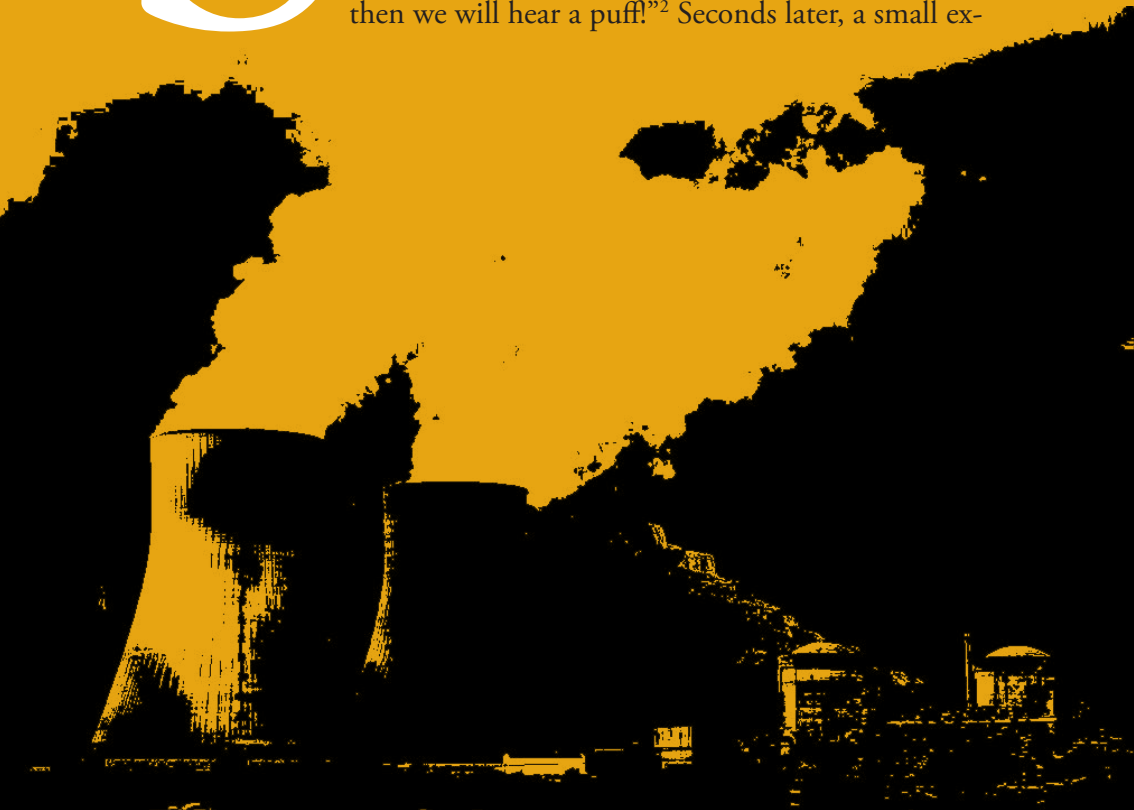


“Rather Active Today than Radioactive Tomorrow!” Environmental Justice and the Anti-Nuclear Movement in 1970s Wyhl, West Germany

Martin Kalb

Shortly before Christmas, old Mr. Hoppenstedt buys the board game “We are Building a Nuclear Power Plant”¹ for his grandson. While the youngster remains disinterested in the game, the rest of the family set up trees, houses, cows, and the neutron accelerator. Soon the miniature plant stands next to the Christmas tree in the living room. The mother of the family exclaims, “If we did something wrong then we will hear a puff!”² Seconds later, a small ex-



plosion leaves a hole in the floor allowing the Hoppenstedt family to wish their neighbors below a Merry Christmas 1978. This seemingly surreal scene from a skit by well-known German comedian Loriot captured contemporary debates. Meant as a comedic contribution to the widespread discussion on nuclear power, its broader implications remain closer to actual events than is generally acknowledged. In a time when anti-nuclear protests were erupting in various regions of West Germany, those interested in an increase in nuclear power relied on a variety of measures to battle a growing skepticism. In one of the first major disputes over the construction of a nuclear power plant in Wyhl, southwest Germany, a business lobby actually did offer small models of nuclear plants equipped with many colorful lamps to schools for educational purposes.³ By then, nuclear energy had become a highly controversial issue and the stage was set for an anti-nuclear tradition that continues to define Germany to this day.

The following discussion proposes a new theoretical framework for analyzing the origins and beginnings of the anti-nuclear movement in West Germany. Inspired by recent shifts within the scholarship, this essay draws on environmental justice theory as a means to capture the nuances of the early anti-nuclear movement. Broadly defined, environmental justice can be a powerful and useful framework to shed some light on this highly complex and heterogeneous movement. Acknowledging a unique German understanding of nature as *Heimat* or homeland is key when trying to elucidate the roots and complexities of the anti-nuclear movement in Wyhl and beyond.

Scholars from numerous fields have discussed the evolution of the anti-nuclear movement in countless publications. Whereas participants and activists initially dominated discussions,⁴ scholars soon began to

¹ Loriot (Vicco von Bülow), *Loriot, Sein Großes Sketch-Archiv*, Radio Bremen, Hamburg 1997.

² Ibid.

³ B. Nössler, "Die Besetzung geht weiter", in *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends: betroffene Bürger berichten*, B. Nössler, M. de Witt (eds), Freiburg, Dreisam 1981, p. 125.

⁴ Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., pp. 7-9. N. Gladitz (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv*, Verlag

put forward a more nuanced range of interpretations. Although historians today duly acknowledge the importance of earlier events,⁵ Wyhl still claims center stage in studies focusing on *Bürgerinitiativen* (citizen initiatives) as well as the rise of the anti-nuclear movement.⁶ The growth of environmental history and the recent success of the anti-nuclear movement allowed scope for additional discussions, although these remained limited when it comes to theoretical underpinnings.

The following essay aims to address these shortcomings. It is divided into three main parts. Part I briefly discusses and defines environmental justice. Grounded in the work of political theorist David Schlosberg, the proposed definition moves beyond a traditional understanding of environmental justice as the unequal distribution of environmental goods and bads. Part II then relates this environmental justice framework to German discussions of *Umweltgerechtigkeit*. The definition of nature as *Heimat* and cultural, social, and geographical differences are key within this discussion. Finally, Part III applies this definition to a specific local struggle. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, the essay aims to paint a complex picture of the events that helped trigger off the anti-nuclear movement. The focus is on the self-perception of individual protestors and their understandings of the larger context. The conclusion outlines possibilities embedded within the application of environmental justice theory beyond the events in Wyhl, illustrating the broader potential of an environmental justice framework for historical scholarship.

Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin 1976. H. Wüstenhagen, *Bürger gegen Kernkraftwerke: Wyhl – der Anfang?*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1975.

⁵ S. Chaney, *Nature of the Miracle Years: Conservation in West Germany, 1945-1975*, Berghahn Books, New York 2008. M. Bergmeier, *Umweltgeschichte der Boomjahre 1949-1973. Das Beispiel Bayern*, Waxmann, Munich/Berlin/Münster/New York 2002.

⁶ On environmental history (*Umweltgeschichte*) in Germany in the context of the anti-nuclear movement see, for instance, Ch. Hillengaß, *Atomkraft und Protest: Die politische Wirkung der Anti-AKW-Bewegung in Deutschland, Frankreich und Schweden*, Oekom-Verlag, Munich 2011.

