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FOREST POLITICS: (POST)FOUCAULDIAN SUBJECTIVITY, THE GENEALOGY OF RESISTANCE, AND ARBORISM**[1]

Abstract. *The article proposes a Foucauldian genealogy of the forest as a political, ethical and ontological subject. By tracing the historical role of forests as active agents in human resistance in Slovenia, the discursive and institutional formations that govern them, along with the ideological system of "arborism" – a culturally embedded hierarchy among tree species analogous to carnism within speciesism – forests are reconceptualised in this article not merely as ecological spaces but as sites and subjects of power, resistance, and cultural-value production. Drawing on posthumanist, ecological and decolonial thought, an expanded view of subjectivity is called for that includes the forest as a co-constitutive agent in human and nonhuman histories.*
Keywords: *Forest Subjectivity, Governmentality, Biopolitics, Arborism, Environmental Political Science.*

INTRODUCTION

In this article, a Foucauldian genealogy of the forest as a political, moral and biopolitical subject is proposed. Moving beyond traditional representations of forests as passive backdrops to human history, I argue that forests have actively shaped histories of resistance, governance, and ecological ideology. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concepts of governmentality, biopower, and counter-conduct, I examine how forests historically functioned as heterotopic spaces of insurgency and resistance, from Celtic uprisings to medieval *silvatici* and guerrilla warfare in the 20th century. By way of case study, I primarily focus on Slovenian forest histories.

Simultaneously, I analyse the emergence of forest governmentality through scientific forestry, carbon markets, and conservation regimes, demonstrating

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how forests have been rendered legible, manageable and optimised as biopolitical populations. By introducing the novel concept of arborism – an ideological apparatus analogous to carnism – I address the internal hierarchisation of tree species across cultural, economic and aesthetic domains.

Synthesising insights from posthumanist ethics, Indigenous epistemologies, and environmental humanities, I seek to challenge anthropocentric notions of subjectivity. This text is a call to reimagine forests not simply as subjects of management or reverence, but as complex, relational agents participating in multispecies worlds. In this way, I hope to contribute to a decolonial and posthumanist forest epistemology, repositioning forests as vital subjects of political ecology and multispecies justice.

THE FOREST AS A FOUCAULDIAN SUBJECT

The epistemology of an autonomous subject holding emancipatory potential has determined modern history significantly. Ever since the Enlightenment, the self-reflective "subject" has been central to Western understandings of culture and society. Cartesian, Kantian and Hegelian theories of the subject addressed man as a rational and metaphysical being. Postmodernity has generated sociological and cultural theories of the subject, among which Michel Foucault's remains the most influential.[2] It inspired Louis Althusser's theory on the interpellation of the subject into existence and Judith Butler's delimitation of the subject from others in gender studies, while Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak transposed it to postcolonial/subaltern studies (Wiede 2020, 3–9).

Although Foucault primarily studied human subject formation,[3] post-Foucauldian theorists, eco-philosophers and posthumanists have expanded this framework to include nonhuman subjectivities. Among others, Cary Wolfe has explored biopolitics beyond the human, asking how animal and ecological lives are governed as "biosubjects" (Wolfe 2013, 22). Rosi Braidotti considered nonhuman subjectivities, arguing that subjectivity is a field of forces, not an exclusive human domain: "… posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations" (Braidotti 2013, 100). Val Plumwood critiqued the exclusive human focus of earlier subject

[2] According to Foucault, the concept of the self lends to "creating a history of the different ways in which people have become subjects in our culture" (Foucault 1997, 326). Foucault emphasises the duality of the constitution of the subject: subjects are subject to and subordinate to rules (subjectivation), but they also self-identify and emancipate themselves as subjects (subjectivisation): "There are two meanings of the word 'subject': to be subject to someone else through control and dependence; and to be bound to one's own identity through awareness and self-knowledge" (Foucault 1997, 331). Foucault's theory of subjectivity is not essentialist, but relational. Foucauldian subjectivity is constructed through power relations and discursive practices, historically contingent, and culturally produced. The essential issue here is thus through which mechanisms of power and knowledge (human) beings become recognisable and (self)identified as "subjects".

[3] Foucault, an urban intellectual, never referred to forests in his writings (Winkel 2012, 81).

theories and the human's conceptual hyper-separation from nature, pushing toward a dialogical interspecies ethics (Plumwood 2002, 27, 44).

Recent theories of subjectivity thus do not presuppose innate consciousness of the subject but explore how living entities are made into subjects through discourse, governance, classification, and systems of knowledge/power. If subjectivity is constructed via power and knowledge, it may and should be extended to nonhuman entities, such as animals, rivers, mountains, ecosystems etc. Enter forests.

Forests, especially in the modern era, have been governed through a network of scientific, economic, legal and bureaucratic mechanisms. These make the forest knowable and manageable and hence subject to governmental rationality. Following the emergence of modern scientific forestry (silvology) in Europe, forest trees were measured, counted and classified (e.g., in cubic metres, as biomass). Forests became plantations, carbon sinks, or economic assets. Their ecological complexity was reduced to legible data for the purpose of utilitarian control and progress of anthropocentric science.[4] By way of enclosure, colonial forestry, and modern forest management, forests have been transformed from commons to a commodity.

