than ownership-based self-designations and their conditions for further negotiations, they explicitly oppose the untransparent sales process:

[...] The bidding process for the monastery at Lousbergstraße 14 ends on Tuesday. Until then, potential buyers can provisionally express interest and submit an initial price proposal. The identity of the bidders and their plans regarding the use of the monastery are not public and cannot be viewed by the neighbors. "This procedure continues the non-transparent and profit-maximizing misery that has already left the monastery empty for 12 years," said one of the activists [...]. (AB, 2021c)

Published on their blog, AB's later press release titled *Against an untransparent sales process* sheds light on the process:

[...] In addition to the municipality, Landmarken AG, which has been buying up vacant buildings in Aachen for years to redevelop them profitably, is interested in buying the monastery. CR Management itself has remained silent about the process. On inquiry of journalists, CR did not give any information [...]. As far as the auction of the monastery is concerned, the squatters are unequivocal: "Such a non-transparent procedure clearly only serves the interests of investment companies that want to make a profit from the monastery. The perspectives of the local people are excluded and ignored. We therefore demand that the auction be stopped [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021h)

Besides explicating the sales process' illegitimacy¹²⁵, RASA (2021c) highlight the social cost of private interests in the case of an eviction:

[...] On December 17th it was published that the procedure will be continued only after the end of the occupation. The monastery is thus acutely threatened with eviction. If this were to happen, massive amounts of taxpayers' money would be sacrificed for the property rights of a company that is only concerned with profits. A valuable and exemplary social project could become the victim of profit interests. Another example of how capitalism has a grip on urban development. This must be prevented! The city should pull out all the stopsto buy the building and prevent the eviction [...].

Likewise, N5 reflected around the concept of private property in our interview:

[I]n a capitalist system [...] this is just exploited to the maximum and [...] if [...] people [...] can have so much property that they could spend more every day for the next 500 or 5000

¹²⁵ AB's scrutiny towards the sales process overlaps with their investigations regarding "the housing debate", as they unravel *Landmarken AG* as a potential investor and contextualize the monastery's vacancy with real-estate speculation in Aachen.

years than the average wage earner earns in a lifetime then obviously something has gone wrong with this concept of property and then maybe we should take a look at it [...].
(Interview #5, 08.09.2022)

While journalists establish blind trust in institutions and private investors, RASA (2022)

[encourage] all affected tenants and dissatisfied people in Aachen to fight back! We want to encourage local media, the city administration, and politicians to give up their benevolent attitude towards these companies. Thousands of tenants in Aachen suffer from high rents and rising living costs. At the same time, cultural and social life is degenerating under the commercial influence of the companies. They block climate protection and social justice [...].

Strengthening their scrutiny towards private property, AB anticipate ongoing police investigations by stating that they have been attacked by someone associated with CR in their press release and blogpost titled *Threats against the squatters of the monastery in*

Lousbergstraße:

[...] On Tuesday morning, the occupants of the monastery in Lousbergstraße were threatened by an employee of a building management company. On August 31, "a squad of people" would come to evict the squatters. More precise information about who it was not given. The person drove up in a company car, stopped briefly to talk to the people at the gate, and then disappeared again [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021e)

They relativize the importance of the "vigilant police" and replace them with attentive and solidary neighbors, instead of portraying "a neighborhood in fear":

[...] In the night from Tuesday to Wednesday, unknown persons tore down the banners on the gates of the monastery. "Attentive neighbors immediately let us know. At least we can now paint new, nicer banners," was the laconic comment of one squatter [...].

Similarly, another silenced statement published on AB's blog explicates the political necessity of squatting, rather than self-interest or ignorance:

[...] The monastery in Lousbergstraße has been occupied for a week [...]. There were lectures about the political necessity of occupations and from the 'Mietshäuser Syndikat'¹²⁶ [...]. (ac-besetzen, 2021f)

Likewise, while journalists copy paste CR's statement about face masks and violence, a curious neighbor reflects deeper around her prejudices during our interview:

[...] masked [protest], first of all is not a good impression [...] I mean they will have their good reasons [...] only I always have a negative impression [...] because, even at demonstrations [...] there's also a masking ban and I think that's right because I think if you... stand up for something ... you should [...] show yourself. So, like I said, I don't want to accuse them of anything, maybe they have their good reasons for doing that, that they have

¹²⁶ *Mietshäuser Syndikat* is a solidary association of autonomous housing projects where established projects financially support younger housing projects or squats whose inhabitants wish to purchase a building. In turn, the inhabitants of established projects have the possibility to partake in political struggles (Mietshäuser Syndikat, 2023).

already had bad experiences, um, yes, it just looks very dark, gloomy, and very illegal (laughs) [...]. (Interview #4, 06.09.2022)

After considering potentially unjust state repression for political engagement, N6 moreover described squatting not as frightening but said, that she associated

[...] courage with it [...] you must resign from your [old] life, right, you must be there, that's really a physical thing [...]. And um, you certainly also break some rules and laws [...] and uh determination, it must be worth [...] something to you, and um, yes appreciation for [certain] values [...].

Following a similar structure as this chapter, the next chapter explores the production and dispersal of dominant narratives around Lützerath's defense, as well as the realities those "facts" marginalize or silence.

7 Corporate media reporting on Lützerath and systematically marginalized or silenced realities

I identified three dominant narratives around Lützerath in articles published in *Rheinische Post* (RP) from the eviction's preparatory period until its aftermath: "the symbol", "the deal", and "left extremism". These narratives are already present in early official statements; however, they strengthen, develop different expressions, and reinforce each other over time. Later, journalists treat them as "facts" through steady repetition and disconnection from their sources, as well as through their incorporation into background information boxes, overviews, and articles labeled "analysis" or "fact checks". Moreover, journalists base their opinion pieces on these narratives. Masked as "personal opinions", these texts refrain from referencing sources or listening to and presenting counter-narratives. Further, journalists juxtapose most counternarratives with official statements¹²⁷ and refrain entirely from publishing uncommented or unprocessed interviews with Lützerath's inhabitants. Meanwhile, RP publishes countless interviews with authorities, politicians, and RWE. This demonstrates the extent to which journalists' "personal opinions" influence their reporting. Keeping in mind the structural constraints of Germany's media landscape as elaborated on in chapter 4, this chapter first explores how journalists and official sources produce "the symbol", "the deal", and "left extremism" as dominant narratives. Thereafter, I contrast each dominant narrative to the counternarratives from press releases of *Lützerath lebt* (LL), blogposts of the *Anarchists in*

¹²⁷ There are a few exemptions, for example two interviews with Luisa Neubauer (Fridays for Future), one with Greta Thunberg, and one with a solidary local inhabitant.

Lützerath Collective (AIL), and the texts and stories other inhabitants shared with me¹²⁸.

Hereby, I collate the counternarratives to "the deal" and the "left extremism" narratives at the end of this chapter because of their interconnectedness.

"The symbol"

Journalists inconsistently refer to Lützerath as the symbol for either "the climate justice movement", "the climate protection movement", for "an early coal phase out", for "climate politics", for "the German climate test", or for "the consequences of lignite mining", but always as the symbol for the fight of an especially dedicated minority. "The symbol" narrative builds on the assumption of a fundamental difference between "climate activists" and the rest of society. This difference is expressed through the characteristics ascribed to Lützerath's inhabitants, which imply that they follow naïve, and generally irrelevant interests. The following excerpts of RP author's opinion pieces illustrate "the symbol" narrative. RP's deputy chief editor writes shortly before the eviction:

[...] Some people talk about the last stand, the showdown, the decisive battle: the very terms are false and treacherous. They turn the battle for Lützerath into a war scenario, as if it were a matter of life and death. Yet the battle for the last houses of the long-abandoned village in the Rhinish lignite mining region is nothing more than symbolic politics. There is nothing left of Lützerath that is worth saving. Thus, it is not the former residents who have lost their homes who are in the front row of the protest. Rather, the spokesmen are professional coal opponents [...]. (Thoren, 2022)

Similarly, another author's opinion piece titled *The climate show of Lützerath* contends:

[...] the spectacle currently performed in Lützerath has nothing to do with serious climate protection. Here, activists who have lost relevance in the energy crisis are using the demolition of a ghost village to draw attention to themselves. Pack your backpack, they lure young climate activists in Woodstock fashion, pretending that the fate of the 1.5-degree target will be decided in Lützerath. This is wrong and is not made any better by the fact that Luisa Neubauer claims¹²⁹ otherwise [...]. (Höning, 2023a)

During a panel in Lützerath with guests from Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador who spoke among others about anti-mining struggles in Latin America, I met "Rupi", one of Lützerath's short-time inhabitants. After countless shared walks through and around Lützi, Rupi told me about one of their personal encounters with the symbol narrative. In our interview at the mine's windy edge, they said laughingly:

¹²⁸ I deliberately refrain from considering counter narratives of ADB separately, as they largely overlap with those of LL.

¹²⁹ Luisa Neubauer is a prominent German climate justice activist, co-organizing Fridays for Future, and member of the Green Party.

[...] Last Sunday my mother was here and said: "But your main concern must be that the coal remains under Lützerath, right? So, all that is [...] just symbolic, isn't it??" [...]. (Interview #12, 10.11.2022)

Another close friend, *konkreteutopie22* began living in Lützerath around the same time as me. During one of our hourlong breakfast conversations, they referred me to their blog, where they describe their encounter with "the symbol" narrative:

[...] Today I wanted to write the blog while having breakfast and therefore I went with the plate [...] past the Kolawi (collective agriculture), where I picked some more nasturtium-tastes quite spicy, but is an amazingly effective herb to support the immune system [...]. On the way back from the field, a fat SUV pulls up next to me and rolls down its window. "What are you still doing here?" an older man asks abruptly and not very friendly. "Nobody lives here anymore, they're all gone" he continues, without giving me a chance to answer in any way. "Well, I've always been against something like that" and points in the direction of the pit. "But you are too late". He didn't really let me finish my sentences during the whole situation. He had driven 300 kilometers in his SUV to Lützi to answer his own questions himself, what a pity, really [...]. (*konkreteutopie22*, 2022c)

Symbolic politics

One element of "the symbol" narrative is journalists' repetitive emphasis that the struggle for Lützerath is nothing but the struggle of a minority for their symbol. They do so by uncritically repeating official statements, as one of the first articles published about the press conference announcing Lützerath's eviction shows. Under the title *Earlier coal phase-out in NRW - with a symbolic sacrifice* (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022a), the authors base their article's title on a quoted statement of NRW's economic minister Mona Neubaur¹³⁰ (Green Party):

[...] Lützerath is a powerful symbol for the diverse climate protection movement, for an early coal phase-out [...].

Similarly, other authors assert Lützerath's irrelevancy to global climate by quoting state parliament member for the Heinsberg district, Thomas Schnelle (CDU), who said: "The 1.5-degree limit has nothing to do with Lützerath" (Pasvantis & Wibbeke, 2022). On the same day, journalists incorporate official statement's emphasis on Lützerath's "symbolic value" and "emptiness" into their summary-like article titled *Coal phase-out 2030 - The end for Lützerath* (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022b):

[...] However, the plans also marked the final end of the symbolic, evacuated village of Lützerath, which has now become a base for climate activists [...].

¹³⁰ Because of their similar last names, this chapter refers to either M. Neubaur (economic minister) and L. Neubauer (activist and Green Party).

Published one day later, an interview with M. Neubaur similarly shows how journalists and M. Neubaur treat Lützerath's "symbolic value" as a fact:

[...] Ms. Neubaur, Lützerath is a symbol for coal mining. Now [green ministers] announce that the village will be dredged. [Neubaur:] The Hambach Forest and Lützerath are symbols for climate protection and for an ambitious, early coal phase-out. This is precisely what we have agreed on [...]. (Zehrfeld, 2022a)

So does Ruth Seidl (Green Party), quoted in an article the next day:

[...] This loss is a "downer," but "results for the climate are clearly more important than symbols" [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022a)

On the same day, RP's head of the political department wrote an opinion piece titled *Lützerath is the wrong symbol for climate policy* (Kessler, 2022) which repeats official statements without referencing their source:

[...] The preservation of the hamlet of Lützerath is not necessary to achieve the 1.5-degree target. And there are more reasons for why the emptied village is not very suitable as a symbol [...]. Lützerath [...] has already been emptied. A symbol of the climate protection movement, true. But also one of compromise [...]. The loss of Lützerath may be painful, but it is bearable. After all, preserving this symbol would once again significantly increase the energy bill, without gaining much for the climate. Saving the hamlet would change virtually nothing in terms of achieving the 1.5-degree target [...]. But the costs of preserving it would be immense. This is because the quantities of lignite without Lützerath would not be sufficient to supply the power plants with the necessary fuel. Now, however, the use of all energy sources that promise independence from Russia has become necessary [...].

He argues that Lützerath is an expendable and expectable sacrifice "the climate protection movement" must make to ensure "energy-security" and "solidarity with Ukraine" by reducing dependency on Russia. Likewise, journalists reassure Lützeraths "worthlessness" on January 2nd, 2023, the day when the police forcefully entered the village to pursue the eviction. They do so by juxtaposing counternarratives with official statements:

[...] The coal under Lützerath must remain in the ground [...]. Every person who spends an afternoon seriously considering the causes of global warming knows that every additional ton of coal that is burned endangers our survival on this planet [...]." In contrast, energy company RWE said, "The use of the former settlement this winter is necessary to ensure a secure supply of power plants in the midst of the energy crisis." The legality has been conclusively confirmed by the courts, he said. "All the original inhabitants of Lützerath have left the place," RWE said [...]. (Stegner & Schwerdtfeger, 2023)

More explicitly, an article published on the evening before the January mass demonstration claims to present "The activists' arguments in a fact check". Under the title *Do we really need the coal?* (Höning, 2023c) a journalist asks, whether it "helps the climate, if Lützerath stays":

[...] No, says Wilfried Rickels, head of the Climate Policy Research Center at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. "The CO2 emissions generated when the coal under

Lützerath is converted into electricity have no impact on whether the 1.5-degree target is achieved or not," Rickels told the Science Media Center. "CO2 emissions in the energy sector are limited by European emissions trading." This means that if RWE does not use the certificates for Lützerath coal, it will use them for other coal. [...] RWE emphasizes [...]: "Due to the current energy crisis, in which gas is to be saved, these companies need this fuel for a secure energy supply [...]."¹³¹

Likewise, the last article published in 2022 titled *What will be important in Erkelenz in 2023* (RP, 2022e) explicates Lützerath's "irrelevancy" and burdensomeness a few days before the eviction:

[...] Admittedly, the operation is less important for Erkelenz as a town - it is a nationwide conflict, the physical scene of which lies on the outskirts of the town [...].

Journalists repeat this conclusion in their "summary" titled *Who wants what in the cosmos Lützerath* (Pasvantis et al., 2023) during the eviction:

[...] Lützerath as a village [...] no longer has any increased value for the people of Erkelenz [...] after all, the last true Lützerather left the village last year [...].

In parallel, journalists' continuously repeat a statement from *Ende Gelände* (EG)¹³² but attach it to previously constructed "facts" of emptiness and irrelevancy:

[...] In the houses, whose former inhabitants have moved away, live activists who want to fight for the village [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022d; RP, 2022c)

[...] Lützerath, the centuries-old village [...] has become a symbol of resistance against lignite. Activists who come from all over the world fight to preserve the village to protect the climate. The village is firmly in their hands. Lützerather have not lived there for a long time [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2022b)

During the eviction a journalist reassures, that the struggle concerns "only the activists":

[...] Activists occupied a bucket-wheel excavator in the Hambach opencast lignite mine [...] on Monday in *their* fight to preserve Lützerath [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023g, *emphasis added*)

Journalists uphold the "fact" that Lützerath is just another wrong symbol for "the climate movement" throughout the eviction. One of the final overview-like articles contends under the title *Climate clash at the quarry edge - what is it all about in Lützerath?* that "[t]he Hambach Forest is a symbol of the climate movement, as is Lützerath (Gilles, 2023a). Finally, a journalist quotes "Climate Protection Minister Robert Habeck" during the eviction:

¹³¹ The same journalist quotes RWE in another "fact-check" two days earlier: "RWE also points to the EU's emissions trading system: "If one company emits less, others elsewhere can emit more. The capped amount of emissions remains the same." (Höning, 2023b)

¹³² EG's original statement was: "We will fight for Lützerath just as we defended the Hambach Forest. Whoever attacks Lützerath will pay a high price. We are all coming, we stand together, we are unbreakable, we stand with Lützi!" (Vallata, 2022)

[...] There are many good reasons to demonstrate for more climate protection [...]. But Lützerath is simply the wrong symbol [...]. (Boots, 2023)

A distinct and irrational minority

In parallel to describing the struggle for Lützerath as a minority's symbol, journalists moreover characterize this minority as irrational and inherently distinct. One journalist reports from his visit¹³³ to Lützerath in October, 2022:

[...] When they come, the policemen and women, Amaka Baum will be there. She will, she says, defend her home. Her home, that is a house, high up in the tops of some trees she calls LütziForest. And her home, that is the planet Earth. If one home disappears, the other can hardly be saved, she says [...]. (Rasche, 2022)

While the author seemingly integrates the partly explicit anti-capitalist counter-narratives¹³⁴, he juxtaposes the defense of "some trees" with RWE's "informative" statements:

[...] The use of the former Lützerath site is necessary in a timely manner to ensure a secure supply of power plants in the midst of the energy crisis and to save gas in the power supply," RWE informs [...].

While reasserting that Lützerath is expendable he offers detailed descriptions of peoples' "lifestyle":

[...] The climate activists have created a new village here. It consists of the old houses and buildings they have moved into and given names to; in the "rancid eel," for example, they watch movies. The village consists of the 'kolawi', the collective agriculture, a kind of field where they grow fruits and vegetables. Of the circus tent, where the plenary meets, which wants to make decisions by consensus. [...]. Of the 'Küfa', another abbreviation, the kitchen for everyone. And of the LütziForest, where Amaka Baum stands on the first Thursday in October, facing the hamlet's end. In the "Villa Kunterbunt", a timbered board hut, waist high, stands a horse made of fabric, its snout lowered into a mini flower box. On a white plastic table, like those found in thousands of German gardens, lie a bottle of tartar sauce, jam from Bonne Maman, one and a half pickles, and a rather large jar of hazelnut milk cream [...].

After exploring this "culture" with its own language, and strange and childish humor, he explicates peoples' difference and alien identities around peoples' security concerns, as many

[...] operate with aliases, calling themselves radish, edge, or berry; in the village, some cover their faces. To protect their identity, but also a bit because it is part of their identity [...].

He presents Lützerath's intersectional approach similarly:

[...] I, the reporter, am not allowed to see the inside of the tree house where Amaka Baum lives. It is a place exclusively for FLINTA* (women, lesbians, intersexuals, non-binary,

¹³³ Note that RP published another article titled *A glimpse into life on the edge of the quarry* (Dwertmann, 2022) which refrains from juxtaposing counternarratives with official statements, but still emphasizes activists' inherent distinctiveness.

¹³⁴ He also quotes another of Lützerath's inhabitants, who says: "In the global North, people can better imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism."

transsexual, agender persons), she says. A place for all those who are patriarchally discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity, of which I am undoubtedly not one [...].

By presenting anti-discrimination efforts as exclusive and concluding, that he is "without a doubt" not subjected to patriarchy¹³⁵, the author implies that discrimination and social hierarchies are not larger societal issues. They only affect a few individuals, most of whom have "unnatural" gender identities. Along this line, he embeds associations of utopianism, irrationality, and escapism:

[...] The village, where people greet each other in a friendly manner, hand out apples and carrots to each other, and ask three times rather than twice if you wouldn't like a croissant, seems like a Bullerbü¹³⁶. A utopia in which the activists show how things could work. Without capitalism, which they demonize here, without waste and without representative democracy. Where everyone always agrees and looks out for each other. [...] But without donations from outside, from capitalism, the concept would not work [...].

Lützerath becomes a child's dream, the sanctuary of a few, an artificial home for those who prioritize their (gender) identities and ideals over national energy security. Through descriptions of someone "from the outside", the journalist portrays Lützerath as a pretentious showcase for how it could be, but never will be because this self-indulgent lifestyle depends on donations from capitalist society. Similarly, the opinion piece of Tim Achtermeyer (2022), chief of the federal Green party, almost mockingly highlights the naiveté of those defending Lützerath:

[...] such ideas also have to be implemented [...]. The bitter fact is that we still have too few renewable energies in Germany to phase out coal immediately. This has been neglected for decades. For a preservation of Lützerath one would have to literally dredge past the settlement on the left and right [...]. It is not only questionable who would really want to live there. It could also not withstand events such as heavy rains [...].

Similarly picturing Lützerath's inhabitants as childish, journalists describe them as stubborn by ending articles with the dry contention that the government, like a parent, "has long disagreed":

[...] The arguments and demands have been presented many times [...]. The federal government has long objected this presentation [...]. (Lehmkuhl, 2022)

[...] Reiß protests: "The federal government and RWE want to demolish the village, even though this is incompatible with climate protection targets. Here, five times more lignite is being mined than what is possible to meet the 1.5-degree target should", he says. Politicians have been objecting the activists' account for many months now [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022b)

¹³⁵ See Dowd, N. (2016), *The Man Question: Male Subordination and Privilege*

¹³⁶ Following Astrid Lindgren's book series based on a young girl's descriptions of idyllic life on Sweden's countryside in the early 20th century.

