

Forest Activism in Victoria:
Relationships of Power and the More-than-Human in
Everyday Practices

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This thesis was written on Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries. Sovereignty was never ceded, and colonisation is ongoing. I acknowledge the continued resistance and survival of Indigenous peoples, and pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted to the School of Geography, The University of Melbourne, as partial fulfilment for the requirements of completing the Bachelor of Arts (Honours). The work contained in this thesis is the result of original research, and has not been submitted in whole, or in part, for a higher degree to this or any other University or similar institution. Any errors are my own.

Lara Wiesel

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lara Wiesel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

10 December 2018

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Like everything, this is a work created from countless entanglements.

To my dearest family, friends, housemates, and a particular bee in my life, your fountain of love, support, and belief in me is the fabric that has bound this work together.

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ABSTRACT

Forest activists within Victoria engage in a variety of tactics to stop logging of native forests in Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries (Central Highlands and East Gippsland). This thesis applies an alternative politics and more-than-human (MtH) lens to the everyday practices of forest activists, in order to understand relationships of power and entanglements with other beings. Situated from my position as a forest activist, I undertook ethnographic research with forest activists between May and September 2018, and conducted thirty informal and ten formal interviews with forest activists.

This thesis will argue that whilst forest activists might seek to enact an alternative anti-hierarchical politics, power unevenness still emerges within everyday practices. In exploring forest activists' engagements with the other beings they seek to protect, I also consider how power unevenness extends to more-than-human relationships.

Key words: forests – activism – environmental politics – alternative politics – more-than-human – East Gippsland – Central Highlands – Victoria

Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	III
ABSTRACT.....	IV
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION.....	1
AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	2
ALTERNATIVE POLITICS.....	2
THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN.....	3
THESIS STRUCTURE.....	4
CHAPTER TWO – RESEARCHING VICTORIAN FOREST ACTIVISM: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	6
ALTERNATIVE POLITICS.....	6
ARTS OF NOTICING.....	8
KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE.....	10
DIFFERENCE.....	11
MORE-THAN-HUMAN THEORY.....	12
CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY OF FOREST ACTIVISM.....	15
CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCHING WITH ACTIVISTS AND OTHER BEINGS: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	17
INTRODUCTION.....	17
METHODOLOGY: EMBODIED AND COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH.....	17
RESEARCH FOCUS: FOREST ACTIVISM.....	19
METHODS.....	19
<i>Participant Observation</i>	19
<i>Interviews</i>	21
<i>Fieldnotes</i>	22
<i>Analysis</i>	23
POSITIONALITY & LIMITATIONS.....	24
<i>Identity</i>	24

<i>Friends and Acquaintances: Insider/Outsider Positionality</i>	25
<i>Activist Research</i>	26
CONCLUSIONS	27
CHAPTER FOUR – SETTING THE SCENE: THE “FOREST WARS” OF VICTORIA	28
INTRODUCTION.....	28
VICTORIAN FORESTS: CONTESTS OVER FOREST POLITICS AND MANAGEMENT	28
<i>Forests</i>	29
<i>Forest Management</i>	29
<i>Contests</i>	30
VICTORIAN FOREST ACTIVISM: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW	31
<i>Tactics</i>	32
CONCLUSIONS	36
CHAPTER FIVE – POWER, EXPERTISE, AND GENDER IN VICTORIAN FOREST ACTIVISM	37
INTRODUCTION.....	37
PRACTICES AS POLITICS	37
KNOWLEDGE HIERARCHIES	39
<i>Knot-Tying</i>	39
<i>Skill-Shares</i>	43
GENDER HIERARCHIES	46
CONCLUSIONS	50
CHAPTER SIX – TRACKS OF KNOTS, SEEDS, AND A GPS: FOREST ACTIVISTS’ ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN	52
INTRODUCTION.....	52
EXPERTISE.....	52
SHEOAKS	53
GPS.....	56
REGENERATING TRACKS	58
FOREST ACTIVISM: A MTH POLITICS?.....	61
CONCLUSIONS	62
CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION	64

POWER UNEVENNESS IN PRACTICES	66
<i>Between Humans</i>	66
<i>With Other Beings</i>	67
RELATIONSHIPS MATTER.....	67
<i>Perpetuating Broader Social Systems</i>	68
<i>More-than-Human Politics</i>	68
DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	70
CONCLUSION	71
REFERENCES	72

CHAPTER ONE –

Introduction

Forest activists are significant actors in the “forest wars” of Victoria, resisting logging of native forests through a variety of tactics. This thesis focuses on the everyday practices that constitute these tactics in order to consider how forest activists interact with each other, and with the forest they are seeking to protect.

The forests of the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, Victoria are complex ecosystems, composed not just from the tallest flowering gums in Australia, the mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) but also from the tallest moss (*Dawsonia superbia*), the last remaining spotted-tail quolls in eastern Victoria, and the endangered greater glider. These beings are part of a complex ecological web, an intensely social world (Tsing 2013). Humans are also part of these complex ecosystems – these are Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries,¹ and human interactions with the trees, moss, and gliders has been one part of shaping these forests’ lives. To discuss the “forest”, then, I consider a complexity of ever-changing interactions.

Contemporary settler-coloniser understandings of the forest, however, are guided by dualisms such as the construct of humans as essentially separate from other beings, and these dualisms can enable control over Nature (Plumwood 1993, 2002; Porter 2007).² This is apparent in the logging regimes of Victoria, in which forests are clearfelled for timber extraction. In part, forest activists seek to not only stop logging, but also transform the dualistic worldview encouraging it. Understanding the

¹ Wherever practicable I refer to the “Central Highlands and East Gippsland” by their Indigenous Country names, in acknowledgement of re-naming space as a (de-)colonial project. However I also acknowledge that colonisation has meant Country names and boundaries are contested.

² I capitalise Nature here, and throughout, in recognition of the human construct of “Nature” (Castree 2005)

mechanisms with which humans and other beings interact with, support, and resist native forest perceptions and logging practices, is also important for the health and existence of forest ecosystems themselves, and in the context of global climate change. Through focussing on forest activists, I argue that whilst activists might seek to enact an alternative anti-hierarchical politics, power unevenness still emerges within everyday practices. In exploring forest activists' engagements with other beings, I also argue power unevenness extends to more-than-human (MtH) entanglements.

Aims and Research Questions

In understanding the politics of forest activists, this thesis aims to critically analyse the everyday practices of forest activists in order to understand relationships of power between humans *and* between other beings. In fulfilling these aims I pose two research questions:

- (1) What are the everyday practices and politics of forest activism in Victoria?
- (2) How do forest activists engage with other beings and a more-than-human (MtH) politics?

I addressed these research questions through conducting ethnographic fieldwork between May–September 2018. Based on my existing involvement in forest activism, I was engaged in participant observation with forest activist practices, and conducted thirty informal and ten formal interviews with forest activists. As part of my embodied and collaborative methodology these interviews also involved a partially collaborative analysis process. My research questions, methodology, and analysis, emerged from my conceptual framework which I outline below.

Alternative Politics

I analyse forest activism through an alternative political lens so as to consider a grassroots perspective of forest politics in Victoria. “Alternative politics” is diverse, and from it I draw the analysis that politics can occur outside formal institutions, and that change-making happens partly through everyday practices (Pickerill & Chatterton 2006; Sitrin 2016). Some interpretations of alternative politics have drawn on feminist traditions of scholarship in understanding “everyday practices” to be

the patterns and rhythms of life, constituted through embodied encounters (Dyson & Jeffrey 2018), and it is to this definition I refer throughout the thesis. In line with this approach, I focus my analysis primarily on *practices* that constitute the tactics of forest activism. This enables analysis of *whether* and *how* Victorian forest activist practices are transforming dominant narratives such as human/Nature dualisms that in part underpin logging.

To analyse these practices I consider how these practices emerge through relationships. Being attentive to the co-production of practices between all beings, and the ways different identities influence the process of relationships, enables a critical analysis of power within forest activism. Attentiveness to these relationships matters in order to understand how broader dominant systems of power are, or are not, replicating themselves within the practices of forest activism, and so how forest activists are, or are not, influencing broader scale change.

The More-than-Human

Alternative politics scholarship has only to a small degree considered the agency of other beings in co-constituting practices, and the power relationships that can emerge within these politics (Lee 2013; Feigenbaum 2014; Waterton 2017). Such a consideration is important in the context of an activism explicitly engaged in “environmental” politics and seeking to change wider relationships with other beings (“the forest”). In order to consider these relationships, I turn to more-than-human (MtH) theories, which recognise that the world, and politics, emerges through encounters between all beings including trees, animals, and technology. This recognition allows for consideration of the power dynamics that can emerge in relationships between humans and other beings, as well as consideration of how other beings are part of broader political considerations – a MtH politics.

Within Victoria’s “forest wars” grassroots activists resist the logging of native forests through a variety of tactics which emerge through everyday practices. In analysing these practices I consider

whether and *how* forest activists are transforming broader systems of power. While alternative politics has focussed mostly on considering human actors, I argue it is also important to consider other beings as agents within activist practices, and so within forest politics. To this end I consider the ways power emerges through the relationships between human and other beings.

Thesis Structure

To address my research questions, the thesis is structured as follows. In chapter two, *A Conceptual Approach for Victorian Forest Activism*, I develop a conceptual framework to understand alternative politics through the relationships between humans as well as other beings, considering the power dynamics that emerge. I draw together Tsing's (2015) 'arts of noticing', Jasanoff's (2004) co-production, work on social difference, and Mth theories, to assist in critically analysing the power relationships within forest activist practices.

In chapter three, *Researching with Activists and Other Beings: A Methodological Approach*, I develop my collaborative and embodied methodology and discuss the methods I used to address these research questions: participant observation, interviews, and a collaborative analysis. I also discuss my positionality as an insider both as a forest activist, and as a friend of those I was researching, and the limitations to my research this posed.

In chapter four, *Setting the Scene: The "Forest Wars" of Victoria*, I address my first research question, positioning forest activism within the larger "forest wars" of Victoria, analysing the diverse politics and tactics in which forest activists engage. I expand this analysis in chapter five, *Power, Expertise, and Gender in Victorian Forest Activism*, focussing on the uneven power dynamics that emerge between humans, through the everyday practices of forest activism. Here, I use knot-tying as a practice to analyse the formation of knowledge hierarchies and expertise. I consider ways activists

recognise these hierarchies and seek to mitigate them through skill-shares. However, identities, such as gender, are implicated in these relationships, and are underpinned by broader power dynamics.

Addressing my second research question, in chapter six, *Tracks of Knots, Seeds, and a GPS: Forest Activists' Engagements with the More-than-Human*, I expand my analysis of power through considering other beings as agents in forest activists' everyday practices. I re-consider the example of the knot, and turn to practices of gaining knowledge of the bush, such as surveying. In considering a MtH world, it becomes apparent that there is power unevenness within these relationships, and that forest activists are engaging with other beings only to a certain extent.

In chapter seven, I conclude by drawing together two key themes of this thesis. First, within forest activist practices power unevenness emerges both between humans, and between humans' relationships with other beings. This can disempower certain activists and deny the agency of the other beings that are part of forest activism. Second, and more broadly, I argue for the importance of being attentive to the processes by which relationships emerge: it is through relationships that activists perpetuate broader systems of power unevenness. It is also through relationships that activists can enact a politics aligning with MtH understandings, and so enact a non-dualistic relationship with other beings. In concluding, I speculate on potential ways forest activists might begin to mitigate power unevenness through engaging more explicitly in such a MtH politics.

CHAPTER TWO –

Researching Victorian Forest Activism: A Conceptual Approach

Introduction

In this chapter I develop a conceptual framework to understand forest activism. I consider forest activism as an alternative politics that emerges through relationships between humans and other beings, and critically analyse power within these relationships. To do so, I draw together Tsing's (2015) 'arts of noticing', Jasanoff's (2004) co-production, considerations of social difference, and more-than-human (MtH) theories. Drawing these theories together provides two key insights to address my research questions. First, I understand power unevenness as emerging through the relationships which constitute everyday practices. Second, I argue that noticing relationships with other beings, and recognising other beings' agency, can mitigate human/Nature dualisms; these engagements de-centre humans and highlight difference, enacting a MtH politics. Through these perspectives, then, this thesis contributes to an understanding of power relationships within alternative political practices, and the role of other beings within a practice that is an explicitly environmental alternative politics.

Alternative Politics

Alternative politics considers change-making which occurs outside formal institutions (Sitrin 2016; Brissette 2016). This has been useful in considering the politics of "grassroots" activist movements: activism occurring mostly outside formal institutions such as non-government organisations (NGOs), and which emphasises autonomous community decision making (Featherstone 2003; Routledge,

Cumbers & Nativel 2007).³ Such analysis has understood that, while grassroots activism might not explicitly result in institutional reform, its power is in disrupting and creating alternative political visions, and so subverting dominant institutions (Vasudevan 2015; Araujo et al. 2017). Grassroots activists can be particularly influential actors through their abilities and willingness to engage in illegal direct action – something formal NGOs are often unwilling to do (Death 2015).⁴ I consider forest activism’s political influence through this alternative lens. This brings a new perspective to forest activism and forest politics in Victoria, given dominant contemporary scholarship of Victoria’s “forest wars”, and Australian environmental politics more broadly, focusses on the role of formal institutions and NGOs (Doyle 2000; Ajani 2007; Christoff 2016).

Alternative politics also focuses analysis on autonomous/anarchist political praxis. This praxis seeks to mitigate power unevenness and hierarchies through recognising individual autonomy within a collective consciousness (Springer 2014; Araujo et al. 2017). Hierarchy is understood to perpetuate social unevenness through giving certain bodies/communities *power over* others, rather than allowing each body/community to engage on their own terms (Springer 2014). Those at the bottom of the hierarchy are then excluded and marginalised. Scholars such as Graeber (2009) and Vasudevan (2015) have critically analysed how activists seek to enact non-hierarchical politics through embodied performative processes. Hierarchy and loss of autonomy, for example, is performed through the physical act of a decision being made by a few on behalf of many (Maeckelbergh 2011). In turning to forest activism I consider how forest activist practices are engaging in and performing a politics of non-hierarchy.