Defining Environmental Justice

Simply put, environmental justice is about humans, justice, and the environment, while ecological justice is about the environment, justice, and humans. Rooted in these differences in emphasis, innovative definitions of nature and the environment originally emerged in the United States. According to these definitions, the environment is “the place where we live, work and play”⁷ and could be “defined to include all aspects of the social and natural environment”.⁸ Whereas this framework generally perceives humans as part of the environment, nature is often thought of as an intrinsic value, underlining connections between the two approaches.

Discussions focusing on justice are equally multifaceted. In the words of one scholar, “justice’ is complex” and “both the idea of justice and environmental problems are among the most important issues of modern times”.⁹ Most scholars dealing with environmental justice are primarily interested in justice towards humans and nature, and espouse John Rawls’s liberal conception of justice. Rawls, one of the leading figures in moral and political philosophy, attempted to reconcile equality and liberty. He concentrated on justice as fairness and saw equity as central to all discussions.¹⁰ In consequence, environmental justice theory has been likewise focusing on equity

⁷ P. Novotny, *Where We Live, Work and Play: The Environmental Justice Movement and the Struggle for a New Environmentalism*, Praeger, Westport/London 2000.

⁸ K. Bosselmann, B. Richardson (eds), *Environmental Justice and Market Mechanisms: Key Challenges for Environmental Law and Policy*, Kluwer Law International, The Hague/London/Boston 1999, p. 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 1971. For an overview of the growth of environmental justice as a theoretical and practical approach in the United States, see, for instance, R. Bullard, *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco 1994. B. Bryant, P. Mohai (eds), *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, Westview Press, Boulder 1992. L. Cole, S. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*, New York University Press, New York/London 2001.

or the equal distribution of environmental goods and bads, all while emphasizing fairness between humans and nature.

Discussions around environmental justice rooted in these definitions originally emerged in the United States. Here, questions like “why do some communities get dumped on while others don’t?”¹¹ were at the center of the discourse. Triggered off by Robert Bullard and his groundbreaking study *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and the Quality of the Environment*,¹² discussions and movements at the local level were especially bent on exposing environmental racism and classism. Gender inequalities played into these discussions as environmental justice theory spread around the world and was used to address numerous issues.¹³

More recently, the widespread focus on equity rooted in Rawls’s definition of justice has been challenged. Notably, political theorist David Schlosberg has broadened conventional definitions by incorporating issues of justice beyond equity. Clearly taking a more pragmatic approach, Schlosberg grounds his work on self-definitions of movements as widely portrayed by other scholars and activists. In addition to equity, he focuses on three aspects: (1) the importance of recognition for local groups, (2) the significance of participation in political processes, and (3) the need for capabilities or community functioning.¹⁴

Recognition of local groups plays a key role in broader understandings of environmental justice theory. According to numerous scholars, the respect for and acknowledgement of individuals, com-

¹¹ J. Agyeman, R. Bullard, B. Evans (eds), *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 2.

¹² R. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, Westview Press, Boulder 1990.

¹³ Intragenerational, intergenerational, and equity between humans and nature are key concepts within this larger framework. Sustainable development is essential when talking about equity and future generations (intergenerational). Justice to nature or ecological justice is important with reference to the equal distribution between species. As formulated by John Rawls and outlined by Brian Baxter, nature cannot partake in a social contract, which ultimately limits this discourse. B. Baxter, *A Theory of Ecological Justice*, Routledge, London 2005, p. 77.

¹⁴ D. Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2007.

munities, and nature is essential for understanding social movements. Such discussions regarding recognition in contrast to oppression are rooted in the work of scholars like Iris Young and Nancy Fraser. Whereas both conceptions are deeply intertwined with procedural justice, individuals and communities also need to be recognized and acknowledged as equal partners in political processes.¹⁵ As Schlosberg points out, this aspect is important when talking about traditional groups exposed to environmental injustices like minorities, the poor, or simply those who do not have a voice in discussions.

The participation of individuals, groups, and nature within democratic processes is another crucial factor. As outlined by political scientists Luke Cole and Sheila Foster, equal participation in the decision-making process is important for social movements.¹⁶ Biologist and philosopher Kristin Shrader-Frechette notes in this context that environmental justice groups continually “argue for correcting unequal opportunities to participate in environmental decision-making”.¹⁷ Speaking for oneself is eminent in this context and connected to the reliance on democratic processes as the basis for governmental legitimacy.¹⁸ In addition, Schlosberg does acknowledge

¹⁵ I. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990. Id., “Communication and the Other”, in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting Boundaries of the Political*, S. Benhabib (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996. Id., *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2000. N. Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation”, in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, G. Peterson (ed.), University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 1998. Id., “Rethinking Recognition”, in *New Left Review*, 3, May/June, 2000, pp.107-120. Id., “Recognition without Ethics?”, in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18, 2001, pp. 21-42.

¹⁶ Cole, Foster, *From the Ground Up* cit.

¹⁷ K. Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2002, p. 5.

¹⁸ G. Di Chiro, “Defining Environmental Justice: Women’s Voices and Grassroots Politics”, in *Socialist Review*, 22, 4, 1992, pp. 93-131, here, p. 98. Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice* cit. Id., “Living Environmentalism: Coalition Politics, Social Reproduction, and Environmental Justice”, in *Environmental Politics*, 17, 2, 2008, pp. 276-298. The inclusion of justice into a discourse on sustainability also deserves mentioning when conceptualizing a broader framework. See: Agyeman, Bullard, Evans, *Just Sustainability* cit.

the need to include nature. He notes, “participatory parity for nature and political participation of the nonhuman would not strictly mean votes for animals; the goal is more broadly the recognition of the consideration of the natural world in human decision-making”.¹⁹ Whereas such statements underline the increasing fusion of environmental and ecological justice, it also illustrates the interconnectivity between equity, participation, recognition, and procedural justice.

A focus on the capabilities of individuals and communities in their relationship with nature concludes this more practical approach towards understanding environmental justice. Grounded in the work of philosophers Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, these conceptions highlight the importance of potential prospects and community functioning while exhuming injustices and emphasizing possible solutions. Even in cases where there is no unjust distribution of environmental goods and bads, inequality can prevail if community functioning is jeopardized. This inclusion of capabilities does not simply see economic resources as important but also takes account of the ability to use them effectively, and for the benefit of the community at large.²⁰ According to Schlosberg, the “language of capabilities and functioning can also be applied to the natural world in a theory of ecological justice”.²¹ “If the capabilities approach is about flourishing”, he argues, “and most animals flourish in particular environments, flourishing in this respect means contributing to the set of relationships that make up, and support, the system as a whole”.²² Such a broad understanding of connections mirrored in definitions

¹⁹ Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice* cit., p. 158.

²⁰ A. Sen, “Capability and Well-Being”, in *The Quality of Life*, A. Sen, M. Nussbaum (eds), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992. Id., “Human Rights and Capabilities”, in *Journal of Human Development*, 6, 2, 2005, pp. 151-166. M. Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion and Humanity’: Justice for Nonhuman Animals”, in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, C. Sunstein, M. Nussbaum (eds), Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 2004. Id., *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2006. See also: Di Chiro, *Living Environmentalism* cit.

²¹ Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice* cit., p. 143.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

of environmental justice clearly allows a more coherent and pragmatic conception of the larger framework. It also provides space for social, cultural, and geographical specificities, thereby paving the way for the use of environmental justice theory in other contexts.

