

SURVIVAL AGAINST ALL ODDS
AN ANALYSIS OF PERSEVERANCE IN THE COMMUNITY EARTH FOR US

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Abstract

In this thesis I am writing about a community on island Brač in Croatia called Zemlja za nas [Earth for Us]. It is a women's community with a strong focus on ecology and feminism. Community has been shaping and changing in the last 15 years, especially with the influx of new members. The main question I answer with my thesis is what is the bond that holds this specific community together even after many changes and crises. I will be covering literature related with ecofeminism, women and lesbian organising and community and social movement research, with topical literature about communities in Croatia and the postsocialist Croatia to contextualise the specific local situation. With this text and the story of my informants I bring the answer to a bigger overarching question about what community means to its members, how they think it is created, formed, transformed and how they can be sustained.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed: Sara Moric

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Chapter I. Introduction

In 2016, I arrived with Luce and my friend to the land of the community Earth for Us. Luce was then a former member of the community. I was spending the weekend at her house in Ložišće, Brač. I spoke to her about her experience and asked her to take me to the community's plot of land. After going through what seemed like 30 minutes of gravel road, passing through olive groves and beautiful nature around the inners of the island Brač. As we exited the car, the first thing that welcomed us were 5 curious dogs who were barking loudly. It reminded me of the years when I worked in the animal shelter in my hometown of Zadar. The people who welcomed me were quite hospitable and immediately offered us homemade wine, brandy and food. The relaxed conversation lasted until late into the night, and that evening, in addition to Mrvica, I met her then partner Ivana with the married couple Aneta and the now deceased Jens and their daughter Sena, who joined the community at the time the association was founded. But that day, as on all other occasions when I came to the land, we haven't been just resting. The hosts immediately gave us something to do, and that day we dug 20 metres of canal for a hose that led water from the rainwater tank to the area where their then-neglected garden was located. I remember that day I came just to stay for the afternoon, to find out more how the community functioned, but it seems to me now that I never truly left after that. I kept coming back to the land, first shyly, when my schedule allowed, all the while forming friendships. Now I consider myself a part of this community and a friend. There is always a piece of me on the land.

In this thesis I will write about a community on island Brač in Croatia called Earth for Us. It is a women's community with a strong focus on ecology and feminism. When it comes to ecology, they have been trying to build a self-sustainable farm since they began this journey, a

work in progress that will probably never reach the final form. Using ecological methods when working on their olive trees, or tending to the garden is very important. Locally sourced and natural products are often used. Fruits, herbs and various natural goods are picked or collected to make jams, rakija,¹ cleaning products, teas, ointments, and salted food. When it comes to feminism, this is a primarily women's community founded by queer women, rooted in the ideas of solidarity and equality, of which I will write more about later. They are trying to create a community where everyone will feel welcome, themselves, their partners, children, friends, animals but also for new people who need shelter and support. Community was founded on one location in the island of Brač in 2006, by three women, but it has been shaping and changing in the last 15 years, especially with the influx of new members and a change in location.

I wrote about this community at my previous University of Zagreb, at the department of Ethnology and Cultural anthropology in Zagreb. At that time my thesis was "Theory in practice. Ecofeminist principles in the work of association Earth for Us" (Morić, 2017) and I tried to answer the question "How do ecofeminist principles apply in the practice of this community and their cohesion?". The story of the community Earth for Us begins with three city girls: Mrvica, Antonela and Luce, who realised that they were not satisfied with their lives, and thought something was missing. Soon after making arrangements, they migrated from the city to Brač and went to practise a way of life that was unknown to them until then, new and above all idealised. From the original idea of escaping into nature and moving away from the "superficial" way of life of the modern world, an association and living community of (mostly) women has developed which now operates as a registered association, that has continuous cooperation with islanders, public institutions and other associations on Brač and with a network of volunteers

¹ Rakija is a popular Balkan drunk, a strong (40 %) alcoholic drink made from fermented fruits.

who gladly return and respond to calls for help with work on the ground. To sketch out ideas behind this motivation, I am bringing the interpretation by Nataša Bokan of the results of her research on ecovillages in her article "Eco villages: a sub-political response to unsustainability". Bokan identified sustainability as an important source of motivation for inhabitants of ecovillages in Croatia that she researched. She states: "This motivation has two directions. One direction is the critique of the social order, which research participants consider unsustainable, and the other the creation of a more sustainable order at the micro level." (Bokan, 2016: 53).