³ The definition of “grassroots” is necessarily fluid. Some Australian NGOs work within a “grassroots” model, and some non-NGO affiliated “community groups” can mimic many characteristics of formal NGOs (Routledge, Cumbers & Nativel 2007; Doherty & Doyle 2013).

⁴ Historically NGOs engaged in, and overtly supported, direct action in Australia (Wilkie 2017; Foskey 2015). However, within the contemporary political climate, organisations that overtly support illegal activities, such as direct action, are at risk of losing their tax-deductible donation status, jeopardising their predominant source of funding (Burdon 2015).

An emerging perspective on alternative politics considers change-making occurring through everyday actions – the embodied patterns and rhythms of life (Chatterton & Pickerill 2010a; Dyson & Jeffrey 2018). For example, in using consensus processes hierarchies are challenged through everyday decision making practices (Polletta & Hoban 2016). So, I turn my analysis to the everyday practices of forest activism, considering how forest activists are engaging in an alternative politics through their everyday practices.

However, while alternative politics is a useful framework with which to analyse the politics of forest activists, there is currently limited scholarship on alternative politics' engagements with other beings (Lee 2013; Feigenbaum 2014; Waterton 2017). Similarly, in understanding power unevenness as emerging through *practices*, I draw on Jasanoff's (2004) co-production and theories of social difference.

Arts of Noticing

Underpinning my analysis of forest activist practices is Tsing's work on 'arts of noticing', which allows consideration of other beings, relationships, and power. Tsing (2015) argues the world emerges through relationships between beings – a series of 'polyphonic assemblages' (p.24) which are 'never settled' (p.22), always in the process of being made and re-made. This understanding is distinct from other types of assemblages, such as those proposed by Latour, in that they are 'open-ended gatherings' (Tsing 2015, p.23) rather than a 'network... structur[ing] further associations' (Tsing 2015, p.292). I find this useful in considering forest activism as an 'emergent gathering' (p.23), and my research approach was influenced by following and noticing instances where 'gatherings... become happenings' (Tsing 2015, p.23).

For Tsing (2013), relationships are formed partly through embodied encounters, and so she is attentive to the mundane everyday practices of bodies. Noticing these practices can reveal different

ways of living and being, highlighting difference and clashes of perspectives – for example, alternatives of a capitalist world, and alternative sites of resistance. The attention to everyday bodily practices emerges from a broader consideration in feminist scholarship, which has sought to consider how attention to practices can highlight the lived experiences of difference (Mol 2002; Haraway 2008; Phillips 2013). This complements the understanding of everyday practice outlined in alternative politics, by contributing the insight that attending to the diversity in everyday practice allows attention to beings otherwise overlooked, and the acknowledgement of these beings' world-making power.

For Tsing (2015), 'making worlds isn't limited to humans' (p.22). Rather, other beings are important agents in these creations, and are themselves engaged in a 'more-than-human sociality' (Tsing 2013). At the end of this chapter I return to a discussion on MtH work, however mention it here as a guiding principle of my conceptual framework. Tsing (2015) turns to the creative and transformative potential of the matsutake mushroom to make her point – matsutake mushrooms interact in a social sense with pine trees and a myriad of other species, and it is these interactions, on the scale of the fungal system of matsutake, which contributes to creating pine forests. So, while other-than-human beings do not have human consciousness, and do not participate in constructing or relating to the world in the same way as humans, they can be understood as having their own form of being; 'organisms don't have to show their human equivalence (as conscious agents, intentional communicators, or ethical subjects) to count' (Tsing 2015, p.158) – they can "count" in and of themselves. Recognising the agency of other beings contributes to a creative project of moving away from a human/Nature dualism and anthropocentrism. This is important in the context of forest activism, given activists are seeking to alter perceptions and interactions with a forest environment.

However within these relationships power unevenness emerges. This draws on Haraway's (2008) understanding that different beings have 'different degrees of freedom' (p.72) to influence, create, and transform the world. For Tsing (2015), freedom 'depends on the bodily form we have inherited;

through it, we navigate the world' (p.30). Understanding how forest activist bodies interact, then, is useful to notice the different freedoms, and relative power, of different beings.

Together, Tsing's work allows an analysis of the alternative politics of forest activism as a Mth sociality, and activism as a practice that is continually being made and re-made through embodied encounters between all beings, with different degrees of power.

Knowledge and Expertise

I expand the analysis of differing degrees of power by focussing explicitly on the co-production of expertise, developed through science and technology studies (STS). Similar to Tsing's discussion of emergent gatherings, co-production understands that 'the ways in which we know and represent the world (both nature and society) are inseparable from the ways in which we choose to live in it' (Jasanoff 2004, p.2). Co-production then sees epistemologies as created in tandem with social lives – knowledge is never a project of an objective reality, but emerges from the specific situation in which it is created (Haraway 1988; Jasanoff 2004). Attentiveness to the process of knowledge production can reveal uneven power relationships, 'highlighting the often invisible role of knowledges, expertise, technical practices and material objects in shaping, sustaining, subverting or transforming relations of authority' (Jasanoff 2004, p.6). Framing of expertise is one example of this. Developed particularly in civil society and governance/policy spheres, work on expertise argues a division of expert/inexpert, such as scientist/non-scientist citizen, means the non-scientist citizen is less able to contribute knowledge to debate – their knowledge is considered inauthentic. So, experts are able to frame issues such as climate change, defining the parameters of debates and accepted realities (Miller 2000; Chilvers & Kearnes 2016; Domènech 2017). As Jasanoff (2003, p.159) states, 'expertise, by this view, becomes politics by other means', being a form in which knowledge and political views are channelled to fit the "expert" view. Within forest activism, understanding how expertise is co-produced can then illuminate one way in which power unevenness emerges.

So, in being attentive to the arts of noticing, and the ways that gatherings emerge through polyphonic assemblages, it is possible to understand that power dynamics also emerge through moments of relationships. Interrogating these constructions of expertise, knowledge, and power involves being attentive to the inherent diversity of these relationships – becoming aware of the ‘difference’ and ‘friction’ within these knowledge productions (Tsing 2005). It is to be attentive to the power relationships and the frictions of knowledge production that I consider the everyday practices within forest activism, and the situated circumstances from which a diversity of relationships emerge.

Difference

Tsing’s (2015) attentiveness to polyphonic assemblages, and Jasanoff’s (2004) understanding of co-production, also invites a consideration of the ways power differences are shaped by different identities and subjectivities. To do so, I draw on scholarship which considers the intersectionality of identities, and the intersectionality of identities within broader structural powers.

This work highlights two themes: first, identities are part of the subjectivity that influences how people interact and co-produce the world (Haraway 1988). In my analysis I focus particularly on the ways gender identities influence knowledge co-production, and how expertise can become a gendered identity (Sundberg 2004; Lamb 2018). I recognise gender is one of many intersecting axes of identity, and this analytical focus emerged from my embodied experiences as a cis-woman (a woman who identifies with their assigned gender at birth) forest activist, and through collaborative analysis with other activists. Through these experiences it became apparent that a “cis-woman” relates differently to knowledge production than a “trans-man” (a man who was assigned female gender at birth). Drawing from Butler’s (2004) gender theory, these identities are continually emerging and being reinforced through relationships – the identity of “cis-woman” is created through interactions with others. Similarly, through working as a forest activist it became apparent that relations of power and authority within forest activism were not static, but were continually fluctuating based on

circumstances. A theoretical understanding of subjective identities is then useful in analysing how particular forms of power emerges within forest activism through different constructions of identity – for example the co-creation of an “expert” identity.

Secondly, in understanding these continually emergent identities, scholarship on difference considers how identities are reinforced through broader discursive structures of power and social conceptions of difference, such as the patriarchy or human/Nature dualisms (Sundberg 2004). Plumwood (1993) conceptualises these broader power structures as a “master narrative” in which the dominant Self is defined by a hyper-separation from an Other which is objectified and denied agency. Recognising these narratives allows for an understanding that identities do not emerge in a vacuum, but in the context of broader social dynamics (Hackfort & Burchardt 2018). Understanding identities as emergent focusses potential for change of dominant narratives, such as patriarchy, on the everyday practices that enact them. However, while forest activists might seek to subvert broader systems of power, their everyday practices still emerge within these broader contexts. So, in understanding how differently positioned identities, and particularly gender, influence the power relations in forest activism, I argue it is important to consider the moments of relationships as sites for both analysis and potential change.

Drawing together the arts of noticing, co-production, and a perspective of difference contributes to an understanding of how power is constituted through practices within forest activism. However to understand relationships between activists and other beings, I consider further more-than-human theory.

More-than-Human Theory

More-than-human (MtH) theory is one approach to considering the interconnection between humans and other beings, through recognising the world as continually emerging from encounters between

all beings, not just humans (Whatmore 2008; Haraway 2008; Tsing 2015). “Humans” are constructed through relationships with trees and technology, just as technology or trees emerge from encounters with other beings (Whatmore 2008). This approach is then useful in understanding that the “environmental” politics of forest activists is in fact a “more-than-human” politics.

In understanding the importance of other beings within relationships, MtH theories extends “agency” beyond a human capacity for consciousness or intentionality, exploring how other beings have the capacity to create, transform, and influence the world through their relationships (Jones & Cloke 2002; Haraway 2008; Head, Atchison & Phillips 2015). Jones and Cloke (2002), for example, discuss the transformative agency of trees as being able to ‘make new directions and formations... trees can act autonomously in seeding themselves and growing in unexpected places and in unexpected forms’ (p.81), which can then transform landscapes, colonising an old coal slag heap, transforming it into a site of cultural significance recognised by the local community. While there may not be *intention* in these actions, there can be a purposiveness – trees’ material forms contain within them the ability of self-seeding, and a purposiveness of reproduction (Jones & Cloke 2002). Considering the agency of other beings in a forest activist context is useful for moving beyond human/Nature dualisms, by recognising the fluidity of relationships and the continual making and re-making of all beings through processes of relationships. This allows a consideration of activism as not just the result of human activist engagements, but as shaped through the creativity, influence, and transformation potential of other beings as part of these practices.

Recognising the agency of other beings does not imply an “equal” agency – different bodies will have different capacities to act and influence relationships (Haraway 2008). Such a recognition allows for an understanding of power unevenness within relationships between other beings – some beings will have power over others (Phillips 2013). This extends analysis of power, co-production, and difference discussed above to consider the different roles of power between all beings within activists’ everyday

practices. For example, activists are not just engaged with a harmonious “forest”, but also with car petrol fuels, and decisions about which areas of forest to save.

MtH insights on relationships of power, and other beings’ agency, is also important in the context of forest activists’ alternative politics. Noticing the engagements with other beings ‘provides new insights into and framings of the political’ (Head et al. 2014, p.864) through altering an understanding of “what matters”, and “who counts” in the political sphere: the lives of other beings also matter, and are themselves political subjects. This work has drawn on the understanding that to engage with other beings politically is to learn to be a witness, to listen to other beings, to be affected by other beings, and to act with response-ability (Rose 2005; Potts & Haraway 2010; Haraway 2015). In applying this, one branch of MtH scholarship has considered the implications of other beings as agents within formal governance and democratic theories, considering for example how notions of democratic participation and decision making are expanded through engaging with other beings’ as political subjects (Braun & Whatmore 2010a; Disch 2010; Stengers 2010). In contributing to work on a MtH politics, I expand this analysis to consider the ways other beings participate as political subjects within an *alternative* politics that seeks to make change outside formal institutions.

Adjacent to, and as part of work on MtH politics some scholarship has considered the intersections between activism and MtH theories. For example, recent work within alternative politics has analysed the importance of the materials and “stuff” of activism, particularly in the context of protest camps (Feigenbaum, Frenzel & McCurdy 2013; Frenzel, Feigenbaum & McCurdy 2014; Feigenbaum 2014). Some work has also considered the agency of other beings in contributing to the affective atmospheres and co-creation of activism (Lee 2013; Pike 2017). In the Australian context, Cianchi (2015) has explored the importance of these relationships for radical environmental activists, highlighting the importance of individual connections and emotive experiences with other beings as motivators for activism, the complexity of political interactions that seek to “save” other beings as

well engage with them as partners, and the ways environmental activism can increase care with other beings. I expand from these works by focussing explicitly on how *everyday practices* as emergent from relationships can assist in understanding *power dynamics* between activists and other beings.

MtH theories are then useful for analysing forest activism in several ways. Attributing agency to other beings can displace anthropocentrism, allowing a consideration of activism as emerging through relationships with other beings. Analysing the processes of these relationships can assist in understanding the power dynamics that emerge through practices, and the ways that activists, from their alternative political perspective, interact with other beings as political agents. These considerations are important in critically analysing how forest activists are, or are not, moving beyond a human/Nature dualism through their practices.

Conclusions: Towards a Framework for Study of Forest Activism

This chapter has introduced key tenants of a conceptual framework developed to address this thesis' aims, which seeks to critically analyse the everyday practices of forest activists in order to understand relationships of power between humans and between other beings. Situating forest activism within an alternative political framework allows an analysis of forest activist politics as seeking to make change outside formal political institutions and through everyday practices. In order to understand relationships of power within these practices, and so understand how forest activists are mitigating broader hierarchies of power, I draw together Tsing's (2015) 'arts of noticing', Jasanoff's (2004) co-production insights, perspectives on social difference, and MtH theories. Similar to Tsing, I understand the world as a polyphonic assemblage formed through embodied encounters involving humans and other beings, all with differing degrees of freedom. I draw from co-production in understanding knowledge and expertise as an axis of power, emerging from situated encounters. In further understanding the complexities of power unevenness, I turn to scholarship on social difference

and identity. I then expanded an analysis of the MtH through considering other beings' agency, power unevenness within these relationships, and the importance of MtH considerations in politics.