Environmental Justice as *Umweltgerechtigkeit* in Germany

Understandings of environmental justice in Germany are still in flux. Slowly on the rise since the 1990s, discussions in the United States have clearly influenced this framework. Starting from the premise that a simple translation of the terminology of environmental and ecological justice is not a sufficient starting point, debates about specific notions and understandings of various translations of the German terms *Umwelt* (environment) and *Gerechtigkeit* (justice) continue to influence discussions. So far, scholars from numerous fields have made efforts to come up with definitions for conceptions of justice and nature in Germany. These attempts include *geographische Umweltgerechtigkeit* (geographical environmental justice)²³ and *ökologische Gerechtigkeit* (ecological justice), the latter primarily used to include both environmental and ecological justice.²⁴ Scholars also employ the terms *umweltbezogene Gerechtigkeit* (justice towards the environment)²⁵ or simply *Umweltgerechtigkeit* (environmental justice).²⁶

²³ M. Klopfer, “Environmental Justice und geographische Umweltgerechtigkeit”, in *Deutsches Verwaltungsblatt*, 115, 11, 2000, pp. 750-754, here p. 750.

²⁴ K. Bosselmann, M. Schröter, *Umwelt und Gerechtigkeit: Leitlinien einer ökologischen Gesetzgebung*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden 2001, p. 37 and p. 16.

²⁵ A. Mielck, J. Heinrich, ‘*Environmental Justice*’ (*Umweltbezogene Gerechtigkeit*): *Faire Verteilung von Umweltbelastungen auf die verschiedenen Bevölkerungsgruppen*, GSF Forschungszentrum für Umwelt und Gesundheit, Neuherberg 2001. Id., “Soziale Ungleichheit und die Verteilung umweltbezogener Expositionen (Environmental Justice)”, in *Das Gesundheitswesen*, 64, 7, 2002, pp. 405-416.

²⁶ W. Maschwesky, *Umweltgerechtigkeit, Public Health und soziale Stadt*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Frankfurt 2001. Id., *Umweltgerechtigkeit: Gesundheitsrelevant und empirische Erfassung*, WZB, Berlin 2004.

Most recently, the term *Umweltgerechtigkeit* has become more widely accepted. Well-known scholars like Werner Maschwesky, Stephen Elkin, and Horst-Dietrich Elvers have convincingly argued in favor of this term.²⁷ In addition, *Umweltgerechtigkeit* has been widely used by environmental organizations and activists.²⁸ *Umweltgerechtigkeit* has also seen an application beyond its traditional use. The term has been used in the context of health issues, spatial planning, or its larger effect

²⁷ Ibid. S. Elkins, “‘Umweltgerechtigkeit’: Das Umweltgerechte und die soziale Gerechtigkeit. Dimensionen eines gesellschaftlichen Spannungsfeldes”, in *Die Natur der Gesellschaft: Verhandlungen des 33. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Kassel 2006*, 2 Bde, K.-S. Rehberg, D. Giesecke, T. Dumke (eds), Campus, Frankfurt-New York 2008.

H.-D. Elvers, “Umweltgerechtigkeit als Forschungsparadigma der Soziologie”, in *Soziologie*, 37, 2007, pp. 21-44. See also H. Köckler, “Coping Strategies of Households Exposed to Unequal Environmental Quality in Germany”, Paper for the 4th Global Conference, *Environmental Justice and Global Citizenship: Environments, Sustainability and Technologies*, Oxford July 2005. C. Hornberg, A. Pauli (eds), *Fachtagung: Umweltgerechtigkeit – die soziale Verteilung von gesundheitsrelevanten Umweltbelastungen*, Dokumentation der Fachtagung vom 27. bis 28. Oktober 2008, Universität Bielefeld, Berlin 2008, available on the web at: <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/gesundhw/umweltgerechtigkeit/>, (last accessed 11/28/2008).

²⁸ Based on a Google search (11/02/2008) and following the approach of K. Bosselmann, the term *Umweltgerechtigkeit* (ca. 194,000 hits) is most common in Germany. The second most common is *environmental justice* (ca. 17,800 hits), followed by *ökologische Gerechtigkeit* (4,020 hits) and *umweltbezogene Gerechtigkeit* (636 hits). A brief follow-up survey (9/13/2012) brought the following results: *Umweltgerechtigkeit* (ca. 949,000 hits); *ökologische Gerechtigkeit* (ca. 584,000 hits), *umweltbezogene Gerechtigkeit* (ca. 33,500 hits). K. Bosselmann, “Ecological Justice and Law”, in *Environmental Law for Sustainability: A Reader*, B. Richardson, S. Wood (eds), Hart Publishing, Oxford/ Portland 2006, p. 129. Only some environmental groups include *Umweltgerechtigkeit* in their agenda. In 2008 (10/25 – 11/02/2008), I conducted a preliminary analysis of major environmental organizations with the status of *eingetragener Verein* (e.V., “registered associations”). According to this analysis, the interest in *Umweltgerechtigkeit* or like issues was surprisingly low. The included organizations were: BUND, NABU, Robin Wood, DUH, Naturfreunde, Grüne Liga, Greenpeace, and WWF, and was based on their Internet presence. Governmental organizations seemed more interested, while the Green Party itself remained surprisingly inactive. A brief follow-up study conducted in 2012 (04/09-04/11/2012) detected a growing interest in the larger field, although *Umweltgerechtigkeit* remained the preferred term.

on society, allowing scholars like Heike Köckler to expose unequal environmental quality when it comes to housing.²⁹ *Umweltgerechtigkeit* thus starts from a broader basis compared to original discussions within the United States, which brings it closer to Schlosberg's definition.

To characterize *Umweltgerechtigkeit* is more difficult. The most influential scholars working on this subject agree that equity is at the core of *Umweltgerechtigkeit*. The main focus of this discourse remains the unjust distribution of environmental goods and bads within subfields like the public health sector. Class plays a larger role than race, although connections between the two need to be explored further. The unequal distribution of environmental goods and bads within generations (intragenerational), between different generations (intergenerational), and between humans and the non-human world (interspecies) is also essential. An emphasis on intragenerational justice is evident given the visibility of future generations, while intergenerational justice is addressed by *nachhaltiger Entwicklung* (sustainable development). Debates on justice towards nature are extremely diverse as well, and include animal rights and *Umweltschutz* (the preservation of ecosystems/nature). Other defining aspects of justice have seen surprisingly little attention. For instance, only some scholars refer specifically to *Verfahrensgerechtigkeit* (procedural justice), an aspect of justice partly connected to recognition, participation, and equity. Instead, connections with rather progressive environmental laws in Germany overshadow discussions. In this sense, *Umweltgerechtigkeit* does not view recognition, participation, or capabilities as essential components of justice.³⁰

Specific understandings of nature as *Heimat* need to play a more central role in discussions of *Umweltgerechtigkeit*. Historians David Blackburn and historian Sandra Chaney remain among the few who

²⁹ On the broader use of *Umweltgerechtigkeit* (health, spatial planning, and society) see also: W. Maschewsky, *Umweltgerechtigkeit*, available on the web at: <http://www.umweltgerechtigkeit.del>. Köckler, *Coping Strategies* cit. Elkins, "Umweltgerechtigkeit" cit.