Despite a break or two, the original three members are still part of the community, but many more people came, and left. The people who are now part of the community as landowners, meaning they have invested in the infrastructure or are planning to build on the land, are Mrvica, Luca, Antonela, Aneta, Karla, Maja, Armina. It is important to mention, that even though being a part of the community in most cases means that the person owns the land, all the people who lived and worked on Earth were not necessarily the owners. Some owners have also been on Earth for Us for limited periods of time because they lived in cities and did other jobs. Mrvica, one of the founding members, does not even own land. Her former partner Ivana was the one who bought the land. In the period between 2016 and 2018, the community began to be divided into two groups, after Mrvica and Ivana broke up, and as a result existing community organisation was changed. Even though the ignition was a break up of two people, this reflected on all the other members as well. I witnessed that, in a small community that is closely knit together, a break up, be it partners or friends, shakes up the whole ecosystem. All the emotions, experiences, differences, struggles and disagreements were brought to surface. Four members left the community, the land size of the community was cut almost in half, and consequently,

there were fewer olive trees. The division put a big emotional strain and affected every member, and put the community to a test. Around this time I started thinking about rewriting my thesis and looking into what makes, sustains and supports a community, and how it persists with many difficulties. The process of separation took a long time and was emotionally difficult and demanding, besides being a challenging legal process. While the land ownership separation was agreed in spring 2021 via contract, this process is still ongoing.

After completing my research, I have been visiting the community a couple of times a year, spending time with them as a friend and outside member and witnessing many changes and problems happening. The legal circumstances and membership of Earth for Us kept changing, and with it the community changed. At this time many other questions emerged. Is this community even ecofeminist? Some members strongly disagree, like Karla, who thinks that ecofeminism is essentialistic, too spiritual and "mythical", and that the community should focus more on socialist ecology. I remember a heated conversation from January 2020 that lasted a while on the community Whatsapp group about an ecofeminist panel the community was invited to. Nobody ended up going in the end, as the members could not reach an agreement. With these conversations in mind I have decided to refocus on the community itself and am moving forward in a different direction with this thesis. I wrote my previous thesis primarily to discover how the principles of ecofeminism permeate the work of the association and I came to the conclusion that there is actually no simple answer to this. I found it difficult to answer the question about the connection between the principles of ecofeminism and the work of the association because its members are so different from each other and nurture different political, spiritual and environmental views. While some members, for example, follow a (mostly) vegetarian diet, some believe that eating meat is part of the natural cycle. Some members are turned more to

spirituality and place this as their top priority, while a few of the members are atheists. On the political side, some follow a socialist and materialist ideas, while some do not think of politics or want to be involved with it. Some are ready to share everything with the community and think living there on the ground is the best way to sustain the community, while others come on a more irregular basis, when they can. But somehow, while talking to everyone, there are also similarities between all members, which I will try to map out later in the text. The community had many problems in the 15 years of its existence, of which I will speak in more detail later in the third chapter, but it also continued to exist, losing some older members, but also attracting new people.

The main question I aim to answer with my thesis will be what is the bond that holds this specific community together even after many changes and crises? With this community I hope to find an answer to a bigger overarching question about what a community means for its members, how they think it is created, formed, transformed and how they can be sustained. Community means different things to different people involved. What is a community today? Why is Earth for Us a community? Through the interviews I will aim to discover the different ways people perceive this community. I wish to discover how the new members view the long term member and vice versa, and how each member situates themselves within the community. I aim to discover how their involvement in the community shaped their understanding of themselves, what made it easier or harder for them to remain in the community (or leave), and how did the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships change?

One more topic that interests me are the ideological changes that happened. During my previous research the community identified as ecofeminist, which I discovered not only in my interviews with the members, but also in their manifesto. I considered ecofeminism as the guiding principle behind the community's activities. Now, with changed membership this has changed, but each member still has a strong political stance and feels the community should act politically, and operate in a certain way. Being an ecofeminist community means a lot to some members like Mrvica, but not to members like Karla, who thinks that ecofeminism is just a flimsy word, which does not really mean anything. Armina is, on the other hand, very much determined to find a way to properly valorise labour and for the members who earn more to participate more. The community as it is today - I would not describe it to other people as ecofeminist. But there are a few terms, such as solidarity, socialism, sharing, equality and sustainability that are mentioned often in the conversations I have participated in during these years. This to me means that there are many similarities in the worldviews of the members of the community. And these similarities are certainly part of the reason why decision-making might be occasionally easier.