Taken together there are two themes of this theoretical framework, addressing my two research questions. First, an understanding of power as emergent through the relationships which constitute everyday practices; second, the importance of being attentive to relationships with other beings in noticing difference and creating environmental politics. This thesis then contributes a theoretical perspective on power relationships within an alternative political practice, and the role of other beings within an explicitly environmental alternative politics.

CHAPTER THREE –

Researching with Activists and Other Beings: A Methodological Approach

Introduction

Developed from my conceptual approach I engaged in a methodology of embodied and collaborative research to address my research aims and questions. This methodology provided insights into the everyday practices of forest activists' interactions, and their engagements with other beings. Based from my position as a forest activist, I conducted participant observation between May – September 2018, in which I engaged as a “full-time” activist in the practices of forest activism. Throughout participant observation I conducted thirty informal conversational interviews with activists, and more targeted interviews with ten activists. Conversational interviews often emerged as part of participant observation activities, such as car trips or campfire conversations. These informal interviews assisted my partially collaborative analysis process, gaining activists' feedback and interpretations of important themes for analysis. Combined, these methods enabled an embodied understanding of the everyday practices of forest activism, focussing on both humans and other beings as research collaborators, and gaining the direct verbal insights of human activists into relationships of power and MtH engagements. In concluding the chapter, I discuss the tensions and limitations of my positionality, and identity as an insider and outsider: researcher, friend, and activist.

Methodology: Embodied and Collaborative Research

Based in the theoretical context outlined in chapter two, my ethnographic methodology seeks to engage in embodied arts of noticing everyday practices and engagements with other beings. Noticing the everyday can occur by using the body as a research tool, understanding ‘how bodies interact, meld, and constitute social spaces, and thereby create inclusions and exclusions’ (Watson & Till 2010, p.122). Participant observation is one such method, in which the researcher's body participates

in the everyday actions of the research community so as to gain detailed insights into the interactions between bodies. This is an explorative process, following the bodies which present themselves, and can highlight the everyday practices, and power relations that are constituted through these practices (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Jeffrey & Dyson 2008).

MtH ethnographic methods extend the noticing of everyday interactions to other beings. Tsing (2015), for example, follows the ‘life-worlds’ and ‘social life’ of other beings through attentiveness to embodied relationships between these beings. This recognises that ‘knowledge about the nonhuman world emerges out of situated, embodied, and technological encounters with the nonhumans that are the subjects of research’ (Lorimer 2015, p.45). In my research I am attentive to bodies by *following*, *noticing*, and *responding* to other beings, using methods such as ‘engaged witnessing’ so as to understand both the minutiae of everyday life and the flows between the material beings present (Tsing 2015; Bell, Instone & Mee 2017).

Embodied research is necessarily a collaboration between subject (researcher) and subject (researched), drawing on theoretical understandings of agency discussed in chapter two. In *following*, *noticing*, and *responding* to other beings, I am to some extent collaborating with them – for example altering my research practice to attend to different spatial and temporal scales of other beings (Bastian 2017). Collaborative research has also been used in ethnographic methods in instances where the *researcher* is also the *researched* (Routledge 2002; Mason 2015). Rather than a discrete participant *observer*, the researcher is involved and active. In my research I am a forest activist, and am researching *with* friends and colleagues. My methodology then positions me not as an objective outsider, but as someone who is researching and analysing from *within*, from a subjective position as a member of those I am analysing, and in which research occurs in *collaboration* with activists. Based within this position, I also draw on collaborative ideas of research in order to create research beneficial to the “research community” – forest activists (Routledge 2015; Araujo et al. 2017). To

this end, I interviewed activists in order to gain their insights into the directions of the research, and into forest activist politics and practices more broadly (McDowell 2010; Dunn 2016). So, the methodologies of embodied and collaborative research enable my research focus on the embodied practices and collaborative engagements with other beings, in an activist context.

Research Focus: Forest Activism

In this thesis I focus on grassroots forest activism – activism which mostly operates independently from or adjacent to NGOs. Grassroots activism is necessarily a fluid space. Drawing from my conceptual framework my research process engaged with this fluidity, understanding forest activism as an ‘emergent gathering’, and following and noticing instances where ‘gatherings... become happenings’ (Tsing 2015, p.23). My research focus shifted throughout my research processes, as I was researching whatever happened within activism during the period of my research. Following activist practices in this way involved surprises in the sites of my research – some research occurred (with consent) in my living room, or via electronic communication on online platforms.

Methods

Participant Observation

Ethnographic fieldwork took place between May – October 2018. I engaged as a “full-time” activist for two of those months, participating in as many forest activist events as was feasible (influenced by emotional capacity and personal commitments). I continued to engage in forest activism beyond those two months, as part of my continuing involvement as a member of the activist community. Throughout this time I engaged in multiple aspects of forest activism, including planning and strategy meetings in Naarm (Melbourne), activist social events like fundraisers and parties, and several trips to forests throughout Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Wurundjeri, Gunnai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries. On these trips groups of various sizes (between five and twenty) drove into the forest and camped, conducted citizen science surveys, undertook a variety of direct action tactics, went

bushwalking both in areas designated for logging and in protected areas of forest, participated in activist trainings, and on one trip met with community members discussing their experiences of forest activism and living near logging practices. I participated in the organisation of almost all of these trips, assisting with recruiting, one-on-one conversations with other key organisers, camping logistics, and facilitating planning meetings. I took detailed fieldnotes of all of these interactions (see below).

To conduct this research I gained verbal consent from every activist participant, consistent with the verbal consent culture of forest activism.⁵ I understand consent as a continual process, and regularly asked questions such as ‘is it ok to be a “researcher” in this meeting?’, ‘how would you feel if I took notes about this conversation for my research?’. There were times when activists were uncomfortable with a researcher being present and in one instance, this altered the shape of my research. I had initially planned to focus my research on a specific direct action; however to protect the actions and identities of activists I expanded the scope of the research to include a variety of forest activist tactics. This was a beneficial collaborative re-shaping of the research project, as it meant I was able to consider forest activist practices with a wider lens of activists’ tactics.

Throughout participant observation I engaged my body as a site of research. I was attentive to the senses of my physical form, and the ways my body was engaged with other beings. This provided insights into how other bodies interact – for example, being attentive to how my body responded to changing temperatures, how I moved away from campfire smoke, and how consensus processes were materially created through sitting in a circle. In this process I was also researching engagements with other beings such as trees, cameras, cars, mosses, tables, and birds. I was attentive to all the different

⁵ As per my ethics clearance (Ethics ID: 1851593), in asking for research consent I verbally explained the aims of my research. I outlined that I would be using composite characters in my analysis (see below), and that consent could be refused or withdrawn at any point without adversely impacting our relationship, or my research.

types of bodies within the activist space, and how different bodies were included or excluded. For example, while driving in a car I became aware of the different beings actively included through conscious noticing – phone charging cords, camping gear squeezed into a small boot, petrol – and the beings which were excluded through this form of engagement – the sounds of birds, the seedlings we ran over on the gravel track, and those who were uncomfortable driving on a forest track or carpooling with strangers.

While I was attentive to other beings, my research focussed specifically on following how humans engaged and followed other beings – for example, I was attentive to how activists’ climbed into a tree hollow to see a dead feathertail glider, rather than being attentive to following the family of the feathertail glider. This is reflective of going along methodologies – research responses were elicited from the landscape through people referring to their direct bodily experience – ‘look over there’, ‘being here makes me feel...’. This also meant informal interviews were mostly sparked by people’s reflections. When someone remarked ‘why do the batteries always run out?’ as their headtorch switched off, I discussed activist materials with them – ‘what kind of batteries do you have? What do you think about needing to use batteries out here?’.

Interviews

To explicitly gain perspectives of activists I conducted informal conversational interviews with about thirty activists and targeted informal interviews with ten activists. Interview themes included current forest activist tactics and practices, forest politics, perceptions of the forest, personal histories of the forest, forest activism, other activism, and the motivations behind particular tactics and practices.

Conversational interviews occurred during participant observation and were often spontaneous – for example, discussions arose during car trips, or else through conversations around the evening campfire. I was an active participant in these conversations, with activists’ perceptions emerging from

the collaborative discussion. My existing relationships with many forest activists meant several conversations arose in settings not specifically related to forest activism (such as my living room). In these situations I asked for explicit consent before including the conversations in my fieldnotes and analysis. The collaborative research process also often emerged from these conversations, with activists highlighting key themes they considered interesting in my research process.

In more targeted interviews I engaged explicitly as an interviewer with ten key people who I considered as able to give insights into particular themes. These judgements were based on my existing knowledge and relationships with the community. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. Some interviews took place during the course of other activist practices, while other interviews were arranged separately. The interviewee and I discussed particular topics of interest to that activist, such as gendered relationships, alternative politics, direct action, activist histories, as well as themes I felt needed more explicit individual insight. These themes included general forest activist history, forest activist politics, gender and sexuality relations, knowledge in activism, spirituality in forest activism, anarchist politics, and personal motivations for actions.

Fieldnotes

I took detailed handwritten fieldnotes of both participant observation and interviews. In order to protect the identity and actions of activists I did not take any audio or visual recordings, or record any names, dates, or places in my notes, using a shorthand code to refer to different individuals.

I took three forms of fieldnotes. The first were those I wrote during direct interactions and conversations. These included people's direct words, and my immediate impressions often expressed through single words or phrases such as 'knot-tying before breakfast'. The second type of field notes were those I wrote immediately following these direct interactions, or at the end of the day. They included detailed descriptions of events and conversations, as well as my own initial reflections,

questions to ask myself and others, and the beginnings of analysis. The third type of field notes were those I wrote at the end of an intensive research period, such as a forest trip. In these I expanded on the descriptions, events, and conversations of my previous notes, and recollected words and phrases I had not previously noted. In these notes I also began the analysis process, through writing preliminary key themes.

I was constantly aware of the fact that ‘recording things is always an ethical choice’ (Watson & Till 2010, p.3) and that fieldnotes (my primary “data”) was shaped by my own subjectivity – tiredness, concentration levels, memory slips, and interest in particular themes. My bodily interactions also shaped the fieldnotes – the different colours and flows of my pen changed my words, and the amount of sunlight or battery left in my torch determined how long I could keep writing. These practical constraints intersected with interactions with others, such as whether it was appropriate or practicable to take notes while engaged in emotional conversation or knot-tying. In navigating these tensions I mostly found myself taking notes when in sedentary conversations or in “quiet moments” of waiting for movement and action. My “data” was then inherently shaped by my own positionality and interactions with other beings.

Analysis

I began analysis by typing fieldnotes into a spreadsheet and forming descriptive codes, such as “driving” and “citizen science”. I then grouped these under analytical codes, such as “knowledge”, and mind mapped links between themes. This coding process enabled me to realise the meanings and themes of my field notes (Cope & Kurtz 2016), and contributed to forming broad analytical themes addressing my research questions.

I extended my analysis by writing a series of 30 portraits on interactions and themes I had noticed as important through coding. In writing the portraits further key themes emerged, and I was able to

critically interrogate the relationships and interactions between all the beings present in forest activism. Through the process of portrait writing I developed composite characters and events to increase the anonymity of participants, and to protect the identity and actions that forest activists identified as sensitive or private (Ellis 2007). I drew out key words and phrases of activists, and collated them into several key characters and events, while being mindful of retaining the diversity of activists' opinions. This is reflective of an ethnographic tradition of writing which understands that detailed moments collated into "types", and written as narratives or vignettes, can provide a rich understanding of broader forest activism (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Jeffrey & Dyson 2008).

The analysis process was supplemented by conversations with Naarm-based forest activists. In these informal discussions activists highlighted areas of analysis they felt to be particularly relevant, and discussed their interpretations of key themes. Collaborative analysis was further supplemented by activists' own self-reflective processes, such as debriefs. These conversations shaped my analysis focus.

Positionality & Limitations

Identity

This research necessarily arose from my embodied identity. Making this identity explicit situates my knowledge production, and highlights some tensions and limitations that arise (Rose 1997). I am a white settler-coloniser from a middle class background of British/European/Jewish descent, and currently identify as a queer woman. This identity influenced the types of power relations to which I was attentive. As a white settler-coloniser, it is likely I was blind to relationships of racialised difference and ongoing processes of colonisation (Moreton-Robinson 2000). As Sundberg (2014) makes clear, this position also influenced the lineages of scholarship with which I am familiar, and upon which I drew to form the analytic basis of my argument. Similarly, my existence and livelihood is not entwined with Victoria's forests, and so my engagement with forest activism is shaped by my

ability to “walk away”. My physical body enabled participation in strenuous and agile activities, possibly influencing my analysis focus on “bushwalking”. Finally, as a queer woman my lived experience of forest activism encouraged attentiveness particularly to relationships of gender and sexuality.

Friends and Acquaintances: Insider/Outsider Positionality

Research mostly took place with my friends and colleagues, and so was based on existing relationships with forest activists. This was helpful in the context of the short research timeline as my analysis benefitted from several years of existing participation in forest activism and existing connections and trust with forest activists.