Another article highlights impertinence by referencing M. Neubaur:

[...] At the same time she urged the activists in Lützerath to exchange arguments on a factual level. For those who see Lützerath as a symbol, however, it is very difficult to discuss rationally [...]. (RP, 2022c)

Two weeks before the eviction, RWE's CEO Markus Krebber responds with incomprehension to an interview question about whether he expects similar scenes as in Hambach:

[...] With all understanding for protests: I hope that there will be no scenes like the eviction of the Hambacher Forest. This is not about a forest, but about a few houses whose residents have long since moved out [...]. Through this agreement, five inhabited villages can remain standing [...]. (Höning & Krebber, 2022)¹³⁷

M. Neubaur further "explains" this stubbornness in an interview shortly before the eviction:

[...] Especially young people are very concerned that politicians are doing too little to protect the climate and are not taking the issue seriously. That's why I'm trying to clarify that we now must temporarily accept more CO2 emissions due to an exogenous shock like the war in Ukraine and the failures of the past. However, the entire federal government is working across departments to ensure that we stay on the 1.5-degree path [...]. (Plück & Döbler, 2022)

While pertaining that those defending Lützerath lack understanding of politics and "climate protection", this statement subliminally scrutinizes the hybris and audacity to question "the entire federal government".¹³⁸ Similarly, "climate researcher" Mojib Latif advocates technological fixes and dialogue in an interview titled *I understand young peoples' impatience* published during the eviction. While Latif assures the need to drastically reduce emissions, he "consults" the "climate activists in Lützerath" to do

[...] everything that more people get involved in climate protection. A small group with actions like in Lützerath will not achieve that [...]. (Kessler, 2023b)

RP's head of the political department depicts Latif as "the expert" on global warming and societal issues and publishes his technocratic and anthropocentric statements without further investigating processes of social change or listening to Lützerath's inhabitants, political ecologists, degrowth scholars, or thinkers within decolonial theory. Connected to activists' irrationality, an early interview with NRW's police union chairman Michael Mertens emphasizes their inherent distinctiveness from "the general population":

[...] I come from the region and see that the phase-out of lignite is an enormously charged issue for everyone involved. But I don't see the same support from the general population as with the Hambach Forest. I don't understand why the small town of Lützerath is now being

¹³⁷ This article is no longer available on RP's website. However, the almost identical article can be found in AZ (Höning, 2020c) and on RWE's website (Höning & Krebber, 2022).

¹³⁸ See also Weinspach's statement in Pasvantis (2023f) on the public information event during Lützerath's eviction.

made so big and the big successes, such as the lignite phase-out brought forward to 2030, are being made so small by the occupiers. For me, this is a self-deprecation of the climate movement [...]. (Plück, 2022)

In contrast to the external and irrational "activists", Mertens positions himself as a "real local" who comprehends concerns about the loss of home. About two weeks before the eviction an article titled *Activists unwelcome in the villages* (Pasvantis, 2022g) strengthens this separation by emphasizing some inhabitants' concerns regarding the "take-over" of other villages by activists. The journalists explain the activists' irrationality and characterizes them as disrespectful to those who lost their "real" homes after quoting Erkelenz' Mayor Stephan Muckel:

[...] Rationally, I see no basis for this, because the villages are not [dredged] and no world climate conferences are held here in Erkelenz", [...]. From the activists' point of view, a settlement in Keyenberg [...] could make sense: Once Lützerath has fallen, they could establish a new base in the old villages and plan actions against open pit mining from there. In addition, the commune-like structure that has formed in the climate camp will lose its location with the demolition of Lützerath - many of the activists do not want to give up their current way of life [...].

Journalists repeat this conclusion until the eviction's aftermath in two articles titled *Activists set up camp in Keyenberg - residents angry* (Wibbeke, 2023) and *"Gardens full of shit", "smashed windows" and "firecrackers in the night"* (Pasvantis, 2023h). The latter contends that the after-eviction camp in Keyenberg was "much to the chagrin of residents in the coal villages". Centrally, an "analysis" article published a few days earlier informs its readers about *What turns climate protectors into activists* (Krings, 2023). According to the "background information box", activists are distinct from citizen initiatives, because they

[...] consciously decide against participation in political processes, for example through offices [...] to advance their goals [...]

while citizen initiatives "can serve as self-help and influence public opinion or parties in pursuit of political goals. Combining the "facts" of symbolic politics and self-interest, the author contends, that activists' deeds are

[...] usually symbolic. Activists are not concerned with the concrete political process, which always has to do with obtaining a majority in democracies [...]. Activists set signs, create attention, hope for acceleration or even the forcing of political decisions in their sense. [...] Being an activist is [...] young, courageous, hip - regardless of age. It attracts attention in the digital networks and is part of a young culture in which old left-wing set pieces reappear.

By referring to Karl Popper's definition of activism as "the inclination to activity and the aversion to any attitude of passive acceptance" she concludes, that

[...] Some [activists] regard accepting things, even if they are not immediately understood, as a slight. But it is the prerequisite for living together. And sometimes also a protection against going too far too fast [...].

Further, she refers to Max Weber, who

[...] has warned against the intoxication of the revolutionary, against the "romanticism of the intellectually interesting' running into the void without any sense of factual responsibility." But of course, sober distance contradicts the activist urge. And possibly also the self-image of activists who consider their own view [...] to be the measure of all things [...].

By brushing over some philosophical writings based on already established "facts" derived from official statements, the author proclaims the defense of Lützerath as egoistic, subjective, and self-indulgent, just a few days after Lützerath's eviction. In addition, she portrays the ignorant and venerated activists, as they willingly accept,

[...] that content shifts. Because the action itself often comes to the fore. After the protests in Lützerath, people talk about two men in a tunnel, Greta Thunberg dancing, and police violence. And not about the 1.5-degree target or emissions trading [...].

In accordance with this "self-indulgent utopianism and desire for attention", journalists describe the defense of the "empty village" and its "few trees" as mere self-dramatization. These sentiments crystallize in journalists' opinion articles¹³⁹ shortly before and during the eviction. After the eviction, another journalist presents the defense of Lützerath as an exaggeration and proclaims peoples' real intentions. Under the title "Climate activist is taken away - Thunberg photo staged by police?" he contends based on police statements:

[...] It is likely [...] that Greta Thunberg got what she wanted with the photograph: a photo showing her being taken away by police officers. "The goal of these activists is, after all, staging. And this picture probably goes around the world. Ms. Thunberg has thus achieved what she wanted: Attention [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023i)

¹³⁹ See excerpts introducing "the symbol" narrative.



Image 36: Several articles emphasize how "leading climate activist" Greta Thunberg dances at the edge of the mine during the mass demonstration on January 14th, 2023. At the same time, journalists accuse activists of "accepting" that their actions distract from talking about global warming. Source: dpa/ Federico Gambarini, 2023a.

Lützerath is not a symbol, Lützerath lives!

Instead of turning Lützerath into an abstract symbol, whose empty houses, trees, soils, habitats, inhabitants, and waters are worthless, the silenced and marginalized realities of LL, AIL, other inhabitants, and supporters explicate that Lützerath is *not* a symbol. They do so through 're-inhabiting' Lützerath and emphasizing intersectionality, local to international¹⁴⁰ solidarity, and misdirected media attention. As the following excerpt from a *klimareporter*¹⁴¹ article's description of the eviction illustrates, people approach "inhabited" non-anthropocentrically:

[...] While the first trees are falling on the edges of the village, an activist [...] hangs in a hammock on the large linden tree in the middle of the camp meadow. Only a few weeks ago, a forester measured the tree and determined her age to be just over 370 years [...]. The soundscape has changed [...]. Chain saws, the whistling of reversing large equipment, and bursting wood in many places. The chaffinches, which felt so at home in the cast, screech distraughtly [...]. A squirrel hurries across the ground with a nut. It can't find a tree to escape to. Birds flutter around disoriented. A wooden box which was supposed to be used to relocate the protected dormice hangs from a poplar tree. I wonder if anyone looked inside before the tree was cut down. "Oh, unfortunately, that's all collateral damage," says BUND director Dirk

¹⁴⁰ The counter-narratives to "the deal/extremism" narrative elaborate more on international solidarity.

¹⁴¹ *Klimareporter*^o is an independent online magazine on climate change.

Jansen disillusioned on the phone [...]. The linden tree of peace is cleared. "You are not alone," shout the people on the neighboring trees, and: "Linden tree stays, linden tree stays!" [...]. The linden [...] is the last tree on the camp. Of her inhabitants, no one can be there to accompany her dying [...]. (Schnell, 2023)

Explicating the liveliness of Lützerath, LL's press releases often use the self-designation "inhabitants" (LL, 2022l) or "new Lützerathers" (LL, 2021). More comprehensively, *konkreteutopie22* reflects on the meaning of 'home'¹⁴²:

[...] Lützerath is home [...]. Most people I meet come back and not because of an idle, self-imposed political commitment, but with great anticipation - Why? and what does that have to do with home for me? For many, home relates to origin or family, and for most it somehow lies in childhood. Accordingly, home is something that is lost and not something that can be achieved and fought for [...]. (*konkreteutopie22*, 2022c)

Hereby, *konkreteutopie22* describes inhabiting Lützerath based on Ernst Bloch's (1985) concept of 'home':

[...] For Bloch, home is "not a geographically localizable, static goal, but an ongoing process of approach [...] by recognizing a "not yet". The search for home is driven by the dream for a better world, a world full of freedom and possibilities. A world without violence that forces one to waste one's lifetime doing some meaningless things for other people just to survive. A world in which every human being finds the real possibility to live as he wants, no matter with which gender, skin color and which parents he came into the world. The search for home is therefore driven by the "hunger for a fulfilled life" [...]. Even if Bloch certainly had something else in mind than Lützerath, Lützerath [...] is a project for the creation of home: the creative, fertile, resistant, and joint work on realizing the possibilities of a better world. The world already carries [these possibilities], but it is up to us to bring [them] forth. Lützi is not perfect, it is a process, with dead ends, conflicts, and problems, which are not least caused by the fact that [its] existence [...] is in our hands to a limited degree, but who comes here [...] will feel this energy, the urge for a better life and not least: Home. Something that people may not have been aware they were missing but will miss afterwards [...]. Next time a person tells you that there are no longer any real residents there, why don't you answer with the counter-question of why the residents' registration office should decide when a person is at home there? Home is not the queue at the citizens' registration office. Home is not least the practice that is carried by the hope for a better world."

Based on this conception of home, they express their pain in face of Lützerath's destruction:

[...] Do you know that Lützerath will be evicted? [...] Do you know what this place means to us? Maybe you think it's your own fault, you decided for it. And you're right about that. We have chosen this place [...]. Yes, we even built it right there because others want to destroy it [...]. I came for a fight and stayed for home [...]. (*konkreteutopie22*, 2022d)

As these excerpts illustrate, people do not reinhabit Lützerath out of a desire to isolate themselves from society in a "utopia" outside or in parallel to society, but out of hope for a

¹⁴² Note, that "home" can have different meanings in German. Home as "Zuhause" hereby describes a place of belonging, comparable to "feeling at home", while home as "Heimat" is attached to a geographical place, the place in which one grew up. In the context of national socialism in Germany, the latter is usually closely tied to patriotism and nationalism.

less destructive society, cultivated *in tension* and thus in relation with current society. Rather than emphasizing a supposedly "different and unrealistic lifestyle", konkreteutopie22 and AIL stress values, ambitions, relationships, and imperfection of living in tension with society:

[...] Lützerath is empty and dead, say the conservative media and the residents' registration office. Lützerath lives, that's the web presence of Lützerath [...]. Lützerath is [...] a *real* utopian undertaking [...]. Lützerath administers itself autonomously, which means that there is no superior authority except the village community itself [...]. Concretely this means that there is a village plenary three times a week, where important things and matters for the community are discussed [...]. Each working group, each village section (barrios) and any other type of association is organized within plenaries [...] characterized by the attempt to create less hierarchy. Leading roles and tasks are alternated [...]. (konkreteutopie22, 2022a, *emphasis added*)

[...] Maybe it's depressing to think that as a single little person I can't achieve anything anyway. But maybe it's also okay to accept that and not expect yourself, a group, or a single occupation to have the power to abolish everything we're fighting against in one fell swoop. Revolution does not mean simply replacing one system of rule with another. It means learning, changing, and reaching out to each other every day [...]. Our relations with each other are not only the basis for a revolution, they are the revolution itself [...]. (AIL, 2022a)

Similarly, "Spotted Woodpecker", who lived in Lützerath since the summer, voiced their desire to stay in tension with society and make Lützerath as inclusive as possible. In our interview in the "Villa's" living room, they wondered how other inhabitants of Lützerath engage in non-activist contexts:

[...] people just have so much in their lives like looking for an apartment, work stress, that they don't have the chance [...] to really deal with [political struggle] in any case I don't condemn people for not being in Lützerath or not being active, because [coming here] is triggered by experience [...] and I grew up in such a bubble and I think many people are not [...] I'm just annoyed that I somehow don't manage to give many people access to [Lützerath] by [...] feeling totally [...] uncomfortable in my skin [...]. Because [...] back in my everyday life [...] I noticed very much that I don't feel so much part of it anymore or so foreign all of a sudden [...] basic consensus like we let each other speak or we try to criticize each other when we reproduced some form of discrimination, because [if something] was pacifistic [I] tend to be condemned for criticizing that [...]. (Interview #1, 16.09.2022)

Likewise, Gentian, a wonderful storyteller and poet reflects in our interview at the mine's edge:

[...] I always find it funny to say we come *from* society, as if we were not ...part of it [...] no matter where we come from we have [...] learned common things, be it through uh education systems, through family, or advertising [...] that doesn't mean at all that we are no longer part of society here but we are maybe even more than ever before [...] that's where we come from and that's what we try to [...] think about [...] anyway I would [...] wish from all [people] [...] that they think more about who they are and [...] how they have become the people they are [...]. (Interview #8, 05.10.2022)

konkreteutopie22 further expresses interdependence with society through acknowledging local and regional solidarity networks:

[...] Lützerath could only become so big because it received great and reliable help from the outside from the beginning. From the citizens' initiative "Alle Dörfer bleiben" (All Villages Remain) to the food cooperations to legal aid and awareness structures that have been supporting social movements in NRW and all over Germany for quite a few years [...]. (konkreteutopie22, 2022b)

Similarly, LL write on the mass demonstrations in November 2022:

[...] The village of Lützerath is [...] threatened. For more than two years, residents and people affected by resettlement, climate activists, farmers, clergy, and cultural workers have been protesting against the destruction of the village and the mining of climate-damaging lignite [...]. (LL, 2022h)

On the day of the press conference announcing the "RWE deal", they describe a broad alliance around Lützerath's defense and solidarity with people affected by rising electricity bills and floods:

[...] Habeck claims that the coal under Lützerath is needed for supply security. What is actually meant by this is RWE's security of continuing to profit. [While] RWE is making record sales, many households can't pay their electricity bills. To solve the social and ecological crisis, we need an economy of needs, not of profits [...]. (LL, 2022d)

[...] In reaction to the energy price debates of the last few weeks, [LL] primarily problematizes market-oriented power generation: "We in Lützerath are in favor of energy security - but we don't need the coal under Lützerath for that. Energy security for people can only exist when the profit security of corporations ends [...]." Several members of the Green Youth, including Luisa Neubauer, already announced active resistance against the party and government course. So did a broad alliance of activists* and more than 10,000 people who signed the call "X-thousand for Lützerath"¹⁴³ [...]. (LL, 2022e)

[...] Here in Germany, too, Habeck and Co. show that they are not making policies for people, but for corporations: Yes, private households will get an electricity price cap at 40 ct per kWh - but industry should not have to pay more than 13 cents! (LL, 2022g)

[...] Preventing the demolition of any infrastructure in Lützerath concerns us all. Because we finally need the end of this dirty climate destruction with brown coal. Climate catastrophes like the floods in Nigeria, Bangladesh, and in the Ahr valley are already killing many people [...]. (LL, 2022m)

In connection to this *mutual solidarity with* rather than a one-way *dependency on* parts of society, AIL emphasize Lützerath's rootedness in other social struggles:

[...] Lützerath [...] is not a struggle only against RWE, but a struggle that connects many perspectives of other social struggles with each other. Struggles for housing and free spaces, struggles against discrimination and for justice, but also struggles for a new, self-determined life organized from below, in which everyone can participate. A life without capitalist exploitation and destruction [...]. (AIL, 2022d)

Accordingly, LL explicitly reject the designation of Lützerath as a symbol:

¹⁴³ "X-thousand for Lützerath" was an online signature list in which people could declare their support in the case of an eviction.

[...] Lützerath is not a symbol. There is so much coal in the ground here that it will not achieve the climate targets set by the politicians themselves. How can politics and the police be for the profit of a few and against the survival of so many people? (LL, 2023a)

As these excerpts show, people emphasize that Lützerath's defense is not irrelevant, symbolic, or spatially bound, but intersectional, material, and global. Along this line, Marten's statements about their participation in one of Germany's most watched TV-shows called "*Wetten, dass...?*" rejects accusations of "the self-dramatizing and attention seeking activists":

[...] I'm glad to have been on the show [...] however, another topic should get much more attention on television, especially at prime time: The climate crisis and its serious consequences, which are already making regions uninhabitable. And approaches to solving the problem of how to live together in solidarity beyond capitalism - as we are trying out in Lützerath [...]. (LL, 2022j)

LL continue the press release collectively:

[...] While we were sitting in the studio, empty words were exchanged again at the World Climate Conference in Egypt, instead of finally taking responsibility for the climate crisis and holding corporations like RWE accountable for their climate crimes. While we were in the studio, Turkey started bombing the Kurds in Rojava. While we were in the studio, the demonstration was going on in Dortmund for Mouhamed Lamine Dramé, who was murdered by the police there. There is far too little primetime coverage of such important issues and far too many sexist comments from moderators like Gottschalk and Hunziker [...].

Likewise, the statement of "Pinky & Brain" who occupied Lützerath's tunnel condemn misdirected media attention:

[...] It is with mixed feelings that we observe how much attention the media have paid to the tunnel. The questions we have been asked most often (how we are doing, what we did down there, how we built the tunnel) are absolutely irrelevant and completely miss the point. The tunnel itself has no importance, the more crucial question is why it was built and occupied [...]. (LL, 2023l)



Image 37: The struggle for Lützerath is intersectional, international, and alive. This picture at the edge of Garzweiler II was taken during an earlier the mass demonstrations in April 2022. Source: moritz v:3rës, 2022.

"The deal"

In contrast to Lützerath's "symbolic" defense, journalists depict the government's "deal" with RWE as a successful "climate protection" measure, while ensuring NRW's (and Germany's and Europe's) energy security in times of multiple crises. They emphasize the government's ambitiousness and incomprehensible conflicts between "the climate movement" and the Green party, within the Green party, and among different political parties. They legitimize the deal against critiques and emphasize the need for investments into "renewable energy", concomitantly justifying RWE's unshared profits with its sustainability and social responsibility. I encountered "the deal" in a conversation with "Aristoteles" who lives in a nearby city and regularly visited Lützerath. In our interview at the vigil, he told me about his curiosity and wish to show solidarity. Nevertheless, he emphasized his ambivalence towards Lützerath's defense:

[...] The alternatives to this are simply not yet there in the form, uh [if] one would say now so tomorrow the excavators stop ... the electricity that is produced here is produced about 40% of the electricity in north rhine-westphalia if they were to disappear overnight [...] north rhine-westphalia would be [...] dark. Because we can't say right away that [...] now all the wind turbines are there, now all the photovoltaic plants are there [...] that this is not possible [...] there must be somehow another [...] for both sides justifiable compromise that this is still necessary for a while [...] but with an end that has to be [...] fixed and there I would [...] prefer

it if that not until 2030 but that this would be the case much sooner, but for this the alternatives have to be there and unfortunately I don't see them yet [...]. (Interview #6, 21.09.2022)

Successful governance in times of crisis

Like "the symbol", "the deal" originates in official statements given during the press conference on October 4th, 2022. As one of the first articles titled *Earlier coal phase-out in NRW - with a symbolic sacrifice* (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022a) indicates, journalists immediately present "the early coal phase out" as a fact. Another article published by the same authors contends:

[...] The federal government [...] and the energy company RWE have agreed on an early end to the extraction of lignite by 2030 [...]. (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022b)

As the following excerpt exemplifies, journalists repeat the government's "achievements":

[...] Habeck described the agreements as a climate policy success. "This will keep 280 million tons of lignite in the ground and prevent a potential firing of 280 million CO₂" [...]. Mona Neubaur emphasized that further open pit mining had been reviewed with three independent expert opinions. According to these, preservation is not possible [...]. But it is a great success for climate protection to be able to announce the coal phase-out in 2030." In addition, the villages of Ober- and Unterwestrich, Berverath, Keyenberg and Kuckum no longer have to make way at the opencast mine [...]. (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022b)

The same journalists juxtapose these statements with brief reference to critiques from "different initiatives", nevertheless ending their article with the contention that "others" still support "the deal":

[...] Various initiatives have announced protests against the end of Lützerath [...]. The NRW spokesman for the Green Youth, Rênas Sahin, said, "The decision on Lützerath destroys social peace in the region and is fatal in terms of climate policy." But others, such as the Renewable Energy State Association, welcomed the compromise between the federal government, the state and the energy company [...]. (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022b)

Similarly, journalists emphasize "the successful deal" amidst multiple "very serious" crises and Germany's "solidarity with Ukraine":

[Neubaur] emphasized that, as minister, she wanted to "get the best possible deal for climate protection" in balancing processes. "The situation of energy supply security due to Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, which is contrary to international law, now requires the necessary coal under Lützerath [...]. (Siedentop & Gilles, 2022)

[...] in the face of the current energy crisis, many people in Erkelenz were worried that the actually already determined preservation of the five villages could be overturned once again [...]. The fact that the residents there can now finally sigh in relief is also welcomed by Thomas Schnelle (CDU), the NRW state parliament member for the Heinsberg district: [...] Schnelle described the now fixed coal phase-out in 2030 as a "great success for the climate protection movement" [...]. In fact, Robert Habeck had spoken of a "good day for climate protection" - referring to the bringing forward of the coal phase-out to 2030. [...]. Thomas

Schnelle [...]: "The 1.5 degree limit [...] is about leaving as much coal as possible in the ground, for this we have found a good compromise [...]. (Pasvantis & Wibbeke, 2022)

Another article titled *Minister President Wüst sees NRW as a pioneer in climate protection* extensively quotes Wüst and only superficially brushes over opposition in its last sentence:

[...] North Rhine-Westphalia is leading the way: in securing our energy supply, protecting our climate, and entering the energy of the future [...]. The planned mining of lignite under the Lützerath settlement met with great criticism from environmental associations [...]. (Gilles, 2022)

RP's head of the political department incorporates official statements in his opinion piece and treats them as facts:

[...] North Rhine-Westphalia's early phase-out of lignite by 2030 is a major success for climate policy. It will save 280 million tons of carbon dioxide, save valuable farms and five villages that were actually supposed to make way for the excavators [...]. (Kessler, 2022)

Likewise, Achtermeyer's (2022) opinion piece contends:

[...] The Higher Administrative Court has also ruled unequivocally: RWE has the right to mine Lützerath [...]. So we had to reach a compromise. And we found a good one: In the midst of a very serious energy crisis, we in NRW have gone ahead and finally got the coal phase-out 2030 [...].