Community Earth for Us is a unique community in Croatia. The community has been existing in many forms for the last 15 years. It and its members have left traces on the whole island of Brač, physical and personal. Community has achieved various forms of cooperation with the islanders of Brač, both privately working on their land and slowly getting to know the locals, developing a network of friends, and at the local engagement level with NGOs and institutions since they founded the association and thus had the opportunity to participate in various projects, some of them including drywall building workshops, leaving actual physical trace on the island. Members made wonderful connections not only with the islanders, but a wide

network of people from many places. It is also, in my knowledge, the only community in Croatia that has persisted for so long. In my thesis I will try to discover why that is, what makes the community Earth for Us go on, after so many years. By answering the research questions I will try to connect with existing community building theories and add my own insight, highlighting that the fact that this is a women's community has a lot to do with this. Emotional support and continuous emotional labour of members is of utmost importance in sustaining this community, in my opinion. In her work "Wages against Housework" from 1975 Silvia Federici argues that emotional work is something that women are uniquely faced and accustomed to within their upbringing (1975: 3), so this kind of work is much more prominent and important in a community that consists mainly of women in my opinion.

METHODOLOGY

To get to the answer of my research questions I conducted ethnographic field work in Croatia, on the island Brač and in the city of Zagreb where many of the community's former or "outside" members live. Before going to the island I prepared semi-structured interview questions that guided me toward reaching the answers to my questions. I interviewed eight people, three of the members that founded the community, one member that lives in Germany and Brač and four members that have joined during the last few years, one that lives in the community on the island and three who live elsewhere but often visit. Others are not official members but still visit and participate in activities often. The interviews were quite close and casual, as my involvement in the community is deep. So they ranged from a 1.5 hour long interview one on one, to speaking to two people at the same time, while often stopping due to interruptions. I came to the island in April 2021, and stayed a bit longer than two weeks, as a researcher and as a friend and outside member.

I started my research in Zagreb, due to the fact some members do not live on the island. Due to lockdown uncertainties because of the Coronavirus pandemic, and most of them being artists or freelancers they could not give me an exact date of their arrival to Brač, so this is why I decided on Zagreb as my first and last point.

Besides interviews I did participant observation both onsite and online. Onsite there are many activities happening. When I visited in April 2021, the main activity was olive pruning and mulching of the branches. I volunteered between two and four hours everyday for these activities. Other activities included housework like cleaning up, cooking and taking care of the animals. But these domestic chores and olive trees tending are not the only tasks. There are daily mini synchronisations to determine what the day is going to look like and which activities need to be done. There are informal gatherings over the week or weekend where other people join, from the island as well as those residing elsewhere. These gatherings usually include music, dancing, talking and laughing. Due to Coronavirus and pandemic restrictions, people are limited in travelling, which means that a lot of "outside" members come less frequently than they did before. The community consists of about ten members, three of those living on the land in the island at all times, with others joining when they can. These "outside" members might be away, but still need to be included in decisions about land, pruning, membership, land dispute and many other ongoing things. This is why the community has recently started doing weekly Zoom meetings and formed a Slack channel to try to ease the communication and convey the tasks to people who cannot be there at the moment. There are a few channels used for this, first is the Whatsapp group which was used the most and longest. Second is email which is also used in

topics considered more serious, like legal land disputes. Third is the Slack channel, created just in 2021. Finally, Zoom is used for weekly small sync to discuss ongoing topics and to socialise. For the online observations I took note of how the meetings went, who was leading, how the tone was. I attempt to analyse the interactions to see if a shared community experience is expressed through these messages: common memories, common jokes, etc.

As I embarked on my research, a significant concern was how to holistically capture the diverse array of voices, opinions, and experiences within the Earth for Us association pertaining to women's lives. I was anxious about the challenge of crafting a cohesive narrative that does justice to each perspective and does not undermine its significance. While interviewing it occurred to me that there is not a single story. Rather, every story is different, and the way to not diminish individual perspectives is to tell them all. I later decided how to structure the thesis, in a few separate subdivisions, but providing as much as I could original quotes and thoughts, without changing anything. These thoughts I do comment on and analyse as I see some correspondence with theoretical work or similarities or different points that I hear from others.

In my research, I held a distinct position in the field. Alongside being acquainted with the location and individuals, I also identified as queer and shared common views with my informants. This insider viewpoint provided me with a privilege, granting me access to information that an outsider may have found hard to come by. However, this position also posed challenges regarding objectivity in ethnography. Can an insider uphold true objectivity in their research? This issue of objectivity is addressed by Goran Šantek, a professor at the department of Ethnology and Cultural anthropology in Zagreb. In his 2005 article "Ethnographic realism and

the role of the ethnologist of religion" Šantek primarily relied on participation with observation to gather the most trustworthy data. Given the sensitivity of the topic he was writing about, piety, Šantek found that observing and listening to individuals during spontaneous reactions or ritual events provided more insightful information than traditional 1on1 interview settings. (2005: 137). Following Šantek, I also plan to include my own experiences and reflections during the analytical part of the chapter, as I have previously been involved in many events and conversations with my informants. As an insider, I am conscious of the need to maintain objectivity and authenticity in my representation of the community. While I have many anecdotes to tell and a whole bucket of data to draw from email correspondences and Whatsapp conversations to back up some interviews and thoughts, it also means that I have participated in various events and developed my own opinions and views on a situation.