This position also meant my research was influenced by tensions of an insider/outsider positionality (Ellis 2007; Reitan & Gibson 2012). In the process of my research I altered my engagement in activist practices, interacting analytically rather than with my usual practical “get it done” approach, and consciously holding in-depth conversations with those outside my immediate friendship circle. In some instances, then, my research may be limited by inability to perform an “outsider” role, and so gain a diversity of analytical views. At times, this “outsider” position was also in conflict with my ethical obligations to friends and forest activism. While seeking to address my research questions in depth and through detailed descriptions, I also needed to respect personal trusts, and did not want to expose sensitive information of forest activism. Similarly, I was also concerned with being too critical of intimate friends and acquaintances, which may have impacted the extent of my critical analysis (Wilkinson 2009). I mitigated these tensions through continually seeking research consent, and making clear times when I was, and was not a “researcher”, even within one conversation. I also analysed the relationships of composite characters rather than particular individuals, and discussed my analysis themes with other activists, collaborating in the critique.

Activist Research

An initial methodological aim was to assist the research community – forest activists – through both the process and analysis of research. This aim arose from my three-year engagement in forest activism and other alternative and grassroots activism. In one respect my position as a forest activist meant I was able to be a ‘friend who accompanies the political protest with whatever modest contributions are at my disposal’ (Oslender 2016, p. 43). In the process of researching I was able to assist forest activist organising and lend my body to various activist projects, contributing directly to forest activism (Routledge 2002). My analysis was also somewhat collaborative, and based within my own existing understanding of beneficial areas of research – namely, internal power relations and relationships with other beings.

However, the timeline of the Honours year and my own emotional and physical capacity meant that research was not as collaborative as initially anticipated. The design and analysis of research was predominantly my own, and only I collected “data”. The analysis in this thesis is then somewhat limited in contributing to forest activism. Many of the findings – such as uneven gender relations – are already known by forest activists, and the contributions of this research is to formalise that knowledge within an academic framework. Furthermore, the application of altering the activist practices to mitigate hierarchies and become more explicitly attentive to other beings is somewhat troubled by these being my own individual findings – forest activism is a collective endeavour, and activist analysis must involve a collaborative re-thinking of practices. So I consider this thesis as one step in a collaborative research project, and I plan to continue conversations with forest activists through informal conversations, zines (anti-copyright information sharing booklets) and workshops – the dominant form of knowledge sharing within alternative activism.

Conclusions

My embodied and collaborative ethnographic methodology helped generate important conversations and insights with forest activist research participants. Embodied research provided a focus on a complex multi-sensory reality, allowing consideration of other beings within the research. Engaging in collaborative research enabled elements of a research co-analysis with forest activists. Participant observation provided insight into forest activist everyday practices and engagements with other beings. Formal and informal interviews allowed greater insight into forest activists' perceptions. All interactions were recorded in detailed, anonymous field notes. Attentiveness to anonymity continued during analysis, in which I coded field notes, wrote analytical portraits, and created composite characters and events. My identity and positionality as a friend, colleague, and existing activist, were key considerations and shaped my analytical focus. Nonetheless, these methods presented fascinating insights into the lived experiences of forest activist practices, and activists' engagements with other beings – which chapter four will begin to explore, presenting the context of Victorian forest activism.

CHAPTER FOUR –

Setting the Scene: The “Forest Wars” of Victoria

Introduction

The Australian “environment” and its management is deeply contested (Lucas & Warman 2018). In this chapter I outline the context of native forest logging in Victoria, discussing current forest management and logging practices, and the issues of regulation and environmental degradation that arise from this management regime. I then discuss how forest activists engage as one actor in the “forest wars” through a variety of political views and tactics. I argue that in an environmental contest framed by differing constructions of the “forest” it is important to understand how activists are engaged in political action to resist logging, and how they themselves frame the “forest” through their interactions with other beings.

Victorian Forests: Contests over Forest Politics and Management

The “forest wars” in Victoria are complex and multi-faceted (Ajani 2007). In part this complexity can be understood as a difference in broader values and philosophies of the “forest” (Ford 2013). The logging industry and supporters understand the “forest” as a site of economic gain through physical resource extraction, as well as a site for recreational use, such as hunting (Anderson et al. 2018). Those opposing logging also understand the “forest” as a site for recreational use, such as bushwalking, and as a site for economic gain through Nature tourism. These values emphasise forests’ global ecological value, and their inherent value (Ford 2013; Anderson et al. 2018). Value differences occur in the broader context of ongoing colonisation, and a conflict over ownership and management control of Country (Porter 2007; Feary et al. 2010). To unpack these “forest wars” I turn to consider the forests, and debates over current forest management.

Forests

The forests of Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries are complex ecosystems. In parts, they are mostly comprised of mountain ash communities. The mountain ash is the world's tallest flowering plant, and the community in which it lives includes myrtle beeches, southern sassafras, as well as the Baw Baw frog and barred galaxias fish, both critically endangered (DELWP 2018a). In eastern Countries there are over 75 different vegetation types, including warm and cool temperate rainforests and the Giant Gippsland earthworm, which grows up to 3 meters in length (DELWP 2018b). Since colonisation about 60% of Victoria's native forests have been cleared, and many of these forest communities are listed as vulnerable or endangered (DEPI 2013; DELWP 2018a). Predominant threats to these forests include high frequency fire disturbances, loss of hollow-bearing trees, and habitat fragmentation, all of which are influenced by current logging regimes (Burns et al. 2014; Lindenmayer et al. 2011, 2012).

Forest Management

In Victoria, 7.9 million hectares of forests are publicly owned, categorised as National Parks, State Reserves, or State Forests (DEPI 2013). Forest management contests occur particularly in State Forests, which are managed under twenty-year Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). RFAs were established between 1998–2008 to give State Governments management control over forests. Ostensibly, they include the interests of the timber industry and conservationists, allocating areas of State Forests as ecological reserves, and other areas as open for commercial logging (Lane 1999). Logging occurs by state-owned corporation VicForests, under the regulatory oversight of the relevant Victorian Government department – currently the Department of Environment, Water, Land, and Planning (DEWLP). DEWLP releases an allocation order for areas of forest available for logging, and VicForests then publishes its Timber Release Plan outlining areas to be logged – “coupes”, which are between 15–40ha in size (*Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004*). VicForests sub-contracts independent logging companies to carry out clearfell logging operations, in which the entire coupe,

excepting designated “habitat trees” are bulldozed (Lindenmayer et al. 2016). Logging must comply with the ecological regulations outlined in the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014*, which includes buffer zones around ecologically significant species. Once a coupe is “active” it is illegal to be within 150 metres of an established Timber Harvesting Safety Zone (THSZ). Approximately one year after logging, the coupe ‘undergoes a regeneration burn and has seed sown by helicopter’ (VicForests 2018a). This seed is mostly single species eucalypt, often resulting in a monoculture regrowth (Lindenmayer et al. 2012). This forest management regime and native forest logging is actively supported by the Victorian Labor Government and Liberal opposition (Willingham & Anderson 2018; Victorian Labor Party 2018).

Contests

The process of forest management and logging procedures are contested. There has been scrutiny over the efficacy of the RFAs as management tools, and the extent to which these laws and regulations are sufficiently upheld (Lane 1999; Musselwhite & Herath 2005). Within the RFA framework, reserves and logging allocation areas are predetermined and unable to shift with changing ecological circumstances, such as increased threatened species and climate change (Lindenmayer et al. 2016). There have also been numerous instances in which DEWLP and VicForests failed to undertake sufficient surveys for threatened species in proposed logging areas (FoE, FFRC & GECO 2017). VicForests’ compliance with regulations has been questioned by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), who denied VicForests the lowest certification level, noting that ‘key elements of VF [VicForests] harvesting practices such as clear felling and burning in old growth... do not comply with the requirements... VF must review and revise its timber harvest planning and operations procedures to more effectively avoid threats to high conservation values’ (SCS Global Services 2018, p.16).

There is contest over the economic viability of native forest logging. The industry argues that there is continuing economic demand for native forest timber, and that the timber industry contributes vital jobs to regional communities (VicForests 2018b). However, external assessments note a downturn in market demand, and argue that VicForests is making comparatively little profit compared with other Victorian industries (Victorian Auditor-General 2013; PWC 2016). This is also linked with the ecological impact of logging in Victoria, with an ecosystems services analysis finding logging reduces the economic benefits of water and tourism (Keith et al. 2017).

There is also broader debate as to the ecological sustainability of logging Victoria's forests. It is important to note that scientific research is less than objective in this political climate. Scientists supporting logging argue current forest management is sustainable because it manages fire risk, promotes healthy silviculture, and allows forests to regenerate (Attiwill et al. 2014; Poynter & Ryan 2018; Powell & Sedunary 2013). However, other scientists have argued logging has widespread environmental impacts, decreasing biodiversity, and further impacting already endangered species and ecological communities – such as the Leadbeater's possum and the mountain ash forest of the Central Highlands (Lindenmayer & Ough 2006; Lloyd, Law & Goldingay 2006; Burns et al. 2014; Taylor et al. 2017). Furthermore, VicForests' fire management regime negatively influences biodiversity by changing the forest composition to become less fire resistant, logging older, wetter, fire-resistant forest, and regenerating a dominant eucalypt forest (Lindenmayer et al. 2009). Victoria's forests have also been shown to have high storages of carbon (Berry et al. 2010). Logging then means these forests are unable to act as carbon capture storages, and so contributes to anthropomorphic climate change (Keith, Mackey & Lindenmayer 2009; Mackey 2008; Berry et al. 2010).

Victorian Forest Activism: A Contemporary Overview

Forest activists are one actor within these contests. In situating contemporary forest activism, I draw on Kanowski's (2017) assessment of three key phases of forest debates in the history of forest contests

in Australia. The first is the ongoing resistance to invasion by the Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro people (Kanowski 2017). The second is the conflict between agriculturalists and forest preservationists, which occurred predominantly until the 1960s. The third is the conflict between “foresters” – those involved in logging industry, and “conservationists” – those wishing to preserve forest ecosystems (Eklund & Fenley 2015; Kanowski 2017). While these histories are all important, I focus the scope of this thesis on the third debate.

Victorian forest activists hold diverse political views and are engaged in a variety of tactics, which influence the everyday practices I discuss in later chapters. In this section I outline the political analyses and tactics of activists I worked with throughout my research, between May–September 2018. For publicly available information I have discussed actions until late November 2018.

Most grassroots forest activists are involved in a variety of activism and change-making tactics, as well as being connected in some way with NGOs through work and volunteering. There are also considerable interactions between forest activists and other activist spaces - throughout my research I was involved in connecting forest activists with other Australian grassroots organisations. The fluidity of forest activism means that tactics and practices are constantly evolving, and it is difficult to definitively isolate purely “grassroots” and purely “forest” tactics. It also means there is a diversity of political views, consideration of potential solutions, and involvement with different tactics. This is noted by some activists, with long-time campaigner Amanda saying that ‘the strength is in the network’ of different forest activist opinions and tactics. The sentiment unifying these diverse views is a wish to stop native forest logging.

Tactics

For some forest activists logging of native forests is understood to occur because of insufficient legal protections and insufficient regulation of existing legal mechanisms. This is understood partly

through the contests outlined above, with perceptions that the RFAs are not sufficient, and that there are insufficient regulations and protections for stopping logging. Activists then work to influence the State Government to strengthen these protection measures, for example by submitting proposals to the RFA review in 2018. Activists also seek to introduce new regulatory mechanisms, such as placing different threatened communities on listed protections lists, or establishing new National Parks in which logging cannot occur. For example, Sam, an older cis-man (cis: someone who identifies with their gender assigned at birth) who is part of the community living near these forests, believes there is ‘a massive Park deficit in Victoria’. Amanda also believes that campaigning for national parks is one way of moving beyond ‘campaigning coupe by coupe’ and achieving lasting protection for Victorian native forests. Currently, there are campaigns for a Great Forest National Park (GFNP) and an Emerald Link (designed to connect existing national parks and create ecosystem corridors) (GECO, TWS & EEG 2017; GFNP 2018).

Campaigns for increased legal protection include electoral campaigning and seeking to build public support to influence politicians’ positions. Rowen, another community forest activist, believes it is important to ‘gently push’ the Government into action by showing that there are ‘no votes in native forest logging’. Mandy, also a community forest activist, agrees, but says that ‘if we don't get [protection measures] this election it will be too late [for the health of the forest]’. So, electoral campaigning has been particularly emphasised throughout the 2018 Victorian State election, and has included tactics such as banner drops on highway bridges, letter-boxing key electorates, and market stalls to talk with community.

Some activists have focussed on taking regulatory measures into their own hands, monitoring VicForests’ logging practices. As part of this citizen science approach activists conduct their own ecological surveys of proposed areas of logging to ascertain whether there are protected species or ecological communities, which would protect the area from logging. As Pete, an experienced activist,

said, ‘if the Government and VicForests won’t survey properly, then we’d better do it’. In November 2018 monitoring VicForests’ logging practices led to allegations of logging occurring outside areas designated in the RFA – which is illegal (Slezak & Timms 2018). Citizen monitoring of forests can result in legal cases. Pete maintains, ‘laws can be pretty powerful’ and so it is important to ‘kick up a fuss’ if surveys have found a protected species. In the past, successful legal cases have resulted in protection for part or all of a coupe. However, as Pete reminded me, often this approach is only partially successful as protection measures can occur ‘at the discretion of the department [DELWP] or VicForests’. So, while ‘we need to use these methods’ it is important to ‘not 100% rely on them, and still work to change them [the laws and the broader systems supporting the laws]’. Pete is echoing Amanda’s earlier words that a variety of tactics are important for forest activism to be successful, and that it is important to work both to improve the current system, and to agitate for broader structural change. I will return to this point throughout my analysis.

Some activists are engaged in tactics seeking to influence the economic market for native forests. This work focusses on asking timber buyers and distributors such Bunnings, Officeworks, and Australian Paper to stop trading in native forest timber. Such work can include a variety of tactics, including awareness raising and brand shaming tactics, guerrilla projecting in the city, talking to customers, and social media campaigns. For some activists a market focus is part of a broader anti-capitalist sentiment underpinning an analysis of why logging occurs. Luca, a young university activist who engages in a variety of campaigns, sees one of the underlying issues to be the fact that forests are ‘logged for the sake of profit’ which will ‘benefit [a] few for not very long’.