At present, forests are chiefly considered economic instruments in terms of ecosystem services, carbon stocks, or development offsets. Carbon credits allow companies to "offset" emissions by protecting forested areas, turning the forest into a governable unit of climate accounting. Forest life is managed not just through rules, but through markets and incentives as well. Further, national parks, conservation zones, and biosphere reserves often involve strict spatial and behavioural regulations. Indigenous people are sometimes excluded from ancestral lands in the name of "wilderness" or "biodiversity protection". This is an example of power that claims to 'care for' populations or nature but exercises authority over them by defining what counts as legitimate use. Forests are thus not just protected – they are subjectivised within rational regimes of care, development and surveillance. By extending biopolitics to forests, people treat the forest itself as a governed life system: It has vital cycles, productivity, health metrics, and epidemiological risks (like wildfires or disease vectors). States and corporations intervene in these processes by controlling pests, regulating biomass, enforcing fire regimes etc. "Forest wars" between environmentalists and corporations are being fought against the ideological background of conservationist romanticism and utilitarianist capitalism.

[4] In 1831, the botanist Augustine P. de Candolle assumed that "a tree is a plant that is two things at once, an individual and a collective. Trees don't die of old age; rather, they eventually succumb to accidents – so it stands to reason that some have reached extraordinary ages. Scientists should endeavour to find and date such trees. Just as people preserve documents and coins from antiquity, they should preserve ancient trees, for evidence as well as sentiment. By determining the ages of the oldest living things, scientists might be able to fix dates on the "last revolutions of the globe" (Farmer 2022, 75).

Just as Foucault's state manages the human population's fertility, productivity or health (Foucault 2009, 83–110), the biopolitical forest is managed through satellite surveillance (e.g., deforestation maps), climate modelling, and eco-rehabilitation protocols. The forest is thus governed as if it were a population and therefore a community, not only a landscape.

In fact, forests are being governed as if they were alive, legible and rational, yet without being granted subjecthood. This opens space to re-politicise the forest not just as a resource or a risk, but as a sovereign terrain, a biotic subject, and perhaps even a threat, a counter-power to state authority.

THE FOREST AS A MORAL SUBJECT

When a forest is granted legal personhood, it is being constituted as a subject via juridical discourse. At present, several state legal systems recognise forests and forest ecosystems as legal persons. Half a century ago, legal scholar Christopher Stone (1972) was the first to argue that natural entities like trees possess legal rights.[5] He did so in a controversial article entitled *Should Trees Have [Legal] Status? For the Rights of the Components of Nature*. Three years later, Peter Singer's (1975) *Animal Liberation* was published, representing a breakthrough in the biocentrisation of the rights of nonhumans. Stone's text challenged modern Western anthropocentrism in a novel way, i.e., as a scientific attempt to question the "natural" anthropocentric hierarchisation not only of animals, but of all living things, according to which the human species is the most important, and other species, including trees, are subordinate to it, serve human needs, and hence are only objects without rights. Stone based his reflection on three arguments that remain relevant today: the historical evolution of rights, i.e., the fact that the circle of rights' beneficiaries has been constantly expanding, even though at first each new expansion seemed 'unthinkable' (e.g., the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage etc.); the fact that inanimate entities, such as corporations or universities, already have legal rights, and the assumption that living components of nature also have the ability to unambiguously express their interests (agency). Contemporary enactments of the subjectivation of nature include Ecuador's 2008/2021 Constitution that bestows legal rights on Mother Earth, the attribution of legal personhood to the Whanganui River (Charpleix 2018) and the Taranak Mounga mountain (Corlett 2025) sacred to the Mâori in New Zealand or the political experiment in Iceland where, by human proxy, the Snafellsjokull Glacier ran for president (Kassam 2024). In this article, the Te Urewera Forest in New Zealand is the most literal case in point: it had its status as a national park removed to allow it to be bestowed legal personhood with all ensuing rights and responsibilities as a sacred spiritual Mâori site (Middleton 2024).

[5] Not to be confused with »forest rights« such as the eponymous Indian legal act that only regulated human rights to manage and exploit forests (Rosencranz 2008).

In several South American countries, the status of a legal subject has been proposed for the Amazon rainforest. Ecuador made history in 2008 by becoming the first country in the world to recognise nature as a legal subject in its Constitution. Article 71–74 of the Ecuadorian Constitution declares that Pachamama (Mother Earth) "has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles". It allows any person or community to go to court on behalf of nature, even if no direct human harm has occurred. The legal framework has been invoked multiple times in court cases involving mining, deforestation and pollution, sometimes with success. While not specifically identifying the Amazon rainforest as a person, the legislation applies directly to the Amazonian ecosystems within Ecuador. Bolivia then followed with the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth in 2012. In this law, Mother Earth is recognised as a collective subject of public interest and granted rights such as life, biodiversity, water, clean air, and restoration. The law also regulates the state's responsibility to defend these rights. Although the latter remain symbolic in many respects, have failed to prevent exploitation and not been fully enforced (Muñoz 2023), the mentioned legal framework reflects Bolivia's Indigenous cosmologies according to which the forest is alive and sacred. As a living system, the Amazonian forest is implicitly included within this framework, especially in Bolivia's northern departments where large swathes of the Amazon basin extend. In 2018, Colombia's Supreme Court recognised the Colombian Amazon as a legal entity with rights to be protected, preserved and restored (Eco Jurisprudence Monitor). The decision followed a lawsuit filed by 25 children and youth who claimed that deforestation violated their constitutional rights to a healthy environment. In its ruling, the Supreme Court cited the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and international environmental norms and ordered the government to create action plans to combat deforestation and mitigate climate change, acknowledging the Amazon's agency and the need for intergenerational justice. Even though the case has become a global reference point for environmental constitutionalism and the legal personhood of ecosystems, the Colombian government has not enforced it (Dejusticia 2019).

Recognising the Amazon as a legal subject challenges anthropocentric legal frameworks by opening space for eco-centric jurisprudence and embeds Indigenous ontologies within state law, particularly those that consider forests and rivers as kin, ancestors or spirits. This recent legal shift reflects a growing ethical stance that forests may and should possess rights and responsibilities, and thus function as moral subjects in both philosophical and legal senses.