³⁰ See, for instance, K.-W. Brand, *Politik der Nachhaltigkeit: Voraussetzungen, Probleme, Chancen – eine kritische Diskussion*, Edition Sigma, Berlin 2002.

incorporate *Heimat* into their analysis when discussing environmental history. In their view, *Heimat* is almost the equivalent of nature. Chaney's study on early post-WW II conservation movements, for instance, focuses on discussions of *Heimatschutz* (protection of the homeland). Blackburn problematizes the term a little more, yet also limits himself to traditional understandings.³¹ But *Heimat* is more than just nature. It is a complex discourse embedded in German identity. Historian Celia Applegate provides some insights into these complexities in her study on *Heimatvereine* or community groups.³² Theorist Peter Blickle adds several nuances as he focuses on a total of six notions of *Heimat*. His discussion of *Heimat* "through notions of nature and landscape"³³ is a good starting point for conceptualizing this term. As a discourse, *Heimat* is characterized by a deep connection to home and nature. Yet it also incorporates notions of a simple and idyllic livelihood within a well-protected community. According to a recent discussion in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, *Heimat* is a feeling, a connection to food, culture, and nature. Interference with this inherent German feeling of being connected to one's heritage and nature could thus easily fuel protest movements.³⁴

To argue for the utilization of the term *Umweltgerechtigkeit* as the proper definition for a broad environmental and ecological justice discourse in Germany achieves three objectives. First, the German

³¹ Chaney, *Nature of the Miracle Years* cit., p. 9. D. Blackburn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, Norton, New York 2006.

³² C. Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1990.

³³ P. Blickle, *A Critical Theory Of The German Idea Of Homeland*, Camden House, New York 2004.

³⁴ D. Kurbjuweit, "Mein Herz hüpf", in *Der Spiegel* 15/2012, available on the web at: <http://wissen.spiegel.de/wissen/image/show.html?did=84789668&caref=image051/2012/04/05/CO-SP-2012-015-0060-0069.PDF&tthumb=false>. See also *Der Spiegel*, available on the web at: <http://www.spiegel.de/flash/0,28406,00.html>, (last accessed April 7, 2012). E. Reitz, prod., *Heimat – A Chronicle of Germany*, Facets Video, Chicago 2005. See also German Historical Institute (ed.), "From Heimat to Umwelt: New Perspectives on German Environmental History", in *Bulletin*, 3, German Historical Institute, Washington D.C. 2006.

term *Umweltgerechtigkeit* is the most accurate translation of the original English expression. Since the discourse on environmental justice originated in the United States, it is indispensable to acknowledge this origin through the most literal possible translation. Secondly, the use of the term is widespread among scholars and activists alike, as is apparent in ongoing discussions. Preferring the most commonly used term seems the most practical and logical solution, given that environmental justice originally emerged “from the ground up”.³⁵ Finally, the German term *Umweltgerechtigkeit* expresses the combination of ecological and environmental justice in the most convincing way. According to German scholar Stephan Elkins, the term *Umweltgerechtigkeit* has two dimensions: social justice towards humans and adequate measures towards nature.³⁶ Accordingly, justice towards humans and justice to nature as *Heimat* are inherent in this term. Adoption of this term and the perspective it implies thus allows the inclusion of Schlosberg’s broader definition of environmental justice when analyzing local movements in Germany.

Umweltgerechtigkeit in Wyhl

The anti-nuclear movement in West Germany is rooted at the local level, making it an excellent case study for the application of *Umweltgerechtigkeit*. Initially, a variety of local ground-up initiatives questioned a seemingly widespread pro-nuclear energy consensus.³⁷ Yet soon the small rural town of Wyhl took center stage. As most scholars note, anti-nuclear protests established their “first [and] lasting stronghold”³⁸ in the Badische Upper Rhine area in southwest Germany. Within this context, a growing opposition in Wyhl and

³⁵ Cole, Foster, *From the Ground Up* cit.

³⁶ Elkins, *Umweltgerechtigkeit*’ cit., p. 3751.

³⁷ D. Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen: Deutschland, Frankreich und USA im Vergleich*, Campus, Frankfurt/New York 1994, p. 446. J. Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975: Verdrängte Alternativen in der Kerntechnik und der Ursprung der nuklearen Kontroverse*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1983, p. 439.

³⁸ Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit. p. 447.

the rise of numerous *Bürgerinitiativen* or community initiatives against the construction of a nuclear power plant marked the beginning of the anti-nuclear movement in West Germany.³⁹ By bringing national attention to growing protests, the events in Wyhl became the spark for a widespread movement.⁴⁰ As an early symbol that “sowed the seeds for a national anti-nuclear movement”,⁴¹ the actions in Wyhl inspired opposition in Brockdorf, Gorleben, and Wackersdorf, giving Wyhl a virtually mythical character.

Wyhl seemed an unlikely place for the cradle of the anti-nuclear movement. Located along the Rhine River a couple of miles away from the French border, this small town had only about 2,700 inhab-

³⁹ C. Joppke, *Mobilizing Against Nuclear Energy: A Comparison of Germany and the United States*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1993, p. 97. G. Zint, R. Paul (eds), “...und auch nicht anderswo!” *Die Geschichte der Anti-AKW-Bewegung*, Verlag Die Werkstatt, Göttingen 1997, p. 18. Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975* cit., p. 440. D. Rucht, “Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung”, in *Von der Bittschrift zur Platzbesetzung: Konflikte um technische Grossprojekte: Laufenburg, Walchensee, Wyhl, Wackersdorf*, unknown author (ed.), J.H.W. Dietz, Berlin 1988, pp. 158-164.

⁴⁰ Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 455. Hillengaß, *Atomkraft und Protest* cit., p. 27. Ibid, p. 447. Other scholars describe Wyhl as the “signal.” R. Paul, “Die Anti-AKW-Bewegung: Wie sie wurde was sie ist”, in Zint, Paul (eds), “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., p. 1. Anti-Nuclear protests had occurred prior to the events in Wyhl, an aspect highlighted within some scholarship “to limit the creation of legends.” See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 12. Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 446. H. Kitschelt, *Kernenergiepolitik: Arena eines gesellschaftlichen Konflikts*, Campus, Frankfurt 1980, p. 69. Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975* cit., p. 372. Participants of the movement in Wyhl underline the importance of Breisach for the growth of their own protests, describing it as “the unanticipated shift” (p. 30). E. Schillinger, “Breisach. Der Kampf beginnt”, in Nössler, de Witt, *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., pp. 29-33. See also: Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 447. W. Rüdiger, *Anti-Nuclear Movements: A World Survey of Opposition to Nuclear Energy*, Longman Current Affairs, Harlow 1990, p. 129. Radkau specifically names the protests in Würzgassen as the beginning of public protests against nuclear energy. Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975* cit., p. 446. For a chronology capturing many nuances of the anti-nuclear movement until 1997 see: R. Paul, “Chronologie des Widerstandes”, in Zint, Paul (eds) “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., pp. 46-160.