Disillusionment in the current system is one of the reasons activists engage in direct action. Forest direct action can involve a variety of tactics, such as directly preventing logging through physical blockading, using bodies and structures, or else physically being in a THSZ, forcing logging to stop

temporarily.⁶ These points highlight the embodied practices of activism, which I explore further in later chapters. For Pete, any direct action is important ‘because every five seconds of work is worth stopping... that is five seconds more of forest which will never be logged’. For others, such as Mandy, direct action needs to be strategically developed, and to be ‘fully backed by community’. Aside from physically preventing logging, activists also use direct action to raise awareness – ‘mainstream media prefer [reporting on] direct action than endangered wildlife’, as Roger, another experienced forest activist, said. This awareness can then provide political mandates for increased protection measures. In the words of Nettie, a seasoned forest campaigner, activists also use direct action to ‘let them know we’re here’, making visible community resistance and the lack of social licence for logging.

Some activists, however, consider it important to move beyond these moments of conflict, so as to transform the broader dualisms perceived to be structurally underlying logging practices. As Amanda argues, it is important to ‘start from respect between all people’. So, Amanda is engaged in community building tactics, for example bringing people out to the forest. She says, ‘there are so many beautiful animals people don't know about... you're that disconnected [in the city. You] need to get people out to forest, to realise the relationships’ between all beings. For Rowen, this also involves ‘bringing the forest back to the city’, for example by recreating a ‘giant tree’ and taking it to urban markets. Some forest activists then use creativity as a community-building tactic.

So, considering the politics of forest activists involves considering the variety of tactics that activists are engaged in – influencing legal mechanisms and electoral politics, citizen regulation of the forests, stopping economic trading of native timbers, direct action, and creatively moving beyond conflict. Underlying these tactics, however, most forest activists understand logging as an interconnected issue. This leads to a variety of intersectional and alternative political practices, such as an emphasis

⁶ For detailed accounts of some of the direct action tactics used by activists in Australia, see McIntyre (2015) and Wilkie (2017).

on mitigating hierarchies and consensus practices, which I discuss in more depth throughout chapters five and six.

Conclusions

My research of forest activism is positioned in the complex “forest wars” around Victoria’s native forests (Ajani 2007). This contest can be understood as part of broader differences in values and perceptions of the “forest”. Current management involves clearfell logging in native State Forests by state-owned corporation VicForests under the legislative mechanism of Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs). While the industry considers this to be commercially and ecologically viable, logging is poorly regulated, economically unviable, and contributes to biodiversity loss and climate change. It is then important to understand how activists, as actors seeking to resist and transform the native forest logging industry, are engaging in politics and interacting with other beings. Forest activist politics are diverse, and activists engage in a variety of tactics including contesting legal regulations, public awareness raising, electoral campaigning, citizen regulation and citizen science, influencing buyers and distributors of native timber, direct action, and community building through connection and creativity. These tactics are underpinned by a range of politics, however most grassroots activists consider broader intersectional structural oppressions as underpinning ongoing logging. In the next chapter I turn to an analysis of how activists are seeking to transform these broader structural oppressions in the process of practicing their tactics.

CHAPTER FIVE –

Power, Expertise, and Gender in Victorian Forest Activism

Introduction

In this chapter I analyse the everyday practices of forest activists, considering power unevenness that can emerge. This power unevenness can negatively influence involvement in forest activism, and perpetuate broader hierarchies activists are seeking to change. According to activists' perceptions, forest activists engage explicitly in an anti-hierarchical politics. I turn to knot-tying to consider how, despite these politics, knowledge hierarchies and expertise are co-produced through practices. Activists recognise these hierarchies to some extent, and I consider skill-shares as one example of attempting to mitigate knowledge hierarchy. Understanding hierarchies involves understanding the intersectionality of power and identities, and so in the final section of this chapter I examine gendered relationships within forest activism, considering the gendered division of labour, and the gendered construction of expertise. Despite their anti-hierarchical politics, then, power unevenness emerges within forest activist practices, and is in part informed by broader structural narratives.

Practices as Politics

As seen in chapter four, forest activists hold a diversity of political views within the unifying politics of stopping native forest logging in Victoria. Despite this diversity, most grassroots forest activists identify at least loosely with an anti-hierarchical anarchist inspired practice-based politics. This is a politics that understands power relations to emerge through everyday practices, and so locates the site of change-making within these everyday practices. Part of this politics is a recognition that environmental and social justice issues stem from hierarchies within broader society. As long-time activist Mitch put it,

‘we’ve seen how hierarchies can be damaging to society, we can see the links between the patriarchy of men above women, and how that is also linked to the anthropocentric hierarchy... perpetuating humans above forests and nonhuman animals... we see with hierarchies how the thing that is at the bottom suffers the most... [but] also everything’s suffering because it’s all interconnected... We need to extinguish the hierarchy between humans and forest and animals [which can emerge from the] patriarchy’.

Mitch is identifying that hierarchies create dualisms, and that these hierarchies are intersectional – work that stops logging must also consider how to mitigate human/Nature hierarchies, and male/female hierarchies. This echoes Plumwood’s (1993) understanding, discussed in chapter two, that hierarchies involve the radical separation of a Self and Other, and that hierarchies are reinforced through their enactment in different settings such as relationships with Nature and gendered interactions.

Forest activists seek to enact these politics and mitigate hierarchies through particular practices, such as consensus decision making. Consensus processes seek to give each person an equal say in the decision, by ensuring everyone provides their active consent. Consensus is then a process of working out the best collective outcome, while allowing for individual autonomy (Polletta & Hoban 2016). This can mitigate hierarchies through ensuring no person has power over another’s decision.

Activists’ interactions with consensus are at times slightly ironic. At the end of one forest trip, Shannon, an experienced activist engaged in a variety of campaigns, summed it up by saying the process can be ‘a little annoying’ and ‘takes a long time’ but ‘is important for practicing our politics’. During my fieldwork I was also part of multiple jokes mocking consensus, such as ‘we should definitely have a two hour meeting to decide where to pitch our tent’. Part of this ironic interaction is a recognition by most activists that hierarchies always exist. For Alexis, who has been involved in

grassroots organising for several years, non-hierarchical politics can be problematic because ‘there can be a fantasy of non-hierarchy’ in which activists think consensus processes will erase other power dynamics. Guila, who also works in a variety of grassroots activist spaces, agrees, and says that ‘we prefer to use the term “anti-hierarchical” rather than “non-hierarchical”’ – “anti-hierarchical” understands that mitigating hierarchies is an ongoing process, rather than an already achieved end goal. As part of this recognition people who identify with these politics, like Shannon, are ‘trying to constantly reflect on how these hierarchies emerge’ in order to understand ways of changing and mitigating them. Forest activists are then explicitly attempting to mitigate hierarchies through practices as part of a broader political analysis of power. It is partly for this reason that I analyse forest activist practices – to investigate the ways that other practices reinforce anti-hierarchical organising. In the section below I examine knowledge hierarchies as one instance of hierarchies forming, highlighting the tensions of an anti-hierarchical activist practice, and the ways that informal knowledge hierarchies can emerge through practices.

Knowledge Hierarchies

Knot-Tying

Ten activists, including me, are standing underneath 60 metre tall shining gums. This is a proposed coupe, and we are deciding how to prevent logging. While we are meeting, clouds threaten overhead and it starts raining. People quickly dig around in cars for wet weather gear, and Roger and Pete, both older men who have extensive experience in forest activism, take out large tarps. The tarp requires rope, and the appropriate knots – which becomes evident as the wind starts to pick up. No one other than Roger and Pete feels confident with their knot knowledge – some have forgotten knots they once learned as a kid, and some have never learnt. Roger and Pete are having difficulty tying up the tarps by themselves. They are trying to

tie four ropes at once, but the trunks of the trees are slippery, and the wind keeps ripping the tarp away.

Once the rest of the group has rainproofed our remaining gear we huddle next to the cars, some watching Roger and Pete and some passing around hot beverages from a thermos. ‘Does anyone know what we are doing now?’ Bethany, an experienced activist but new to the forest scene, asks. ‘I feel like I’m not being very helpful’. Muttered comments are the reply: ‘I don't really know...’, ‘I don't really know how to do anything’, ‘Let's wait and see...’, ‘I don't want to get in the way’. Eventually, Bethany goes to ask how she can help, and Roger and Pete direct people to certain roles. With this rudimentary help, Roger and Pete get the tarp up – but not before we are all thoroughly soaked and dispirited.

In this example Pete and Roger have certain knot-tying skills that the rest of the group does not have. This means it is up to them to put up the tarp, while everyone else stands around wondering what to do. In having the relevant knot-tying skills Pete and Roger have greater ability to shape decisions, and so have some power over shaping the actions of the rest of the group. They are able to decide how and where the tarp will be set up, shaping the camp. They are also able to define what roles people fill, such as holding a tarp or rope (although this is mediated by an individual’s autonomy to refuse participation). The remaining members of the group lack knot-tying skills, meaning we are unable to contribute to the decision making or construction of camp. We then end up idle, standing around wondering what to do. So, Pete and Roger have more knowledge, and more power, than the rest of the group.

This composite example is reflective of other practices of knot-tying in forest activism, such as in direct action contexts. For security purposes I do not discuss these in detail, but these wider instances

speak to how differently positioned knot-knowledges can influence activists' broader tactics. In this broader context, some activists recognise the existence of knowledge hierarchies. In a group discussion reflecting on why a particular tactic did not work, several people raised the fact that not enough people could tie knots. Experienced people said it would be good to recruit more experienced people, while those without knot-knowledge suggested a training to 'practice' and 'skill people up'. This highlights how different positions of knowledge can influence perceptions of hierarchies, which I discuss in more detail below.

Beyond immediately shaping activists' tactics, these knowledge hierarchies also contribute to constructions of "expertise" – those with knowledge consider themselves, and are considered by others, to be "experts". I draw on Jasanoff's (2004) co-production here, understanding that those who produce and frame knowledge have greater power and authority. Such framings of expertise can be seen in the numerous instances where, in Roger's words, forest activist tactics are 'dependant on a million different possibilities in a million different ways'. Even the skilled people like Roger are operating on 'guesswork'. Yet in one such instance, Yin, a newer cis-woman to the group turned to Roger, the most experienced of the group, and asked 'what would you do? If you encountered this with your crew?'. Roger replied that they 'had never been in this situation' before and so did not know. A group discussion followed, with those who felt inexperienced, like Yin, contributing ideas but following them with sentiments such as '... but that's probably a silly idea', or '... I'm just throwing ideas out there'. Those who felt somewhat expert contributed ideas with more confidence, and a decision was made through an informal discussion between these three "somewhat experts", which in this instance included me. Experts then have more authority to shape activist decision making, practices, and tactics.

For some activists, predominantly those who are "experts", constructions of expertise within forest activism is seen as pragmatic. Roger, for example, points to the potential danger of unskilled people

undertaking these skills, especially if heights or irate loggers are involved. 'It's best the people who know what they are doing take on those roles', he said as we were distributing roles. Similarly, Edan, who also has extensive experience in forest activism, argues that there are instances in which quick decisions need to be made, such as when sheltering from the storm. In these instances, Edan considers it more practicable to delegate decision making abilities to a few people with expertise, rather than engaging in a full consensus process. More broadly, several skilled people argue that, while these knowledge hierarchies might exist, it is more practicable to focus on practices and tactics directly stopping logging, rather than spending considerable time teaching new people skills. For some forest activists (mostly those with knowledge), then, knowledge hierarchies are not considered an important issue.

For other activists, however, constructions of expertise contribute to feelings of disempowerment. People like Bethany (who has been involved in grassroots activism around Australia for several years), feel 'not useful' and 'helpless' especially when 'waiting around while the people with the knowledge are doing the things [and] making the decisions'. In these moments people without the particular knowledge recognise they are unable to actively shape or participate in particular decisions. Ellie, another woman who has been part of forest campaigns but not necessarily grassroots organising, said to me in annoyance, 'I've been at [forest gatherings], and seen it, and been part of it, but I still don't know what to do'. Ellie is frustrated that, even though she is not new to these practices, she is unable to shape what happens, or feel she is meaningfully contributing. This annoyance was shared by Rowen, who is also new to grassroots activism. After an instance similar to the tarp-tying above, Rowen exclaimed 'I don't want to come back until I know knots!' because 'I don't feel I can be useful here until I have those skills'. Lack of particular knowledges can then negatively influence people's involvement in forest activism.

The feeling of disempowerment is furthered by some activists perceiving the knowledges and skills they *do* hold to be less useful and “inexpert”. For example, while Rowen did not have knot tying experience, she had been involved in shaping that particular forest trip in a myriad of ways. She was a communication point for our location, and she made sure everyone was fed by bringing communal food (curry, dried fruit and nuts, and chocolate), and providing warmth through her spare jumpers and rugs. The prioritisation of particular “expert” knowledges was also noted by other activists. For example, Guila noted that

‘the most powerful actions I’ve been involved in are when music and art and theatre are at the forefront. But this can often be thought of as taking time and taking people away from the “vital” jobs. So our ability to bring the ukulele and the fun into the action can be sidelined – as is our own creativity.’

In being attentive to the formation of particular types of expertise, then, it becomes clear that other types of knowledges, such as Rowen’s emotional labour and Guila’s musical contributions, are overlooked (Jasanoff 2004). Later in the chapter I discuss these knowledge prioritisations further in relation to gendered identities. Constructions of expertise highlight a need for forest activists to actively recognise the diversity of work that helps shape political actions. So, while some forest activists seek to practice a politics of anti-hierarchy, informal knowledge hierarchies and expertise can emerge through practices.