> *The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don't yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all.* (Kimmerer 2013, 29)

A collective moral subject is an entity made up of multiple members that can have interests or goals, exhibit a form of autonomous agency, and be capable of participating in moral relationships. While this typically applies to governments, corporations and communities, I argue here along with ever more numerous authors that collective subjectivity can also be applied to nonhuman communities like forests. Even considering moral subjectivity where traditional moral philosophy requires the conscious intent of moral agency, some eco-philosophers claim that the human form of self-awareness might not be the only route to moral standing. In the biocentric viewpoints of deep ecologists such as Arne Næss, all living beings (individuals, species, ecosystems) hold inherent worth, not just an instrumental value. According to Næss (1973, 2), "the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to human beings is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of men and women themselves". While Næss mostly focused on living individuals, his logic may be extended to forests as living communities. A forest is a living collective entity and therefore also possesses an intrinsic value and moral relevance.

Almost by rule, Indigenous traditions consider forests and other ecosystems as relational beings, not just resources. Forest trees to them are kin or relations as living, moral participants in a shared world in which we are all connected. In Indigenous ontology, forests act as collective beings, teaching reciprocity, balance and responsibility; they thus cannot be considered commodities. The Indigenous forest-dwelling communities have treated forests as moral subjects throughout their evolution as *naturecultures*. Landing this argument close to home, a recorded tradition from the Rezija Valley is telling: "Once upon a time they said that the forest was speaking. When people were about to cut down a tree, it said: "Not me, cut down another one!" … Once upon a time, everything was speaking" (Pleterski 2015, 16). For members of the historical counterculture of the Nature Worshippers in the northwest of Slovenia, trees were co-dwellers and brothers; being in the forest, their communal treasure and neighbour, was like being in a sanctuary or "in the womb, while the wind howls outside" (Medveščék 2015, 188, 190). The Nature Worshippers clearly attributed agency to the forest: "Forest is the master of land that always triumphs over man … [Forest] is the winner of the war it wages on [human-made] clearings" (Medveščék 2015, 62, 83, 49).

Posthumanists like Jane Bennett challenged the idea that only humans are moral agents and emphasised assemblages of matter and life – like a forest – as sites of agency and ethical significance. For Bennet, agency is not something humans possess and nonhumans lack. It is distributed across networks and assemblages: "The locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman collective" (Bennet in Khan 2009, 102). Thus, if one is willing to expand the understanding of subjectivity beyond human-centred ethics, acknowledge nonhuman agency, and embrace relational ontologies, a forest can be conceived of as a collective moral subject, a material collective with its own ethical vitality.

According to actor-network theory by Bruno Latour, agency is distributed across networks, including nonhumans like forests, rivers, and even technologies. Latour challenges the modernist divide between nature and society, exposing "nature" as a modernist historical construct aimed at separating humans from reality and determining who was allowed to speak for whom:

> *Nature is not a thing, a domain, a realm, an ontological territory, but a fully political way of distributing power. … ecology seals the end of [conventional concept of] nature.* (Latour 2004, 476)

Nonhumans are actants since alongside humans they co-construct the reality of the Latourian "Common World". This collapses the idea that agency is a human monopoly. Suzanne Simard's concept of the "Wood Wide Web" may be an overly anthropomorphising term that ignores the fundamental differences between organisms and machines[6] but does ascribe a sort of decentralised agency to forests: A forest is "a web of interdependence, linked by a system of underground channels, where they perceive and connect and relate [into] a forest society" (Simard 2021, 9). Michelle Westerlaken and co-authors explored forests' participation in environmental discourses and practices via forest organisms as bioindicators, decision-making algorithms raising questions about forest ownership, and the redistribution of subjectivities by Amerindian cosmologies in forest monitoring within Indigenous territories (Westerlaken et al. 2023).

Besides the controlling and objectifying silvology, scientific research can also reframe the forest as an agentic, communicative network rather than a passive resource. This knowledge production contributes to its subject-status in cultural imagination and translates into policy all the more easily when combined with the recognition of Indigenous ontologies.

Framed this way, a forest is not merely a background for moral action, but an actant in its own right. It does not require a human-like mind to participate in moral relationships. It participates through interconnection, care, balance and reciprocity – the very values supposedly lying in the centre of (human) ethics. A forest thus may be conceived of as both a governable and a moral subject. These forms of subjectivity are far from mutually exclusive – they intersect, co-construct each other, and sometimes conflict.

[6] Through networks like mycorrhizal fungi, forests share resources, support younger trees, and even warn each other of threats (e.g., insect attacks). Further, forests regulate themselves in terms of nutrient cycles, population balance, succession etc., easily without any human interference. This anthropomorphising concept of ecological autonomy has been challenged by Sheldrake, among others: "Today, the study of shared mycorrhizal networks is one of the fields most commonly beset with political baggage. Some portray these systems as a form of socialism by which the wealth of the forest can be redistributed. Others take inspiration from mammalian family structures and parental care, with young trees nourished by their fungal connections to older and larger '"mother trees'" (Sheldrake 2020, 157).

A GENEALOGY OF (SLOVENIAN) FORESTS AS COUNTER-POWER

A Foucauldian genealogy is not a linear history; it is an archaeology of power. It seeks to uncover the contingent, messy and buried roots of present formations. It asks how certain truths, norms and subjectivities came to be by exploring the discontinuities, ruptures and power struggles that shaped them. "Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (Foucault 1991, 83). Could the body in question also be the body of a forest?