⁴¹ Rüdiger, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 135.

itants in the early 1970s.⁴² Locals mostly voted for the conservative party along with the majority in the state of Baden-Württemberg. Most also remained tied to their traditions and *Heimat* on many levels. Sited within vineyards, thick forests, and the flow of rivers and streams, Wyhl seemed like an ideal place for people favoring Catholic values, established traditions, and a conservative social order.⁴³

Plans to construct a nuclear power plant in Wyhl stirred up this idyllic space. These plans were part of a larger political consensus to expand the use of nuclear energy throughout West Germany. Initially disinterested, locals soon began to ask questions regarding the use of nuclear power in their backyard or *Heimat*.⁴⁴ For reasons to be explored in the following, the community increasingly split over the issue. After initial opposition at various information and town-hall meetings, protestors organized in *Bürgerinitiativen*. Many participated in demonstrations, blockades, and even the occupation of the building site. Passive resistance, peaceful blockades, and, at times, violent skirmishes made the construction site the frontline of protests against what appeared to many as an undemocratic decision-making process. For local and state authorities, these conflicts became inconvenient and disruptive. Combined with legal measures and petitions, a growing opposition put pressure onto officials and kept slowing down the project. Even though it took until 1994 for the state government to officially stop plans to build the plant,⁴⁵ the dedication of the Wyhl movement fueled protests well beyond this very small town in Baden-Württemberg.⁴⁶

⁴² Rucht, *Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung* cit., pp. 141-142.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Id., *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 405. Initially there was little interest in the use of nuclear energy. See: Ibid., p. 443.

⁴⁵ Hillengaß, *Atomkraft und Protest* cit., p. 27.

⁴⁶ Rucht, *Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung* cit., pp. 133-135. Dieter Rucht distinguishes between argumentative debates (p. 147), judicial debates (p. 149), and political debates (p. 154), thus capturing the scope of this conflict. Ibid., pp. 147-157. The conception of being “vor Ort” (right there) was key for those participating in and learning from the events. W. Sternstein, *Überall ist Wyhl. Bürgerinitiativen gegen Atomanlagen. Aus der Arbeit eines Aktionsforschers*, Haag Herrchen, Frankfurt 1978, p. 3.

Inspired by this straightforward storyline, scholars have described the protests in Wyhl as little more than the starting point of the anti-nuclear movement. Initially, participants and former protestors shared their views in publications. Hoping to provide an alternative assessment of the events, they also became the first to investigate, revisit, and interpret discussions.⁴⁷ Some saw *Bürgerinitiativen* as “a yardstick for evaluating democratic processes.”⁴⁸ Others, including historian Joachim Radkau, moved beyond such interpretations, noting that “the struggle about nuclear energy was and remains a real discourse, the biggest and most deep open discourse within the history of the federal republic so far.”⁴⁹ Surprisingly, given its publication year, Radkau’s 1983 publication *Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Atomkraft 1945-1975* remains the most in-depth analysis of the topic at large.⁵⁰ Over time, scholars also analyzed various grassroots movements similar to the protests in Wyhl in the context of the *Neue Soziale Bewegung* or new social movement.⁵¹ Connections to

⁴⁷ Wyhl and the growing anti-nuclear movement played a key role in the rise of alternative media outlets, including publications like “Atom Express” or “anti-akw-telegramm”. See, for instance: Zint, Paul (eds), “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., p. 13. The most notable case of a scholar being involved in the actual protests remains that of Wüstenhagen. For an overview regarding historiography see also: F. Uekoetter, *Umweltgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Oldenbourg, Munich 2007, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁸ Wüstenhagen, *Bürger gegen Kernkraftwerke* cit., p. 9.

⁴⁹ J. Radkau, “Die Kernkraft-Konstrove im Spiegel der Literatur”, in *Das Ende des Atomzeitalters?*, A. Hermann, R. Schuhmacher (eds), Moos & Partner, Munich 1987, p. 397.

⁵⁰ Id., *Aufstieg und Krise* cit. See also: id., *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008. As Verena Winiwater and Martin Knoll rightfully point out, even the events in Chernobyl have seen little in-depth analysis. V. Winiwater, M. Knoll, *Umweltgeschichte: Eine Einführung*, Böhlau, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2007. Recent publications do not see protests against nuclear power as a major turning point in environmental history, and give little room to larger discussions. See namely: F. Uekoetter (ed.), *The Turning Points of Environmental History*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2010. J.D. Hughes, *What is Environmental History?*, Polity, Cambridge 2006.

⁵¹ Hillengaß even connects it to the *Außerparlamentarischen Opposition* (extra-parliamentary opposition, APO). Hillengaß, *Atomkraft und Protest* cit., p. 83.

the Green Party seemed apparent.⁵² Different chronologies emerged, with most seeing Wyhl as the beginning of a larger movement. The most recent scholarship perceives Wyhl as the starting point of a long struggle against nuclear energy concluded by Germany's most recent withdrawal from nuclear energy altogether.⁵³ Beyond this role within larger discussions and some comparative analyses, Wyhl has seen surprisingly little attention.⁵⁴

Umweltgerechtigkeit as a broad theoretical framework provides an avenue and case in point to deepen our understanding of the events in Wyhl, especially since connections to traditional conceptions of environmental justice are less evident within Wyhl. Although discussions regarding the unequal distribution of environmental goods and bads were vital for the self-perception of protestors, issues of race, class, and gender played only limited roles in the distribution of environmental bads. Furthermore, in what was a time of economic renewal, there was a widespread perception of nuclear energy as a promising and exciting new technology. Inhabitants of Wyhl and its surrounding areas should have embraced this supposedly clean way to generate energy, spark industrialization, and bring jobs. According to authorities and officials in favor of the plan, nuclear power would make the area a second Ruhr valley, bringing prosperity to all within the region. The limits of participation, recognition, and community capabilities, on the other hand, are clearly visible. The use of *Umweltgerechtigkeit* as a framework of analysis also leaves room for the specific nuances within

⁵² Zint, Paul (eds), "...und auch nicht anderswo!" cit., p. 24.

⁵³ See also: Hillengaß, *Atomkraft und Protest* cit., p. 79. On German scholarship and as an example of a three-phase chronology, see: D. Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben: Bürger gegen Atomprogramm und nukleare Entsorgung*, Beck, Munich 1980. U. Linse, R. Falter, D. Rucht, W. Kretschmer, *Von der Bittschrift zur Platzbesetzung. Konflikte um technische Großprojekte. Laufenburg, Walchensee, Wyhl, Wackersdorf*, Diets, Berlin/Bonn 1988. Joppke, *Mobilizing Against Nuclear Energy* cit. Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit.

⁵⁴ For an example for a comparative study see: Joppke, *Mobilizing Against Nuclear Energy* cit. For a broad though partially outdated overview regarding studies on protests against nuclear energy, see also: Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 407.

each regional and historical setting. In Wyhl, notions of *Heimat* are particularly powerful, given the rural, agricultural, and idyllic character of the area. Moreover, the application of environmental justice theory as a whole seems fitting when it comes to understanding the formation, use, and power of *Bürgerinitiativen*. By focusing on aspects beyond equity, *Umweltgerechtigkeit* ultimately provides a more nuanced explanation and analysis of protests in Wyhl.

Although equity in the traditional sense played a minor role, inhabitants protesting against the construction of the plant felt treated unjustly. Drawing on a widespread rhetoric that is also apparent in other environmental justice movements, they did not want a nuclear power plant in their backyard or *Heimat*. As one contemporary slogan read, “No nuclear power plant in Wyhl or anywhere else!”⁵⁵ Opponents soon framed broad alliances around these sentiments and attitudes with other communities even beyond the German border, thereby giving the movement a solid foundation.⁵⁶ There were broad similarities here with the widespread not-in-anybody’s-backyard attitude,⁵⁷ especially since those against the plant primarily protested due to a lack of recognition and participation, as well what they perceived as a threat against their communities or *Heimat*.