A few days before the eviction, RP repeats the government's "ambitions":

[...] At the same time, Neubaur is committed to making NRW "the first climate-neutral industrial region in Europe" despite the crisis - as ambitiously stated in the black-green coalition agreement [...]. "The eviction is a painful but unfortunately necessary step," she tells the German Press Agency. And she points out that the Greens have succeeded in bringing about the coal phase-out in the Rhenish coalfield eight years earlier [...]. (RP, 2022d)

During the eviction, one author elaborates extensively on a letter from the economic ministry and only briefly mentions critique towards the studies underlying "the deal". As the letter repeats,

[...] the coal phase-out in 2030 is a "firmly anchored goal" in the coalition agreement. At the same time, however, the national government is also committed to its "responsibility, together with the federal government, to ensure security of supply at all times [...]". How much coal is still needed from the Garzweiler and Hambach opencast mines has been "examined in detail by independent experts" [...]. As calculated by both the NRW Ministry of Economics and the NRW Geological Survey [...], [...] the required energy would not be covered [...]. Furthermore, [...] if Lützerath were not used, the supply in 2023 would already be acutely endangered [...]. In addition [...] it would not be feasible to do without Lützerath in terms of mining technology [...]. The early coal phase-out and the preservation of the five coal villages in Erkelenz could in turn leave about 280 million tons of lignite in the ground [...]. Climate activists, on the other hand, doubt the independence of the expert opinions listed by the state government [...]. Germany's contribution to achieving the global target of a maximum of 1.5 degrees of global warming [is] no longer possible [...] if the coal under Lützerath is dredged [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023c)

One journalist repeats official statements in her "fact-check about Lützerath's eviction" one day before the mass demonstration:

[...] To the chagrin of coal critics, coal is thus needed under Lützerath in most scenarios [...]. "Due to the current energy crisis, in which gas is to be saved, these companies need this fuel for a secure energy supply," [says RWE.] Could Lützerath be left out [technically]? RWE says: no [...]. Manfred Fishedick, Scientific Director of the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, confirms this: [...] "To preserve Lützerath, other places [...] would then have to give way. The federal government has understandably decided in favor of preserving the villages where people still live today [...]. (Höning, 2023c)¹⁴⁴

After the mass demonstration on January 14th, among others the same author reasserts the "early coal exit" in her article's background information box:

[...] In October 2022, the federal government [...] and RWE agreed to bring forward the phase-out of coal in the Rhineland by eight years to 2030 [...]. (Höning et al., 2023a)

Additionally, journalists and official statements frequently reassert the government's "immense and successful efforts" by highlighting the incomprehensible conflicts within the Green party "because of Lützerath" in several articles' titles:

The wrath of the Green Youth (RP, 2022a)

How Lützerath tears apart the NRW Greens (Höning et al., 2023b)

The Greens in the Lützerath dilemma (Zehrfeld, 2023b)

Another article titled *Clearance of Lützerath becomes a test of endurance for the Greens* (Drebes et al. 2023) reasserts this by quoting the co-chair of the Green Party's federal parliament group, Wibke Brems:

[...] Today is not an easy day for us Greens and all people committed to climate protection." She referred to the phase-out of lignite, brought forward by eight years to 2030: "Keeping 280 million tons of coal in the ground in the middle of an energy crisis is a milestone for climate protection [...].

In parallel, some articles claim to investigate "the deal", but reassert its legitimacy¹⁴⁵. An article titled *Is the coal phase-out a deception?* (Hönig, 2022b) contends that "the deal" saves less emissions than claimed but concludes based on M. Neubaur's statements and studies:

[...] Contrary to what coal critics had hoped, two of the three scenarios show that coal is necessary under Lützerath [...]. Neubaur sees herself confirmed: The report does not refute the need to draw on Lützerath but confirms it [...].

¹⁴⁴ Note how this statement builds on "the symbol narrative's" emphasis on Lützerath's "emptiness".

¹⁴⁵ Note that RP published an interview with Luisa Neubauer who scrutinizes the deal and rejects allegations of an "early coal phase out" (Wolf, 2022). However, these statements remain "a critique" and journalists do not incorporate them in subsequent articles but rather claim to refute them.

Another journalist reasserts "the deal's" legitimacy under the title *Secrecy in coal agreement?* - *NRW state government under fire* (Zehrfeld, 2022b):

[...] Many people are outraged. Also, about the way in which the agreement was reached behind closed doors [...]. Minister Mona Neubaur did not directly address the accusations when asked. "I am glad that the talks held by the state, the federal government and the company have come to this result," she said. The RWE group [...] also pointed out that they had "publicly presented the results of the talks at a press conference [...].

Another, seemingly critical article published on the same day by the same author with the title *Scientists see CO2 savings "of almost zero"* (Zehrfeld, 2022c) ultimately reassures "the deal" and the need for even greater investments into "renewable energy":

[...] Catharina Rieve is the lead author of several DIW¹⁴⁶ studies that conclude that the coal under Lützerath would no longer be needed for energy supply and that burning it would jeopardize the climate targets of the state of NRW. The federal government, however, stands by its calculation: the agreement reached between the federal government, the state and the energy company RWE is "an important milestone in terms of the federal government's climate policy efforts" [...]. "How much CO2 is ultimately saved also depends on how quickly we expand renewable energies" [...].

Along this line, journalists emphasize the government's heroism, individual responsibility, and the urgent need for new investments a few days before the eviction:

[...] NRW will be hit harder by the recession because of its economic structure," says Neubauer [...]. A special NRW hardship fund is to be ready at the beginning of February [...]. From the point of view of households, the most important thing in 2023 will be to use their gas heating systems as sparingly as possible, advises Wolfgang Schuldzinski, head of the NRW consumer center. This would not only make Germany less dependent on Russian gas but would also save money [...]. Ehlert adds [...]: "What is needed is a welcoming culture for investments and start-ups - with as little bureaucracy as possible, fast approval procedures and an efficient infrastructure. Against high energy prices, planned economic interventions" are wrong. What is needed instead is "more supply and more stable supply chains. Security of supply and greater energy efficiency are therefore key issues for the entire economy [...]. (Döbler et al., 2022)

Similarly, M. Neubaur reasserts in another interview:

[...] We must now use the time to invest in the transformation [...]. We need to build a network for green hydrogen [...]. We need an overproduction of renewable energy so that we can also produce hydrogen here [...]. But we also know that we need to import hydrogen in large quantities [...]. This year we will finish the decree that will allow wind turbines to be planned on forest areas destroyed by the bark beetle as well as in coniferous forests. We are also pushing ahead with the expansion of photovoltaics on open spaces along highways and railroads to massively increase the annual expansion. We will do this gradually so as not to jeopardize acceptance [...]. We have pushed through a coal phase-out for NRW that has been brought forward by eight years, five villages have been saved, and around 280 million tons of

¹⁴⁶ German Institute for Economic Research.

coal will remain safely underground [...]. Politics sometimes has to make difficult decisions [...]. (Plück & Döbler, 2022)

After the eviction, journalists uncritically quote FDP "energy-expert" Brocke's co-option of counter-narratives' scrutiny towards "the deal" and reassert its legitimacy and the need for investments into "renewables":

[...] The agreement with the federal and national governments stipulates that a reserve could still be required for three years after 2030. This is purely an insurance policy for security of supply," said an RWE spokeswoman [...]. The opposition is enraged. "Through a green backroom deal with RWE, Robert Habeck and Mona Neubaur wanted to seal the early coal exit. However, the necessary conditions are missing: sufficient alternative and reliable energy and storage capacities," said FDP energy expert Dietmar Brockes. But it is right to have a reserve to secure the energy supply, he said [...]. (Höning et al. 2023c)

Finally, one of the last articles rearticulates the government's successes:

[M.] Neubaur pointed to successes achieved by the Greens: "I know what we have achieved, very concretely for the people in the Rhinish coalfield, what we have achieved for climate protection," she said. "We are also breaking part of the 1.5-degree target by bringing forward the coal phase-out to 2030." In addition, she said, a physical limit on open pit mining had been achieved [...]. (Gilles, 2023b)

Would you like to find out just how sustainable RWE is?

While emphasizing the government's efforts, journalists describe RWE as sustainable and socially responsible based on RWE's statements, as an early article titled *RWE wants to bring forward coal phase-out* (Siedentop & Gilles, 2022) illustrates. Another article holds:

[...] To ensure energy security until 2030 and beyond, new gas-fired power plants are to be built [...]. RWE wants to participate with a total power plant capacity of three gigawatts [and] offer RWE employees the prospect of new jobs in plants that will operate in a climate-neutral manner in the future. RWE also undertakes to build wind and solar power plants with a total capacity of one gigawatt by 2030 [...]. (Wolf & Zehrfeld, 2022b)

Moreover, journalists highlight RWE's ownership over Lützerath and all that is beneath and justify its unshared profits with social responsibility and sustainability:

[...] The state government sees RWE in the right after a court decision. RWE is the owner [...] had [...] Neubaur [said recently]. In its core business, RWE was able to more than double its profits to 3.5 billion euros, mainly due to booming business with green electricity and energy trading [...] The federal government wants to siphon off RWE's profits [...]. This is how the price brakes are to be financed. In principle, RWE is ready for this: "We have to stick together in Germany, we will also make our contribution [...]. We are strictly against a retroactive levy. We need reliability and incentives for investors." [...]. RWE wants to keep the money in the group to further invest in the expansion of green electricity [...]. The company, which is the largest CO2 emitter in Germany with its lignite-fired power plants, is driving the expansion of the green power business with billions of euros [...]. (Höning, 2022a)

These arguments are identical with those of a later interview with Krebber published by the same author under the title *"We're getting through the winter well"* (Höning & Krebber, 2022). Thereafter the same journalist justifies RWE's hitherto unshared profits with RWE's benevolence, in two "fact-checks" during the eviction:

[...] The use of the former Lützerath settlement this winter is necessary to ensure a secure supply for the power plants in the midst of the energy crisis and to save gas in the electricity supply, as well as to obtain sufficient overburden and loess for high-quality recultivation," said the corporation [...]. (Höning, 2023b)

[...] What does the company earn from Lützerath? "We cannot break down our results regionally to individual areas," says the RWE spokesman. In any case, there is no question of billions in profits from lignite: The jump in profits that RWE made in the first three quarters of 2022 is not due to lignite [...]. From now on, the profits are also subject to the levy tax that the federal government imposes on energy companies [...]. (Höning, 2023c)

After the eviction, she writes an article titled *RWE with jump in profits - thanks to gas and green electricity* (Höning, 2023d):

[...] RWE made its biggest profit with its gas and green power business [...]. "The main driver of growth is the increase in capacity in the renewables business. The business performance underscores the Group's 'Growing Green' strategy," said CFO Michael Müller [...].



Image 38: Published a few days after the eviction, the article titled *'RWE with jump in profits - thanks to gas and green electricity'* (Höning, 2023d) is accompanied with this picture of "sustainable mining". Source: dpa/ Federico Gambarini, 2023b.

During the eviction, a journalist reasserts RWE's rightful ownership in their summary article titled *Climate clash at the quarry edge - what is it all about in Lützerath*:

[...] Who owns Lützerath? All buildings and land belong to the energy company RWE. And all lawsuits against demolition have been rejected by courts [...]. (Gilles, 2023)

Likewise, journalists normalize persuasion and expropriation by portraying displacement as a somewhat naturally occurring phenomena or a "fairly compensated resettlement" based on statements of RWE and politicians, rather than displaced peoples themselves:

[...] For the land not yet owned by RWE Power AG, purchase, exchange or lease negotiations are still underway with the owners [...]," the Ministry of Economics said. "Land transfer procedures", i.e. expropriations, are to be avoided through the talks. It is not necessary for a company to already own all the land it wants to use [...] for an operating plan to be approved. "It is a normal, regulated procedure that mining successively regulates the use of farmland with the owners / lessees with a lead time of several years." [...] The RWE group strongly rejects the accusation that it exerts pressure on landowners [...]. One talks in all objectivity with the people [...]. (Zehrfeld, 2023d)

[...] In 1970, the hamlet of Lützerath had 105 inhabitants. Since then, the number has steadily decreased [...]. According to the district government of Cologne, the compensation depends on the market value of the old house, thus also on its condition. This market value is deducted from the costs of a new building to calculate the own contribution. So, if the calculated market value is 250,000 euros and the new construction of a comparable house is 270,000 euros, then the personal share of those relocated is 20,000 euros. However, RWE also provided other, smaller financial assistance, for example for the move [...]. (Albustin, 2023b)

"Left Extremism"

While Lützerath's defense is "symbolic" and "the deal is successful", journalists depict Lützerath as a breeding ground for "left extremists" and violence. Articles express this narrative through the categories of the "good protesters" and the "bad protestors". The "bad protestors" slowly take over Lützerath and turn its defense into an undemocratic and ideological fight by radicalizing the desperate peaceful activists who ignore the ineffectiveness and irrationality of their actions. In contrast, journalists emphasize authorities' desire for "a peaceful eviction" and laud their professional and de-escalative strategy. I encountered the "left extremism" narrative in my interview with Aristoteles' who described some of his experiences in Lützerath with the following words:

[...] The ambivalent thing about [Lützerath] is that unfortunately there have also been groups [...] where I think they take advantage of this whole situation, that is, they do not fully stand by the content of what is conveyed here in the vigil [...] they are a bit more set on violence. they are looking for a confrontation somewhere [...] and when there is a calmer phase here [...] they are not there [...] there is always some talk about the black block and there [...] I also said in between [...] I hope this will go well. The connection of really active [...] and those who [...] say let's see what happens here, we are defending something, yes [...]. I always talk to them and ask [...] why are you masked [...] but they can never give me a satisfying answer [...]. In my opinion you don't have to mask yourself. I am a free citizen, I have the possibility

in a state [...] to say my opinion [...] until I possibly tangent the rights of others [...] with the people as said, uh I [...] ask [...] what do you do for it beyond [...] just the fact that you sit here [...] and wait what happens ... that is sometimes a little too little [...] where are you where the decisions are made [...]? I would wish if also parts at least say I go [...] for example in a party [...] There you have of course also many onlookers who are simply [...] more extreme [...] there's also something like that at large events [...]. There are people who go to the football because they um yes leisure organization exercise violence and I had this impression here but also [...] in the Hambacher forest also [...] there I certainly also met some people [...] their freedom is the only real freedom and the freedom of the others you can think about later [...] if it comes [...] to an eviction then all involved were prepared beforehand uh the squatters [...] knew that they actually commit [...] trespass [...]. In Hambach [...] they were resisting passively [...]. I think that's not so bad. [...] But now there were some who were angry that went [...] almost over into fights and that's a border for me [...] I have to accept the legal things [...] and if I think they are wrong or bad then I also have to expect from myself that I try to change something about it [...] in a democratic way I ask to find like-minded people to change for example laws but that I say no I don't find all this right here I resist up to the point that even violence is used to enforce his personal right [...] that can't be [...] purposeful in my opinion." (Interview #6, 21.09.2022)



Image 39: Part of a picture series titled "Protesters set fire to barricades in Lützerath", this photograph accompanied several articles of RP in early January. Taken on January 2nd, 2023, when the police invaded Lützerath, the photograph moreover "made it into" the Constitutional protection report 2022 which refers to Lützeraths inhabitants as "Left extremists" (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2022, p.145). Source: dpa/ Henning Kaiser, 2023.

The good protestors, the bad protestors

Again, the "left extremism" narrative can be traced back to official statements given on October 4th, 2022. One early article holds:

[...] The announcement that Lützerath will have to give way will probably mobilize even more climate activists to come [...]. Protest is acceptable, criticism is fine, but it should always remain peaceful, warns RWE boss Markus Krebber. Thomas Schnelle has a similar view: "I hope for a peaceful protest like it has actually always been in Lützerath [...]". (Pasvantis & Wibbeke, 2022)

The subsequently published interview with M. Neubaur similarly respects "peaceful protest":

[...] I respect the fact that a large part of the peaceful climate protection movement repeatedly takes to the streets for the human task of climate protection [...]. (Zehrfeld, 2022a)

Likewise, interviews with NRW's police union chairman Michael Mertens and Aachen's police president Dirk Weinspach respectively titled *In Lützerath, the hard core has long since taken the lead* (Plück, 2022) and *These are sometimes real violent criminals* (Schwerdtfeger, 2022a) distinguish between "peaceful" and "violent" protest. In the latter, Weinspach "analyses" Lützerath's composition:

[...] We already have an influx from abroad in Lützerath [...]. The influence of criminals is still considerably less than back then in Hambacher Forst. [...] However, the scene there is unfortunately changing, and the influence of the civics is declining [...]. These are sometimes real violent criminals who commit massive crimes. But this is still a small part, which is not yet dominant [...].¹⁴⁷

Besides quoting official statements, journalists incorporate this division in their reporting. The title *2000 people demonstrate peacefully in Lützerath* (Lehmkuhl, 2022)¹⁴⁸ exemplifies this and reasserts the presence of "a few criminals" based on official police statements:

[...] As reported by the Aachen police, there were isolated criminal acts on the fringes of the demonstration. A smaller group of people entered the open pit mine to put down a banner [...]. Elsewhere, a banned PKK flag was shown [...].

Another journalist bases his interview question on this division and juxtaposes LL's positioning statement on "violence" with official statements:

[LL] had reacted evasively to a corresponding question [...]. Meanwhile, the Erkelenz Green local association has also called for peaceful protest. "That Lützerath could not be saved, hurts us Erkelenz Greens very much", [...] but: "We quite clearly reject the resistance against the eviction of Lützerath by demonstrators ready for violence [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023d)

Likewise, other journalists report back from the eviction:

[...] You can clearly see that there are different groups of people among the protesters. Some are extremely aggressive, insulting the police officers [...]. Others, however, behave calmly and peacefully. Guitar is played, the kitchen team distributes snacks to those sitting on the poles [...]. (Isringhaus & Schwerdtfeger, 2023)

¹⁴⁷ Weinspach's statements are quoted again in an article during the eviction: "According to the Aachen police chief in charge, Dirk Weinspach, the activists in Lützerath are a "mixed scene" that is predominantly "middle-class and peacefully oriented". However, a small part is prepared to commit violent crimes." (Gilles, 2023a)

¹⁴⁸ See also the article titled *Predominantly peaceful protest on the first day of eviction* (Kuszlik, 2023a).

Moreover, journalists emphasize internal divisions based on police statements:

[Weinspach:] There are, according to our knowledge, also within the scene not insignificant conflicts between the civil, peaceful and the violent camps [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2022a)

[...] Stones were then also thrown. According to Lützerath head of operations Wilhelm Sauer, these people were to be assigned to "a more violent scene". Nevertheless, many people from the same group had also shouted "No stones" and condemned the violent scenes [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023e)

Furthermore, journalist explicitly connect Lützerath to "left extremism". Early on, one author presents statements of NRW's constitutional protection agency ("*Verfassungsschutz*") under the title *Let them come* (Rasche, 2022):

[...] So far, there are no signs of a comparable quality to the situation in Hambach Forest at that time," they say. However, the situation is being monitored very closely by the security authorities. Whether there will be "violent protests" depends [...] "decisively on the extent to which the majority of the bourgeois center, which is actually concerned about the climate, succeeds in distancing itself from the violence-prone minority from the left-wing extremist spectrum, which is primarily concerned with the aggressive realization of its extremist agenda." Radicalization of individuals, however, could not be ruled out in principle [...].

The journalist's alarming introduction to this article illustrates the extent to which the entire article is framed within the "fact" that "there are some extremists":

[...] When they come, they are expected. When they come, barricades block the entrance. When they come, the training is over. When they come, the final battle begins. When they come, it's "Day-X" [...].