Skill-Shares

In enacting a practice-based politics of anti-hierarchy, some forest activists seek to actively mitigate knowledge hierarchies by sharing skills and distributing knowledge. The process of skill-sharing means that knowledge hierarchies are not static, but are constantly evolving in different times and spaces. This next portrait presents an example of both informal and formal “skill-shares”.

Edan, Jaine (an experienced activist new to Australia), and I are tying up a tarp, but only Edan and I know the relevant knots. ‘Can you teach me those knots?’ Jaine asks. We are not in a rush, so Edan shows Jaine how to tie a bowline knot – ‘Now you try’, he says. We undo a section of the tarp so Jaine can practice some more. The next night as we are again putting up a tarp, Jaine takes charge of the knots.

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Nettie, a woman who has been involved in forest activism for the last seven years, messages an activist group chat to organise a skill-share meeting. On a Thursday morning about twelve of us gather in a Naarm (Melbourne) park and Nettie, Edan, and Shannon, the three people with practical knowledge, begin a demonstration of different forms of knots. We then break into smaller, informal, groups to practice different variations. Some people have brought lunch to share, and we are soon discussing forest politics, our personal lives, and joking around.

These skill-shares point to ways activists are engaged in mitigating knowledge hierarchies through practices. In the first instance, as in the first portrait of the chapter, putting up a tarp becomes a site of political practice. Edan is actively mitigating knowledge hierarchies by walking Jaine through the skill. Tying the tarp then becomes not just about weather protection, but also about distributing knowledge through building Jaine’s skills. This political practice allows Jaine to engage in the tarp-tying practice the next night. In the second instance, a more formal skill-share occurs. Nettie explicitly organises this practice because she is ‘aware that often people don’t have these skills’, and that this can be a detriment to people’s involvement in forest activism. This formal skill-share is also a social occasion, and the combination of skill-share and relationship building through sharing food, gossip, and jokes, highlights how forest activists are seeking to distribute hierarchies within their everyday practices.

For some activists, these skill-shares are successful in distributing knowledge hierarchies. Alexis noticed ‘heaps more capacity for this sort of stuff [trips to the forest, activism in the forest] in Melbourne’ since formal skill-shares began happening, because more people had the knowledge to contribute to shaping tactics. Through my own engagement in forest activism I also noted the benefit of both informal and formal skill-shares in contributing to my increased knowledge of forest activist skills. My learning of these skills has been a journey in which I noticed myself oscillating between feeling disempowered in instances I could not participate due to lack of knowledge, and being the “expert” in instances where I helped organise trips or taught people knots. This oscillation highlights both that knowledge hierarchies fluctuate, and that skill-shares contribute to this fluctuation and dissemination of hierarchies.

Nonetheless, for other activists, while these skill-shares are important, knowledge hierarchies and constructions of expertise are underpinned by broader social relations of difference. Emilia, a young activist based in Naarm, pointed out that because most of the “experts” are cis-men, most skill-shares are necessarily run *by* cis-men, replicating patriarchal relationships. Emilia also noted that

‘you don’t necessarily need skill-shares to learn a new skill. One can figure out heaps of things on your own/together. I think that’s also where creative thinking happens and through that creativity new methods of activism can emerge. People with less set skills have less restrictions when it comes to thinking of actions because they don’t really limit themselves to what is known to them, what they’re used to and what they think is possible’.

So, for Emilia, while it is important to learn the skills, it is also important to extend beyond a narrative of expert authority, and assert one’s own autonomy. As part of this, Emilia recognises that there is more than one type of knowledge. In realising this political sentiment, Emilia and others have begun a non-cis men grassroots forest activist group as one way of making room for alternative narratives

of “expertise”, and to mitigate the gendered hierarchies that emerge within forest activism. I explore these gendered relationships in more depth throughout the remainder of this chapter.

## **Gender Hierarchies**

Differences in identities influence knowledge hierarchies. Here I consider how differently positioned gender identities is one aspect co-producing knowledge hierarchies. I have chosen to focus primarily on gender for two reasons: first, as I discussed tentative themes for analysis other non-cis male activists continually emphasised the insidiousness of gendered relationships within forest activism, and that these relationships are not often recognised by cis-men. Most then resonated with Nettie who exclaimed, ‘please write about gender!!’. Secondly, I have personally experienced the relative power unevenness within the forest activist space that can result from identifying as a woman. However I recognise that identities are intersectional, and that race, class, ability and age are also all important factors contributing to identity and knowledge production (Sundberg 2004), and while outside the scope of this thesis a focus on other axes of difference would be beneficial to further understand relationships of power within forest activism. I begin this analysis with a portrait of a meeting.

Seven of us are sitting in a park in Melbourne deciding where to go for the next forest trip. This decision is dependent on people’s availability, emotional energy, the number of skilled people available, information on broader forest politics, and people’s practical skills. There are 2 cis-women (Luca, me), 1 non-binary person (Morgan), 1 person who prefers to not identify their gender (Vilka), and 4 cis-men in the group (Roger, Pete, Edan, Mitch). Luca facilitates the meeting. We first hear reports back from the people who have knowledge of the bush and the skills to go scouting – these are all men. Based on this knowledge we discuss potential options for political action. Vilka and Luca suggest a specific location and surveying idea. This is only discussed for a very short while – Pete soon points out a logistical flaw,

noticed because of his practical knowledge. Later in the meeting Roger suggests a proposal for action that is similar to Vilka's. This is readily agreed to by the rest of the group, without much critique of a similar logistical flaw in the proposal.

This example highlights three points of gendered relationships. First, those with the skills – the cis-men – are able to identify and contribute to the discussion because they have the relevant knowledge. The cis-men are able to guide the topic of discussion, through their report-backs about the bush and with this knowledge heavily influence the decision being made. This knowledge then means the cis-men were able to more overtly shape our tactics.

Second, this example hints at gendered division of labour within forest activism. It is the cis-men who bring practical knowledge and shape tactical decisions, while it is a woman who facilitates the meeting, a role of emotional labour ensuring everyone is heard, keeping track of energy levels, and mitigating disagreements. A gendered division of labour means that different activist practices are shaped more by people of different genders. However, I note that this gendered division of labour is not universal, with some cis-men providing emotional support, and some cis-women having immense practical skills. So, this division of labour does not emerge from “essentially feminine/masculine” qualities – rather, it is underpinned by broader patriarchal systems and repeated socialisations. Forest activists are perpetuating these socialisations through their practices. The site of “change” for uneven gendered relationships then emerges through activists’ practices, and involves considering who is undertaking what task/labour, and why.

Activists of all genders expressed exhaustion and frustration that the burden of responsibility for particular tasks fell predominantly on them. ‘It would be great if I wasn’t always the one doing this’, Alexis said of one particular practical skill. Luca also expressed frustration that she often took on the emotional labour of making everyone comfortable, and ensuring that the same information and

knowledge is distributed to everybody involved in the group. She recounted to me an instance of an event where only two cis-men knew what was going on, and were making decisions amongst themselves for the larger group. Luca took on the role of ‘probing the guys about what was going on’, and then ‘relaying the information back to everyone else, so then everyone knew sort of what was going on’ and could contribute to the event. However, she found this labour so exhausting she was unable to participate in a crucial public role the next day, and when no-one else put their hand up, this role was filled by another man. Several months later, Luca expressed to me that participating in forest activism ‘just takes so much [emotional] energy! This is why I left for a bit, and I wasn’t going to come back.’ Luca’s story is not unique – in fact Luca is a composite of at least three people I talked to. Other non-cis activists were similarly “burnt out” from the gendered relationships within forest activism, and similarly decided to stop participating in forest politics. So, gendered relationships of expertise, and the gendered division of labour that can emerge as a result, can negatively influence people’s involvement in forest activism.

However this is not the perception of all non cis-men. Mandy, a slightly older woman, saw it as important that activists do not get bogged down in ‘identity politics’. Her experience is that ‘in the past identity politics has stopped action’, because there has been too much of an emphasis on extensive processes designed to mitigate people’s differently positioned identities. For Mandy, it is more important that the group is able to stop logging than that the group mitigates internal informal hierarchies. So, within forest activism there are different political understandings of gendered relationships, which influence the extent to which people wish to engage in mitigating gendered relationships through practice. This reflects an understanding within alternative politics of the contested nature of forest activism (Wilkinson 2009; Schlembach 2011; Chatterton & Pickerill 2010a).



The final theme that emerges from the example at the beginning of this section is that “experts” are gendered. Proposals presented by non-cis men were seen as flawed, and not agreed to as readily, while a similar proposal presented by the male expert is accepted. Penelope, an experienced cis-woman, noted that ‘the reason that it’s become gendered is because [while everyone doesn’t know] what’s going on, [it] is that the men take the lead’. This can also occur even when there is similar knowledge between genders, as seen in this portrait.

Three car-loads of people are learning from community activists. On one stop we are learning about forest ecology from two people – Sam and Amanda. Amanda emphasises the relational and lived aspects of ecology. She begins to explain the complex symbiosis of moss, and asks the group to notice our bodily interactions – how the stream water tastes, whether we feel a difference in temperature in our bodies next to the stream or on higher ground. These questions are posed as we are walking, and often only to the people immediately around her. These feelings, directions, and noticings are the moments in between the formal discussion, quietly passed on. The formal discussion involves us stopping, standing, and listening passively to Sam’s understanding of this ecology - the ages of the trees, the impact of historic and recent bushfires. Several times Amanda seeks to add her understanding of these events, but before she is able to completely finish her ideas, Sam interjects with his own interpretations or corrections.

While discussed differently, in this interaction Amanda and Sam both have extensive knowledge of the forest. However, Sam presents himself as the more formal and recognisable expert. A point is made of stopping the entire group, and in one case, on Sam’s suggestion, sitting down listening to Sam speak at the front. When Amanda seeks to contribute in these moments, Sam talks over her or repeats Amanda’s contribution as his own. Social dynamics such as these influence non-cis men’s

interactions with forest activism, and are one of the reasons that non-cis men consider themselves to be “non experts”. As Penelope says, ‘women [are] made to feel like they don’t know enough... I feel like an imposter, even though I’ve been [involved for many years and have just as many skills]’. This feeling has then contributed to Penelope feeling disempowered, and much less enthusiastic to contribute to forest activism.

These gendered relationships are recognised by others. After walking with Amanda and Sam I was eating lunch with a group of non-cis men and someone asked, ‘did you notice the mansplaining?’ ‘I’m surprised it happens here,’ Lib, a newer person said. Nettie, who has been around a while, replied ‘yeah, it’s so common in forest activism! Just because you’re lefty doesn’t mean you’re aware of the patriarchy...’. Nettie expands on this in a later conversation, saying that while she once was as surprised as Lib, now she recognises that ‘of course the patriarchy is gonna replicate itself in our movement, unless there’s a conscious effort to avoid it’, noting how activists are not automatically separate from broader social systems. So, while she ‘used to think that we could save the forests and then deal with the patriarchy... now I recognise that you’ve got to do them together’. Nettie then understands that the patriarchy is not only a broader power structure, but is a social dynamic constantly emerging from the everyday lived practices of forest activists. For more equitable gendered relationships to emerge in forest activism, it then becomes important to focus on the processes of relationships that emerge through practices.

## Conclusions

Forest activists in Victoria engage in practice-based politics, seeking to recognise and mitigate hierarchies through practices such as consensus decision making. Despite these explicitly anti-hierarchical practices, informal hierarchies emerge. Activists with more knowledge of knot-tying, for example, are considered “experts” and have greater ability to shape practices and tactics. While some activists – mostly those with skills – consider these hierarchies to be necessary, knowledge hierarchies

can disempower activists, and negatively influence their involvement in forest activism. These knowledge hierarchies are constantly shifting, partly due to informal and formal skill-shares. However, skill-shares can still perpetuate narratives of expertise and broader systems of power. In understanding these broader narratives I analysed gendered relationships of knowledge, highlighting the gendered division of labour that can lead to non-cis male activists “burning out”. Forest activist practices also perpetuate patriarchal relationships through constructing cis-males as more “expert” than non-cis males. This matters as it means forest activists are perpetuating the broader power dynamics that underpin logging, and which activists are seeking to change.

## CHAPTER SIX –

# Tracks of Knots, Seeds, and a GPS: Forest Activists' Engagements with the More-than-Human

## Introduction

In this chapter I bring a more-than-human (MtH) approach to bear on the everyday practices of forest activism. Specifically, I consider my second research question, “how do forest activists engage with other beings and a MtH politics?”. In doing this I focus on how other beings are also present in knowledge production, co-creating activists' practices. I begin by discussing how an expanded analysis of expertise to include other beings, such as the “knot” introduced in chapter five, contributes to my understanding of power and agency within activism. I then discuss how the practice of surveying, or “getting to know the bush”, emerges through encounters with sheoak seeds and GPS devices. I turn to regenerating tracks to consider the power unevenness that emerge in these relationships. I argue that attentiveness to engagements with the MtH can highlight uneven power relationships with other beings, as well as recognising the existing power of other beings. This matters because forest activists are seeking to change harmful relationships with forests, both through their overt politics of stopping logging, and through their practices. Perpetuating dominating relationships of power with other-than-human beings is then problematic as it undermines forest activists' aims.