Connecting subjectivity and genealogy, Foucault also paid extensive attention to conduct and counter-conduct, the practices of transforming the way one conducts oneself and the way one is conducted by others, including the ways individuals resist being governed. The forest has historically functioned as a spatial condition of possibility for this sort of resistance. In medieval Europe, forests sheltered peasants, heretics and bandits who resisted feudal control. In Mughal and British India, forests provided hideouts for tribal insurgents and anti-colonial rebels. Enslaved Africans, like the Maroons in Haiti, fled into forests to build autonomous communities in the revolutionary Americas. "In contrast to the estates and towns, the forest was the antonym to the controlled domain of the colony; a marginal space inhabited by those inhabiting the margins of colonial society such as landless or unemployed" (Sioh 2004, 732).

In the Second World War, resistance movements across occupied Europe relied on forests for shelter and to prepare for confrontations with enemy military. In 20th-century guerrilla warfare from the jungles of Vietnam to Latin American *selvas*, forests became zones of asymmetric resistance. In these instances, the forest has been more than a backdrop to human action. It has become a necessary co-conspirator and a space that disrupts the legibility of the state, absorbs fugitives, shelters lawlessness, and refuses discipline. In this sense, forests have historically stood outside the episteme of order as heterotopias of resistance (Foucault 2007, 214–23).

The forest thus resists Foucauldian governmentality and allows for spatial counter-governmentality because it is difficult to map, it hides movement, and disrupts surveillance. For the powers that be, to govern a forest is crucial then to first make it visible through simplification and standardisation (Scott 1998, 15, 18–19). Unruly forests remain zones of opacity and a challenge for modern forms of power that rely on clarity, transparency and categorisation. Modern forest management has been oriented not only to the maximising of profit but also, in Scott's terms, "legibility" achieved by the orderly plantation-like cultivation of forest monocultures, and to ensuring visibility and easy access.

For Slovenia, where at present almost 60% of the territory is covered by forest, one could claim that throughout history humans living here have shared their living space with the forest. There is no doubt that the history of these lands

would have been different had it been less forested, let alone an open plain.[7]

Owing to its geostrategic position at the juncture of Germanic, Latin and Slavic cultural worlds, Slovenian territory had constantly been colonised and subjected to various foreign powers. Forests played a vital part in its consequent history of resistance. Prior to the arrival of the Slavs in the early Middle Ages, the Celtic populations of these then predominantly forested lands were conquered by the Roman Empire. Forests, however, continued to be the domain of Barbarian "silvatici",[8] people of the forest, while the Roman legions and traders stuck mainly to river valleys, roads and settlements. From the start, early settlers here had to win the battle with the forest for arable land. The previously mentioned Nature Worshippers' tradition included multiple testimonies of the hardships of the early settlement of forested hilly areas, particularly in the era of the medieval "highland colonisation". Nature Worshippers not only respected but worshipped the forest and ritually thanked the 'forest spirits' for every clearing. The term for the basic territorial administrative unit of this secretive pre-Christian community, *hosta*, means a forest or thicket in vernacular Slovenian. Moreover, *hosta* has been synonymous with resistance throughout history. *Hostar* (a forest man) was for the Nature Worshippers a peasant rebel or a military deserter in hiding in the forest. Later, members of the partisan resistance in the Second World War were also called *hostarji* (Pl. of *hostar*). Even these days, the phrase "let's go to the *hosta*" can still mean a call to guerrilla warfare.[9]

Aside from this etymological connection between the forest and resistance, Slovenian literary classics are an ample source of forest genealogies. In the Middle Ages, the forest was the sole refuge for those resisting forced conversion

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[7] I am keeping the focus on the forest genealogy of resistance, leaving out historical silviculture in Slovenian-speaking lands, the political economy of Slovenian forestry, and contemporary heritage discourses in silvology covered by numerous authors (e.g., Perko 2011, 2014 and 2021; Kordiš 1986; Panjek 2023; Kačičnik Gabrič 2023, Mastnak 2004, Anko 2004). To briefly resume them, Slovenia is understood to have a rich tradition of forestry, and Slovenians are presumably "a people of the forest". People's attachment to wood and forests is imprinted in numerous surnames and toponyms. Slovenians entertain the idea that forest management in Slovenia is an old tradition and has been exemplary and progressive for centuries (Batič et al. 2007, 32). Perko points out, however, that Slovenians tend to boast about early planned forest management and forget or omit that it was vital, due to the catastrophic destruction of forests before and during the slow introduction of forestry plans (Perko 2011, 135). Even the praised "sustainable" Austrian imperial forestry orders relied on clear-felling, yield maximisation and monoculture afforestation for a long time (ibid. 146). The worst exploitation of forests occurred in the first decade after the Second World War due to the reconstruction of war-devastated Yugoslavia: in that period, logging accounted for twice the natural annual growth increment and forest mass fell to one-half of what it is today (Perko 2011, 168–70). One may sadly conclude that this was how the authorities 'thanked' the forests for having made the resistance and thus the creation of the SFRY possible.

[8] Roman historians like Livy and Pliny wrote extensively on the Romans' horror with trackless gigantic forests, such as the Ciminian forest bordering on Etruria, or the Hercynian Forest in Central Europe stretching from today's Schwartzwald in Germany to Bialowieza in eastern Poland (Sallmann 1987, 118–20). Although the goal is to only consider Slovenia as a case study here, it is worth mentioning that members of the anti-Norman resistance after the conquest of the British Isles in the 11th century were also called Silvatici or »green men« because they took shelter in forests.

