

## Forest

Call for Papers, *PERIPHERIE*, Issue 180 (to be published in Winter 2025)

As a result of the worsening ecological crisis, the diverse relationships between our societies and their supposedly ‘natural’ environments are increasingly being put to the test and demand a reorientation of our relationship with non-human living beings and the habitats we share. In this special issue, we would like to focus on one of these habitats, the forest. Although the forest usually only receives peripheral attention within the social sciences, it can be regarded as a social space in which the multiple social, political, economic and ecological crisis dimensions of the present crystallise and condense. However, European colonialism had already inscribed itself into the forests in the past: Fir and spruce from the Black Forest in particular were used to build the Dutch merchant fleet and German forestry was a colonial export in order to cultivate trees as a valuable raw material in their African ‘protected areas’. And the omnipresent concept of ‘sustainable development’ also has its origins in forestry.

Since at least the 1980s, forests in the Global South and North have been at the centre of the escalating climate crisis and often play a central role in social and political disputes (e.g. the ‘forest dieback’ in Central Europe or the deforestation of the Amazon). These disputes are still part of socio-ecological transformation conflicts today, which mostly revolve around the question of the preservation, social utilisation or appropriation of forests. For example, (natural) scientists argue that the preservation of forests and reforestation is a key instrument for curbing global warming. In addition, countless protests and social movements around the world are taking action to protect forests in various forms. Whether forests should be preserved or cut down, reforested or maintained, are questions that reflect different ideas (of nature), social power relations and political disputes. The US essayist Rebecca Solnit writes: ‘Whether trees should be cut down or preserved or maintained is decided in political battles.’ These political battles, which this special issue aims to explore, can take a variety of forms: the disputes over market-based emission certificates for forest protection measures in the Global South (REDD+), resistance to (neo) extractivist forestry industries (e.g. eucalyptus or pine plantations in Chile or Portugal), protests against deforestation as resistance to racist police violence (e.g. resistance to the clearing of a section of forest outside Atlanta in the USA for the construction of the Cop City police training centre) or forest occupations as a form of resistance to the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure (e.g. since the protests in Frankfurt a. M. to prevent the expansion of the airport in the 1980s or more recent forest occupations against the continuation or even expansion of lignite or gravel mining and

motorway expansion). Conflicts between indigenous groups and national majority populations are also often fought out in the shadow of forests. Demands for collective access and utilisation rights, the importance of forests as a habitat and the blanket attribution of belonging to the forest pose major challenges for the local population as well as national and international institutions, particularly in the countries of the Global South.

In addition to these lines of conflict, other current crisis constellations can be observed in the forest: In the course of militarised border regimes (especially in Europe and the USA), flight and migration routes are increasingly shifting to mostly heavily forested peripheral areas (e.g. in the border region between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the so-called Balkan route to Western Europe in Serbia or in the Darién forest between Colombia and Panama as the main migration route from South to North America). This relocation to forest areas increasingly exposes migrants and refugees to endangerment of life and limb due to climatic conditions or additional threats from security forces in extralegal areas. In addition, new lines of conflict are emerging between migrant and already resident groups, especially indigenous groups, whose relationship with the forest has already become precarious due to state intervention (e.g. in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh). Elsewhere, the coronavirus pandemic since spring 2020 can also be understood with a perspective on forests: on the one hand, the coronavirus as a zoonosis can itself be directly traced back to human intrusion into forest areas. On the other hand, forests and other recreational areas became popular places for human interaction and human attention towards the non-human environment, while conventional urban meeting places were almost completely deserted. The trees, it seemed, replaced the passages of the urban flâneur. Finally, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent energy price crisis, the forest and wood as a raw material also became increasingly relevant as an alternative source of energy, causing the price of firewood and forest land, among other things, to skyrocket.

All these contexts invite us to understand the forest not only as an ecological and certainly not 'natural' space, but also as a social, legalised and political space within current crisis dynamics. In this sense, this call for papers invites you to approach the topic of forests and the complex human-forest relationships from a social science perspective using different disciplinary, theoretical and methodological approaches and empirical case studies. The focus is not only on the ecological, epistemic or cosmological significance of forests, but also on their symbolic and political role in the context of climate change, resource use, economics, migration and environmental justice, as well as the diverse social practices in and with the forest (care work, recreation, etc.).

We look forward to contributions on the following topics:

- Social movements, protests and forest occupations for the preservation of forests or against extractivism in the Global North and the Global South as well as the connection between forests and climate justice (discourses around the importance of forests in the global climate crisis and questions of ecological responsibility as well as alternative forest use concepts).

- Political ecology of forests and political forests: Analysis of power relations and political conflicts over forest use, deforestation and access to resources, national and international political conflicts over forestry and climate policy.
- Indigenous, decolonial and feminist perspectives on forests, forest use, extractivism and land grabbing (e.g. perspectives on care labour, the concept of cuerpo territorio, etc.).
- Empirical and theoretical debates that explore and expand the relationships between the human/non-human environment using the example of the forest (actor-network theory, posthumanism, object-oriented ontology, etc.).
- Legal and ethical dimensions: Rights of nature and the legal implications of civil disobedience and environmental activism.
- Communitisation and forests: The interactions between urban development, periphery and forest areas and the role of forests in sustainable forms of communitisation, alternative lifestyles and development.

*The editorial deadline for articles is*  
15.05.2025.

Please send manuscripts, consultations on possible contributions and further questions to [info@zeitschrift-peripherie.de](mailto:info@zeitschrift-peripherie.de). Further information for authors can be downloaded from our website at <https://www.zeitschrift-peripherie.de>.