While pretending to quote thoughts of Lützerath's inhabitants, these words are the author's creation. Accordingly, RP releases a (hu-)manhunt relating to the open conflict in February 2022 a few days later under the title *Police search for Lützerather stone thrower* (RP, 2022b). Alongside preparations for the eviction, a journalist reassures the presence of "left extremists":

[...] According to [...] our editorial office, there are also almost two dozen potentially violent persons who can be assigned to the left-wing extremist scene [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022e)

Around the same time, the same journalist reports on debates within Heinsberg county about whether there is "not only a problem with right-wing extremism, but also with left-wing extremism" (Pasvantis, 2022c). Based on police statements, journalists pick up this debate on the early morning of January 2nd, 2023, under the title *Extremism on the rise?* Here, Weinspach contends that there is

[...] such a scene "in the vicinity of the Garzweiler open-cast mine, which is a threat to the infrastructure there, to RWE and RWE employees and to us as police [...]." The State

Protection Service assumes a small double-digit number of left-wing extremists in Lützerath [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023a)

Likewise, the "background information box" of an article published right before the eviction "informs" based on statements of the interior ministry, that NRW's constitutional protection agency

[...] monitors extremist actors within the climate movement. In North Rhine-Westphalia, according to the Ministry of the Interior, they mingle with occupiers in the Rhenish lignite mining area - such as in Hambacher Forst or in Lützerath. In addition, extremists have been noticed in local groups of "Ende Gelände". Left-wing extremists also took part in "Fridays for Future" demonstrations [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2022b)

On the same day, RP's deputy chief editor's opinion piece asserts this:

[...] The eco-ideologists, mobilized for resistance all over Germany [...]. The [...] partly militant manifestation of the extra-parliamentary opposition, does not shy away from breaking the law; it has already shown at Hambacher Forst that it does not consistently reject violence [...]. Those who now rightly demand from the police not to let the confrontation escalate should direct such an appeal above all to the activists [...]. (Thoren, 2022)

Journalists assert the "external provocateurs" observable on the after-eviction camp:

[...] On Monday, around 250 coal opponents pitched their tents in Keyenberg. Some of them have come a long way, and not only from Germany. Many languages can be heard on the campsite [...]. (Wibbeke, 2023)

Likewise, an article published in the eviction's aftermath reports on a debate in the national parliament initiated by Germany's populist and right-extreme party AfD. The journalist quotes Wilfried Oeller's (CDU) statement "the activists spread fear" in the title and summarizes official statements as "SPD warned against left-wing extremists in climate movement" (Oversteegen, 2023). Additionally, journalists repeatedly emphasize politicians' and authorities' demands on "peaceful protestors" to distance themselves from "the bad protestors":

[Reul] appealed to the peaceful climate activists to distance themselves from the autonomists: "I think it is time for the peaceful climate activists to finally distance themselves from these rioters [...]. (Schwerdtfeger & Pasvantis, 2023)

Two days later, another journalist incorporates this demand in her opinion piece:

[...] What do the peaceful protesters do if the feared riots occur? All too quickly, their Lützerath climate show could be misused by extremists [...]. (Höning, 2023a)

Another journalist summarizes her article before quoting Reul, the police, and NRW's constitutional protection agency:

[...] Alongside the large peaceful majority, violent left-wing extremists are mobilizing their forces. Interior Minister Herbert Reul appeals to people to distance themselves from "chaots" [...]. (Zehrfeld, 2023a)

After the mass demonstration on January 14th, 2023, the same journalist quotes official statements under the title *There was clearly the will to overrun the police* (Zehrfeld, 2023c) while omitting counter-narratives. In the article she writes:

[...] Gregor Golland¹⁴⁹ [:] "I condemn the attacks by left-wing extremists and violent criminals on police officers, and I expect peaceful demonstrators to distance themselves from these actions." The FDP's interior expert, Marc Lürbke, was even more explicit. "Under the guise of climate protection and carried unchallenged by the broad mass of demonstrators, fully hooded climate chaots have given free rein to their hatred of the rule of law and our police with violence and firecrackers on the field in front of Lützerath," he found. The accusation that the violence came from the police is an impertinence, he said. "Our police are not whipping boys for left-wing extremist chaos," Lürbke said. "Violent and dangerous attempts to storm the area of the village and the demolition edge have nothing at all to do with peaceful protest anymore [...]."

Another journalist's opinion piece titled *The activists' double standard* (Schwerdtfeger, 2023e) contends:

[...] The behavior of the so-called activists is hypocritical [...]. Certainly, not all squatters in the village are violent by far, but they do not distance themselves from the autonomists either. In doing so, they not only tolerate their crimes, but also make themselves jointly responsible for the violence. The moderate protesters had enough time to banish the stone-throwers from their ranks. They missed this chance. And with it the chance to show the general public that they are really only concerned about the climate and not about violence [...].

His later article is nearly identical and almost exclusively refers to and quotes Reul, who

[...] is annoyed that activists do not clearly distance themselves from the perpetrators of violence. "People always act as if such attacks are completely normal, as if you have to accept it" [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023j)

After neither LL, nor ADB, nor Luisa Neubaur or Greta Thunberg discredited "the left-extremists", journalists *nevertheless* reassert this division in an interview with Henrik Wüst titled *NRW Minister President thanks peaceful demonstrators* (Zehrfeld, 2023f). Based on this interview, a subsequent article elaborates:

[...] After the evacuation of the lignite village of Lützerath, [...] Hendrik Wüst (CDU) sees the possibility for social pacification in climate policy [...]. Wüst [also thanked] the demonstrators who peacefully demonstrated in and around the lignite village of Lützerath. His thanks go to all those "who kept to agreements, who did not put themselves or others in danger," the CDU politician said in Düsseldorf on Tuesday. These peaceful demonstrators "successfully drew attention to one of the greatest tasks of our time." These people represent the part of the climate movement for which violence should never be a means of conflict in a

¹⁴⁹ See background chapter on financial entanglements between Golland and RWE.

democracy, "no matter how convinced you are of a cause, no matter how good it may be in the end," [...]. (Gilles, 2023b)

Anti-democratic desperation

Besides distinguishing "good" from "bad" protestors, journalists "explain" the latter's undemocratic behavior with their desperation and irrationality. For example, journalists emphasize peoples' ignorant recklessness:

[...] The edge of the open pit lignite mine [...] is [now] so close that the ground in Lützerath not far from the mine has cracked. Landslide hazard [...]. (Rasche, 2022)

[...] A 27-year-old man died in the Hambach Forest in 2018 [...]. (Rathcke, 2023)

[...] The rescue of the two people [in the tunnel] would have to be done by special forces of the fire department and the THW, says [Weinspach]. "I just think it's terrible what dangers these people are taking on, for themselves." The construction, he said, was not safe, the oxygen supply inadequate [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023d)

Other articles quote RWE-spokesperson Guido Steffen, who condemns sabotage as ineffective, costly, emotional, and criminal in their title *RWE seeks compensation from Lützerath climate activists* (Kuszlik, 2023b) and in their text:

[...] You don't prevent open pit mining and you don't prevent open pit mining progress by such actions [...]." The three arsons from last week could be interpreted as a kind of "act of revenge" [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022f)

Additionally, journalists assert increasing desperation in the last article published in 2022:

[...] The year will probably start with a bang in Erkelenz: In the occupied Lützerath, a nearly four-week eviction operation is pending [...]. A high four-digit number of people will try to prevent this - and not a few observers believe that in an increasingly hysterical, desperate and aggressive global climate debate, there could be excesses of violence [...]. (RP, 2022e)

Two articles with the titles *The futile fight for Lützerath* (Rathcke, 2023) and *Appeals to reason remain unheard* (Pasvantis, 2023b) re assert desperation and irrationality on January 2nd, 2023. Another opinion piece from the same day likely represents the epitome of journalists' emphasis on desperation. Under the title *It's over, Lützerath!* one journalist writes a belittling, ridiculing, and pitying farewell letter to a personified Lützerath, a "long-dead village", "artificially enlivened by activists", a "circus-clown", and "ant's muck" on the map, which "no one will remember", which "will not save the climate" (Büren, 2023). Likewise, journalists conclude during the eviction:

[...] In their desperation, the demonstrators throw bottles, stones and even a Molotov cocktail towards the police [...]. (Isringhaus & Schwerdtfeger, 2023)

[...] Lützi stays," they shout with the courage of despair, although they know that this cannot be true [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023d)

In parallel, journalists describe Lützerath's defense as un- and even anti-democratic. First, they reference Pusch's justification for the eviction:

[...] In terms of the rule of law and democracy, the claim on Lützerath has been clarified," said the district administrator [...]. It is therefore his duty and responsibility to exercise the will of the democratically elected state government [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022f)

Then they quote Schnelle's conclusion:

[...] The decisions have been made with great political consensus, have been approved by the courts, and must now be accepted by all [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023b)

Thereafter, RP's head of the political department claims to investigate the origins and "rules" of civil disobedience in his "analysis" titled *When citizens may violate the law* (Kessler, 2023a). He warns of ineffectiveness, incoherency, elitism, narcissism, and anti-democratic behavior:

[...] However, civil disobedience [according to Jürgen Habermas] must not degenerate into a general rejection of the rule of law. Precisely because he recognizes the legal norms in a democracy, the disobedient citizen also accepts the punishment - like Thoreau in his time, but also King [...]. The prerequisite for this, however, is that the disobedient person can appeal to his conscience without merely following an elitist attitude or a certain narcissism. Also, the means chosen and the goal must be in reasonable proportion to each other [...]. Even the prevention of a certain amount of the climate-damaging gas carbon dioxide does not yet justify resistance to a majority decision, even if the occupants of Lützerath use this argument. Finally, more activities of the government to achieve its self-chosen climate goals cannot be forced by illegal actions. [...] It must be a genuine decision of conscience [...]. Whether this applies to the protest actions in Lützerath [...] remains more than doubtful [...].

Based on police statements, another journalist describes the "inhumane climate-chaots":

[...] It is a disturbing scene, which has happened during the assault run [...] on Lützerath [...]. Finally, the "monk" even pushes a policeman back on the muddy ground with full intent - under loud bawling of the climate chaots [...]. "When did humanity cease to exist? When did hatred of emergency forces begin to win? [...] To mock a human being in a defenseless and needy situation, to revile him, to place oneself above him and even to push him over, cannot be surpassed anymore in inhumanity, in contempt and baseness," [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023h)

Radicalization

Moreover, journalists describe how "the criminals" radicalize "the good protestors". One author writes on the mass demonstration on January 14th, 2023:

[...] Thousands of demonstrators] were also driven by a loudspeaker announcement of an assembly speaker¹⁵⁰. "I think it's right if you paralyze the pit and try to get to Lützerath," it echoes from the loudspeakers. Many respond to his call. And this even though the Heinsberg district has issued a danger warning for the area [...]. This does not seem to interest the demonstrators, among whom are also parents with their children [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023f)

Other articles likewise describe an allegedly "blind followship" by referring to Greta Thunberg as "the leading climate activist" (Albustin, 2023a). Subsequently, journalists claim to quote Greta but omit her words about global solidarity, decolonization, Germany's historic responsibility, and public-private-partnerships¹⁵¹:

[...] Climate activist Greta Thunberg [...] shouted to the crowd: "You are the saints; you are the hope" [...]. (Höning et al., 2023a)

While her actual greeting was "You are the change, you are the hope", this known or unknown mistake reasserts people's irrationality and attaches fanatic and reckless followship or "cultism" to them. Similarly, an "analysis" titled "What turns climate activists into activists" reasserts distinctiveness and radicalization:

[...] The accusations against politics are well known, what is new is that more and more people believe that they have to take active action against what they see as failures. And so committed citizens become activists, people who no longer want to wait for democratic processes [...]. Time thus plays a central role in this radicalization [...]. Moreover, the apocalyptic nature of the climate scenarios is also driving people from the middle class into activism [...]. The stakes are indeed high, but the survival of democracy is also at stake if more and more people turn their backs on moderate political processes [...]. (Krings, 2023)

While admonishing activists to be patient and warning them of hybris, she denounces political engagement that goes beyond what is legal as ineffective and undemocratic. On the same day, another journalist writes based on further official statements:

[...] The protests would be infiltrated by enemies of democracy, who discredited the good intentions of the demonstrators. [...] Wilfried Oellers (CDU) [:] "What the activists don't care much about is how the people living in the region feel. The activists spread fear there, even now," [...]. Lukas Benner (Greens) [said:] True, the bulk of the demonstrators had protested peacefully. [...] "But whoever uses violence, leaves the political discourse [...]. (Oversteegen, 2023)

The article titled "Habeck calls on climate movement to distance itself from violence" offers several variations of politicians' and authorities' assertion of radicalization:

[...] More and more politicians are warning of a radicalization of climate movements [...]. "Violence is not a legitimate means of political confrontation," the minister stressed. The debate focused on a possible infiltration of the protest movement by left-wing extremists. "Actors from the left-wing extremist scene are trying to influence climate protection groups,"

¹⁵⁰ See the speech of Peter Emorinken Donatus here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzPI7wyotDQ>

¹⁵¹ See Greta's speech here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZV9TaSx9B4s>

a spokeswoman for the Federal Ministry of the Interior [...] said. SPD interior politician Sebastian Fiedler said [...], "There are violence-oriented left-wing extremists who are trying to infiltrate parts of the climate movement." He added that they were using the movement "for their anti-constitutional aspirations." FDP member of parliament Konstantin Kuhle spoke of violent forms of protest as a "breeding ground for left-wing extremist influences on the movement." [...] North Rhine-Westphalia's Interior Minister Herbert Reul (CDU) warned against an escalation of the protests. If people would "absolutize" their own opinion, "then the climate on the street is the first thing - and the shooting afterwards is the last thing," [...]. (RP, 2023)

The subsequent day, a journalist reasserts radicalization and separation by referencing some local inhabitants:

[...] It is important to the residents that they definitely distinguish between demonstrators, activists and extremists. "[...] we also believe in our representative democracy [...]. Of course, an agreement can never be reached in every respect [...]. It's just that a democracy is characterized by respecting the opinion of the majority." The activists and also alliances such as "All Villages Remain" had recently become increasingly radicalized - from which the residents distance themselves [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023h)

Professional authorities

Meanwhile, journalists describe the professional authorities. An early interview with Mertens highlights responsible police preparations:

[...] During the clearance, demolition, and clearing process, a four-digit number of police officers must constantly be on site to carry out the clearance and secure the work [...]. This must also be thoroughly prepared [...]. (Plück, 2022)

Likewise, journalists emphasize M. Neubaur's de-escalative efforts:

[...] "For the eviction of the settlement Lützerath, which is legally clearly judged in the possession and property of RWE, we will offer the initiatives talks in the sense of de-escalation" [...]. (Zehrfeld, 2022a)

[...] "This will be a time when I will do my utmost to de-escalate wherever possible [...]. I am always ready for dialogue, I listen to the criticism," emphasized the Green Minister [...]. (Corman, 2022)

[...] "I believe in the power of dialogue and talk to the activists [...]. These are exhausting talks for both sides. [...] I can only appeal that this takes place as non-violently as possible. [...] I will do my utmost to ensure that it does not escalate" [...]. (Plück & Döbler, 2022)

As well as Weinspach's ambitions:

[...] "We [...] will continue to talk with the moderate part through our communication officers, who are constantly seeking conversation there, and that all sides will use the opportunity to achieve a peaceful eviction. We will always be the first to communicate substitutes and look for communicative solutions" [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2022a)

Likewise, journalists reference Pusch, who ordered the eviction, but

[...] indicated [...] that he wanted to seek dialogue with the activists in Lützerath. This offer [will] now to be realized at a public information event [...]. (Pasvantis, 2022h)

Reul's quoted statements emphasize rigor and caution:

[...] In the end, Lützerath has to be empty, and that can only be done within a single operation in which firstly the barricades are removed, secondly the people are moved, thirdly all the houses are demolished and the trees are cleared [...]. Reul said, "It's all going to take some time, no one is rushing into this. It has to be done thoroughly." People's lives will not be put at risk [...]. (Boots, 2022)

Accordingly, an interview with Reul published thereafter is titled *We do everything so that no one gets harmed* (Schwerdtfeger, 2023b). Similarly, journalists describe "the informative police" regarding their "on-site inspection" in December 2022:

[...] With batons and shields, a hundred police officers visited the occupied village [...]. The activists see the operation as a provocation. The police stressed that their goal was "elucidation" [...]. "[The operation is] essential to ensure a professional and adapted operational preparation," it said in a statement [...] the activists spoke of a "show of force" and a "completely exaggerated" appearance that wanted to "provoke an escalation" [...]. (Pasvantis, 2023d)

[The activists] spoke of an escalation of the conflict over climate protection [...]. On Monday, a police detachment had visited the hamlet. Activists [...] considered the appearance of the police officers with batons and shields as a provocation [...]. (RP, 2022c)

Journalists fragmentally quote and reword statements of LL¹⁵², thereby contrasting "the easily provokable activists" to "the professional police visit", rather describing the latter as a failed attempt to legitimize an eviction. A subsequent opinion piece published during the eviction similarly reassures that activists should have expected and accepted the eviction:

[...] It should send partly martial images and messages: Lützerath was under attack, police troops were invading, the battle for the coal village was beginning. But it has long been in vain. What the activists try to sell as a provocation is rather the preparation of a long-planned, legally confirmed eviction [...]. It does not come as a surprise [...]. (Rathcke, 2023)

Through "detailed investigations" into police tactics, one journalist describes professionalism and the "de-escalative use of water cannons":

[...] High-ranking police sources will later say that this was part of the tactics of the operation [...]. Water cannons arrive [...]. The police warns the demonstrators several times urgently [...]. Then water is sprayed on the demonstrators - and this has an effect. The situation calms down noticeably [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023f)

¹⁵² The original statement is: "We see this as an attempt to provoke an escalation with a completely excessive police force and thus legitimize an eviction. We will not play this game! We know that legitimacy is on our side" (LL, 05.12.2022l).

In another article published on the same day, the same author accuses activists of "double standards" (Schwerdtfeger, 2022e). Moreover, journalists present the professional police as concerned about global warming, sustainability, gender-equality, and peoples' wellbeing:

[...] Weinspach shares the concerns of climate activists about global warming [...]. And he [...] seeks communication with the occupiers. He even responded in detail to a letter from the climate activists, expressing respect for them. His strategy clearly relies on transparency and de-escalation [...]. (Pasvantis et al., 2023)

[...] There is [...] a hot meal once a day," says Arno Keusch, chairman of the police union (GdP) in the Aachen district association. "In the past, there was goulash [...]," he says. Today, there is always a vegetarian option as well. For the day, the task forces get a so-called rations bag, with sandwiches, fruit, one and a half liters of water and apple spritzer, and a chocolate bar [...]. ["Today] there are also many more women in the [units] than in the past." [...] For many task forces, who stand at the edge of the demolition for the first time, it is already impressive and frightening [...]. Mertens [adds], "We all want our environment to be preserved, and the people who are working for that basically deserve recognition first." The only question is how the protest is carried out, peacefully or violently [...]. (Hauser, 2023)

Meanwhile, journalists discredit charges against the police by juxtaposing them with statements of the police and higher-ranking politicians:

[...] The police escalated the situation [...]," the spokesperson [...] said. "One activist fell without external impact and injured herself [...]. A policewoman was hit and injured by a stone wedged under the tire of a construction machine. She was taken to a nearby hospital," says the message of the responsible police Aachen [...]. (Schwerdtfeger, 2023a)

[...] The head of the Green Youth, Timon Dzienus, sharply criticized the actions of the police: [...]. "The violence clearly came from the police, not from the demonstrators and activists." An impression that the FDP member of the state parliament Marc Lürbke could not confirm. He was also on the scene and praised the actions of the police as "absolutely professional": "The officers are acting here very communicative, de-escalating and planned" [...]. (Drebes et al., 2023)

[LL] accused the police of an overly harsh deployment [...]. "The purposeful communication has contributed to the de-escalation of the situation," said police union chairman Rainer Wendt on Wednesday afternoon [...]. (Kuszlik, 2023a)

Likewise, the article titled *Resistance in Lützerath crumbles* (Pasvantis & Vallata, 2023) concludes after quoting critical statements of Greenpeace, Scientist Rebellion, Yupka delegate Juan Pablo Gutierrez, and a spokesperson of "Lützerath unevictable":

[...] For the most part, the police had a very coordinated, calm, and careful approach. There were hardly any injured ones on day two [...]. When the officers had cleared the "Paula" yard, many bottles were thrown, firecrackers and stones - also media representatives [...] had almost been hit [...].

Accordingly, journalists present examples of police violence as isolated cases by quoting Mertens, Golland, and Reul:

[...] He wanted images of police use of force to be placed in the larger context [...], Mertens said [...]. (Höning et al., 2023a)

[...] These videos always show only the moment when the baton was taken out, and not the attacks on the officers that occurred before," explained [...] Gregor Golland [...]. (Zehrfeld, 2023c)

[...] NRW Interior Minister Herbert Reul (CDU) doubted the figures cited by the activists [...]. (Corman, 2023)

Thereafter, journalists juxtapose numbers of injuries "on both sides" based on police statements. They emphasize "a few mistakes" during a "largely professional operation" in an article titled *Operation in Lützerath - Investigations against five police officers* (Schwerdtfeger, 2023j). Finally, another articles hold that

[...] a total of more than 100 officers have been injured, and almost 500 criminal offenses have been recorded by the police. In five cases so far, investigations have been initiated against officers, with accusations of assault and battery and, in one case, sexual harassment [...]. (Höning et al., 2023c)

Colonial continuities, responsibility, and a diversity of tactics!