[9] Again, a comparison can be drawn with the similarly forested Estonia where the resistance movement against the invasion by the Soviet Union and later by the Nazi military was called the Forest Brothers (Laar 1992).

to Christianity by the Francs in the 9th century and for peasants who had nowhere else to flee (Bevk 1930).[10] Peasants involved in failed peasant rebellions between the 16th and 18th centuries also hid in the forest (Pregelj 1927). Between the 17th and 19th centuries, extensive forests in the hilly north of Slovenia sheltered bandits called *rokovnjači*, bands of outlaws and deserters who purportedly stole only from the rich, married among themselves, and protected poor peasants who acted as their informers (Kersnik and Jurčič 1882; Holz 1996, 266). Although the Slovenian bandits were not explicitly referred to, *rokovnjači* greatly resembled the European banditry of the period as described by Eric Hobsbawm in *Bandits* (Hobsbawm 2000).[11]

In the First World War, Austrian Slovenian deserters fled to the opposite side, but also into the forests, disillusioned by either the attitude of the Serbian military or the alliance with the capitulated Italy. Often, they were "soldiers, who were released on temporary leave, but did not want to return to the frontline" (Nećak and Repe 2005, 136). These included members of the Nature Worshippers' community, which was emphatically pacifist and valued the life of the individual over the state (Medvešček 2015, 118). Soon, the deserters were joined by many farmers, frustrated by the wartime shortages. Mainly dwelling in forests, these paramilitary groups were tellingly called the "Green Cadres" and could be found across the entire Austro-Hungarian territory. In Slovenian-speaking lands, their presence was most prominent in the Trnovski Forest in the northwest (one of the areas where the Nature Worshippers survived the longest).

In the era between the world wars, the forests enabled contraband to be transported from the newly created Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its neighbours, as well as the movements and activities of the secret revolutionary resistance movement against Fascist Italy, TIGR. The history of the Second World War is particularly rich with evidence and testimonies about the connection between the forest and the Slovenian tradition of resistance. In the far northeastern region of Prekmurje occupied by the Hungarian Fascist regime in 1941, the organised armed resistance only commenced in 1944 in contrast to the almost instant reaction to the Nazi's and Fascist occupation in other Slovenian regions. A partisan unit was supposed to operate in the area as early as in autumn 1941, but such plans proved to be unrealistic: "Prekmurje does not have mountains or dense forests and is also interwoven with roads. This meant that in the period under consideration, the occupier could reach every part of Prekmurje in a very short time. The Prekmurje partisans were constantly on the move. They only stayed in the same place for a day, two at most,

[10] In this parable of the northwest of Slovenia under the Italian Fascist occupation between the world wars that focused on 14th century rebel paganism, France Bevk writes: »In those times, people felt like one with trees, they were living beings to them. Man watched them and listened to them. He saw and heard more that present man can see or hear for he was still connected with nature ... He knew he was part of nature. The tree was holy to him« (Bevk 1930, 13).

[11] Hobsbawm interprets the history of banditry as inseparable from the history of political power and class struggle. Even though he repeatedly locates historical bandit groups in forests and remote hilly areas, he does not pay forests any attention. The book was first published in 1969.

otherwise the occupier would have discovered it" (Dobaja 2024). Dobaja quotes the writer and resistance member Miško Kranjec's indicative account: "The forests in Lower Prekmurje are not at all suitable for taking refuge in them. They are mainly small, so they were very easy to cross…. On top of that, people always walk through our forests, so it has happened to me many times that someone found me in them, if I had taken refuge there" (Kranjec in Dobaja 2024). In other parts of Slovenia, partisans of the resistance movement stayed in the forests even in winter and conducted their military operations from there. Forests were most prominent in the topography of the resistance (IZDG 1959). They provided early resistance activists and subsequent organised military units with precious shelter, besides water, food and fuel. Partisans built bunkers in forest ground or dwelt in caves and climbed up into the canopies when in need of a safe rest. Courier meeting points, printing presses and field hospitals were located in remote forest areas such as the practically unreachable Franja Hospital near the sub-Alpine Cerkno. According to local oral tradition, the hilly forest of Drnova nearby Cerkno was burned to the ground by the occupiers precisely to expose the partisans. As told by Silvo Močnik in an interview on July 1 2025 the partisans were attacked in the forest after their locations and movements had been revealed in an act of betrayal by the locals as happened to the Pohorski battalion (70 men and women) whose winter quarters in the vast Pohorje spruce forests had been encircled in January 1943 and every last fighter killed. The monument standing today at the protected forest site of the Pohorski battalion's last battle refers to the whole woody hill range of Pohorje as their memorial.

Had Slovenia been a grassy plain instead of mostly forested land, the resistance would still have taken place like it did in the comparatively barren Malta or the Netherlands, but would needed to have been organised differently. Its scope and temporality were mostly made possible by the fact that Slovenians knew the forests and were willing to leave their homes in large numbers to go live in the forest for the time necessary to win the war, relying on forest-owning farmers for support. Collaborating paramilitary units were "legal", enjoyed the occupying forces' protection, and hence could remain in settlements. For the partisans to organise the resistance from the forest, complex logistics networks had to be put in place with the cooperation of local rural populations all the way down to a secret subsystem of underground creches for infants and toddlers whose parents had fled Ljubljana to join the partisan units in the forests (Štrajnar et al. 2004). The Slovenian resistance movement in the Second World War was accordingly largely made possible in conspiration with the forest.

When the resistance cannot be enacted without the forest, or the presence of forest determines its form and sustainability, the forest must be recognised as a participant in the resistance and not merely as a setting for it. From the genealogical perspective, the forest in Slovenia is co-constitutive of resistance subjectivities because the forest helped produce and preserve the secret heretic, the fugitive rebel, the bandit hero, the desperate deserter, the defiant smuggler, the

partisan fighter, and not just sheltered them. It subverted norms, refused governance, and inscribed itself in the archive of resistance. As a form of nonhuman agency or a site of subjectivation, the forest enabled the counter-conduct of marginal subjects who were formed through their relationship with the forest.