Šantek, whose research experience was similar to mine as an insider, identified several factors that contributed to the authenticity of his work. Firstly, he documented his daily observations through the traditional method of writing field notes. Secondly, he drew from a range of anthropological literature to inform his research. Finally, he actively sought feedback and criticism from colleagues to refine his work (Šantek 2005:131). These are all methods that I used while writing my thesis or doing fieldwork to try and preserve my objectivity and to bring the closest possible interpretation from my informants to life here in this paper.

Radica Hura, a Serbian activist, writes in her article "Against erasing bisexuality: The beginnings of bisexual activism in Serbia" that she discovered autoethnography and how to use her own experiences as an activist to gain knowledge, which helped her face the challenge of the

lack of information about bisexuality in the former Yugoslavia (2019: 73). She argues that activism can provide a reflective and empathetic voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. Initially, she wanted to collect testimonies from bisexual individuals, but after talking to colleagues and going through what she collected, she realised that autoethnography could inspire people to fight for their rights, and she decided that her personal story was just as significant as others and needed to be shared (2019: 74). Following Hura, I also realised that as an insider in the Community Earth for Us, my autoethnographic approach allows me to use my personal experiences and reflections as a source of knowledge about the community. In my opinion, my thesis benefits from this methodological approach as it provides a unique and in-depth perspective that is not always accessible to outsiders.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

First of all, it may be necessary to contextualise the community Earth for Us. It is made up of people gathered around the association Earth for Us. In 2013, they bought four hectares of land in the North-West heart of the island Brač, on a small hill between the villages of Loziska, Dracevica and the city of Sutivan, away from the sea. The community was then registered as an official citizens association, which in Croatia means they could buy land and become legal owners of it.

Before this, the members (at least the three founding members and their partners) lived next to a small bay called Stipanska. They lived on land that was not theirs, owned by a Brač native called Tonko who allowed them to use the land. After spending six years in Stipanska, they decided that the only way they could move forward with their own ideas was to be on their own land, under their own rules. So they bought *zemlja*. From that moment on, the members are

working on building a self-sustaining property. That land they bought was first without infrastructure for water and electricity, though in a beautiful and sunny location, overlooking the sea. The land was mostly destroyed by a big fire in 2011 which at that time had affected a third of the island. It was estimated by the members that there were about 600 olives on the land, but due to the fire they were badly burned and it was necessary to revitalise them.

There was a lot of work to be done on the land. In the beginning, each member of the community became responsible for their own plot, which was about 3700 m² big. There are currently four residential buildings there, including a shared house for cooking and socialising (along with several mobile caravans), an enclosed bathroom with shower, a compost toilet and a horse stable. There are currently three people living permanently on *zemlja*, and that number has varied over the last five years. The work that requires most of their time, but also the one which entrances the most hope for the future is their olive grove which has several hundred trees. Interestingly, this olive grove suffered fires before the land was purchased, but with constant care, the burned trees are now recovering and have become fruitful. In addition to olive trees, effort is being put into planting fruit trees, and every summer work is being done on the garden, which changes size depending on how much time the members have and how many volunteers are there on the ground. There are also animals living on the land, the number of which also varies greatly, currently there are three dogs, Aska, Magična and Liko, five cats, Toni, Duška, Igor, Teisha, Shmone and, more recently, a small horse called Srebrni. The horse was actually a rescue, a seven year old working horse from a neighbouring field that broke its leg and was taken in by a few members who decided to try and save him. Electricity in the houses is obtained from solar panels on the roof, or from generators when larger projects are being worked on, like

construction. The most of the water, a crucial resource for sustaining an off grid community, comes from rainwater that is stored in the concrete water tank, while drinking water is usually brought in from friend's houses, shops or drinking water fountains located on the island. Nothing that is now on *zemlja* existed before the members joined. Everything was built, or paid to be made, by the members who decided to join together to buy the land the community now exists on.