In contrast to "the deal" and "left extremism", the marginalized and silenced realities of LL, AIL, and other inhabitants of Lützerath highlight systemic violence within (green) capitalist society as colonial continuities. Governments, institutions, and corporations uphold these through empty promises and greenwashing. By recognizing their relatively privileged positions and responsibility towards those most affected by global warming, oppression, and ecosystem destruction, people reclaim and defend Lützerath out of solidarity and political emancipation. Instead of appealing and obeying to the institutions that enforce capitalist destruction, people take inspiration from other political struggles and emphasize ambitions of autonomy and a diversity of tactics. LL condemn the destructiveness of RWE:

[...] We are angry. Still, people in Pakistan, Somalia and all other places strongly affected by the climate catastrophe must fight for survival because of the irresponsible actions of RWE and politics. It is the task of all of us to stop this capitalist climate destruction now and to protect Lützerath [...]. (LL, 2022d)

[LL] supports, among others, the lawsuit of the Peruvian farmer Saúl Luciano Lliuya, who has been claiming compensation from RWE since 2015 [...]. It is absurd that RWE, which is destroying villages, biodiversity and our global livelihoods, is now claiming compensation from climate activists who are trying to preserve them [...]. Saúl Luciano Lliuya lives in the northern Andes of Peru in a village below the Palcaraju glacier. As temperatures continue to rise, the glacier is melting directly into Lake Palcacocha, which threatens to overflow and destroy Lliuya's home and those of 50,000 others. Among others, the energy company RWE, Europe's largest producer of greenhouse gases, is to blame [...]. (LL, 2023n)

[...] RWE immediately created irreversible facts, as it did throughout the expropriations [...]. (LL, 2023h)

During a village walk demonstration in early October, "Mascha", a former inhabitant of Immerath condemned RWE's "socially compatible resettlement procedures" in her speech. She told us about witnessing the demolition of their parents' house and that today RWE surveils Immerath although five families still live there [...]. Mascha recounted, how her parents renovated their house thoroughly when they bought it in 1974 until neighbors wondered why, since it would be demolished in 50 years. While no property in Immerath was sold to RWE until the 90s, the mere possibility of Immerath being demolished, hindered people from moving there or maintaining their houses. Property values decreased far below prices for a new house and forced "resettling" people into debt. Further, Mascha told how RWE infiltrates itself into people's everyday lives, causing interpersonal conflicts among others through secret contracts for selling properties (Fieldnotes, 09.10.2022)¹⁵³. Likewise, AIL and LL analyze the violence inherent in governments, institutions, and "democracy":

[...] Mona Neubaur and Robert Habeck's backroom deal with RWE bosses is a hypocritical sham. No emissions will be saved, but the coal will simply be burned earlier [...]. (LL, 2022g)

[...] The German government should be ashamed to go to the climate conference in Egypt with promises it has already broken before! Like all industrialized countries of the Global North, the German government will only misuse the climate conference for greenwashing. For decades, the Global North has been making empty promises while continuously exploiting the Global South economically and ecologically [...]. (LL, 2022h)

[...] The fundamental social change that is needed [...] can only come from below. 27 years of climate negotiations, with steadily rising emissions, have shown that governments can only produce empty words [...]. (LL, 2022i)

Rather than "being unpolitical", "undemocratic", or "disappointed by a particular party", early blogposts of AIL reflect on freedom, representative democracy, oppression, and green capitalism:

[...] We want to live freely [...] without telling others what they may or may not do [...]. We organize ourselves [...]. The state, on the other hand, forces us into a system of oppression and violence. We must perform, at school, at work, at university [...]. The state tries to keep us in the illusion that we can have a say [...]. But [...] elections, parties, trade unions only serve to give us the feeling that we could be powerful ourselves if only we have the right place in the system of rule. The participation in power, however, prevents us from abolishing what we want. Already Audre Lorde said "The Master's tool will never dismantle the Master's house" [...]. Equal participation is a false promise of the state and capitalism, which exploits and destroys us all and the planet [...]. We have already seen often enough how state-protected property robs people of their livelihood, how nation-state borders kill people, how the state

¹⁵³ See also Brock & Dunlap (2018).

structures complex lives and makes them completely dependent on itself. It is not only capitalism that is the problem, but also the state relations that perpetuate the alienation between all living beings [...]. And the fact that [the state] does nothing to stop climate change is not because it has to be pushed to do so first, but because it is part of the problem. [...] Neither do we want a green capitalism controlled by the state, because we have found the growth compulsion and exploitation as the core of the problem [...] the basic problem of the state is the social hierarchy, the domination over people and their lives. People, living beings, the environment are seen as a means to an end, as something that must be dominated and controlled [...]. (AIL, 2022a)

Along this line, AIL condemn "de-escalative" police tactics long before Lützerath's eviction:

[...] The cops and the state are never cooperating partners, interacting with them always weakens any of our positions [...]. The cops have professionally trained personnel who are specialized in dividing the resistance through talks and supposed "rescue" offers or compromises. And this division always aims at the demarcation of the "non-militant" activists from the "militant" activists [...]. (AIL, 2022b)

After the eviction, LL conclude correspondingly:

[...] Agreements on de-escalation [...] were not adhered to by the police. The public claim of the police to carry out a transparent, de-escalative and level-headed operation was, as expected, only pretended, and lied [...]. "From the beginning, the eviction was visibly under a very considerable time pressure, which led to life-threatening situations [...]" . Although it was communicated in advance of the eviction that in various "crisis situations" a stop [...] would happen [...] this was not adhered to [...] despite a tunnel occupation and mass demonstration. "The communication strategy failed with the beginning of the evacuation operation, [...]. (LL, 2023i)

They report on dangerous situations, force, and chaos caused by the brutal eviction:

[...] From a medical point of view, the evacuation of Lützerath is irresponsible and dangerous [...]. While the strictest moral standards are applied to us climate protecting people, police officers beat peaceful activists without consequence [...]. (LL, 2023b)

[...] The police puts about 8 climate activists in the occupied village of Lützerath in acute danger of death. They are on 3 monopods in about 8-10 meters height. In these minutes, the police cut statically necessary ropes [...]. (LL, 2023e)

[...] The police cut off the occupied village of Lützerath from food and drink [...]: "No one ought to be forced to do anything by depriving them of basic human needs. It is a clear violation of international conventions, the constitution, and human rights [...]. (LL, 2023g)

[...] The eviction and simultaneous clearing in Lützerath caused chaos in places and wide-ranging cordons in the village, which hindered the reporting of many journalists and created unnecessary sources of danger [...]. (LL, 2023h)

[...] Our tunnel is safe. Only careless police actions can put us in danger here [...]. The tunnel builders demand a professional approach with a cave rescue team [...]. (LL, 2023c)

However, rather than comparing numbers of injuries and blaming individuals, LL describe police violence as a *structural* issue:

[...] The flowing through of police chains, which the police cited in the media as a reason, in no way justifies a sweeping and such brutal action by the police. What we saw on Saturday

must have consequences for those responsible for the massive violence. This is especially true for the black-green state government, which ordered this operation. In addition, we need independent institutions so that police violence finally has consequences and perpetrators can no longer cover for each other [...]. (LL, 2023k)

[...] Regarding the current discussion about police violence, we would like to criticize [...] the systemic circumstances that favor police violence [...]. At other demonstrations, we have repeatedly experienced that [the] duty of confidentiality on the part of the treating hospitals was broken and, for example, personal data or even discharge letters were passed on to the police. In the case of Lützerath, an activist described to us the release of personal data from the Hermann-Josef Hospital in Erkelenz to the police [...]. The police generally assume that activists injured by the police had disregarded police instructions and that physical coercion was therefore proportionate. Often, the injured activists are charged with "resistance against law enforcement officers". This logic, however, does not consider baseless police violence, as was the case on Saturday. We therefore strive to protect our patients from further repression [...]. [For this reason, we [...] do not keep statistics and do not name concrete patterns of violations that would allow conclusions to be drawn about individuals. [...]. The fact that neither the police nor the press receive figures or information about our patients, we see as a quality feature of our work [...]. Characteristic of the extent of police violence were unexpectedly many head and thorax injuries, which show that here was a deliberate attempt to inflict severe and most serious injuries [...]. Herbert Reul demanded on Sunday evening to give him "evidence of police violence", names and cases. For the reasons above, we will not do this [...]. Furthermore, he mentioned that these cases would then be examined [...]. Here we would like to remind Mr. Reul that there is no identification obligation for police officers in NRW and an identification of the "individual cases" is almost impossible. Mr. Reul himself abolished the identification obligation in 2017 as [...] one of his first official acts. The fact that a prosecution and conviction of police violence occurs in practice only in 1-2% of cases should be well known [...]. (*Demonstration paramedics* in LL, 2023j)

[...] It is unbearable that the Minister of the Interior speaks of a highly professional operation, although we have countless recordings of helmeted policemen who hit unarmed demonstrators in the face and thorax with their fists [...]. "In the context of Lützerath, police violence was also unleashed against white privileged demonstrators and therefore receives such attention. For people affected by racism and otherwise marginalized people, however, exactly this violence is an everyday reality without being talked about [...]. In the medium term, we must abolish the police as a body that primarily supports the interests of a capitalist system and repeatedly puts people's health and lives at risk for this purpose [...]. (LL, 2023m)

Thereafter, LL shared a report on structural racism and intersectional political struggle:

[...] I was the subject of a racist police control at Hochneukirch train station [...] 4-5 Bundespolizei got out of their van [...] and approached me first. [...] based on my skin colour alone, they suspected and assumed I had no right to be in Europe and was therefore and illegal immigrant and demanded to see my passport. [...]. It was a humiliating experience and highlights how police repression is threat to all of us: how racial profiling and the repression/criminalisation of ecological resistance can coincide with each other and how much more vulnerable participants from more marginalized backgrounds are in these struggles. The restriction of legitimate dissent and the criminalisation of minorities of all kinds, especially those on the move fleeing from war, poverty and other threats to life, must be resisted with equal vigour. Climate catastrophe will only bring more irregular movements of people fleeing from natural disasters [...] if the adults in the room of the industrialised nations in Europe and beyond continue to [...] perpetuate an unequal destructive economy [...], then it can only be called an act of horrific hypocrisy to criminalise and demonise those

who flee from the consequences of those same policies; on top of the politics of xenophobia scapegoating anyone "other" for the crises caused by a bankrupt political and economic order [...]. (LL, 2023o)

A tagged wall inside Lützerath's skatehall further illustrates people's concern with systemic causes underlying police violence, rather than individualizing violent behavior:

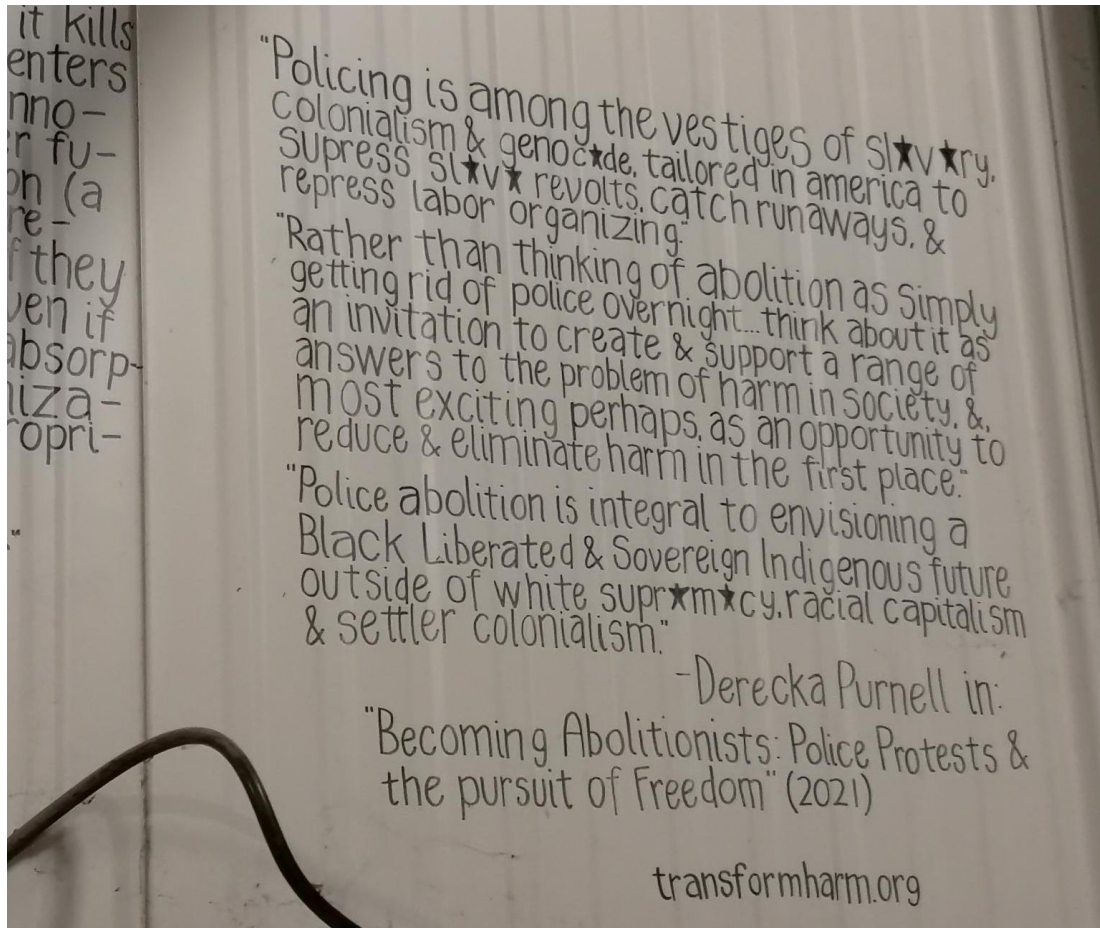


Image 40: Linking the systemic causes of "police violence" to colonialism in Lützerath's skatehall in September 2022. Source: Author.

Along this line, LL and AIL steadily emphasize that global warming and oppression are colonial continuities and that 1.5° are not a laudable "goal", but the ultimate limit:

[...] This disaster was not made in Kenya. It was made here. The economic boom that brought Germany a pioneering role in the world is fossil and colonial [...]. (LL, 2022e)

[...] For hundreds of years, people around the world have suffered under white supremacy and colonialism, both of which are drivers of climate catastrophe. In Germany, we find ourselves where neocolonial destruction has one of its origins. To fight against the climate catastrophe is not to fight for our future, but to survive in the present [...]. (AIL, 2022e)

[...] Industrialized countries deliberately lead countries of the Global South into further indebtedness and thus dependency - this is modern colonialism! [...] Countries of the Global North must fully pay for the climate catastrophe and its effects. There is no justice in a racist system!" [...] Climate justice and peace activist Kaossara Sani [...] also adds: "For someone

like me, who comes from Togo, one of the least developed countries in the world and most affected by the climate crisis, more than 1.5°C is hopeless and murderous [...]. (LL, 2022h)

[...] From 1750 to 2018, Germany was responsible for about 5.7 percent of all global emissions-more than Africa and South America combined-and thus bears major responsibility for causing the catastrophe [...]. (LL, 2022i; 2022j; 2022l)

[...] RWE [...] would [...] continue to fuel the climate crisis, which is already a brutal reality of life for millions of people in the Global South. The exploitation and destruction of the livelihoods of other parts of the world for the prosperity of a few in the Global North is a continuation of colonial structures. Climate justice means a break with these colonial continuities [...]. (LL, 2023n)

Accordingly, global warming is not a future event, but an unjust reality, the prolongation of colonial relations and an inevitable consequence of capitalism and Lützerath's defense is not about "climate protection" and calculations about how much Germany "can still emit" but about struggles for long overdue justice. Besides focusing on *justice* in their self-designation¹⁵⁴, LL quote a spokesperson of *Make Rojava Green Again* and stress international solidarity:

[...] Erdoğan's war obviously bears genocidal features, yet Western media adopt the Turkish narratives unquestioningly and thereby make themselves complicit. German Interior Minister Faeser went even further, backing Turkey [...]. While German politicians like to be photographed with the slogan of the Kurdish women's movement 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' in relation to the feminist revolution in Iran, they close their eyes in Berlin when exactly these women are bombed by Turkey." [...] In addition, Charly Dietz, press spokesperson for Ende Gelände: "The climate justice movement is connected to the Kurdish freedom movement [...]. An attack on them is an attack on all those who stand up for ecology, feminism, and grassroots democracy [...]. (LL, 2022k)

LL also write on visitors from Honduras and El Salvador in Lützerath:

[...] The visit of the active people from Central America touches us a lot, because these people are incredibly brave and together successful against destruction of nature and displacement. The fact that it is many times more dangerous for them than for us is due to the very mixture of colonial violence and financial interests against which we are fighting together [...]. (LL, 2022f)

Additionally, AIL elaborate what justice entails regarding international solidarity and green capitalism:

[These] struggles have been going on for centuries in the global South. There, people are already losing their homes every day, suffering from hunger, or dying from the consequences of global warming - but they are organizing internationally and fighting in villages and cities for a just environment. The revolution of the Zapatistas is only one of many examples. Therefore, our response to any crisis must be intersectional. We must connect struggles, even if they don't affect us at first. So, we fight in Lützerath against the coal mine of the criminals

¹⁵⁴ Note how LL's frequent self-designation "climate *justice* activists" is sidelined by RP's journalists.

of RWE, with residents, but also with an internationalist claim. Because it is about much more than just saving a few houses, but about making a fairer life possible [...]. (AIL, 2022e)

[...] The [...] environmental movement has taken up the so-called "climate justice" as one of its central goals [...]. In practice, however, this goal remains nothing more than lip service, since it would mean the total subversion not only of existing conditions, capitalism, and colonialism, but also the renunciation of what might be called the European way of life¹⁵⁵ [...]. Even worse: By acting as a kind of (extra-)parliamentary lobby organization for the renewable energy industries [...], large parts of this movement make themselves accomplices of an unchanged colonial industry, whose global players [...] are the same actors as those who profit from the petrochemical and nuclear processes of destruction and genocide. In doing so, it performs the more than dirty task of shattering all doubts within the populations of the global North [by], for example, rising above populations that do not want wind turbines or solar fields in their neighborhood and rejecting their resistance as selfish and lacking in solidarity. But is it more solidary to help an industry [...] that contributes with its mines to the ongoing genocide of indigenous populations, that engages in colonial enslavement and turns regions of almost unimaginable size into uninhabitable deserts, that both depletes and poisons groundwater supplies of entire subcontinents, and that also turns the last untouched forests of this world into hostile plantations? [...]. "Climate justice" cannot be about enabling the survival of European culture. Rather, it should be about destroying that culture and allowing in its place the former multitude of human cultures to flourish, sharing in harmony with each other and with all other living things the lands on which they thrive [...]. (AIL, 2022c)

Based on this understanding of systematic violence and colonial continuities, AIL and LL encourage people to recognize their privilege, take responsibility, and act in solidarity:

[...] Question your privileges that often make it easier for you to survive in this world, because most people don't have them. It is up to all of us to change something. If we all pull together, the rulers cannot stop us [...]. (AIL, 2022d)

[...] We must say goodbye to privilege and luxury. And stand before a crossroads... further activism for the good conscience or revolution for the good life for all? School, study, work? What good is a secure life under capitalism against the ruin of the modern world [...]. We are of course aware that being here in the long term only works if you have a certain privileged position [...]. Therefore, it is even more important that all those who can do it, do it [...]. (AIL, 2022e)

[...] I may not be able to change the system because my privileges are limited [...]. I don't lose hope [...] because I know that we are strong and resilient enough to make the resistance we are committed to [...]. Please, do not lose hope and do not give up, do not lose faith in yourselves, in your strength and your privileges to live in one of the richest countries in the world [...]. You are able to reverse this sad fate for life on this planet if you use your privilege and keep fighting [...]. (Kaossara Sani, Founder of the *Act on Sahel Movement* from Togo in LL, 2022h)

To act on this responsibility, LL and AIL aim to embrace a diversity of tactics, rather than preaching one or the other "kind of protest". Along this line, the following statement painted on the inside of "Paula" was one of the first pictures I took in Lützerath in September 2022:

¹⁵⁵ This text refers to a speech of Russel Means (1980), co-founder of the *American Indian Movement*. Held at the *Black Hills International Survival Gathering*, the speech was titled "For America to live, Europe must die".



Image 41: "Condemning any action that does not fall under the paradigm of nonviolence divides our movements, protects the prevailing order, and hides historical facts of social change. In fact, civil rights movements drew their successes from a combination of militant direct action, determined self-defense, rioting, and nonviolent civil disobedience." Source: Author.

Rather than division, LL and AIL consistently stress solidarity between different but complementary tactics:

[...] It is understandable if people cannot imagine violently stopping the eviction attempt and do not want to do certain things for fear of repression or personal change. It is equally understandable that some are incredibly angry and have other ideas of what they would like to do [...]. (AIL, 2022a)

[...] The rejection of the demolition of Lützerath unites the entire climate movement in colorful and diverse actions. The alliance therefore emphasizes the solidarity among each other and opposes the criminalization of climate activism [...]. (LL, 2023f)

LL emphasize the opportunity of supporting the struggle within legal confines:

[...] The vigil in Lützerath has been prolonged in October and offers a legal place to go for all those who want to support the climate activists [...]. (LL, 2022d; 2022g)

In parallel, AIL elaborate on the divisive function of dogmatic nonviolence, and the inspiration they derive from other past and present land-based struggles:

[...] We value all forms of action [...] each form [...] supports the other [...]. We must find ways to live diversity of tactics and to bring all forms of action together [...]. It is well known that there are deliberate attempts to divide social movements and uprisings by isolating and condemning radical elements from the "socially acceptable" parts. We can win here only together in cooperation [...]. But we would also like to see a solidarity approach to militant actions and thus feel the support that we also like to give to non-militant actions. Because often militant actions are made invisible: [...] when people claim as an example that the Hambli or Danni are a "peaceful" occupation [...]. Militancy can be a part of anarchism, but it doesn't have to be for all people. Lumping the two together only serves the stereotype that anarchists are only violent slobes [...]. Let's find out how different forms of action support each other [...] so that we can develop the strength as a movement to overcome the state and capitalist normal state [...]. (AIL, 2022b)

[...] Even 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 30, or 40 people can shut down a construction site or an operating deadly industry permanently. [...] let's look across the Atlantic Ocean to Canada, where a construction site was permanently destroyed in the Wet'suwet'en fight against the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline project. We are not powerless [...]. Be inspired by past resistance and the resistance currently happening around the world. From Hong Kong to Myanmar to Rojava to the Niger Delta to the Zapatista, Yukpa, Mapuche, up north to the Wet'suwet'en, Standing Rock and many other restorative forces in countless places around the world [...]. (AIL, 2022f)

Finally, and connected to a diversity of tactics approach, AIL discredit allegations of "fanatic followship" or "cultism" by highlighting autonomy and self-organization regarding the mass demonstration on January 14th, 2023:

[...] that is the best strategy: just do it! So, it is clear for us, who is self-organized, remains best prepared. Don't follow anyone. Think for yourself. Organize. (AIL, 2023a)

8 Discussion: Colonizing the social imaginary through distraction

The previous two chapters empirically demonstrate how dominant narratives in newspaper articles of *Aachener Zeitung* (AZ) and *Rheinische Post* (RP) systematically marginalize and silence the realities from within the struggles they claim to report on neutrally. Hereby, journalists' extensive reliance on and steady repetition of official statements reassure arguments of (green) politicians, corporate leaders, "experts", authorities, and institutions, based on and reproducing already existing credibility hierarchies. In the case of Lützerath, journalists opaquely incorporate official statements into opinion pieces, interviews, "fact-checks", "summaries" and "analyses", explicating the extent to which the *Propaganda*

Model's (PM) sourcing filter shapes news production. In addition, the PM's ideology filter materializes in journalists' anti-anarchist and anti-communist sentiments which ignore¹⁵⁶, brush over, or warn about anarchy, anonymity, autonomy, and welfare programs or state intervention. Especially during Lützerath's eviction, journalists copy-paste and continuously repeat statements about the "potentially violent left extremists" from authorities. Those are identical to warnings in reports of the European Parliament's *Radicalization Awareness Network* and the *German Constitution Protection Agency*. Moreover, repetitive reassurance of the need for private investments, the inviolability of (corporate) private property, national (energy) security concerns, and continuous emphasis on Germany's "energy transition" reproduce (neoliberal and green) capitalist ideology.