The authorities’ exclusion of local communities from the decision-making process was evident from the start, and was perceived as a spiteful dismissal. As sociologist Dieter Rucht has rightfully pointed out, “The nuclear lobby reacted more amazed than concerned”.⁵⁸ In other words, those in charge simply did not anticipate opposition. As a result, authorities pushed for their plans to set up numerous nuclear power plants along the Rhine River, largely hidden from the public eye. In their view, there was a widespread consensus and as elected officials they had the legitimacy to implement broadly supported poli-

⁵⁵ Zint, Paul (eds), “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., p. 18.

⁵⁶ For reference to France and Switzerland see, for example, the Verbund badisch-elsässischen Initiativen. Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 448. Rüdiger, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 132.

⁵⁷ This NIMBY-attitude made the situation in Wyhl a concern for many local inhabitants. See, for example: Sternstein, *Überall ist Wyhl* cit.

⁵⁸ Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 446.

cies. Hoping to create an industrial area similar to the Ruhr valley, they appeared to show little concern for the unease of inhabitants.⁵⁹

This lack of information and inclusion increasingly alienated the people. Farmers, winegrowers, and other local stakeholders confronted those in charge with unease and anxiety at information meetings.⁶⁰ Although these gatherings were generally understood as an initial attempt to soothe possible concerns, opponents of the nuclear power plant described them as one of many “unexpected turning points”.⁶¹ Meetings like the one in January 1972 failed to provide space to discuss the issues at hand and gave concerned citizens little room to ask questions and present their views. Instead of setting the stage for the endorsement of the larger project, the meeting underscored a lack of recognition and acknowledgment. Not surprisingly, it left concerned inhabitants uncomfortable and anxious. In this sense, the authorities clearly missed a chance to alleviate and possibly appease concerns early on.

A perceived arrogance of power and widespread corruption within the government strengthened dissenting voices. As apparent in countless descriptions that highlight the exclusion of the people’s voice, locals experienced the behaviors of government representatives like Minister Eberle as arrogant on several levels. As the representative of the government, he showed little interest in the concerns of the people, and did little to defuse the situation. Together with some local supporters and state minister Hans Filbinger, Eberle soon impersonated what was widely felt as the authorities’ detachment, arrogance, and belittling attitude in their dealings with ordinary people.⁶² For instance, many saw questionable motivations in the fact that the authorities scheduled several information meetings during the harvest season. The larger administrative setup of those responsible for the construction of the plant also fueled distrust towards elected officials

⁵⁹ Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975* cit., p. 449.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Gladitz (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv* cit., pp. 66-67. See also: Rucht, *Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung* cit., pp. 143-146.

and governmental authorities. Differently than in other Western industrial nations, in West Germany the government heavily subsidized the development of nuclear energy. Although major utility companies had been convinced of the profit margins of nuclear energy by the late 1960s, the federal and state government remained deeply involved. Once opposition dissected the inner workings of decision-making processes within the nuclear energy sector, this widely apparent entanglement between private corporations and government authorities became all the more reason to question rosy promises.⁶³ In the context of Wyhl, for instance, major elected officials sat on the board of directors for the company building the plant, and the state itself owned three-quarters of the utility company Badenwerk. This in turn meant that the state owned 50 percent of the corporation Kernkraftwerk Süd GmbH, the company responsible for building the power plant in Wyhl.⁶⁴ As activist scholar Reimar Paul explains, “nuclear technology [in West Germany] remained the most obvious and broad embodiment of anonymous, self-perpetuating, social and political removal from control mechanisms”.⁶⁵ Soon basic autonomy from those in charge seemed impossible to maintain, because for opponents those conducting “independent research”⁶⁶ all appeared to be part of the larger fusion of private corporations and the government. As political scientist Wolfgang Rüdig concluded, in this context legitimacy was “severely undermined by doubts about the independence of the

⁶³ Such subsidies existed mainly due to concern for the financial risks private corporations were exposed to. See: Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 444. In 1967, the first commercial nuclear power plant was built. In that same year, authorities invested in an ambitious third nuclear power program that cost 5 billion DM. The energy crisis of 1973 sped up these efforts. The ultimate goal was to derive 40% of total energy from nuclear power. *Ibid.*, pp. 444-445.

⁶⁴ On connections between politicians and companies see: Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 131. See also: Schillinger, “Breisach”, in Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., p. 32.

⁶⁵ Paul, *Die Anti-AKW-Bewegung* cit., p. 16.

⁶⁶ Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 131. See also: B. Nössler, “Das Genehmigungsverfahren”, in Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., p. 46.

licensing authority”.⁶⁷ This situation augmented an already growing distrust within the citizenry, as many local residents felt increasingly cheated by an arrogant, corrupt, undemocratic, and unjust system.⁶⁸

Surprised to face local resistance, the authorities seemed to actively avoid opportunities to include the general public. Their inability to adjust, accommodate, or simply act soon became apparent. Fearing the unpredictable consequences of an open dialogue with the populace, those in favor of the plant simply moved forward or made only slight changes to existing procedures. No attempts were made to include the public. On July 13, 1973, the local population found out about the decision to build the plant in Wyhl over the radio. The news came as a surprise and shocked many.⁶⁹ Locals described the event as a “bolt out of nowhere”.⁷⁰ They saw the exclusion of their voices and input with growing anger. Disenchantment soon took over. As one contemporary noted, “it does not surprise me that they [the regional government officials] make decisions behind the back of the citizens”.⁷¹ This helplessness in combination with the perception of elected officials and authorities as “arrogant and condescending”⁷² is widely supported by scholarship on this topic and underlines the growing rift between opponents and supporters of the plant.⁷³

Limited attempts by authorities to include citizens after the decision seemed hollow. Faced with disregard and exclusion, local residents again found that “the [state] government in Stuttgart wanted to make the nuclear power plant a reality even against the will of those protesting.”⁷⁴ The authorities granted insufficient space for opposing

⁶⁷ Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 131.

⁶⁸ Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975* cit., p. 196. Schillinger, *Breisach* cit., p. 32.

⁶⁹ Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., pp. 448-449.

⁷⁰ B. Nössler, “Die Auseinandersetzung um das KKW Wyhl”, in Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., p. 35.

⁷¹ Ibid. See also: Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 130.

⁷² Schillinger, *Breisach* cit., p. 32.

⁷³ Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 131. Rucht, *Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung* cit., p. 130.

⁷⁴ Schillinger, *Breisach* cit., p. 31. Nössler, *Das Genehmigungsverfahren* cit., p. 36.

voices in ongoing discussions and, in general, continued to do little to defuse legitimate concerns. At the first community meeting in Wyhl on July 22, those in favor of the plant dominated discussions. The meeting began at 8 p.m. Critical voices were not allowed to voice their concerns until late that night. Many participants in this meeting exposed references to more jobs and revenue for the region as exaggerations.⁷⁵ Various incidents that occurred in the heat of debates left opponents disillusioned. At one public forum, for example, the representatives of the authorities turned off the microphone when an upset citizen tried to voice his views. The timing of meetings and their being dominated by disconnected technocrats also upset the local opposition. In one instance, opponents perceived comments by professor Sigel as “audacious and inane”.⁷⁶ Sigel had indicated that grapevine needed less sun than potatoes and would thrive even if steam from the plant decreased exposure to sunlight in the valley, a ridiculous statement in the minds of winegrowers tied to the land for generations. In this sense, and to follow Rüdig’s analysis, abstract and disconnected “theoretical deliberations clashed vehemently with the wine growers’ personal experiences”.⁷⁷ For concerned citizens such incidents merely underlined, as contemporary social commentator on nuclear energy Ralph Gräub pointed out, that “the problem of nuclear power stations should not be judged by experts and biased scientists alone”.⁷⁸ The formation of a *Bürgerinitiative* rooted in anxieties, a lack of recognition, and the limits to participation eventually gave a voice to the voiceless and helpless, and seemed only logical for those desperately trying to be heard by decision-makers.