As mentioned before, this is my second work on the community. In the first one titled "Theory in practice. Ecofeminist principles in the work of association Earth for Us" (Morić, 2017), I was focusing on ecofeminism and how it is applied in practice. The idea of implementing ecofeminism really drew me in back then, as it embodies the feminist and ecological theories that I was reading, into one overarching ethics. So in 2015 when I first heard about *Zemlja Za Nas Amazonke* or *Bračke Vještice* [Earth for Us Amazonians or Witches of Brač], from my queer friends who were going to Brač, to this, what I imagined as a mystical gay commune, I was immediately fascinated and wanted to learn more. Back then in 2016 for the very first time, I decided to learn more, and found that there are actually two groups of queer women living on Brač in a communal way of life, one in the Stipanska and one on *zemlja*. I also learned that the people of *zemlja* founded Stipanska and are very much connected, by friendship or romantic relationships. Being a queer woman myself, and knowing many people who know them and visit Brač I decided to write about them.

Besides contextualising the community, it is also important to contextualise the situation in Croatia. In their work "(In) visible T: Trans activism in Croatia", Amir Hodžić, J. Poštić and

Arian Kajtezović described the situation in Croatia, more precisely in Zagreb, at the turn of the century. They say there has been growth and integration of a number of minority communities / movements, in part due to changes since the 2000 elections, when the right-wing conservative wartime government was replaced by a coalition of left-wing parties and the central. parties, and in part by the development of online forums (2019: 31). The community grew, but things also changed on a legal level, so discrimination based on sexual orientation was banned by law in 2003. The authors state:

"It was the result of intense lobbying by NGOs, but also the state's response to the demands of the process of joining European institutions and organisations. Dominant oppressions common to societies in the region have contributed to the strengthening of traditional gender roles, and people who have not adapted to them have been discriminated against and exposed to violence on a daily basis." (2019: 32).

The kind of community that Earth for Us is like, is quite important for queer people, as I learned in conversations with many people visiting *zemlja*, even though the members of the community itself would never define the community as queer. As they told me more than once, gender identity or sexual orientation of the members is not something that is relevant in becoming a member. Living in Croatia during this period meant coming to terms with the fact that queer individuals faced numerous challenges. Josip Glaurdić and Vuk Vuković in their article "Proxy Politics, Economic Protest, or Traditionalist Backlash: Croatia's Referendum on the Constitutional Definition of Marriage" (2016) write how in 2013, a conservative right-wing movement was gaining momentum in the country, and a non-governmental organisation called U ime obitelji [In the Name of Family] was advocating for a referendum on the inclusion of the

definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman in the Croatian Constitution (2016: 805). They garnered enough signatures and the referendum was approved, resulting in the restriction of the word "marriage" to refer only to heterosexual unions (2016: 804). As a consolation, same-sex couples were allowed to register as "civil partners"(2016: 808). In my opinion, besides being important for the queer community in Croatia, as I have gathered from my conversations with members and visitors, Earth for Us also appealed to those who were advocating for natural resources to remain publicly owned rather than being sold to private companies for concessions. Additionally, it resonated well with people who were exhausted from struggling to make ends meet, working low-paid jobs and barely able to afford their rent. Since many of my queer friends fell into all of these categories, it seems natural to me that this type of community would attract them.

And right after this decision, before I went for the first fieldwork in 2016. I found a description of Community Earth for Us and their definition on a Croatian feminist media website Voxfeminae, which is as follows:

*"The Earth for Us Association was founded with the aim of promoting the values of sustainability and self-sustainability, biological and cultural diversity, revitalization of Dalmatian islands, preservation of cultural heritage, promotion and affirmation of ecofeminist values. tolerance, cooperation, pacifism and all forms of equality through the environment and gender education, promoting the life of law, encouraging the development of creative, free and self-sustainable community models."*²

This description, the intermingling of ecology, Dalmatian heritage and feminism gave me a sense of familiarity, and ideals that I held close. As a person from the seaside in Croatia, who was

² <https://voxfeminae.net/organizacije/zemlja-za-nas/>, accessed in April 2021.

raised in a world where Dalmatian identity meant being backward and far away from what I thought was right, I was hooked. This is the first time when I saw the possibility of progress and achieving something in an area I ran away from. When you grow up as a young queer in a very homophobic small city, the metropolitan area seems like heaven and only safe space. But, reading the description made me wonder. And I realise now that the stories and folklore surrounding the Brač Witches is most probably what draws so many people to come there for the first time. So this is how I arrived. But how I stayed is another story.