Forests act as mnemonic anchors and arborial agents of collective memory (Ibrişim 2023). Old forests are not only the living witnesses of centuries of Slovenian history of resistance; they took part in it. The initial war between the earliest settlers and the forest over arable and habitable land, which the forest started to lose following the human invention of the (chain)saw, had partly been subverted into a temporary alliance between people and the forest over the recurring issues of inequalities, landgrab and genocide affecting Slovenian society. Even nowadays, forests continue to provide a crucial locus of resistance to systemic oppression as a temporary haven for illegal migrants along the Slovenian-Croatian border or as symbolic enactment sites for political processes aimed at the remembrance and reconciliation of past collective traumas.

ARBORISM: A FOREST APPARATUS

Before I propose arborism as a Foucauldian apparatus[12] pertaining specifically to forests, I must first make a digression via speciesism. In a sentence, speciesism is the discrimination of living beings based on species. It permeates all aspects of human society and serves as a foundational underpinning of the capitalist economy. It also represents one of the greatest moral challenges of our time, revealing a glaring contradiction between human ethics and human behaviour.[13]

Ever since the 1970s, speciesism has been central to ethical debates concerning our treatment of nonhuman animals. To cite only the most influential

[12] Michel Foucault introduced governmentality to describe the way modern states exercise power not just through law or force, but by shaping the conduct of populations via knowledge, norms and institutions. "Governmentality" is the rationality of governing: it explains how life is managed, optimised, and regulated on a population level. For Foucault, power in modernity increasingly focuses on biopower, its mechanisms called *dispositifs* (apparatuses), and the normalisation of what is "healthy", "productive" or "sustainable" (Wiede 2020, 4–5).

[13] Humanity's earliest relationship with animals was likely a mixture of reverence and exploitation; many Indigenous cultures still perceive certain animals as sacred beings. The Neolithic agricultural revolution introduced the domestication of numerous animal species, turning meat into a stable food source and animals a property and a resource. This process solidified an anthropocentric worldview. Philosophical justifications for the latter already appeared in Antiquity: Aristotle classified animals as lower beings due to their lack of reason, claiming they existed for human use. Similarly, Judeo-Christian traditions conferred upon humans the "dominion" over animals (Genesis 1:26). While Islam acknowledges animal welfare, it nonetheless maintains human superiority. In contrast, Hinduism and Buddhism reject the hierarchical ordering of species since animals are considered integral to the spiritual cycle (*samsara*). In the early modern era, René Descartes defined animals as "automata", i.e., machines without souls, emotions or reason. This view justified animal experimentation and harsh treatment. Whereas Immanuel Kant assigned moral worth exclusively to humans as rational beings, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was among the first modern Western thinkers to advocate for animal rights based on their capacity to suffer. Another one was Jeremy Bentham who inspired the utilitarian ethics in the last third of the 20th century. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in the 19th century profoundly challenged human exceptionalism by revealing the deep biological continuity between humans and other animals. Despite this, many continued to defend human moral superiority by appealing to intelligence, culture and technology.

protagonists, the earlier mentioned Peter Singer argued for an equal consideration of sentience across species. If an animal suffers, its suffering should count morally the same as a human's. Although Singer did not equate animals and humans in all respects, he deemed their suffering to be equally significant (Singer 1975). Tom Regan contended that animals possess inherent rights because they are beings with experiences, desires and emotions. Killing or exploiting animals violates their rights, even if such actions benefit humans (Regan 1983). Jacques Derrida deconstructed speciesism in a militant plea for a new ontology of living beings that became a foundational text for animal studies (Derrida 2002). Contemporary animal ethicists such as Eva Meijer argue that animals can communicate with humans and clearly express their interests; humans therefore have no right to make unilateral decisions about them. Animals cannot be merely passive recipients of care since they speak, resist and negotiate (Eva Meijer 2019).

Another important notion for understanding speciesism is that of "arbitrary difference". Granting moral value based on species membership is no less arbitrary than doing so based on race or gender. For instance, pigs and dogs possess similar cognitive and emotional capacities yet people would eat one and adopt the other. People may love cats while wearing the skin of cows, which also possess emotions and maternal instincts. The dominant speciesist claim that humans have greater moral value due to their higher cognitive abilities collapses when considering that not all humans possess high intelligence (e.g., infants or the severely cognitively disabled), yet we do not see their lives as morally negligible.

Humans unconsciously internalise speciesist hierarchies through carnism, a belief system that justifies eating certain animals while attributing other animals other (utilitarian) roles (Joy 2020). Some animals are thus treated as family members, others as food or clothing, while others are enslaved, neglected, persecuted or exterminated for presumed need or pleasure. Joy theorises this differentiation as institutionalised, systemic, and culturally conditioned violence that is supposedly "normal, natural, and necessary" (Joy 2020, 100–03). Carnist animal hierarchies vary across the globe, reflecting cultural constructs according to which animals are edible, sacred, dispensable or taboo. In some cultures, meat remains a status symbol historically affordable only by the wealthy. In modern, increasingly secular societies, religious dietary taboos play a diminishing role. People eat meat routinely today because it is cheap, widely available, and has (an acquired) good taste.

By analogy with carnism, I propose that the belief system by which human societies construct value hierarchies among tree species and particular trees be referred to as arborism. Over time, different communities developed affective, symbolic or utilitarian preferences for particular tree species, often holding significant ecological consequences for the species not in favour. For example, cedar in the Middle East was revered in Biblical and even pre-Biblical traditions as a symbol of immortality, whereas in South Asia the bodhi tree has been sacralised in Buddhism, treated with reverence, and protected by law as well as societal control. The implications here go beyond religious framing: "By nationalizing the

bodhi tree and its origin story – to the point of adding sacred fig leaves to the flag – the leadership of postcolonial Sri Lanka further marginalized minority Hindu Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims" (Farmer 2022, 60). The most straightforward symbols of 'arbonationalism', to borrow a Farmer's term, are national flags that include representations of tree species, such as those of Canada, Lebanon or Sri Lanka (Farmer 2022, 134). On the other hand, monoculture spruces or eucalyptus forests were first de-sacralised in the colonial context, then reduced to economic units in industrial forestry, heavily planted before being clear-felled (Farmer 2022, 135–51).