⁷⁵ The local government promised jobs, cheap energy, and community projects like a tennis court and a public swimming pool. According to state president Filbinger, “without nuclear power, the lights go off”. Die Anti-AKW-Bewegung: Wie sie wurde was sie ist”, in Zint, Paul, “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., p. 16.

⁷⁶ Schillinger, *Breisach* cit., p. 30.

⁷⁷ Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 130.

⁷⁸ R. Gräub, *The Gentle Killers: Nuclear Power Stations*, Abelard-Schuman, London 1974, p. 184. See also: Sternstein, *Wyhl ist Überall* cit., p. 7. Nössler, *Das Genehmigungsverfahren* cit., p. 49. Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 130. Rucht, *Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung* cit., pp. 131-133.

Beyond the exclusion of opponents, participatory processes left open to the public underlined the passive role assigned to protesters. Those opposing the plant could collect signatures and submit numerous petitions. However, such democratic processes relied on the willingness of officials to accept petitions. Distrust spread once rumors surfaced that governmental officials were supposedly refusing to do so. These incidents amongst others underline growing misgivings and a lack of trust regarding existing democratic processes. The *Bürgerentscheid* or public consultation put on the ballot in 1974 also indicated the limits of participation. Citizens of Wyhl voted to answer the question “if an area held by the community could be sold for the purpose of building a nuclear power plant or become connected in any way to the plant”.⁷⁹ In the view of opponents, it was continuing interference by those in favor of the plant plus the decision to use the land no matter what citizens of Wyhl voted for that forged the outcome of the consultation. For them, the referendum seemed far removed from being a true democratic process. Instead, they interpreted the turnout of 92% and a tight race with only 55% in favor of giving up land as sufficient evidence in support of widespread opposition.⁸⁰ Whereas many saw the construction of a nuclear power plant in their backyard as an injustice, it is the perceived arrogance of those in power, a corrupt system, and constant neglect for the voices of the people that gave the opposition its cohesiveness and motivation.

In an attempt to gain influence, protesters set up an organizational structure known as the *Bürgerinitiative*, and thus gave themselves a collective identity. The *Bürgerinitiative* coordinated submission of signatures, petitions, and lawsuits, all efforts reflecting some willingness to rely on officially accepted means to influence decisions. The

⁷⁹ B. Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl”, in unknown author (ed.), *Von der Bittschrift zur Platzbesetzung cit.*, p. 67. A letter by Hans Filbinger tried to dismiss concerns. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ Nössler, *Das Genehmigungsverfahren cit.*, p. 75. On accusation of forging, see: *Ibid.*, p. 78. The referendum took place on January 12, 1975: 55% yes, 43.2% no, 92,3% turnout. *Ibid.*, p. 78. See also: Rüdiger, *Anti-Nuclear Movements cit.*, p. 132. Nössler, *Das Genehmigungsverfahren cit.*, p. 46.

subsequent blockade around and occupation of the building site, however, demonstrated a readiness to move beyond failing routes of protest, and also forged a sense of community and identity. Camping out there the woods, many began to realize that they were not alone in their protest. Locals from numerous surrounding villages brought meals and whatever was necessary to sustain the effort, and the press and visitors from other regions stopped by to see the resistance. The occupiers became more and more organized, and even set up a school.⁸¹ Described by Rucht as a “school of resistance,”⁸² it provided those opposing the plant a home base where they could organize, discuss, and plan. For them, the occupation became a way to regain strength and “a key tool in [their] protest”.⁸³ Yet it also underlined that they did not conceptualize their vote for the state government as a sufficient and legitimate basis for authorities to take away their *Heimat*. In this sense, opponents had to literally force their way into recognition and participation, thus creating organizational structures outside traditionally accepted formats.⁸⁴

Apart from the need for recognition and participation, opponents also feared for the functioning of their community. Seen in the context of capabilities, German understandings of *Heimat* are helpful when trying to capture these aspects. On a basic level, many inhabitants of the region feared a nuclear catastrophe. Unlike in the United States or France, a fear of radiation was widespread within West Germany early on. In 1956, the ministry of nuclear energy dismissed it as “radiation psychosis”.⁸⁵ The journal *Atomwirtschaft* even

⁸¹ On the *Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald* see, for instance: Gladitz (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv* cit., p. 113.

⁸² Rucht, *Wyhl: Der Aufbruch der Anti-Atomkraftbewegung* cit., p. 137.

⁸³ Gladitz (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv* cit., p. 104. See also: *Ibid.*, pp. 91-101.

⁸⁴ The formation of a common identity is also apparent in various publications. See, for instance: W. Ehmke (ed.), *Becquerel-Geschichten: Zwischen Wyhl und Tschernobyl*, Galgenberg, Hamburg 1987. H.-H. Wüstenhagen, *Bürger gegen Kernkraftwerke. Wyhl – der Anfang?*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1977, p. 9. Sternstein, *Wyhl ist Überall* cit., pp. 24-78.

⁸⁵ Radkau, *Aufstieg und Krise der Deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975* cit., p.

construed the public's fear of nuclear power as a mental disorder. A poll from 1959 found out that a mere eight percent of the population supported nuclear energy unconditionally. Although such sentiments hint at some underlying fears of the unknown, most Germans in this pre-Chernobyl-era still regarded nuclear energy as safe.⁸⁶ This trust in the safety of nuclear power increasingly shifted once individuals and groups began asking more questions.⁸⁷ Growing uncertainties in the literature and a more sincere discussion in the scientific community played a role as well, especially once formerly abstract conversations became very real. Local inhabitants in Wyhl also feared the more immediate effects. The proposed plant needed water from local rivers and small streams to cool the nuclear fuel rods, and would thus be releasing used warm water into rivers. Local fishermen in particular became concerned about the effects on fish. There were further fears that steam from the nuclear plant would pollute the Rhine valley as a whole by generating fogs. Wine growers were worried that the steam hovering in the valley would decrease the exposure of their vineyards to sunlight.⁸⁸ Residents, finally, were moved to protest by a more abstract feeling that their *Heimat* was being destroyed.⁸⁹ Understood as

98. See also: H. Freund, *Atomwirtschaft*, 3, 1956, p. 119, quoted in Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 443.

⁸⁶ 17% feared nuclear war. Radkau, *Aufstieg* cit., p. 435. Rucht, *Modernisierung* cit., p. 444. See also: N. Dube, *Die öffentliche Meinung zur Kernenergie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1956-1986: Eine Dokumentation*, Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin 1988.

⁸⁷ In the case of Wyhl, Ralph Gräub's *The Gentle Killers* in particular became one of the key texts at the time. On early publications being more critical towards nuclear energy see: F. Wagner, *Die Wissenschaft und die gefährdete Welt: Eine Wissenschaftssoziologie der Atomphysik*, C.H. Beck, Munich 1969. H. Strohm, *Friedlich in die Katastrophe: Eine Dokumentation über Atomkraftwerke*, Zweitausend-eins, Frankfurt a/M 1981.