In the 5 years that I have been going there, the community has become my second home, the members have become my close friends and emotional pillars. When a bad thing happens and I have no idea what to do, there are two people I call, and those are my mom and Mrvica. My dog Rozi died just before coming to do research for this thesis. The time spent there and the conversations I had with Mrvica, Antonela and Ivona saved me from falling apart completely. And put a halt to my research making me late with everything. So this is the power that *zemlja* had. I plan to buy a piece of land in the next 5 years and move to Brač permanently in about 10 years. I hope to take care of the members as they get older and are less able, the same way they took care of me during many hardships. How did it come to this point, not only for me, but for all the other members is something I aim to cover in this chapter by analysing what everyone told me.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism was a term first used by the French author Francoise d'Eaubonne, in the 1974 article "Feminism ou la Mort" (2000: 1). However, there are some ongoing polemics, as highlighted by Merchant, regarding the correct attribution of the term as it is also attributed to Rosemary Radford Ruether, who, in her 1975 book *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, wrote about ecological feminism (1992: 184).

According to Carlassare the term "feminism" lacks a universal definition due to the numerous interpretations, yet we can all agree that it involves both theoretical and practical efforts to challenge oppressive systems and discourses that primarily harm women and other marginalised groups while also contributing to capital production (2002: 89). Where does ecology come into play? According to Karmen Ratković's introduction to the Center for Women's Studies' journal *Treća* (2000), ecofeminists assert that feminism has been neglected and confined to anthropocentric perspectives, and that the fight must expand to encompass the non-human realm, including animals and the natural environment. According to Ratković (2000: 2), one of the originators of this critical current in Croatia, ecofeminists assert that there is a connection between the subjugation of women throughout history and the exploitation and devastation of the natural world. Additionally, the scientific literature has frequently treated the subjects of "woman" and "nature" in similar ways over time. Ratković concluded that power relations have been manifesting themselves both over the female body and over nature and its resources.

To these asymmetrical power relations, Elizabeth Carlassare, a writer specialising in ecofeminism and politics, juxtaposes ecofeminism. A social movement and a type of theoretical questioning, ecofeminism struggles against forms of dominance and works toward creating a policy that promotes planetary survival and social equality, according to. Given that ecofeminism has been a part of feminist discourse since its inception and encompasses a wide range of various ideas and works, it is challenging to generalise within a single definition (2002: 89).

Ecofeminism is occasionally harshly critiqued by activist circles as well, as it has frequently been linked exclusively to paganism, cults of female deities, and ideas for social and environmental change that occur through personal change, as well as changes in cultural consciousness - rather than changes in economic and political relations. According to Elizabeth Erbaugh, a professor at Stockton University, the academic community is similarly adversarial toward this radical concept (2002: 90). However, much of ecofeminism, according to Carlassare, is based on materialism because it claims that social evolution is contingent on modifications in production, relationships among people, and biological reproduction. That type of ecofeminism, Carlassare continues, seeks to effect cultural and social transformation by means of new methods of spirituality and personal developmental processes as well as through change, such as the rejection of capitalism and commodity culture in preference for non-governmental socialism, buying products manufactured locally, rejection of traditional sexual orientation, and disintegration from the patriarchal nuclear family (2000: 90).

In subsequent sections of her article, Carlassare argues that ecofeminism also connects the capitalist mode of production to the exploitation of women and the late-twentieth-century

environmental issues. Her central argument is materialistic and strongly anti-capitalist. Other materialist elements that circulate within ecofeminist circles include the reliance on historical materialism and the notion that "nature" and "human nature" are convention of society, reminiscent of early Marxist concepts that have been further investigated by new Marxists together with ecofeminist thinkers (2000: 91). In her text, Carlassare emphasised the relationship between Marxism, both traditional and new, and ecofeminism.

Although ecofeminist discourses are diverse, its proponents are unified in their opposition to oppression, including capitalism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Carlassare continues by stating that although adherents of ecofeminism participate in a variety of endeavours (such as fighting for the elimination of nuclear weapons, the right to an abortion, writing about alternative ethics, writing stories about the past or the future, etc.), they all agree that environmental issues are indeed issues of society and culture (2000: 91).

According to Carlassare, a significant number of ecofeminist authors are attentive "to the circulation of power within culture, language and history and seek intervention in the formation of domination that emerges in the service of promoting egalitarianism" (2000: 90). Carlassare goes on to argue that many individual ecofeminist thinkers believe that the exploitation of women and the destruction of the environment are inextricably related, but despite the fact that most agree that ecological decay and female oppression are related. However, she notes that there is a debate about what exactly this connection is and how to observe it. This special bond between women and nature, thought of as subversive/revolutionary within ecofeminism, can replicate patriarchal equating between feminine and primitive/pre-cultural.