Closely tied to ideology, journalists' and officials' positionality as European, binary, and relatively privileged individuals (AZ, 2022; RP-Online, n.d.) as effects of hierarchies within the German media system, contributes to the extent to which racism and sexism filter news. Consequentially, articles neglect and relativize gender and ethnicity related struggles artificially disconnecting them from anti-authoritarian climate justice struggles. While I elaborated on institutional flak in Germany in chapter 4, it remains difficult to point out specific instances of (self-) censorship within RP or AZ. It could however be a sign of editorial censorship that articles which were more critical of dominant narratives and reported on the solidarity and mobilizing efforts of NGOs and celebrities for Lützerath's defense, were often written by younger and female authors who did not publish (many) more articles on Lützerath thereafter (*see for example* Backhaus, 2022; Kirsten, 2023; Kodzo, 2023). Understood in the context of the German media landscape, dominant narratives, their origin, their production, and their dissemination point towards the public-private entanglements involved in the shaping of public opinion around land-based struggles.

Overall, while dominant narratives find different expressions in both places, they function through similar mechanisms. This chapter first explores these underlying mechanisms through which dominant narratives on the monastery and Lützerath manage dissent to extraction. Hereby, I draw parallels to colonial management technologies and consequentially, discuss the reliance of politicians, authorities, corporations, and mass media on the prolongation of an imperialist discourse. After understanding the public perception of land-based struggles in Germany through this theory of media manipulation, and connecting

¹⁵⁶ Journalists entirely silenced investigations of RASA in Aachen, the Anarchists in Lützi Collective, or the socialist demands and analysis of *Expropriate RWE & Co.* ("RWE & Co. enteignen").

back to debates about anarchist decolonization, the second part of this chapter discusses Lützerath and the monastery as examples of a decolonial practice.

Mechanisms of distraction and colonial contradiction

During the analysis of newspaper articles on Lützerath and the monastery, a counter insurgency lens (Dunlap, 2019a; 2019b) helped me to recognize three mechanisms, through which (the producers of) dominant narratives delegitimize and manage dissent: isolating "the other", criminalizing "the unhuman", and pacification. Hereby, the extent to which each mechanism functions differs in both places given the different and sequential intensity of the struggles. As RP was involved in the preparation and implementation of Lützerath's eviction, while AZ reported on a rather static situation regarding the monastery, "the potential threat" and "left extremism" narratives represent a different intensity of the same narrative. This continuum points towards the extent to which media functions as a social management technology, especially in times of open conflict. This is because less intense struggle, as in the monastery, imply less involvement of and fewer delegitimizing official statements of authorities and corporations. This section explores each mechanism, how they work, and how they echo technologies and contradictions of (settler) colonialism. Given the intensity of the struggle and the apparent management function of dominant narratives, much of this section focuses on Lützerath. Thereafter, I indicate the implications of dominant narratives regarding public support for land-based struggles and discuss mass media as tool for governments and corporations to "colonize the social imaginary" (Toro, 2021) and enforce growth driven development like lignite extraction and real-estate speculation.

Isolating "the Other"

Dominant narratives isolate the monastery, Lützerath, and their inhabitants from "the rest of society" through depoliticizing housing shortages and climate catastrophe, as well as through portraying those who struggle for justice as inherently distinct from "normal people".

Dominant narratives scandalize real-estate speculation around the monastery and denounce Lützerath as merely symbolic, hence representing both struggles as irrelevant single-issue campaigns of an especially concerned minority. Thereby, they artificially disconnect the monastery and Lützerath from each other, from other social movements, from a decade- and even centuries-old international history of anti-mining, anti-gentrification, and anti-capitalist

struggles, and from their diverse and wide-ranging solidarity networks (support of citizen initiatives, solidary farmers, local inhabitants, and local shops¹⁵⁷).

Along this line, dominant narratives isolate Lützerath's and the monastery's inhabitants from "normal people" through combining alienating designations with immense attention to supposedly distinctive lifestyles and identities. Simulating curiosity and generous interest, this focus on distinctiveness presents the monastery's and Lützerath's inhabitants as "the instigators of tumult" rather than part of a historical struggle deeply rooted in society. In on-site reports which journalists present as their own supposedly objective investigations, they "explore" self-organization, autonomy, political engagement, collective living, and anti-discrimination efforts as a minority's extraordinary engagement or "alternative" culture which this minority might try to impose on the rest of society. They patronizingly describe peoples' lifeways, social organization, and ambitions as essentially irrational, unrealistic, exclusive, questionable, hypocritical, youthful, naive, emotion-driven, feminine, utopian, and backward or primitive, and over time as overambitious, ignorant, undemocratic, potentially dangerous, and ultimately anti-social.

Similarly, but more admonishingly given the preparation of Lützerath's eviction, the "left extremism" narrative describes those relentlessly defending Lützerath as anti-democratic, desperate, and (in part) extremely dangerous to and thus "outside" of society. Here, "the deal" narrative's explicit emphasis on successful governance and RWE's sustainability reassures the anti-social irrationality of Lützerath's inhabitants. Besides these generalizing stigmas, RP journalists reinforce isolation through creating an artificial unity or sameness around squatters or activists expressed through dedicating the only published interviews with people engaged in defending Lützerath to iconic "representatives" and even "leaders" of "the climate movement" Luisa Neubauer and Greta Thunberg. Ultimately dominant narratives create squatters, activists, occupants, and young people as "the other" and with it, construct an "ongoing debate" between "two sides" about gentrification, mining, and climate change. Instead of recognizing centuries of systemic injustice and intersectional oppression, "the other" simply holds exceptionally strong, weird, irrational, even extreme, and frightening opinions.

¹⁵⁷ In Lützerath for example, people showed solidarity through donating food, material, and money, and with their presence during village walks and decentralized demonstrations. The bakery of a nearby village and local farmers shared their left-over foods, and people working in outdoor stores equipped us with "left-over" winter jackets and hiking boots. In the monastery, neighbors donated plenty of furniture, paid for the monastery's waste collection, and offered to provide electricity for events.

The construction of "the other" hereby proceeds through similar mechanisms and stigmas as described in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978/2003)¹⁵⁸: Based on the belief that those who struggle are either dishonest, confused, or cannot speak themselves, journalists first marginalize and silence counter narratives, to then explore, describe and make statements about the monastery's and Lützerath's inhabitants. This supposedly neutral, observative, and always exterior 'representation' seeks to unravel the "mysteries" of political struggle to the "interested citizen". Thereby it constructs "otherness" alongside similar stigmas as Said identified within the descriptions of orientalist "explorers": general inferiority, distinctiveness, sensuality, a tendency to despotism, aberrant mentality, demanding moral-political admonishment, inaccuracy, backwardness, uncivilized denigration, femininity, and eccentricity, which "requir[e] Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption" (Said, 1978/2003, p.206). "Othering" encourages a male perception of the world, as expressed, and reinforced through patronizing comments about the monastery's and Lützerath's youthfulness, irrelevancy, utopianism, and delusiveness. Ultimately, dominant narratives function through a remarkably colonial contradiction: While the monastery and Lützerath are inherently part of, supported by, and obviously radically engaged with society (through confronting rather than ignoring/ accepting gentrification, mining, and injustice), dominant narratives scrutinize Lützerath and the monastery for the isolation dominant narratives create themselves through focusing on people's supposedly inherent distinctiveness. Despite silencing their systemic critiques and despite consistently ignoring historical and political contexts, dominant narratives claim to be objective, realistic, rational, and based on "facts"¹⁵⁹.

Criminalizing "the unhuman"

Building on and reinforcing this isolation, dominant narratives criminalize those who reinhabit and defend the monastery and Lützerath through the creation of antagonisms. Especially "the social center", "the potential threat", "the deal", and "left extremism" narratives establish a tension between on one side "the good" and trustworthy institutions, corporations, local inhabitants, and "peaceful protestors", who are opposed to "the bad",

¹⁵⁸ In "Orientalism" Said (1978/2003) analyses the "science of the orient" as a discourse through which philosophers', academics', and explorers' descriptions of middle eastern societies constructed "the Orient" as inherently different and inferior to "the Occident", thereby legitimizing Western domination.

¹⁵⁹ This approach to land-based struggle is reminiscent of attempts to explore alternative forms of social organization and measure the material and energy throughput of squats and other spaces of resistance, as it puts them into a power vacuum "outside of society". Ignoring the political tension in which these struggles purposefully exist, creates expectations and stigmas regarding the extent to which "the alternative" provides a solution "applicable" to the rest of society.

ignorant and potentially violent squatters or activists. Hereby, reports on both places emphasize the (local, regional, or national) government's "good intentions" to *care* for "their population" by ensuring participatory and sustainable urban development or peaceful and sustainable mining for "energy security". Demonstrating in a similar way, how care can be another form of control, dominant narratives consistently reassert the rightfulness, rationality, and responsibility of corporate private owners and the inviolability of private property. Through constructing the neutral, rational, and benevolent corporation as opposed to the potentially dangerous activist, dominant narratives legitimize corporations as participants of "democracy", while presenting some humans as extreme for claiming political participation. Accordingly, dominant narratives portray the professional and de-escalative police which ensure law, order, and the public's safety¹⁶⁰. While journalists describe Aachen's police merely as vigilant concerning the monastery, they present the heroic police who master Lützerath's eviction. Moreover, dominant narratives present neighbors of the monastery and inhabitants of Lützerath's neighboring villages as *the only* victims of real-estate speculation and mining. Accordingly, dominant narratives demand the monastery's or Lützerath's reclamation to primarily "make contributions" to the neighborhood or local inhabitants. Based on this inevitably unmet expectation, the monastery's and Lützerath's inhabitants are increasingly described as ignorant and antisocial, while inhabitants of Lützerath are even explicitly portrayed as yet another cruel burden on local inhabitants. In both places, journalists further emphasize the monastery's and Lützerath's ignorance through playing out their supposedly distinct interests to those of other minorities, specifically (war) refugees.

Symptomatic of this black and white thinking, dominant narratives distinguish between "good" and "bad" protestors (Martínez, 2019) and overemphasize internal conflicts considering "the use of violence" (Gelderloos, 2013). While they do so more implicitly in Aachen, reports on Lützerath repeatedly emphasize "the danger of radicalization" and "left extremism". They center (police-) violence by comparing statistics of injuries and explain "the bad protestors'" wildness with their supposed inability to control their almost insane desperation and anger.

¹⁶⁰ Part of this "professionalism" was the (attempted) instrumentalization of journalists, as Nellie Bly shared with me in our conversation: "I witnessed one situation on [January 2nd] when [...] the police were proceeding quite violently, also with machines, and had already taken this gate on L277 on the day when straw bales and car tire barricades were burning [...] a contact officer tried to use me to calm down the um activists or to dissuade them from continuing, [he said that] I probably had a connection to them and could talk to them and I immediately told him that's not my job here [...]" (Interview #14, 01.05.2023).

Combined with the stigmas attached to the monastery's and Lützerath's inhabitants' "otherness", these antagonisms ultimately dehumanize humans who relentlessly defend Lützerath. Like "othering", dehumanization is a colonial management technology, among others described by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon & Sartre, 1963, p.42):

[...] Those hordes of vital statistics, those hysterical masses, those faces bereft of all humanity, those distended bodies which are like nothing on earth, that mob without beginning or end, those children who seem to belong to nobody, that laziness stretched out in the sun, that vegetative rhythm of life—all this forms part of the colonial vocabulary [...].

Settler colonial narratives denigrate(d) those they seek to conquer to almost animal-like impulsive and criminal creatures to justify their annihilation with the fear of inhumanness. During Lützerath's eviction, its inhabitants' "uncontrolled emotions", "hysteria", and "dangerous ideology" legitimized the denial of access to food and electricity, detention, and surveillance, as well as bodily assault through beatings, pepper spray, tear gas, dogs, horses, and water cannons. Moreover, the quantification of criminal acts and injuries on "both sides" instrumentalize human suffering to reinforce an antagonistic worldview. By distinguishing between "the good" and "the bad" protestors, criminalization and dehumanization moreover serve division as a related colonial mechanism:

[...] At opportune moments [the enemy] combines his policy of brutal repression with spectacular gestures of friendship, maneuvers calculated to sow division, and "psychological action". Here and there he tries with success to revive tribal feuds, using agents provocateurs and practicing what might be called counter-subversion. Colonialism will use two types of natives to gain its ends [...]. (Fanon & Sartre, 1963, p.136)

Along this line, Gelderloos (2007) emphasizes how the police treats social movements' internal conflicts as a strategic vulnerability. Evidently in the case of Lützerath, politicians, corporate leaders, and their utilization of mass media overemphasized internal conflicts around "the use of violence" aiming to "divide and conquer" the movement. They repetitively demanded non-violent protestors to distance themselves from militant ones and expressed their gratitude to "peaceful protestors" afterwards, *even though none such dissociation had taken place*. Less explicitly, antagonisms with neighbors and refugees in reports on the monastery and Lützerath divide support for both struggles by playing out diverse forms of oppression against each other. Like isolation, criminalizing narratives contradict themselves. This is best illustrated by a statement of M. Neubaur quoted in an interview titled *Roadblocks in this form are nonsense* (Plück & Döbler, 2022). A few days before Lützerath's eviction the minister states:

[...] I defend the right to protest, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression with everything I have. From the moment when protest leads to talking more about the form than the goal, it does not serve the cause [...].

Politicians, corporations, authorities, and journalists enforce a moral debate about individual's violent acts by ignoring and distracting from always present systemic violence. They silence anti-capitalist and anti-(neo)colonial critiques and center almost every statement and article around the form of protest, only to thereafter scrutinize "the climate movement" as an alleged cumulation of inherently conflicting tactics and positions. Evidently, dominant narratives co-opt LL's admonition of systemic and institutional police violence, distorting and then relativizing their claims as "isolated cases of police violence". Ultimately, journalists create a contrast between a few police officers' "human mistakes" and extremists' "inhuman wildness" that demands punishment.

Pacification

Interplaying with criminalization and isolation, dominant narratives pacify people, no matter if or to which degree they are engaged in land-based struggle. They do so through reassuring trust in institutions, corporations, "democracy", technological progress, and through defining "peaceful protest" as the only acceptable form of protest. Hereby, dominant narratives perpetuate the illusion of successful environmental governance and democracy. They reassure that there is no need for protest or even riots by proclaiming that governments care and are in control despite countless catastrophes and injustices which are concealed as yet another "horrible" crisis or scandal. Hereby, dominant narratives moreover evoke the notion that everyone is already heard and has the possibility to engage politically- through voting or engaging in political institutions.

Another more specific element of pacification especially in the case of Lützerath is journalists' emphasis on national energy security concerns and relatedly Germany's "solidarity with Ukraine". The argument that further mining is necessary to become less dependent on gas from Russia ensures corporate gains through instrumentalizing war¹⁶¹ and portraying political struggle not only as irrelevant, but also as non-solidary. At the same time, dominant narratives delegitimize any attempt of social organization that uses drastically less energy as a way of more honest solidarity not just with Ukrainians, but also with MAPAs. Central to ensuring trust in institutions, corporations, and technological progress, is the way in which

¹⁶¹ This argument further deepens division, as solidarity with Ukrainians is played out against solidarity with MAPA (most affected people and areas) of climate catastrophe and industrial encroachment.

reports on Lützerath present critiques on official studies. Each article which seemingly questions the validity of official studies silences or discredits anti-capitalist critiques and instead allows politicians and RWE to reformulate and adjust their arguments in the same or later articles¹⁶². By gradually reassuring and repeatedly "explaining" the legitimacy of "the deal", dominant narratives on Lützerath indoctrinate trust in "democracy", "technological progress", and the need for more and larger investments in "renewable energy", which might more appropriately be called "fossil fuel+" technologies (Dunlap, 2021a) as they are bough up with the large-scale extraction of non-renewable materials. At the same time, journalists' praise of "peaceful protest", authorities' supposed personal investment in dialogue, de-escalation, and "climate protection", as well as the "danger of radicalization", repetitively limit the scope of socially acceptable tactics to "non-violence". Hereby, in the monastery and in Lützerath, wearing face masks, dropping a banner, or sabotage are already portrayed as violent.

Again, pacification is a social management technology used by settlers during colonialism. First, the claim of Lützerath's and the monastery's irrelevancy and the task to industrially "develop" both otherwise underutilized places for "the common good" resembles a "terra nullius" doctrine which justified settler colonialism and builds on the promise of "progress" (Law, 2015; Means, 1980). Besides removing any ground for dissent to sprout by pertaining Lützerath's and the monastery's irrelevancy, the repetitive argument of ownership is central, as it asserts that certain people, institutions, or corporations have the moral right to own and decide over dividable land. The claim, that all land that is not owned, controlled, commodified, and economically utilized is "empty" and "worthless" erases all life from both places as well as the life affected by the intensified extraction of material and energy directly and indirectly required for industrial development. This continues a European de-spiritualization of the universe through rationalizing the environment as a resource to be exploited, controlled, measured, replaced, and managed "sustainably", rather than full of life deserving to be free. According to Means (1980), this de-spiritualization resembles the de-humanization of dissenting humans discussed above.

In parallel, pacifism¹⁶³ has weakened social movements time and again to unimpededly enforce domination and industrial development. Drawing on liberationist and

¹⁶² This is a manifestation of capitalist ideology, which, as Eagleton (1991, p.137) points out "signal what would count as an acceptable answer in the very form of their questions".

¹⁶³ Note that "pacifism" does not refer to individuals or groups who chose for themselves to exclusively engage in non-violent action. Rather, it refers to dogmatic or prescribed non-violence, put as a condition for people to

de-colonial literature, Gelderloos (2007; 2013) illustrates how pacifists' most praised victories (Indian liberation movement, anti-nuclear movement, US civil rights movement, US peace movement against the Vietnam war) conceal the participation of militant groups in political struggles and distort meagre compromises as great success. Hereby, pacifism obscures how the "successes" of reformist demands depend on being perceived as "the lesser evil" in the face of militant groups' abolitionist demands (Gelderloos, 2013; Martinez, 2019). Further, pacifism derives from and secures privilege and is henceforth discriminatory: "Claims of support and solidarity become even more pretentious when white pacifists draft rules of acceptable tactics and impose them across the movement, in denial of the importance of race, class background, and other contextual factors [...]" (Gelderloos, 2007, p.28). Given its patronizing tendencies which denounce peoples' autonomy, pacifism can be patriarchal, as "the imperative of nonviolence overrides the basic respect of trusting people to liberate themselves" (Gelderloos, 2007, p.24). By imposing a "form of learned helplessness", privileged agents (authorities, corporate leaders, journalists, and NGOs in the case of Lützerath) "place themselves as the teachers and guides, creating a dynamic that is remarkably colonial" (Gelderloos 2007, p.28).

Like isolating and criminalizing narratives, pacifying narratives are contradictory. At the same time as they emphasize the monastery's and Lützerath's worthlessness due to their "emptiness", dominant narratives continuously describe the lives and "alien culture" of people who live there. As violence, or what counts as violence, is a social construct and thus flexible and incoherent (Gelderloos, 2013), dominant narratives moreover contradict themselves in their emphasis on "democracy", which naturalizes static and discriminatory decision-making processes, while portraying demands and direct action for immediate housing and climate justice as egoistic, irrational, undemocratic, immoral, and "extreme", in short "violent". Silencing for example the violence involved in the emptying of Lützerath and the monastery prior to their reclamation, distracts from systemic violence embedded in "democracy", its institutions, corporate power, and the state, thereby securing privilege and reinforcing discrimination.

Corporate media and the coloniality of power

Dominant narratives disseminated through mass media construct, produce, and manage "the other" through claiming to neutrally describe but instead stigmatizing them as different,

participate in actions or a condition for solidarity with other action groups. This is because, as opposed to "a diversity of tactics" approach which includes peaceful or non-militant action, dogmatic non-violence uncompromisingly excludes other tactics (Gelderloos, 2013).

irrelevant, frightening, or dangerous (Said, 1978/2003). They produce fear and social division by criminalizing segments of both struggles and by creating a dichotomic world of "good" and "bad", thereby legitimizing surveillance, suspicion, repression, and in the case of Lützerath, a brutal eviction. By pertaining both struggles' irrelevance, dominant narratives create disinterest at the same time as they provoke enthusiasm for progress and trust in the state, "democracy", and corporations. This trust prescribes a certain behavior rather than encouraging people to listen to their own bodily experiences, their hearts, and their curiosity, ultimately pacifying resistance, and repressing dissent. Following Said (1978/2003, p.254),

[...] the metamorphosis of a relatively innocuous philological subspecialty into a capacity for managing political movements, administering colonies, making nearly apocalyptic statements representing the White Man's difficult civilizing mission - all this is something at work within a purportedly liberal culture, one full of concern for its vaunted norms of catholicity¹⁶⁴, plurality, and open-mindedness [...].

Thus, against the background of how dominant narratives on the monastery and Lützerath function, it becomes clear that the social management technologies of settler colonialism¹⁶⁵ continue to manage populations today and elsewhere (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Crucially, I do not intend to compare the experiences of the monastery's and Lützerath's inhabitants to the experiences of those subjected to settler colonialism's slavery, annihilation, assimilation, expropriation, and epistemic repression. Rather, I draw the parallel to imperial discourse to make Quijano's rather abstract concept of "the colonality of power" more concrete and point out how this colonality inherent in the power of states and corporations manifest in present-day management of anti-capitalist resistance.