⁸⁸ On fisheries, agriculture, and wine-growing in this area and how a nuclear power plant might affect these professions, see, for instance: B. Ehret, "Fischerei am Oberrhein", in Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., pp. 22-24. E. Jenne, "Atomkraft – meine Existenzbedrohung", in *ibid.*, pp. 19-21. J. Reinauer, "Der Weinbau am Kaiserstuhl", in *ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

⁸⁹ On connections to *Heimat* in this context see: Zint, Paul (eds), "...und auch nicht anderswo!" cit., p. 17.

a larger connection to the land of their forefathers, *Heimat* was about “heritage and responsibility”.⁹⁰ According to one local resident, *Heimat* is “where we grew up, where we have our friends, make a living and enjoy our days, where we gather new strength based on familiar support and security. In fact, few people feel as tied to, connected to, and obligated towards their *Heimat* and its landscape as those who have worked it for generations, like wine-growers or farmers”.⁹¹ For the locals, the deforestation required to build this monstrous nuclear power plant, with its impact on the local bird population and other disruptive effects, undermined the beauty of their landscape.⁹² Many saw a dichotomy between uncontrollable technological advancement and established traditions.⁹³ As Rüdig rightfully notes, “all this meant the end of the Kaiserstuhl and the cultural and economic identity of the entire Upper Rhine valley”.⁹⁴ In short, the protection of *Heimat* became a key argument against the power plant.

All of these perceived injustices brought together a diverse movement.⁹⁵ Those in opposition to the plant – conceptualized as an “anticipated and experienced injustice”⁹⁶ – soon organized in a *Bürger-*

⁹⁰ M. Schwörer, “Heimat am Kaiserstuhl und Rhein – Erbe und Verpflichtung”, in Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends*, cit., p. 14.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² On fears regarding landscape and fauna see: Nössler, *Die Auseinandersetzung um das KKW Wyhl* cit., p. 38.

⁹³ Zint, Paul (eds), “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., p. 16. The news magazine *Der Spiegel* quoted the following statement of conservative politician Helmut Kohl (later chancellor) in summer 1979: “The opponents of nuclear energy are reactionaries. They are against progress. They want to approach the people with a strategy of backwardness and poverty”. *Der Spiegel*, July 2, 1979, quoted in, Rucht, *Modernisierung und neue soziale Bewegungen* cit., p. 449. For the counter-argument, see most notably: Sternstein, *Überall ist Wyhl* cit., pp. 4-5.

⁹⁴ Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 130.

⁹⁵ For a basic overview underlining the diversity based on age, profession, and gender, see: Nössler, de Witt (eds), *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* cit., pp. 7-9. See also: Schwörer, *Heimat am Kaiserstuhl und Rhein* cit., p. 14. Jenne, *Atomkraftwerk* cit., pp. 19-20.

⁹⁶ Zint, Paul (eds), “...und auch nicht anderswo!” cit., p. 18.

initiative, a cohort that combined individuals from all walks of life. Apart from farmers, winegrowers, fishers, and others connected to *Heimat* in a more direct and traditional sense, the initiative also attracted professions seemingly unconnected to the discussion. University students from urban environments like Freiburg, for instance, played a vital role in spreading protests beyond Wyhl. The importance of women as a powerful force against nuclear power is evident as well, and echoes similar roles played by women in other environmental justice movements.⁹⁷ As Rüdig notes, “the nuclear issue reinforced the social identity of an already closely knit community of wine-growers on the Kaiserstuhl”.⁹⁸ The actual occupation of the building site further strengthened the initiative against the plant. The protesters were further motivated, Rüdig claims, with reference to previous events in the neighboring community of Marckolsheim, by “the common feeling of a fundamental threat to livelihood and culture, the experience of a successful previous repulsion of a similar installation, and [...] the example of a possible way to express opposition outside established political processes”.⁹⁹ In this sense, the state’s inability to engage protestors’ arguments and police violence during the occupation of the building site strengthened opponents of the plant,

A growth in national attention towards the events in Wyhl not only fueled protests but also helped project the anti-nuclear movement beyond the boundaries of the region. It all began with local newspapers picking up on discussions and storylines connected to Wyhl. Soon, however, the national media took notice as well. By 1975, for instance, the popular news magazine *Der Spiegel* had begun discussing nuclear power more thoroughly, and in most major articles it directly referenced the events in Wyhl.¹⁰⁰ In one article, the news magazine described the situation in Wyhl, including a photo

⁹⁷ M. Albietz, E. Bub, “Regen und Enttäuschung in Stuttgart”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁹⁸ Nössler, “Können wir der Regierung trauen?”, in *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁹⁹ Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements* cit., p. 132. See also: *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance: *Der Spiegel*, “Todesstrahlen aus dem Atomkraftwerk”, July 21, 1975. *Der Spiegel*, “Atom-Unfall: Pfad verlassen”, November 24, 1975.

of state minister Hans Filbinger and protestors occupying the building site. The article underlined the need to include protestors.¹⁰¹ This increasing coverage gave opponents of the plant credibility, and later granted visibility to the origins and beginnings of the anti-nuclear movement. Whereas this shows how protests in Wyhl helped frame the image of nuclear protests as such, the fact that many local farmers, winegrowers, and fishermen participated in these original protests also nourished constructions of *Heimat* in its connection to *Umweltgerechtigkeit*. These individuals brought a specific understanding of *Heimat* to the table, rooted in long-standing traditions, rural surroundings, and agriculture. In this sense, the events in Wyhl changed larger discussions regarding nuclear energy, as becomes clearer when we use *Umweltgerechtigkeit* as a theoretical framework.

Conclusion

This essay has argued for the use of a more practical environmental justice framework by historians. After briefly introducing a theoretical framework moving beyond equity and applying it to the German context, the essay used the notion of *Umweltgerechtigkeit* to revisit the events in Wyhl. The centrality and importance of fighting for *Heimat* became apparent within this context. In Wyhl, a lack of recognition and participation, as well as the threat to the functioning of community understood as *Heimat*, induced many of the locals to organize in a *Bürgerinitiative*. Since the construction of the power plant was perceived as an injustice beyond traditional understandings of environmental justice as the unequal distribution of environmental goods and bads, the events in Wyhl bear witness to the importance of a broader definition of environmental justice theory. *Umweltgerechtigkeit* conceptualized along broader lines and based on Schlosberg's recent definition has provided an adequate framework to highlight these aspects. While keeping in mind the local character of the situation, the present case study shows how environmental justice theory

¹⁰¹ *Der Spiegel*, "Bürgerinitiativen: Ärger, Angst, Sorge", April 14, 1974.

can extract neglected nuances rarely discussed in studies of the rise of the anti-nuclear movement in West Germany.

Taking the objectives of historians to heart and pushing *Umweltgerechtigkeit* into the center of discussions regarding environmental history also has a broader goal. Historians want to learn from the past. Within a democratic structure, a focus on grassroots movements can help achieve this goal. In this sense, fostering understandings of the reasons why citizens are upset and unheard remains key for bettering existing democratic processes. In Wyhl, for instance, connections to at once abstract and very real notions of *Heimat* played an essential role in capturing the sentiments of many local inhabitants. This explains why, at the time, Wyhl was rightfully described as “the most successful protest”.¹⁰² Any theoretical framework aiming to shed light on movements like this has to take such nuances into account. As demonstrated, broadly defined conceptions of environmental justice theory as *Umweltgerechtigkeit* can do exactly that. To export this framework into other national, political, social, and cultural contexts is thus useful, because it furthers our understanding of chaotic grassroots movements, and this can help improve democratic processes in the future.

¹⁰² Sternstein, *Wyhl ist Überall* cit., p. 17.