In her article "Feminism and ecology: Making Connections" Karen Warren, author, scholar, and former Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Macalester College, explains how the term ecofeminism refers to a point of view based on the following statements:

- "1. There is a great connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature
 2. Understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to properly understand the oppression of women and the oppression of nature
 3. Feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective
 4. solutions to environmental problems must include a feminist perspective" (1993: 3).
- Warren, similarly to the feminist and philosopher Val Plumwood, tried to create something that would be a unique philosophy of ecofeminism. Plumwood distinguished between cultural and social ecofeminism, and the basic difference between these two types of ecofeminism is their approach to the woman-nature relationship. Cultural ecofeminists consider this relationship to be essential and mystical, and women are much more caring for them than men by their very biological nature (Plumwood according to Holy 2007: 91). Plumwood put the question of dualistic hierarchy as the centre of interest of philosophical ecofeminism, and he sees the source of the rule of dualistic hierarchy in the Enlightenment, i.e. in the works of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes. Although Plumwood does not deny the existence of differences or contradictions, or dichotomies, she argues that dualism is a process in which opposing concepts are shaped by structures of domination and subordination, that is, constructed as oppositional and exclusive. According to Plumwood, the basic difference between dualism and the dichotomy is the "legalisation" of the hierarchical structure between opposing concepts (Plumwood according to Holy 2007: 93).

Ecofeminist Marty Kheel discusses the relationship between ecofeminism and deep ecology in her work "From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: An Ecofeminist Objection". Kheel argues that nature ethicists have found themselves looking for a theory that will succeed in saving nature. She compares the ethicists of nature and the sought-after theory of the salvation of nature with the prototype heroes in patriarchal stories who must save the standard character of the "virgin in distress." This theory must, without anyone's help, save the weakened "body of Mother Nature from the villains who bound her and subdued", Kheel continues (2000: 65). On the other hand, she elucidates how ecofeminist literature paid little attention to the heated discussions among male thinkers regarding the foundation of an ethical framework for the natural environment. Instead, it aimed to expose the exploitative and dominant attitude towards women and nature that pervades a patriarchal society. Ecofeminists have taken a distinct approach towards the ongoing environmental crisis and have not engaged in a competition among various theories to establish dominance of one over the other. Kheel argues that unlike mainstream ethicists of nature, who base much of their analysis on abstract principles, ecofeminists tend to emphasise the role of metaphor and the notion of nature. This does not mean that they only describe the problems of today, but are committed to the goal of social transformation (2000: 66). Kheel goes on to conclude that we cannot change what we do not understand, and the understanding of the latent action of patriarchal society in ecofeminist works is emphasised precisely because that society could be transformed.

To summarise, ecofeminism is a multi-layered philosophy that discusses the oppression of women, exploitation of nature, sustainable living, among others, and the Earth for Us community embodies many of its principles. By rejecting traditional power structures and trying

to live in harmony with nature, this community challenges patriarchal norms and promotes sustainability. The community's focus on self-sufficiency, alternative energy sources, and communal living aligns with ecofeminist principles of valuing diversity, rejecting hierarchies, and recognizing the interconnectedness of nature and humans. Through their lifestyle choices, Earth for Us community serves as an example of how ecofeminist principles can be applied in practice.

WOMEN/LESBIAN ORGANIZING

In her work "Women's Community Organizing and Identity Transformation", Elizabeth Erbaugh argues the importance of women's organisation and communities in maintaining and empowering an already existing community struggling to achieve long-term institutionalised change should not be underestimated. Such communities serve as inspiration to others, as a medium for developing sisterhood, togetherness, and intergenerational and class solidarity (2002: 9). Erbaugh continues on the same page and claims that although women's communities have wide variations in structure, they have historically displayed participatory, and horizontal ways of organising. However, the author asserts that these communities at some point had to face dominant structures within the public sphere that are hierarchical and patriarchal (2002: 10). In my opinion, the decision of the queer, women, off-grid community that I am writing about to prioritise an off-grid lifestyle is a result of the threatening institutionalised structures they face, combined with a general mistrust of the capitalist system and its values. By living off-grid, they embrace a self-sufficient and isolated way of life that involves giving up conventional forms of housing, work, and consumption, including participation in modern institutions and their services. The members of the Earth for Us community have relinquished the security of a permanent job, services provided by institutions like the police and hospitals, and embarked on a

life entirely different from the one they were accustomed to. Women's communities, therefore, can serve as an inspiration to others in achieving long-term institutionalised change, promoting democratic, participatory, and feminist ways of organising, and building solidarity amongst women.

