

Freeing the Forest: The Asynchronization of Partisan Ecology and Asylum Politics at the Polish-Belarusian Border

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How can a forest be read in relation to the way time is lived, manipulated, and experienced by humans? For many ecological activists the Białowieża Forest at the Polish-Belarusian border needs to be freed from traumatic history and experienced as ecology and natural history—in other words, deep time. For the Polish state and the Polish political right, the forest represents a battle for the soul of Polish sovereignty, where anti-communist partisans and border guards preserve Polish dignity, i.e., recursive and recovered nationalist time. And for humanitarian groups helping asylum seekers stay safe and alive in the gauntlet of pushbacks, there is the matter of split-second timing of rescues and the interminable time of waiting in a dark forest. This book project will explore a spatiotemporal set of kinship relations that need to be explored through the forest. It will synchronize forest temporality over a thirty-year span of my research, making my work a thought experiment on the cultural-symbolic nexus of entanglements, all aimed to free the forest in different ways.