Humans worldwide revere or protect some tree species, while others are felled without hesitation. Returning to the case study of Slovenian forests and paraphrasing Joy: why do Slovenians venerate the linden, play music on maple, and burn beech? Like carnism, arborism is highly culture-specific. Oak and linden were considered sacred in several European pre-Christian cultures. The Celts, Ancient Greeks and Slavs alike performed rituals in sacred oak groves. The Nature Worshippers of northwest Slovenia maintained that "every individual had an oak growing, and they feared cutting down oaks. It could have happened that they would cut down their own oak and consequently die on the spot" (Medveščček 2015, 188).[14] The Slovenian national tree is, however, the linden tree; the linden leaf is a symbol of 'our land'. The first currency of the independent Slovenia was almost named after the linden, *lipa*. Under the Najevska linden in Carinthia, the Slovenian mythical saviour King Matjaž sleeps, and Slovenian politicians traditionally gather next to it every year.[15] Linden were 'village' trees under which premodern local collective authorities, the *dvanajstija*, met to rule; they were 'judgment' trees providing shelter for trials under their canopies, and 'execution trees' used to hang convicts. In the Middle Ages, linden were 'Turkish' trees planted to celebrate victories over the Turks. People planted linden on special occasions or important events as 'memorial' trees.

More than half the trees registered as dendrological heritage in Slovenia are linden (Jenčič 2004: 268) for good reason: attributing cultural value to the linden tree led to the planned planting of these trees, protecting and enabling them to grow to dendrological heritage standards. As a direct consequence of arborism, forest trees considered dendrological heritage account for just 13.5% of all protected trees (Jenčič 2004, 270). The heavily logged spruces among them are comparatively only a handful, allowed to grow to an extraordinary age and size mostly by coincidence (because they were growing in long neglected or hard to reach forests).

[14] An identical belief, related to pipal trees, survived in Vedic practice (Farmer 2022, 61).

[15] In fieldwork in the northwest of Slovenia, I came across a testimony on a linden tree in a village nearby Kanal ob Soči. During the Fascist occupation of this region in the mid-War era, the tree was secretly planted by Slovenian patriots as a symbol of anti-Italian resistance. It was destroyed by their ideological opponents yet replanted again twice in an act of rebellion. At the end, people were guarding the tiny linden tree at night to protect it from being cut. Purportedly, it is still growing in the middle of that village, and now over 100 hundred years old.

Just as speciesism arbitrarily values some animals over others, arborism arbitrarily ranks trees based on human needs, symbolic meaning, representations of desirable qualities, or historical association. These valuations become institutionalised via state policies, education systems, national identity, and economic structures. In addition to very old specific holy trees of various species, the Nature Worshippers revered medicinal, exceptionally hardy and fertility-promoting trees. Slovenians today attribute a special value to trees based on their extraordinary physical properties, rarity, age, cultural-historical and/or aesthetic function, with the exceptional height or thickness of trees receiving by far the most attention, fascination and recognition. The highest category of protection under the current Slovenian legislation is tree 'monuments', old *and* large trees (Anko 2004, 191–95). As stated, very few of such tree monuments were allowed to survive in the constantly logged forests. Only two native tree species are protected by law: the yew (*Taxus baccata*) and the holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). Both owe their protection to their near-extinct status in the forest following excessive extraction. There is no need to formally protect lindens; arborism protects them since "one never cuts down a linden".

Arborism organises tree species into hierarchical categories of value, meaning, and treatment, thereby legitimising unequal relations of use, reverence, neglect or eradication. Just like carnism is based on cultural constructs around a carnivore diet, arborism is based on the symbolic, national, religious and economic value of trees species. When carnism masks violence through ideology, arborism makes us blind to ecocide by the internalisation of economic or cultural hierarchies. Arborism is enacted through silviculture, urban planning, forestry and rituals, just like carnism is enacted through food systems, preferred diets and national cuisines.

Arborism functions as an epistemic structure since it decides which tree species are "important", itself often tied to nationalist, religious or colonial knowledge systems. It also translates into a material practice as it affects reforestation policies, tree planting programmes, urban landscaping, and biodiversity initiatives. Finally, it is an aesthetic regime because it cultivates values and taste regarding what a 'proper' tree looks like (majestic, native, ancient) vs. "common" or "invasive". Like carnism, arborism works best when invisible, i.e., naturalised in forestry practices, overlooked in ecological ethics, and uninterrogated in environmental humanities. Arborism, then, is a bio- and silvo-political apparatus: it governs life not just by what is grown, but by what is allowed to grow. This positions the forest not simply as a subject of resistance or governance, but also as a site where ideological conflicts play out within its very body.

Implications of the arborism concept include the creation of intra-ecological hierarchies, not just human vs. nonhuman, but tree species against tree species. Arborism offers a novel critique of monocultures, invasive species discourse, and (post)colonial forestry, prompting us to rethink arboreal ethics: Should the diversity of tree-species be protected for its own sake? How do we mourn

a spruce forest that was cleared to make space for 'native' trees? Who decides which species are allowed to be restored in 'restoration ecology'?

The current trend in forest governance entails a combination of extremes: intensive exploitation goes hand in hand with the strict isolation of forest from humans in forest reserves. Today, there are 170 such protected areas in Slovenia, including 14 "untouchable" primeval forests. Where deemed so by arborism, we protect the forest from ourselves. There is another way forward, however: the possibility of co-constituted systems, *silvo-human assemblages*, that transcend arboristic hierarchies. Just like carnism, arborism can be overcome when exposed as unnatural, abnormal and unnecessary instead of entrenched opposite. First, humans need to recognise the asymmetry of human partnership with the forest. The forest can survive without people, but people will not survive without the forest.