Quijano (2000) identifies euro-centered capitalism as a global power and dominating force ("globalization"). Hereby, the global imposition of European culture based on the belief of its superiority, on "modernity and rationality as exclusively European products and experience", and concomitantly a European binary and dualist way of knowing, started and continues "European colonial dominance over the world" (Quijano 2000, p.542). This is because global Eurocentric capitalism is "the first model where each structure of each sphere of social existence is under the hegemony of an institution produced within the process of formation and development of that same model of power. Thus, in the control of labor and its resources and products, it is the capitalist enterprise; in the control of sex and its resources

¹⁶⁴ Note that Said (1978/2003) likely speaks not of the catholic church, but of "generalizability".

¹⁶⁵ I have extended this to also include the management technologies of colonialism in other parts of the world. Although these technologies produce heterogenous colonial subjects ("the Orient" was not equivalent to "Indians" or "blacks"), they still function in a similar way to create inferiority and legitimize domination and control (Quijano, 2000).

and products, the bourgeois family; in the control of authority and its resources and products, the nation-state; in the control of intersubjectivity, Eurocentrism" (Quijano 2000, p.545). Arguably, then, corporate media and those agents and institutions allowing and utilizing it, aim to be in control of the mind. Considering the managing function of dominant narratives as well as mass media's interrelation with corporations and the state (which are products of colonialism), mass media can be understood as a tool to manage political movements and govern living beings (whether they are involved in the struggle or not) as if they were resources to be allocated for capital accumulation. Hereby, difference and inferiority are still deliberately produced to serve a capitalist world market (e.g., "worthless" land and life for forever unsatisfied energy and material demands). Understanding the coloniality of power on a concrete and "sensible" example enables us to understand green capitalist claims of modernity and rationality tied to technological progress as inherently (neo)colonial and thus, proves foundational for thinking with a decolonial degrowth project.

The potential of non-metaphorical decolonization: Which worlds become possible?

Given the imperialist discourse reproduced within corporate mass media, this section discusses the reclamation, occupation, and defense of the monastery and Lützerath as processes which bear the potential for non-metaphorical decolonization through the practice of '*re-inhabiting*', and concomitantly, peoples' willingness to struggle for *and with* a space of collective belonging. Building on, supporting, and specifying the idea of anarchist decolonization (Dunlap, 2021d; 2022), this section first reflects on the meaning of decolonization, then discusses how Lützerath and the monastery exemplify a decolonial practice, and finally opens this discussion to include practices that go beyond the spatial and temporal realm of Lützerath and the monastery.

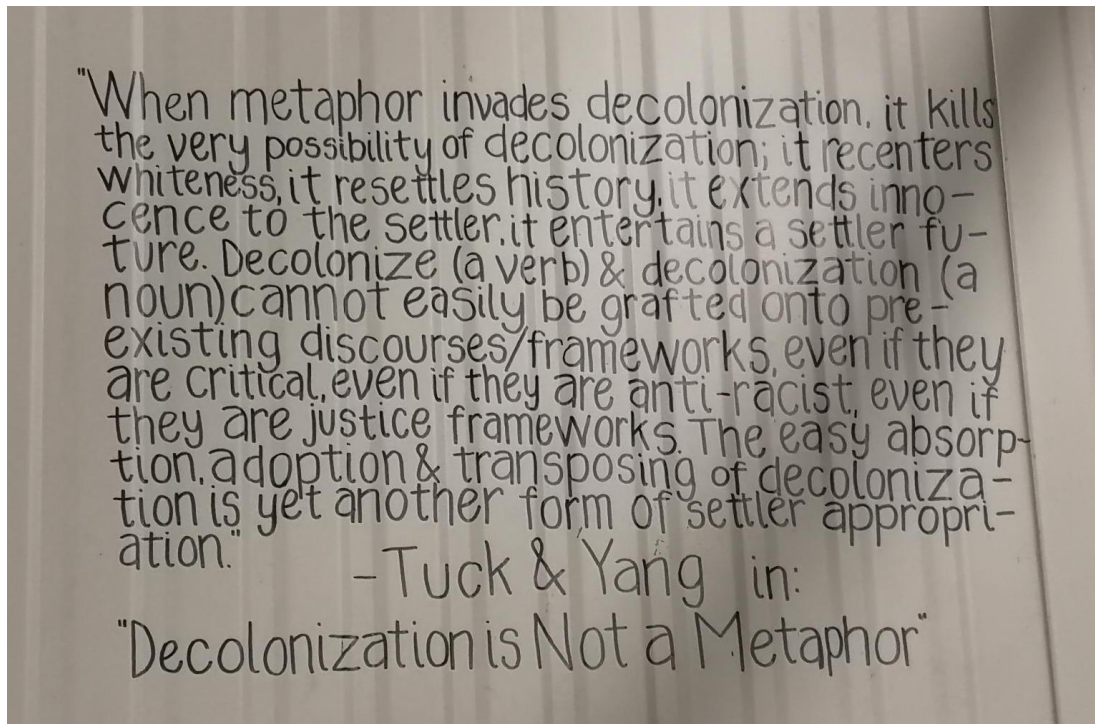


Image 42: A quote from Tuck & Yang's (2012) "Decolonization is not a metaphor" found written on the inside walls of Lützerath's skatehall in September 2022. Source: Author.

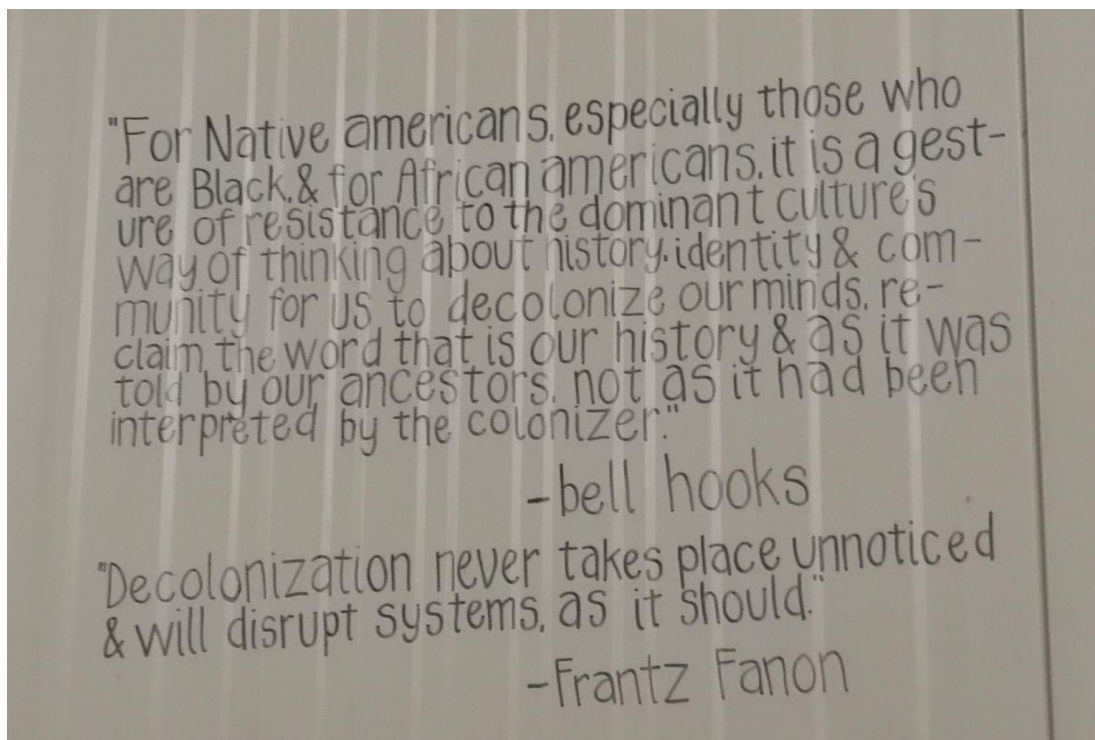


Image 43: Further quotes on decolonization from bell hooks and Frantz Fanon, also found on the inside walls of Lützerath's skate hall in September 2022. Source: Author.

Decolonial, decolonizing, anti-colonial?

In *Decolonization is not a metaphor*, Tuck and Yang (2012, p.1) unequivocally contend that decolonization must entail "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor

for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools." Consequently, non-metaphorical decolonization is material and necessarily unsettling, as it is incommensurable with the safeguarding or the "democratic" redistribution of imperial wealth and stolen land. Specifically relevant for thinking with land-based struggles like the monastery or Lützerath, Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize the incommensurability between "re/occupy" and "decolonize" movements on the examples of *Occupy Oakland* in 2011 and urban homesteading in general. This is because re-occupation and demands to redistribute land as part of social and environmental justice struggles in this context merely represent settler re-occupation on already stolen land based on "profoundly settling, anthropocentric, colonial view of the world" (Tuck & Yang 2012, p.24). Similarly, they describe "going native" (adopting indigenous knowledge and practice such as the love of land and nature), "colonial equivocation" (calling all anti-imperial struggles as automatically decolonial) and the "decolonization of the mind" (the attainment of critical consciousness) as further "settler moves to innocence" which seek to reconcile guilt at the same time as rescuing "settler futurity" by constructing a category of humans who are hurt by the implications of (neo-) colonialism, oppressed themselves, or "enlightened" and thereby conceived of as innocent in rein-forcing colonial relations.

However, as Leanne Simpson (Klein & Simpson, 2013) articulates shortly after the founding of *Idle No More* in 2012¹⁶⁶, decolonization is inherently bound up with (re-) building intimate relationships to land and with "promoting life" through resistance, renewal, and regeneration. Against the background of extractivism which systematically "removes all of the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning" (Klein & Simpson, 2013) in nearly all corners of the world, recultivating these relationships must be continuous (Leyva Solano, 2011), uncompromising, and globally dispersed, and thus bear the possibility for genuine alliances between people beyond their identity categories as "settler or native" and "the guilty or the innocent". Tuck and Yang's (2012) critiques are relevant to comprehend the contradictions involved in attempts "to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self" (Tuck & Yang 2012, p.9). Yet, understanding their conclusion that "opportunities for solidarity lie within what is incommensurable" (Tuck & Yang 2012, p.28) alongside land-based struggles (for now) within a non-settler colonial context like Germany, allows us to think their critique further, explicate responsibilities, and imagine paths and possibilities, instead of being paralyzed by

¹⁶⁶ Idle no More is an indigenous rights and land protection movement in Canada.

'guilt' driven desperation, frustration, and hopelessness of never being good (decolonial) enough¹⁶⁷. Hereby, I understand decolonial/ decolonizing as the attributes of practices in a larger process of transformation. Anti-colonial on the other hand, to me describes an attitude "against colonialism", which inspires and is part of decolonial practice, but more static and thus not transformative in itself.¹⁶⁸

'Re-inhabiting': From anti-colonial attitude to decolonial practice

Lützerath and the monastery exemplify spaces in which this anti-colonial attitude (closely tied to anti-capitalist and anti-imperial attitudes) transforms into de-colonial practice through the act of 're-inhabiting'. This process is well described by the MTC (2018, p.124) on the ZAD in Notre-Dames-des-Landes (ZAD NDDL):

[...] One thing does change over time, however: what one is defending. If at the beginning, it might be an environment or farmland, to the extent that one fights, one begins inhabiting it each day a little more and these initial terms break down. One also defends what one has created there, what one has lived through while defending it. The initial urge to preserve adorns everything that the defence of the places has caused to emerge, the new life that was sketched there, and has tale on form and depth. To safeguard the living and to revolutionize ways of life are not two opposite axes; on the contrary, their reunion uncovers more ancient attachments in the spaces, no longer defended as frozen or unchanging, but as crucibles of a memory that is being reanimated, if it was ever faded [...].

What is defended is thus not merely a physical site, a forest, a village, a garden, even if it was that in the beginning. What people defend is what, growing out of uniting resistance with alternative ways of organizing and being, become spaces of collective belonging far beyond the question of "who came first". Based on the anarchist practices of direct action, mutual aid, self-organization, solidarity, free association, and autonomy, these spaces of collective belonging are generated through 're-inhabiting' and defending spaces which (media) corporations, governments, institutions, and consequentially large parts of the public deem and produce as uninhabitable, uninhabited, worthless, and invisible.

Hereby, 're-inhabiting' and the shared struggle of self-defense are based on radical (non-anthropocentric) equality not as an egalitarian goal, but as a presupposition (Rancière, 2015). That is, the point is not to *prove that* everyone (human and non-human) is equal or that a (non-hierarchical) utopia is "realistic", but *to allow other worlds to become possible* by presuming that everyone *is* equal, by listening, and by building other worlds "*as if*" those who are systematically excluded have the right to speak, live, and disagree. Based on this

¹⁶⁷ One can reflect further around extending this line of thought to land-based struggles in a settler-colonial context which are in explicit solidarity with indigenous communities.

¹⁶⁸ For example, degrowth scholars can state that degrowth is anti-colonial (Hickel, 2021) without it being decolonial.

presupposition, the people who reinhabit spaces emptied for capitalist accumulation re-cultivate relations that are not based on ownership, domination, or exploitation, but on care and love for humans, non-humans, and land, thereby reversing processes of "accumulation by alienation" (Dunlap & Sullivan, 2019). This *de*-alienation presents a process of living with the land and all its inhabitants and in some way *becoming the place*¹⁶⁹. Shortly after its eviction, *anarcholatina* expresses this kind of belonging and *being* Lützerath:

[...] It is physically painful for me to watch the baggers—those giant skeleton ships from hell, made of steel and death—literally eating away the Earth, chunk by chunk, when I know of the rich diversity of insect life who thrives on the wildflower patch activists maintain; when I spot the holes for bird nests in the clay; when comrade hare darts in the floodlights between our barricades and the cops, jumping back and forth for reasons of her own; when the trees who so loved us are fallen, one by one, sending the larks flying into the night [...],

and further:

[...] The first time I ever stepped in Lützerath, the first thing I saw was ladybugs mating on the leaf of lavender. I wrote on a barrier: *This land belongs to meadowbees, wildflowers trees, the crow, nameless little bugs birds, butterflies*. For all the good that my writing did. I watched my friends murdered before my eyes. I cried, again and again facing the police, and not due to the torture holds. [...] I cry for Lützerath, not just because of my dead friends from the Earth, not just because of the sadness of my human friends, not just because this coal will kill many more, but because I selfishly wanted to live there forever because that place was the closest I ever got to experience community, which in the 21st century felt like utopia, and now I'm thrown back into capitalism and nothing you can do in capitalism will buy me that [...]. (anarcholatina, 16.01.2023)¹⁷⁰

'Re-inhabiting' Lützerath and the monastery as a sort of last resort, after no governing body listened to local resistance against mining or gentrification for decades, "translates" the existence of land and all its inhabitants to the only value intelligible for an utterly alienated capitalist society: human inhabitants. This "translation" makes non-human beings, distant human beings, and land *sensible* after decades (in other cases centuries) of being emptied and

¹⁶⁹ I chose to write "place" instead of "land" here, as I do not intend to claim that European land-defenders' relationship to the land is comparable to indigenous ways of being the land. However, as the saying "you can't evict a movement" goes, the *place* Lützerath lives on through people, their (learning-) experiences, their memories, their newbuilt relationships, and their collectively continued struggle. People carry it in their heart.

¹⁷⁰ Another example are notes from a reflection meeting held in the summer months after Lützerath's eviction which a friend sent to me afterwards. A group of people working on how to document and publicly share learnings from Lützerath discussed the topic "non-human perspective": people mentioned their relationship to mud "how we carried it on all our clothes & bodies & merged our skins and hormones & feelings with it. Some of us stayed in the mud-human mix", to the autumn storms, to specific places in Lützerath, to the excavator, to rats concerning that they can be a "health hazard to humans" but that there is another layer of "human responsibility towards rats" in not attracting them in the first place, to the trees emphasizing the "health of trees, impact of treehouses, to minimize negative impact". Ultimately, there are countless other examples that could illustrate this *de*-alienation processes associated with 're-inhabiting', even if I have not encountered them during my time in Lützerath.

invisibilized.¹⁷¹ Most vividly in an eviction, but just as much in the time of struggle before open confrontations, 're-inhabiting' spaces like Lützerath or the monastery makes the abstract and distant capitalist destruction enforced across the world every single day *sensible* to those less affected by it, as they live in capitalist centers, or "the global North". This de-alienation in turn makes dissent thinkable and possible by specifying (infra-) structures of capitalist expansion and inspiring concrete actions. The decolonial potential of land-based struggles like the monastery and Lützerath lies thus, in Rancière's (2015) words, in their ability to "redistribute the sensible": they make the invisible visible, the unthinkable thinkable, and the impossible possible through 're-inhabiting' spaces which a colonial and capitalist state, its authorities, (media) corporations, and consequentially large parts of the public made impossible to inhabit, let alone defend with one's body and life. In that way, 're-inhabiting' decolonizes the social imaginary, among other things.

Hereby, recultivating love to land, 'nature', and each other, 're-inhabiting' includes several elements of what Tuck & Yang (2012) would consider "settler moves to innocence". Yet, by acting on the presupposition of radical non-anthropocentric equality at the material frontlines of capitalist expansion, 're-inhabiting' is never an end in itself. Rather, this "reforestation of the social imaginary" (Dunlap & Tornel, 2023) which unfolds through passionately confronting and rejecting the destructive values and orders imbued in capitalist infrastructures like (decaying) buildings and expanding mines (Dunlap, 2020c; Kallianos et al., 2022), and making less oppressive, and less destructive worlds sensible, hence possible (Rancière, 2015).

Embracing this decolonial potential must be understood as an ongoing, forever unfinished, complex, and thus imperfect process carried on by diverse and always evolving people in movements, and their relentless efforts to deconstruct inevitably internalized capitalist values. While these spaces of collective belonging do not *automatically* entail the repatriation of indigenous land, they are an unambiguous attempt to stop ongoing expatriation through opposing further extraction and the associated (neo)colonization of land for or because of (green) industrial development. Moreover, defending these spaces is a struggle against mental colonization as the foundation for continued imperialism and neo-colonial plunder, against narratives that construct some life as worthless and legitimize extractivism across the world. Because only those colonized by beliefs of (some) human superiority,

¹⁷¹ For example, BUND's efforts to draw attention to biodiversity loss, water, trees, soil, local people around mining in the Rhineland.

technological progress, productivism, the inviolability of law, perfectionism, individualism, land and life as property or resources, and a despiritualized rational world accept, trust, and reinforce the neo-colonial implications of (green) capitalism. Other than the metaphorical use of decolonization, 're-inhabiting' and confronting power and its coloniality hereby entails a considerate abandonment of privileges regarding comfort, health, and security. By taking repression, financial insecurity, trauma, and physical assault into account, 're-inhabiting' spaces at the material frontlines of capitalist expansion becomes incommensurable with sustaining European culture, or the future of an inherently colonial culture and thus forms part of a decolonizing process (Means, 1980).



Image 44: Lützerath during the eviction. When trees, pheasants, hazel dormice, air, and water become sensible. Source: Rüdiger, 2023c.

With love comes rage ... and a range of tactics

During my time in the after-camp in Keyenberg, a tag on the inside of one of the compost toilets helped me to understand, what "Lützi lives" can mean besides enlivening a officially dead space. It said:

"LA LUCHA SIGUE! KEEP BLOCKING & SABOTAGING CAPITALSIM AFTER EVICTION. REGENERATE AND KEEP LÜTZI ALIVE!"

"La lucha sigue" means "the struggle continues" and while the decolonial potential of 're-inhabiting' Lützerath and the monastery in what are non-settler colonial contexts becomes clearer, the agents of this practice are however not only those who physically re-inhabit a place until it is evicted. The agents of "[re-] inhabiting the earth" (Locret-Collet et al., 2021) are also those who show their solidarity with land-based struggle by whatever means and to whichever extent possible in their lives. This leads me to emphasize three important extensions of "re-inhabiting" as a decolonial practice.

First, Lützerath and the monastery exemplify a decolonial practice in a non-settler colonial context. However, solidarity and affinity between anarchist and indigenous struggles extends beyond non-settler colonial contexts, as countless examples of "space[s] of co-creation between Indigenism and anarchy" (Dunlap, 2022, p.22) illustrate¹⁷². Second, the decolonial potential of 're-inhabiting' is not limited to 're-inhabiting' old-growth forests or 'pristine natures' but includes half destroyed villages decaying buildings with only a few trees. This is because lands with "scars and bruises" (Klein & Simpson, 2013) need even greater care and healing¹⁷³. Through building places of collective belonging by 're-inhabiting' land that is visibly damaged and threatened to be devastated, people establish that "there is something left to love" (Klein & Simpson, 2013), something to take care of. In this confrontation of every 'terra nullius' doctrine, the creation of autonomous zones and their solidarity with each other and with land-based struggles across the world become part of a larger struggle unfolding at different (material and immaterial) frontlines of capitalist expansion, in different places and times, leading me to the third extension of 'decolonizing through 're-inhabiting'".

With the regrown love to land and life also develops a rage against the capitalist forces that (seek to) destroy places of collective belonging, and an empathy with others whose are or will be destroyed. As the countless solidarity actions alongside Lützi's physical defense show, people across Germany and Europe translated this love, rage, and empathy into diverse practices, ranging from demonstrations, banner drops, blockades, and creative barricades, to sabotaging pump stations and electric vehicle charging stations, to arson attacks on police and

¹⁷² See publications on *The Indigenous Anarchist Federation's* website <https://iaffaio.org.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁷³ Simpson's full quote in Simpson & Klein (2013) is: "If I think of the land as my mother or if I think of it as a familial relationship, I don't hate my mother because she's sick, or because she's been abused. I don't stop visiting her because she's been in an abusive relationship and she has scars and bruises. If anything, you need to intensify that relationship because it's a relationship of nurturing and caring." While this helps to illustrate with what I mean by this extension of 're-inhabiting', it is important to remember that German land defenders' relationship to land is different than that of indigenous communities.

eviction vehicles. Others supported the struggle financially, through legal consultations, material, and food donations, an incredible after eviction camp, or by listening to and being there with their friends after the eviction¹⁷⁴. The joint attempt of hundreds of people to reoccupy Lützerath during the mass demonstration on January 14th further illustrates the love to a space grown out of and around the practice of 're-inhabiting'. Some of these practices unfold in different times and places, while others are clearly attached to the space of belonging. Overall, however, the locations and times, as well as the practices through which land-based struggle can manifest are undefined.