## Expertise

In being attentive to the role of other beings, it becomes evident that the expertise discussed in chapter five emerges from physical encounters with other beings. For instance, I return to the practice of knot-tying to consider the “knot” as a relationship involving the physical materiality of the rope. This is shown in one encounter where Lib, a new activist, is learning to tie knots. Despite their efforts, the rope is thin and slippery. Just as they have almost finished tying the double fisherman's knot the

final loop slips out. ‘Why can’t I tie this!?’ they exclaim in frustration. Nettie, an experienced knot-tier comes over, watches them try again, and then says ‘sometimes for this knot you need a wider rope. That’s probably why you’re finding it difficult... Different knots work best in different situations... and with different ropes’. Lib and Nettie are identifying that the expertise of knot-tying is not only located within their own knowledges or abilities. In the interaction between the rope and Lib the rope’s bodily form (it’s thinness) interacts with Lib’s beginner abilities (expressed through their unsteady/unsure hands), and this interaction influences the untied knot. I understand this as a form of other beings’ agency – through its physicality, the rope was able to influence, and contribute to the creation (or not) of the “knot”. Rather than being *only Lib* who “has no knowledge”, knowledge is co-produced with the thin rope. Recognising that expertise is not solely human allows a critical re-thinking of knowledge hierarchies. It is important to not only recognise differences of knowledges between different people, but also to recognise the importance of other beings’ role in shaping these knowledges. This recognition moves away from an anthropomorphic understanding of activist knowledge, and ascribes other beings power. In the rest of the chapter, I consider the power of other beings in contributing to activists’ knowledge of the forest, beginning with the tale of the sheoak.

## Sheoaks

Four activists – Emilia, Pete, Mitch and I – are walking through a proposed coupe, trying to find evidence of a protected glossy black cockatoo. Short of seeing a cockatoo ourselves, we are looking for clusters of half-chewed sheoak cones (the seed-like fruit of the sheoak), which might indicate a feeding tree of the cockatoo. These scattered heaps are not obvious, half-hidden amongst the fallen sheoak needles and the other miscellaneous debris of a dry sclerophyll forest. It takes sharp eyes peeled to the ground and a half-crouched body to find the tracks of these seeds. Following the path of the sheoak seeds reveals not only how many sheoaks there are in this bush (more than I would have guessed from the road), but also hitherto hidden

gems in the forest floor. As my hiking boots crunch through the sheoak needles, someone suddenly stops, stoops down, and spots what looks like an orchid shoot. Then, combing the ground for more, we stumble across a hard to identify eucalypt gumnut, and Pete, excited, thinks it might be a rare species of eucalypt, although Mitch is not sure. Pete puts the gumnut in his pocket to later check against an ID-ing book. Our path is now guided by the hunt for more orchids and gumnuts, as well as sheoak seeds.

In this encounter, activists' knowledge of the potentially threatened species in the bush emerges from embodied encounters, which is dependent on both humans and other beings. It is from my body's ability to notice, follow, and respond to the other beings that I, along with Emilia, Mitch, and Pete, activists with different degrees of experience in activism, are able to understand there might be threatened species here. We are "noticing" the sheoak seeds through my half-stooped body, and my sharply peeled eyes. In engaging in this way I am also responding to the seeds physically, through altering my bodily form (being crouched down) to better understand where these seeds are. This is similar to a MtH understanding of following the forms of other beings by altering one's body (Bell, Instone & Mee 2017), and much as Gabrys (2012) argued that following the path of moss throughout urban centres can change perspectives, following the path of the sheoak seeds also changed the perspectives of Emilia, Mitch, Pete and I. It was through crouching down, on the scale of sheoak seeds, that we were able to notice the rich community of the forest floor, and the orchid seedlings and gum nuts – other potentially protected species, which we were not looking for and did not expect to find. We were then also able to follow the path of orchids. It was the encounter between orchid seedlings and us, emerging through activists changing their form, which co-produced the knowledge that there were enough protected species to submit a regulatory report. Changing our form enabled us to encounter different beings, then bringing them into the scope of activism. So, in the practice of "surveying" – understanding whether and where threatened species are – activists are engaged in a

bodily encounter of following other beings, which then leads to new understandings. Other beings then shape the practice of surveying, through shaping the form with which forest activists engage. In this way, forest activists are participating in a MtH politics.

Some activists recognise the importance of these embodied encounters, noting an importance of walking “off track” to engage and respond to other beings. In one instance, Edan, Guila, and I, all activists who occasionally work within the forests context, wandered away from the rest of the group standing on the gravel road, and down a hill into a sclerophyll forest to watch the sunset. ‘It’s so much nicer in here!’, Guila says, ‘why does everyone want to keep standing on the road?’. ‘Yeah,’ Edan replies, ‘you really get a different sense walking off the track. Like you can see everything from a different perspective’. In this instance, as in most conversations I had about bushwalking, the “track” is understood as humanmade, and to limit the ability to have an in-depth understanding of the forest. Instead, walking away from the human scale to follow the “track” of the sloping hill provided a more immersive perspective. In another example, when Lib asked Rowen, an experienced activist, how she has so much knowledge of the bush, she replied ‘the more time you spend in the forest off track’ the more possible it is to use all the senses to ‘listen’ and ‘realise the relationships’ between beings, as well as the ‘connectivity of the forest’. For Rowen, then, understandings of connectivity only emerge when encounters move away from the human perspective, and allow a witnessing/noticing of other beings using all senses. In these instances, forest activists are deliberately seeking out more-than-human engagements, for the purposes of more richly understanding the forest they are trying to save.

These richer knowledges of the forest are considered important in shaping forest activists tactics. In one skill-share, Roger continually emphasised that ‘getting to know the bush’ is the most important ‘first step’ in forest activism. The most strategic tactic emerges from understanding the intricate details of the forest ecology (as in the scouting trip of Emilia, Mitch, Pete, and I), what logging is occurring in which bush, and what potential avenues (legal action, direct action) exist for preventing

logging in those areas. So, activists' tactics emerge from knowledge of the bush, which itself emerges from encounters with other beings, and in this way forest activism engages with a MtH politics. However, in these instances 'getting to know the bush' also involves uneven power dynamics and limitations, and I begin to explore these through the embodied engagements with the GPS.

## GPS

A 4WD is driving along the forest roads, passes a fork in the road, and then reverses back to take the other road. I am in the passenger seat holding a tablet being charged by the car. The tablet displays a map of these forests overlaid with the Timber Release Plan (TRP) which outlines the areas of proposed logging over the next two years. The map also displays attributes of the forest, such as previous sightings of threatened species, and the forest classification type. According to this map, we are currently near a greater glider sighting, in moist eucalypt forest. The other fork in the road leads straight past a proposed coupe, so the 4WD pulls up at the side of the road, and the people in the car get ready to walk into this patch of bush. 'You've got the GPS, right?' Morgan, another passenger, asks. A handheld yellow and black GPS device is pulled out – it has the same TRP map downloaded on it. As we zig-zag through the forest our path is recorded on this handheld GPS, a helpful reference after several turns make some of us (me included) quite disoriented.

In this engagement, forest activists move through the forest in collaboration with the GPS. The satellite signal displays itself onto the material form of the GPS, and activists are constantly checking this signal, responding by moving in the direction the GPS indicates. Activists' path through the bush is then shaped through the engagement with the GPS directives, which in turn creates something new: another track on the GPS device.



This collaboration contributes to activists' knowledge of the forest, allowing them to successfully navigate the multitude of tracks. For example, activists are able to know certain areas of bush are threatened for logging through linking the virtual coupe outline with the little blue dot displaying our position. When the blue dot was alongside or inside of the outline of the coupe boundary, we stopped and paid particular attention to that area. In the example above, we decided to reverse the car and walk into a proposed coupe, rather than continue along another track to interact with other beings further along. The GPS boundary also set the parameters for the walking track, with Morgan in the position of GPS monitor. If we happened to walk outside the coupe boundary, as according to the GPS map, Morgan would re-orient our path to keep inside the coupe. So, attentive interactions with the GPS explicitly influenced the direction of forest activists' surveying practice.

This engagement with the GPS also highlights how the "off track" walking discussed earlier in the chapter is in fact shaped by the virtual tracks of the GPS. Through following the GPS track, activists are prioritising engagements with "potentially logged" other beings, and ignoring other areas. In this instance, activists are engaging with other forest beings through logging schedules, rather than on the terms of the other forest beings themselves. There is a power relationship in this engagement – activists consider the GPS track of greater importance than other tracks, ignoring alternative perspectives.

Power unevenness then influences, and potentially limits, forest activist tactics. Pete, for example, had not known about a beautiful area of bush until it was placed on the TRP; this area of bush had been missing from Pete's understanding of the forest, because of his focus on potentially logged areas. Penelope, another experienced activist, also cited an example of an all-night survey for threatened species, in which

'we were walking, and walking, until 6am, and then suddenly we stopped and looked up at the trees and [my companion] said "oh, this is a nice forest, isn't it?,"

but then [our other companion] calls over the walkie talkie “we found [the species!]”

That whole night, there were fully four seconds we actually enjoyed the forest!’.

Here, Penelope is identifying that the focus on “stopping logging”, by following the tracks of a particular species, meant she overlooked engagements with other beings, and so was unable to notice the interconnectivity, diversity, and beauty of the forest ecosystem. So, in this instance activists’ relationships with other beings moves away from noticing, following, and responding to the diversity of the forest ecosystem on *its* terms, and becomes about imposing a human perception of value onto the forest. I explore activists’ impositions of values further in the next section on regenerating tracks.

## **Regenerating Tracks**

Activists’ engagements with regenerating tracks highlight how some forest beings can be considered more “authentic” by forest activists, and so more important to “save”.

Three cars of forest activists drive along a windy forest track, passing innumerable different vegetation types – manna gums in a riparian forest, box ironbark forests, cool temperate rainforests full of sassafras and tree ferns, and lowland forests with peppermint eucalypts and cherry ballart trees. One of the most common vegetation types, though, is the regenerating forest in different stages of growth. Their clearly defined shapes – mostly rectangular – mark them as old logging coupes. The car I am travelling in drives past a coupe logged about five years ago. Now, the entire hillside is dominated by silver wattles, choking out the intentional planting of eucalyptus, seeded by VicForests about four years ago. This is a ‘failed regeneration’, according to Alexis, my companion, and shows the forest has ‘suffered a massive trauma’. Nettie, another of my companions, had previously spotted a greater glider here, and tried to stop this coupe from being logged by

submitting a report to government department. She chokes back tears – she is devastated this forest was logged regardless.

As we round a corner, we stop at a more mature patch of bush, perhaps 60–100 years old. This forest has already been re-released onto the timber allocation order, and we pull over to see if this bush is worth political action. There are mostly dry red box and ironbark trees here, no mid-story, and a tangled undergrowth of bracken. This is ‘unhealthy forest’ according to Alexis. It has been unable to ‘become multi-layered, multi-storied’, which is ‘what you’re trying to do if you’re a forest’. As we walk quickly through the bush, Nettie and Vilka, who is relatively new to forest activism, describe this bush as ‘scrappy’ and ‘scraggly’. ‘There’s not much in here’, Vilka says. ‘It’s still beautiful, but is it worth it [any action]?’ ‘Any action is worth it’, Nettie replies. But, after some discussion we decided that political action in this forest is not useful, as it would create mixed media messages around the “type” of forest that Victorian forest activists are interested in protecting.

In this encounter, activists are making value judgements on behalf of the forest, deciding which areas of bush are most worth campaign action. While forest activists have a breadth of different emotional attachments to the forest, these tactical judgements are mostly based on external framings of “Nature” and the “forest”, in which particular beings are prioritised as more important. For example, protection from logging is only considered if ‘the coupe displays rare and limited characteristics... [or] displays threatened fauna habitat’ (Powell & Sedunary 2013, p.11; DEPI 2013). This is an anthropocentric framework, in which humans place greater value on beings considered “rare” and “valuable”. These frameworks then lead humans to make decisions (such as the value of particular species) on behalf of other beings, giving humans power over these other beings.

Activists engage with these external framings of value, influencing the areas of forest in which they undertake action. As Roger noted, scouting is a process of working out ‘what bush you want to save, what’s good enough to save’, and ‘look[ing] for values’ such as threatened species. Mitch also noted that, ‘we fall into the endangered species obsession because that’s the framework... Somehow [it] became lost that all the nonendangered animals had been killed... from an animal point of view, they’re all equal’. Despite Mitch’s recognition of the interconnected ecosystem, he argues that activists do need to fit into the broader “Nature” frameworks, in order to successfully achieve the necessary immediate protection measures, and to reach a broader audience. Activists then focus on typical Wilderness areas and flagship species – the ‘charismatic’ species that invite human attachment (Gabrys 2012; Lorimer 2015). This means activists are not interacting with or seeking to protect the forest on the terms of other beings, but are seeking to save a human understanding and value of the forest. So, while there will inevitably be hierarchies in relationships between beings, here I question the ways that they are approached. Recognising the different perspective of other beings, and considering other beings as political agents, invites a consideration of how activists might engage differently with “saving” the forest.

One way that attentiveness to other beings might allow for considerations of difference is through more explicitly noticing how other beings are themselves interacting with logging systems. Focusing on the regenerating forest, for example, it is possible to notice that the beings in the regenerating forest are themselves creating an “unlogged forest” – the common political aim of forest activists. The seedlings in the soil seed bank, and those seeded by loggers after burning of the coupe, have the agency to grow and create the regenerating forest, independent of activists’ interventions. This is reflective of Jones and Cloke’s (2002) example of plants repopulating coal country, enacting their creative agency in transforming landscapes. Such agency highlights that even while activists do not engage with certain areas of the forest, forest beings have their own capacities to resist independently

of humans. A greater recognition of this by forest activists is one way that activists could further engage in a MtH politics.

### **Forest Activism: A MtH Politics?**

Forest activists engage in a MtH world in a myriad of ways, at times explicitly noticing, witnessing, and responding to other beings and engaging with other beings as political agents (Whatmore 2008). There are also instances in which these engagements are present but ignored, or in which particular engagements are prioritised over others. This matters for two reasons. First, through engaging with other beings it is possible to notice how other beings are already contributing as agents to forest activist practices. This allows a recognition of different perspectives, and the power of other beings, both of which can assist moving beyond anthropocentrism.