CONCLUSION

After analysing 39 scientific papers on Foucault and forestry, Winkel summarised the main findings on forest discourses and forest governance from around the world: the Foucauldian theory had largely been applied by Western scholars to forest case studies in the developing world, while forest studies from developing countries paid much more consideration to aspects of forest governmentality as opposed to the Western emphasis on discourse, revealing the effects of governmentality on forest science. Regarding subjectivity, Winkel's explicit recommendation for forest studies was "to focus more on the role of subjects in terms of both constrained and marginalised groups that have been overlooked … as well as power exerting, discursive elites" (Winkel 2012, 91). One could paraphrase Michel Serres' argument on the absence of Gaia at the negotiations of the failed 2009 Copenhagen climate summit (Latour 2004, 478): what and where is the forest in current forest studies?

Forests are subjectivised by power: governed, measured, and surveyed, yet simultaneously recognised as ethical subjects within relational ethics, indigenous cosmologies, and multispecies assemblages. A forest can be simultaneously identified as a Foucauldian subject governed through discourses and technologies of power (science, law, economics), and a moral subject participating in reciprocal relations and possessing intrinsic worth, as well as a hybrid subject shaped by the interplay of biopolitics and ethics, never reducible to either.

This challenges traditional Western ideas that limit subjectivity to individual, conscious, rational humans. Instead, we arrive at a distributed, entangled and relational form of subjectivity, one in which forests qualify as collective subjects.

A Foucauldian genealogy of the forest is a grounded possibility that I hope to have demonstrated with the case of Slovenian forests. It allows us to reimagine forests not as static backdrops, but as active agents of historical processes. It traces how they have been constructed, governed and (how they) resisted. Ultimately, it enables as to recognise the forest as a subject, not just of ecology, but of history.

Within the conceptual framework of Foucauldian genealogy, the forest was constructed as "wilderness", "a resource", "a refuge", and "a threat". It was governed via forestry, enclosure, mapping and militarisation. It enabled subject-positions of resistance and has itself been subjectivised in relation to state power.

At present, forests are governed by environmental policies (e.g., protected areas, deforestation permits), carbon markets (assigning exchangeable value to trees as carbon sinks), and sustainable development frameworks. These mechanisms treat the forest as a subject of knowledge and power; as something to be measured, optimised, protected or exploited. The forest becomes legible through cartography, satellite imagery, and carbon data. It becomes knowable and therefore governable. The forest is no longer only a space; it is made into a manageable subject of power relations. Moreover, forests are discursive constructs, as "resources" in colonial/industrial discourse, as "biodiversity hotspots" in the scientific discourse of silvology or "living heritage" in arboreal humanities, as "sacred" by Indigenous cosmologies and as "carbon banks" in neoliberal environmental discourse.

The Foucauldian perspective shows how forests are constructed by systems of power: through policy, science and economics, while a moral perspective reveals forests as beings-in-relation, embedded in reciprocal, often sacred, relationships. These views can conflict, e.g., a carbon market may govern a forest, reducing its value to CO_2 metrics while ignoring its spiritual, ecological or cultural significance. However, with legal personhood for forests (e.g., Te Urewera, Ecuador's Constitution) governance intertwines with morality – the forest is governed, but as a moral entity with rights and responsibilities. Whereas Foucauldian subjectivity focuses on governance, moral subjectivity centres on ethical agency and responsibility. In deep ecology, Indigenous ontologies and posthumanist ethics, forests provide, shelter, and care for other beings. They participate in reciprocal ecological relationships and have a great impact on human cultural and spiritual life. The forest cares for itself, and through its care, it cares for others. In the exploration of "caring politics" as a possible solution to the current polycrisis (Vrečko Ilc 2025), the necessary "radical redefinition of our core values" (Vodovnik 2025, 359) may and should include not only the attribution of personhood to the forest but humans' willingness to learn from the forest.

Roughly contemporarily to Foucault's writings on subjectivity, Slovenian environmentalist France Avčin let the forest speak in a text entitled Forest to Man:

> *You, Slovenian, are my addressee today. Your farmers and intellectuals valued me as nowhere else around the Mediterranean. I cover over half of your homeland; I am still the greatest asset of your meagre land. I hid you and rescued you when foreigners, hungry for your land, flooded in from north and west. And I will be your saviour again, if they return.* (Avčin 1980, 492)

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GOZDNE POLITIKE: (POST)FOUCALTOVSKA SUBJEKTIVITETA, GENEALOGIJA ODPORA IN ARBORIZEM

Povzetek. *Ta izvirni znanstveni članek konceptualizira foucaultovsko genealogijo gozda kot političnega, etičnega in ontološkega subjekta. Z analizo zgodovinske vloge slovenskih gozdov kot aktivnih dejavnikov v odporu, diskurzivnih in institucionalnih oblik njihovega upravljanja ter ideološkega sistema »arborizma« – kulturno konstruirane hierarhije med drevesnimi vrstami, analogne karnizmu znotraj specizma – avtorica gozdov ne obravnava zgolj kot ekološke prostore, temveč kot kraje in subjekte moči, upora ter produkcije kulturnih vrednot. Članek, ki se opira na posthumanistično in dekolonialno teorijo, zagovarja razširjen pogled na subjektivnost, ki vključuje gozd kot sokonstitutivnega akterja v človeških in nečloveških zgodovinah.*

Ključni pojmi: *subjektiviteta gozdov, vladnost, biopolitika, arborizem, okoljska politologija.*