¹⁷⁴ These are just a few among many more ways in which people were part of the struggle without 're-inhabiting' Lützerath.

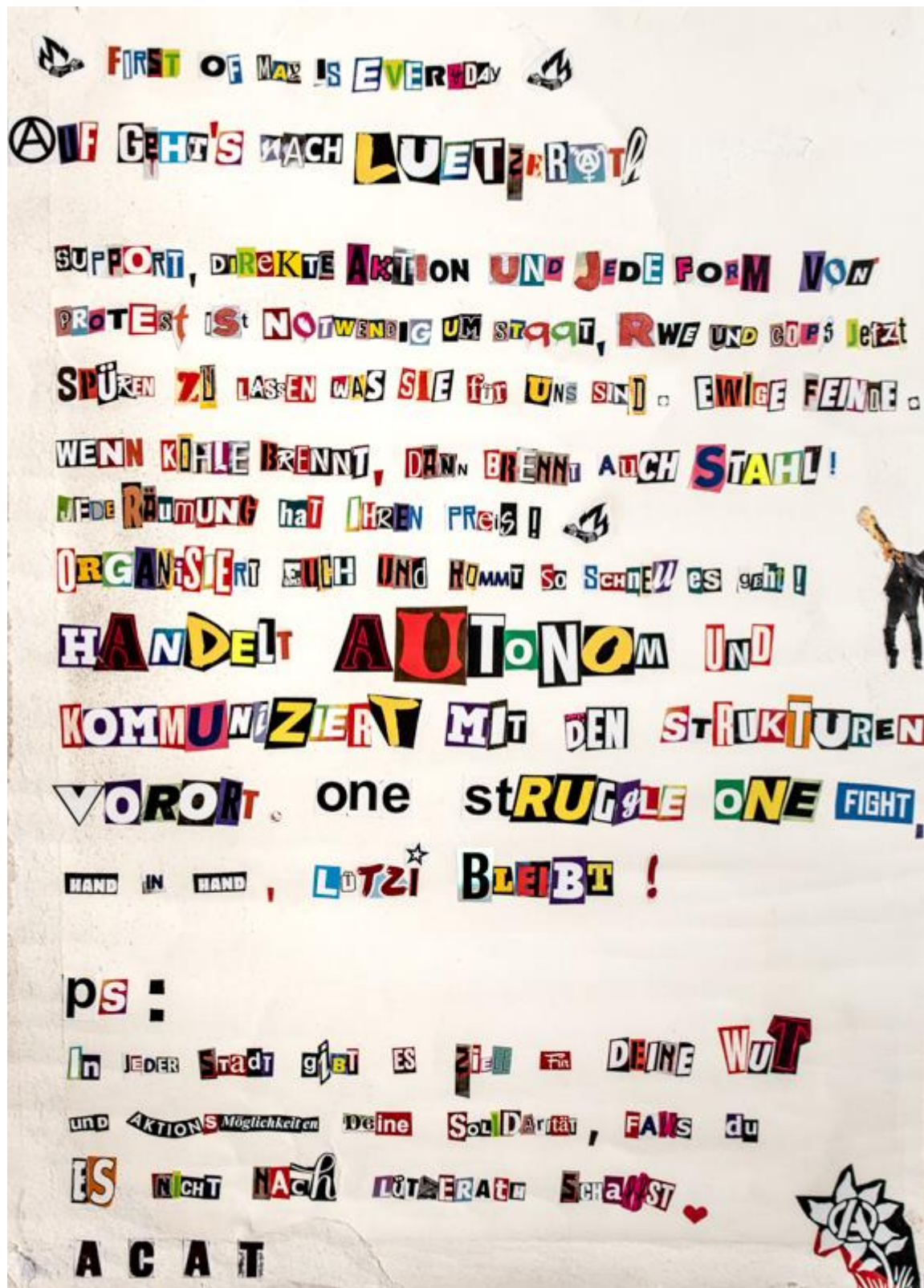


Image 46: A call to action retroactively published on May 1st, 2023: "First of May is every day! Off we go to Lützerath support, direct action and every form of protest are necessary to let the state RWE, and the cops feel what the are to us. Forever enemies. When coal burns, steel burns as well! Every eviction has its price! Organize and come as soon as possible. Act autonomously and communicate with local structures. One struggle one fight, hand in hand, Lützi stays! PS: in every city there are targets for your rage and possibilities of action [for] solidarity in case you cannot make it to Lützerath. ACAT". Source: Indymedia.

Summary

In sum, the effect of all news filters proposed by the propaganda model theory is apparent in the news produced by authorities, corporate leaders, and two regional mass media outlets on Lützerath and the monastery. Hereby, dominant narratives echo imperialist discourse as they isolate "the other" based on claims of neutral observation. Moreover, they criminalize "the unhuman" based on claims of democracy and morality, and in the same breath, pacify dissent by emphasizing the care of state and corporations. Despite internal contradictions, dominant media narratives perform a managing function, as they shape public opinion through distracting from systemic injustice and violence. While legitimizing corporate interests, dominant narratives construct allegations and stigmatizations against people involved in land-based struggle, thereby undermining public support, and creating internal division. Inspired by anarchist political ecology, understanding land-based struggle alongside a theory of media manipulation specifies Quijanos's (2000) concept of 'the coloniality of power' and makes public and private structures that uphold and enforce colonial relations by "colonizing the social imaginary" legible, hence vulnerable. While there are critics to non-indigenous land-based struggles as allies in a project of decolonization, Lützerath and the monastery exemplify the non-metaphoric decolonial potential inherent in land-based struggles: through 're-inhabiting' and re-cultivating love and care for the land and its beings, the reclamation, occupation, and defense of both spaces makes the land, non-human inhabitants, displaced humans, and capitalist destruction, *sensible* (Rancière, 2015). At the same time as "decolonizing the social imaginary" through redefining who exists, these spaces manifest wholehearted attempts of material de-colonization through confronting, blocking, and sometimes stopping growth-driven extraction and socio-ecological devastation (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019). Rather than in their "material and energy throughout", it is in these points of passionate anti-authoritarian struggle, in which the relentless defense of land as spaces of collective belonging converges with a decolonial degrowth project, especially in alienated societies of capitalist centers like Germany.

9 Conclusion: Subverting propaganda

Through combining a counter-insurgency lens with decolonial theory and empirical analysis, this thesis has demonstrated that corporate mass media can be understood as a propagandistic tool to secure capitalist values and (neo)colonial relations, especially in reports about spaces where these values are discursively and physically confronted. Dominant narratives dispersed by local issues of regional newspapers on Lützerath and the monastery exemplify this: They delegitimize dissent to capitalist expansion and instead reassure the arguments of governing

authorities and corporations, which legitimize further mining for material and capital by creating perceived needs (e.g. for more housing and more energy). Thereby, dominant narratives shape the public perception of land-based struggles and undermine public support accordingly. Thereby dominant narratives, which for example describe land-based struggles as "symbolic" and belonging to an alien "activist culture", or as "potential threats" and even "left extreme", 'manufacture consent' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002) to capitalist expansion in form of mining or real-estate speculation. This is because stories dispersed by mass media undergo several 'filters' before reaching the reader. Consequentially, dominant narratives are structurally and intentionally produced to marginalize and silence counter narratives by distorting the reality they claim to neutrally report on.

Revisiting the Propaganda Model in the Rhineland

Hereby, ownership structures of *Rheinische Post Mediengruppe* (RPM) and *Medienhaus Aachen* (MHA) demonstrate that both publishers are run as large profit seeking corporations, which makes them, their journalists, and their editors comply to political and economic pressures at the cost of adhering to publicist demands. Besides diversifying investments among others into the digital marketing company with the telling name "mind-shape" (*see* chapter 4, figure 1), these pressures also entail the concentration of news production into the hands of a few media corporations and leads to the large-scale distribution of close to identical stories under supposedly different newspapers. Hereby, RPM partly owns MHA, and together they own around 30 local issues some of which represent the only local newspaper in the respective area. This leaves both news producers with considerate power over the local distribution of information. Hereby, both newsrooms are dependent on income from advertising for other corporations. Thereby they act as large marketing platforms for energy producers, real-estate, tourism, and automobility companies, banks, and government representatives through organizing conferences and publishing (trade) journals and magazines. As a result, news stories remain uncritical of industrial activities and the overall political-economic system.

Based on economic pressures, news stories produced by RP and AZ about Lützerath and the monastery moreover rely extensively on quotes of official statements from politicians, corporate leaders, "experts", institutions, and their professionalized PR agencies. Hence, journalists' "own investigations" from onsite visits, as well as "opinion articles", or "fact checks", are presented as neutral observations or investigations, but are already informed by and reinforce official statements, stereotypes, and scrutiny. Hereby, flak and censorship filter news production as in the case of Lützerath, through RWE's previously effective threats

against journalists and newspapers, and the censoring of Jürgen Döschner by the public news channel WDR. Again, profit-interest pressures publishers to circumvent risks of costly lawsuits or defending controversial statements, which entails a tendency to censor critical reporting and a reluctance to hire journalists whose investigations might deviate from or even question dominant narratives. Likewise, journalists' and editors' increasingly stressful and unstable working conditions make them more risk averse, potentially leading to self-censorship.

Thereby, news producers enter a partnership with corporations and authorities to reproduce capitalist ideology expressed most openly in anti-anarchist, anti-communist, neoliberal, and green growth elements within dominant narratives. Given that capitalist ideology builds on a hierarchical social order, sexism and racism shape news stories as well. Hereby, unquestioned xenophobic and patriarchal statements, as well the mocking or relativizing of Lützerath's and the monastery's anti-discrimination efforts are common results of the privileged positions of RP and AZ journalists, their editors, and their main sources of information. Finally, restricted (bureaucratic) access to sites of confrontation obstructs journalists from genuinely reporting on socio-ecological struggles, as was the case during Lützerath's eviction and previous open conflicts, for example regarding the defense of the Hambach Forest. Overall, journalists are structurally dependent on uncritically copy-pasting information from official sources, leaving little room for engaging in honest investigations.

Manifestations of coloniality

Further, I have shown how dominant narratives are not only stories but co-producers of reality and concrete examples of 'the coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000). Conversations with neighbors and visitors indicate how dominant media narratives form part of peoples' common sense, delegitimize dissent, and thereby undermine public support for those who disrupt capitalist expansion. They do so by isolating, criminalizing, and pacifying (parts of) land-based struggles, while lauding the efforts of neoliberal environmental governance and "caring" authorities and corporations. Hereby, dominant narratives proceed through a remarkably imperial discourse based on managing mechanisms and distracting contradictions which legitimized colonial expansion, European domination, and the annihilation or assimilation of "inferior" cultures.

Echoing colonial stigmatizations, narratives around an inherently distinct "activist culture" or a mystical minority and its almost worshipped "symbol" artificially isolate those engaged in land-defense from society, from local resistance, and from their diverse solidarity

networks. Thereby, dominant narratives construct land-based struggles as exclusive and almost cult-like. Further, dominant narratives isolate critiques about systemic failure through depoliticization: they silence the political and historical context of anti-mining and anti-gentrification struggles, thereby naturalizing both instances of capitalist expansion either as "horrible scandal" or an "expendable sacrifice", thereby constructing "empty lands" or "worthless life". Accordingly, they depoliticize autonomous and anti-authoritarian struggles as ignorant riots, rather than understanding them as committed and militant defense of land and life. Despite the monastery's and Lützerath's evidently radical engagement with society through *relentlessly confronting* capitalist expansion rather than ignoring or complying with it, and despite counter-narratives' explicit emphasis on this tension, dominant narratives first construct and then scrutinize Lützerath and the monastery's inhabitants as the distinct "other" who is unpolitical, narcissistic, undemocratic, a "unnatural" dropout defending "empty" (yet observably inhabited) lands.

Consequentially, dominant narratives around "the potential threat" or "left extremism" criminalize those relentlessly defending Lützerath and the monastery by dehumanizing them, like colonizers did with indigenous uprisings through enacting imperial discourse. By defining some land defenders as extreme, insane, and driven by uncontrolled desperation, as somewhat "instinct driven and irrational animals", dominant narratives divide anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles and the public. Relatedly, dominant narratives surrounding "the deal" and "the social center" pacify land defenders, their supporters, and the public through despiritualizing the universe and through dogmatic non-violence. Echoing imperial discourse, dominant narratives relativize the need for protest considering the laudable and rational efforts of the respective governments, institutions, and corporations, and by emphasizing their rightful ownership over the "dead and empty lands" under dispute. While dominant narratives themselves uncompromisingly center around individual acts of violence, they delegitimize land defenders for their "obsession" with violence. While silencing counter narratives' emphasis on and efforts to explain colonial continuities, greenwashing, institutionalized discrimination ("democracy"), the responsibility that comes with privilege, and a diversity of tactics approach, dominant narratives effectively distract from, normalize, and prolong systemic violence.

[Towards an anarchist decolonization](#)

Finally, I have demonstrated how land-based struggles can be understood as decolonial practices because they "redistribute the sensible" (Rancière, 2015). That means, that they change what is commonly sensible, or in degrowth terms, they "decolonize the social

imaginary" (Varvarousis, 2019) by making previously excluded and invisibilized beings and the land they inhabit land *sensible*. They do so through 're-inhabiting', loving, and caring spaces deemed worthless, unlovable, and irrelevant by corporations, governments, and large parts of society, who see the only value of such places in the economic profit that can be extracted from them. Based on the anarchist traditions of direct action, self-organization, mutual aid, and free association, the practice of 're-inhabiting' is decolonial, because spaces of collective belonging as those cultivated in Lützerath and the monastery are built on the presupposition of (non-anthropocentric) radical equality (Rancière, 2015). Thus, both, the anarchist practice of 're-inhabiting', and the anarchist theoretical approach of a political ecology of media manipulation, thus indicate spaces of affinity between decolonial and anarchist theory and practice (Dunlap, 2021d; 2022).

Located at the material frontlines of capitalist expansion, these spaces are however not an end in itself. They are not another "settlement for personal gain", or an isolated "utopian anti-capitalist island", but engage *every aspect* of the lives of 're-inhabiting'. Hereby, this practice becomes the uncompromising attempt of disrupting, and even stopping (green) growth driven capitalist expansion, which is where land-based struggles, should receive more solidarity especially from degrowth scholars. While the monastery and Lützerath present examples in a non-settler colonial context, the practice of 're-inhabiting' entails possibilities for solidarity between indigenous and anarchist struggles. Moreover, 're-inhabiting' as a decolonial practice is not bound to "beautiful" natures like old growth forests but includes already scarred lands who are in even greater in need of regeneration. Finally, 're-inhabiting' is not place or time specific, rather it includes a range of actions that make land and its inhabitants sensible. These can include demonstrations, sabotage, and support structures, and take place in cities as capitalist centers and later in time, if a space of collective belonging is already destroyed. This is because of the empathy and rage cultivate through recultivating care for and life. Responding to Bluwstein's (2021) inspiring intervention, this dedicated solidarity, political commitment, and collective confidence to struggle against domination through a diversity of tactics is what researchers and *anyone* concerned with socio-ecological transformation and justice can learn from land-based struggles¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷⁵ Of course, considering the risks and strains associated with 're-inhabiting', this does not mean, that everyone concerned with socio-ecological transformation can or should reinhabit themselves to support or understand these potentially decolonial endeavors. Rather, this reflection opens for alliances and indispensably diverse ways of supporting and showing solidarity with struggles at the frontlines (e.g. donations from solidary local inhabitants, insurrectionary or militant knowledge from solidary researchers, free-of charge services like consultations from "Psychologists for future", and support through care-work).

Resilient relationships

Towards the end of our conversation, Nellie Bly and I talked about the usefulness of the PM in our personal lives, for example regarding an understanding of why violence is so often the focus of media attention in situations of social conflict. Relatedly, they shared how dominant narratives on Lützerath shaped their relationship to some of their friends:

[...] I even had real arguments with good uh friends [...] who weren't in Lützerath and had never been there, certainly they have been green voters for decades [laughs] um, so they were kind of socio-ecological[ly concerned] but not [...] radically political [...] how they let themselves get caught up in this simple discussion about violence, "yes they did, but they also" and we didn't speak about anything else [anymore]. I was so shocked that it caught on. This propaganda works, even with super well-educated people [...]. That shook me so much and also shook our friendship a bit. [I] have to do something about it now, but I was dumbfounded that people say "yes, the police had to [hit those protestors]". How? what did they have to do? Nobody forces me to hit a person, never [...] on a personal level I find it very difficult to talk to people there when they are friends because [these conversations] also make me emotional and then I suddenly don't know any more what do [we have in common]? And to deal with these conflicts in a way that preserves the relationship ... I still have to work hard on that because sometimes I tend to turn away [...] but actually [...] I personally would somehow like to work on it [and] say no I'm staying now, and I can take it now and ... I'm not turning away now [...]. (Interview #14, 01.05.2023)

Experiencing similar situations as Nelly Bly, the PM has helped me to understand how much of the fear, scrutiny, and bias towards radical political action, as well as many of peoples' arguments to legitimize inaction or role as a "neutral spectator", are systematically and intentionally produced capitalist propaganda, disseminated by corporate mass media. Hereby, this propaganda is not based on the intentional spread of lies by journalists obeying to a mystical power conglomerate. Instead, as the PM identifies, propaganda is the result of structural conditions within the capitalist media system which enable corporate and state interests to disseminate distortions of what is observable. By producing contradictory and thus *unresolvable* debates, which delegitimize and distract from dissent to capitalist expansion, socio-ecological catastrophe, and colonial continuities, dominant narratives make people tired of discussing, ultimately. The (nationalist) fear of "extremism", abstinence or skepticism towards "the [naïve, utopist, unrealistic, irrational, ...] other", enthusiasm for technological progress, and trust in "democracy" produced by these contradictory distractions are exhausting in conversations with media representatives, but more importantly, they can be and often are divisive in conversations with friends, family, teachers, sympathizers, and sometimes even accomplices and ourselves.

By understanding the production and function of dominant narratives on anti-capitalist and decolonial struggles, critical journalists, researchers, supporters, and people in

movements can anticipate these distractions, unravel their contradictions, and lever out or even subvert their function. This knowledge hopefully helps not only to develop and assertively share counter-narratives, but also to strengthen social cohesion within movements and their relationships with people less engaged or even skeptical to land defense and dissent. Considering this day-to-day manipulation against the background of counterinsurgency and imperial discourse, corporations', politicians', and institutions' PR statements become refined social management strategies designed to isolate, criminalize, pacify, and ultimately delegitimize political struggle. We may thus cultivate greater understanding for each other's and our own doubts, confusion, questions, and preconceptions, and at the same time confidently refuse to accept that "all opinions are equally valid". We may continue to engage in confrontational conversations with the people we love, while noticing and respecting our own boundaries, making space for emotions, and simply accepting at times that we do not argue with individuals, but an entire system. Finally, people curious about land defense may visit these places fearless of "the other" and with an open heart, without taking instances of uncomfortable anonymity or radical honesty about boundaries personally, and without looking for reaffirmation of supposed stereotypes. Instead, one may understand these encounters within the complex context of political repression, destruction, as well as repetitious, unresolvable, and contradictory stigmas and allegations. By allowing our own preconceptions to be turned upside down, we may start to *really* care for the land and life around us.



Image 47: A poem by Mascha Kaléko written on a wall opposite of "Paula" in September 2022: "Tear apart your plans. Be smart. And stick to wonders. Chase away the fear, and the fear about fears". Source: Author.

Further research

This final section summarizes and complements the possibilities for further research that I have indicated throughout this thesis. First, further research could investigate the effect of the PM's filters on other large (public) news producers on Lützerath¹⁷⁶ or other socio-ecological struggles. While not explored systematically in this research project, dominant narratives on Lützerath were repetitive of narratives on earlier struggles and almost identical across a wide political spectrum of newspapers on local, regional, and national levels. Jürgen Döschner

¹⁷⁶ Note that I refer only to Lützerath here, since to my knowledge, there are no other large newspapers who reported on the monastery.

confirmed this observation in our interview. On my question whether he thought that local news production differed from for example national reporting, he said:

[...] No, I don't see a big difference [...] the narratives that have been put out into the world, especially by those involved [...] in government and industry [in my estimation] they have been repeated again and again [...] at local, regional and national level [...] there is professional press work behind them [...]. (Interview #15, 19.06.2023).

Investigating the effects ownership structures, funding, sourcing, flak, sexism, racism, and restricted physical access on other German news producers and their reports on (other) socio-ecological struggles is thus interesting. Hereby, further research could investigate especially the extent of self-censorship among journalists working for corporate media, and the working conditions of private security forces as well as how the latter might be trained for their encounters with people defending the land under dispute. Regarding the ownership structures of news producers, research could go deeper into the financial entanglements between news producers and subsidiaries of the mining corporations or urban developers involved in a socio-ecological conflict. Finally, given the intensifying extraction of among others, copper, lithium, and "rare earths" associated a globally endorsed "green transition", further research could investigate media manipulation as means to manage resistance also in other parts of the world.



"Als erstes kam dann ein Reporter
Er war'n ganz sympathischer Mann
Er machte Fotos, stellte Fragen
Ha'm uns eigentlich recht gut verstanden
Am nächsten Morgen auf der Titelseite
War 'n abgeranztes Haus
Und 'ne fette Überschrift
"Die Penner müssen endlich raus! [...]"
Die Schlagzeilen war'n schon vorher fertig
Die Verhandlungen sein gescheitert
Doch die Polizei blieb friedlich
Und sofort und so weiter" -Konny, B-Haus (2010)

*"First came a reporter
He was a very nice man
He took pictures, asked questions
We actually got along quite well
The next morning on the front page
There was a run-down house
And a bold headline
"The bums must finally get out! [...]"
The headlines were ready before, saying
The negotiations failed
But the police remained peaceful
And so on and so forth" -Konny, B-House (2010)*

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