Secondly, engagements with other beings matters in the context of an explicitly political “environmental” context. As seen in chapters four and five, activists’ politics are not only about stopping logging, but also about constructing a different relationship with the forest and mitigating hierarchies. I return to Mitch’s words at the beginning of chapter five, stating why a forest activism must also include a practice of dismantling hierarchies and intersectional oppressions:

‘we’ve seen how hierarchies can be damaging to society, we can see the links between the patriarchy of men above women, and how that is also linked to the anthropocentric hierarchy... perpetuating humans above forests and nonhuman animals... we see with hierarchies how the thing that is at the bottom suffers the most... [but] also everything’s suffering because it’s all interconnected... We need to extinguish the hierarchy between humans and forest and animals [which can emerge from the] patriarchy’.

In this context the ways in which forest activism does, or does not, engage with other beings as agents has a political consideration. In prioritising engagements of certain beings, such as the GPS/logging

track or typical Wilderness forest, activists partly reproduce external frameworks of speaking for Nature, rather than acknowledging other beings as themselves participating in, and shaping, a forest politics.

In short then, I am arguing that, just as alternative politics considers ways of mitigating hierarchies between people, these politics should also consider ways of mitigating hierarchies between humans and other beings, by drawing on the MtH understanding of agency. Analysing activist practices has been an important first step in considering how this already occurs, and in the conclusions chapter I consider a few potential ways activists could further these engagements – although ways forward are best considered collaboratively amongst activists. Such a conversation is the next stage of this research project.

## Conclusions

Forest activist engagements with other beings occur differently at different times. In re-considering knot-tying, I argued that the bodily agency of the rope contributes to formations of expertise. In understanding the practice of surveying, human activists altered their form to interact with other beings and through this responsiveness came across something new: the physical form of the seeds influenced activists to alter their own forms. In the encounter between the activist and the GPS, the GPS was able to influence how forest activists came to know the forest, navigating different tracks, and influencing the areas of forest activists were attentive to. The encounter with the regenerating forest furthered the argument that relationships with other beings contain power unevenness. In this instance, power unevenness is influenced by broader social narratives of “Nature”. Despite these narratives, the regenerating forest also highlighted that forest beings are engaged in their own form of activism, regrowing despite/because of logging. Activists’ engagements with other beings is important for two reasons: noticing these relationships can reveal the existing actions of other beings, recognising their power and navigating away from anthropocentrism; and the practices of forest

activists' relationships with other beings influence activists' broader engagements with forest politics.

In the concluding chapter I speculate on how activists could engage differently with a MtH politics.

## CHAPTER SEVEN –

### Conclusion

It is dusk. The glossy black cockatoo is flying back to its nest near the sheoak trees, and spiny crayfish are starting to crawl around their pools. Headtorches are turned on, and tents set up. Someone pulls out a bit of rope to practice knots with. As this group of forest activists sit around the campfire, laughing and sharing a meal, Roger spots a swamp wallaby hopping away, and everyone scrambles to have a look.

For the last few nights, there have been no sounds of logging machines wafting across distant valleys – this group of people managed to set up a direct action and temporarily stop logging. But tonight, logging machines have arrived, and tomorrow the swamp wallaby might not have a home. Tomorrow, this group of activists will drive along the highway towards Naarm, regrouping and gathering energy. The urban environment does not stop these activists, though. They bring the tale of other beings with them, sharing forest stories with their friends – of large moss-covered hollow-bearing trees, of running out of GPS battery and getting lost on dusty logging tracks – and hanging banners from highway bridges. While they regroup, they are actively considering: next time, how can we better stop the clearfell logging of native forests?

This thesis has aimed to contribute to the forest activists’ question, “how can we do better?”, by understanding the everyday practices of contemporary Victorian forest activism, such as those described in the above portrait, to analyse the relationships of power within these practices. As part of this understanding, this thesis has considered how forest activists are engaging with a more-than-human (MtH) world. In fulfilling these aims I asked two research questions:



(1) What are the everyday practices and politics of Victorian forest activism?

(2) How do forest activists engage with other beings and a MtH politics?

In this final conclusions chapter I summarise the main arguments of this thesis and consider ways forward.

In chapter two, *Researching Victorian Forest Activism - A Conceptual Approach*, I began by developing the conceptual framework of the thesis. I positioned forest activism within an alternative politics framework, but expanded from this analysis by drawing together Tsing's (2015) 'arts of noticing', Jasanoff's (2004) co-production, work on social difference, and MtH theories. I argued that while much work has been done to examine power relations between humans, especially in explicitly political or activist spheres, relatively little work has investigated how understandings of a MtH world influences or changes power relations, especially in the context of political action. Through this approach, I contribute an understanding of power dynamics within the everyday practices of alternative politics, and a MtH approach to an explicitly environmental alternative politics.

In chapter three, *Researching with Activists and Other Beings: A Methodological Approach*, I developed my embodied and collaborative methodological approach. I conducted participant observation between May–September 2018, in which I engaged as a “full-time” activist in the practices of forest activism. I conducted thirty informal conversational interviews with activists, and more targeted interviews with ten activists. These informal interviews were part of a somewhat collaborative analysis process, with activists' giving feedback on important areas of analysis. Combined, these methods enabled an embodied understanding of the everyday practices of forest activism, focussing on both human and other beings as research collaborators in considering relationships of power and MtH engagements.

The three empirical analysis chapters have made two key arguments. First, within the everyday practices of forest activists there is power unevenness amongst humans, and between humans and other beings. Second, these relationships matter because it is in moments of relating that power unevenness emerges. Understanding power unevenness highlights the tensions between formal and informal politics, and that, even within the alternative political sphere of Victorian forest activism, broader power structures can be perpetuated through everyday practices. This power unevenness also highlights that forest activists are only partly engaging with other beings as political agents, which matters given that forest activists are engaged in an explicit environmental politics.

## **Power Unevenness in Practices**

### ***Between Humans***

In chapter four, *Setting the Scene: The “forest wars” of Victoria*, I presented the context of Victoria’s “forest wars”, the values underpinning them, and current management and logging practices of native forests. I discussed the range of tactics activists use to engage in these “forest wars”, which include contesting legal regulations, public awareness raising, electoral campaigning, citizen regulation and citizen science, influencing buyers and distributors of native timber, direct action, and community building through connection and creativity.

In chapter five, *Power, Expertise, and Gender in Victorian Forest Activism*, I critically analysed the everyday practices that constitute these tactics, analysing how power unevenness is constructed. Uneven power relations emerge despite the alternative political orientation of forest activism, with some activists holding anti-hierarchical views. In discussing the example of knot-tying I analysed how knowledge and expertise hierarchies emerge, in which some activists are considered more expert, and so are more able to shape the practices and tactics of forest activism. Activists recognise these hierarchies to differing extents, and skill-shares are one way activists seek to mitigate knowledge hierarchies. However, for some activists these skill shares are only partially effective,

given that hierarchies are entwined with identities and broader intersectional oppressions. I considered gender hierarchies as one avenue in which broader systems of oppression manifest within forest activism. These uneven relations of power mean some feel disempowered, and particular “expert” voices have greater ability and authority to shape activist practices and broader tactics.

In answer to my first research question, then, the everyday practices of forest activism are engaged in stopping logging, but also more broadly in mitigating hierarchies. However, in the everyday practices of forest activism, uneven power relationships emerge.

### ***With Other Beings***

In chapter six, *Tracks of Knots, Seeds, and a GPS: Forest Activists’ Engagements with the More-than-Human*, I examined how other beings are also part of forest activists’ practice, and the ways in which these power relationships also extend to other beings. I considered activists’ interactions with the bush through different practices, and the different tracks that activists follow. In surveying and scouting activists drive and bushwalk, following other beings’ tracks: logging roads, sheoak seeds, and GPS tracks. So, other beings are part of forest activist practices, but these engagements are only sometimes explicitly recognised by activists. Uneven power relations can emerge from these practices. Forest activists prioritise certain tracks, and certain other forest beings, making political decisions *for* the forest, without necessarily a conscious recognition of engagement with the MtH world. Activists are then only somewhat engaging with a MtH politics.

### **Relationships matter**

In focussing on the everyday interactions of forest activists I have argued that engagements with other beings matter, because in these interactions there emerge certain relationships of power. This assists understanding that actions shape not only external change, but also activists and the other beings of the forests themselves.

### ***Perpetuating Broader Social Systems***

In the emergence of these hierarchies, the practices of forest activism are perpetuating broader social systems. For example, differently positioned identities such as different genders reinforce knowledge hierarchies, perpetuating broader patriarchal relationships. In prioritising certain beings as more important to save – such as typically Wilderness “old-growth” forest communities, or charismatic species – forest activists are also perpetuating broader human/Nature dualistic relationships, and speaking *for*, not necessarily *with* the beings they are seeking to protect. This speaks more broadly to issues of alternative politics attempting to change the system while still engaged within it, contributing to literature on both the contested aspects of alternative activism, and the tensions of engaging the system while trying to change it (Wilkinson 2009; Chatterton & Pickerill 2010b; Schlembach 2011).

### ***More-than-Human Politics***

The politics of forest activists’ everyday engagements with other beings also has a broader political significance. Forest activists are explicitly engaged in broader contests of environmental framings. The power relationships within forest activists’ practices then translate into formal political discourse and framings of the “forest”. Within this context forest activists need to actively consider how to more explicitly navigate hierarchies with other beings, and bring these practices more explicitly and publicly into their practices. My research then draws from, and contributes to the growing literatures considering a MtH politics (Braun & Whatmore 2010b). In these last paragraphs I speculate on three ways activists might consider more actively engaging in a MtH politics.

First, activists could alter their practices. As seen throughout the thesis, the political moment, or the political response-ability, is in the bodily/material interactions – it is the physical engagement with the birds/seeds that assists in deciding where activists will practice their activism. Activists could

make such engagements explicit, verbally recognising them or holding a decision-making process focusing on which bodies to *engage with*, rather than what *actions on/for bodies* to undertake. This would make explicit the inherent political decision of interacting with other bodies. Such a discussion might include consideration of how other beings such as the regenerating forest are already resisting or supporting logging, and how activists can collaborate with these existing projects.

To facilitate this engagement, there could also be a more explicit focus on witnessing and noticing different beings. For example dedicated times and trips in the forest focused on open-ended engagements with and noticing of all beings, rather than an explicit focus on stopping logging. These engagements might draw on MtH methodologies so as to become attentive to the different temporal and spatial scales of other beings and their different socialities, much as I was attempting to do throughout my own research.

Second, activists could recognise that logging is part of the ongoing colonisation of Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries (Porter 2007). This means activists need to actively and critically engage Indigenous owners of Country as part of the process of “getting to know” the forest. For Morgan, a settler-coloniser who engages in solidarity work elsewhere a process of (de-)colonisation involves remembering there is not one dominant understanding of the forest. Rather, settler-colonisers need to be open to different realities of engagement, and to continually reflect on ‘why are you/we blockading this?’.

My third suggestion is for activists to publicly engage in a MtH discourse. As touched on in chapter six, activists’ external relations are still focussed on charismatic species such as ‘fluffy... greater gliders’, in the words of Sam. However, as Shannon says, ‘media [and other external relations]... is a game – not an expression of who we are’. I argue that for forest activists to disseminate hierarchies it is important to bring the ‘expression of who we are’ and our understanding of an interconnected

MtH world, into public debate. Practically, this might involve changes in discourse – for example, not using ‘wild’ slogans, or prioritising conversations around all ecological communities, not just ‘charismatic’ species (Lorimer 2015). Or, on a larger scale, this might involve activists engaging more explicitly in dialogues of how to live collaboratively with forests without ruining livelihoods.

Such dialogues are beginning to occur, especially around social media debates over the Great Forest National Park (GFNP). In response to opponents claiming the proposed National Park does not allow for recreational activities, the GFNP posted ‘the proposed GFNP tenure does not restrict access...’ outlining the potential for multi-tiered zoning of the park (GFNP 2018). However it is questionable whether recreational “use” of the forest fosters engagements with a fluid, more-than-human, world (Waitt & Lane 2007). This public discourse then needs to be more fully developed, especially amongst grassroots activists.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Collaborative discussions with activists on ways to mitigate hierarchies with other beings, and more consciously engage in a MtH politics, presents one avenue for further work. This could take the form of academic research, or else activist-led workshops, informal discussions, and information sharing. Indeed, I plan on further engagement and collaboration with the Victorian forest activist community, through workshops, informal conversations, and ‘zines’ (anti-copyright information sharing booklets; see Feigenbaum (2013)), in order to continue the practical application of this research.

In the process of analysis and writing it became clear that there is limited consideration of the politics of ongoing colonisation within forest activist practices. Further research into how activists are perpetuating colonisation or assisting (de-)colonisation could provide a further useful analysis of power relationships within forest activism. This is both on the scale of activists’ interactions, as well as theoretical considerations of the MtH approach.

More broadly, this research has presented scope for drawing together scholarship on alternative politics and a MtH world. Expanding on literature which considers a MtH politics in formal political spheres, there can be active consideration of a MtH understanding of other beings' agency within alternative politics; other beings, not just humans, are part of alternative practices, and can be considered in the processes of mitigating hierarchies. Similarly, MtH theories present a way to think through politically contested moments, particularly in the context of contestations around environmental politics.

## **Conclusion**

Forest activists engage in a variety of tactics to resist the logging of native forests throughout Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung, Taungurung, Gunai/Kurnai, Bidwell, and Monaro Countries (East Gippsland and Central Highlands, Victoria). Through resisting logging grassroots activists enact an alternative politics, seeking to transform broader social hierarchies and power unevenness. However through my embodied and collaborative ethnographic fieldwork, which emerged from my own position as a forest activist, I have argued that noticing the process of relationships can reveal how uneven power relationships emerge between humans, and between humans and other beings. This perpetuates the relationships activists are seeking to change, replicating a dualism between human/Nature. To seriously “stop logging” we must then be attentive to the complex, ever-changing entanglements of humans, and the other beings with which we live.

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