Erbaugh also points out some distinctive differences in women's community organisation, and argues that women's perspectives and practices make them the pioneers in bringing the community spirit and collaborative principles into community organisation. She says that movements led by men have an inclination towards instrumental politics and expressive activities, while movements led by women emphasise the respective processes and interconnectedness between private and the public (2002: 9). Erbaugh emphasises the importance of such organisations because she believes that involvement in collective actions offers an opportunity for a person to construct new individual and collective identities that stand as a challenge versus dominant perspectives. Only participation in community organisation can lead to a change in perspective and identity that then transforms women's social reality and feelings of power in relation to the dominant institutions that have marginalised them until then. The authors emphasised that understanding such changes is important in evaluating success in co-organizing (2002: 10).

Catriona Sandilands in her 2002 work "Lesbian separatist communities and the experience of nature" explores the ideologies and practices of lesbian separatist communities in southern Oregon. Sandilands draws conclusions that the lesbian communities' way of life has affected their understanding and interaction with nature, yet it would be incorrect to claim that

being a lesbian necessarily corresponds to ecological practices (2002: 155). Sandilands asserts that the community does not have a singular viewpoint on the relationship between their identity and the environment. Rather, their shared identity as a community, rather than common beliefs or values, is what unites them. She continues to argue that such communities showcase the possibility of embracing one's sexuality in a rural setting without conforming to conventional heterosexual norms (2002: 156). In Sandilands' words, "the fact that this culture has ended up as a hybrid of lesbian feminism and particularised local knowledge is not just interesting; there are also normative implications" (2002: 156). The Oregon separatists themselves acknowledge that nature involves interactions between various human and nonhuman entities, and their separatist aspirations have evolved to reflect this understanding. This evolution suggests that these communities are open to the influence of the land and also affirm lesbian politics. As Sandilands notes, "the active organisation of nature that has accompanied rural lesbian separatism has historically and continues to include a sense of the articulation between feminist and nonhuman voices" (2002: 156).

Nancy C. Unger, a professor at the University of Santa Clara, built her article "From Jook Joints to Sisterspace: The Role of Nature in Lesbian Alternative Environments in the United States" on the work of Catriona Sandilands. Through examining the history of American lesbians, Unger writes that place has always been a crucial part for the identity development of lesbian women but notes that urban environments were considered most conducive to lesbian life, with cities offering closeness and discreteness (2010: 174). Next, Unger discusses the challenges that white middle- to upper-class lesbians faced in finding each other and carrying out relationships in urban environments. To address these challenges, some of these women sought out more

conducive environments, dais Unger. The writer references Esther Newton's publication "Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town" from 1993 that explores how the distinctive physical setting of Cherry Grove on Fire Island was instrumental in shaping a distinct community of lesbians. Cherry Grove was a relatively easy commute from the New York metropolitan area and offered a refreshing physical environment, as well as a community of arts-and-theatre crowd, which attracted independent and talented women (2010: 175). But still, as Unger says, the lesbians who lived in Cherry Grove were not actively involved in politics and ecology, they were in Cherry Grove to avoid the homophobia of the city and lead an enjoyable life, rather than try to work on the ecological landscape of the island. While the lesbian communities discussed by Unger and the off-grid community in my thesis have different goals, both emphasise the importance of place in shaping their identity and providing a sense of community. In both cases, the communities offer an alternative way of living that challenges the dominant culture's values and norms.

COMMUNITIES

When it comes to social movements Deborah Gould, associate professor of Sociology at UC Santa Cruz, claims that in the late 1990 researches started to move away from rational actor models to a more emotional dimension of mobilisations. In short, the turn has happened when scholars stopped treating emotions as something irrational, but rather a normal part of how humans reason their actions (2010: 23). Instead of solely focusing on rational decision-making models, I feel what Gould aims to convey overall is the fact that it is important to consider the emotional and affective aspects of the community's mobilisation towards a sustainable and self-sufficient way of life. This shift in thinking towards the importance of emotions in social

movements can help shed light on the personal experiences, values, and beliefs that drive the members of the Earth for Us community towards living off-grid.

In Kathleen Stewart's book *Ordinary Affects* from 2007, the author puts forward the argument that researchers should prioritise affect. This perspective does not invalidate the significance of ideology, hierarchy, social structure, identity construction, and rationalist framework when studying human everyday life. Instead, Stewart proposes that these phenomena should be examined from the perspective of the people who are affected by them, their active role in shaping people's experiences, and how different actors engage with them in their daily lives. Affect is not simply a response to stimuli that triggers an action. Instead, it is a measure of the intensity of an individual's experience in a social context, including their interactions with other individuals, groups, entities, phenomena, or ideas. This intensity is reflected in a person's actions and practices (2007: 5), according to Stewart's viewpoint. Affect theory might be helpful with conducting such close and personal interviews and approaching them in a more sensitive way.

While discussing the trans community in their work from 2019 "(In)visible T: Trans activism in Croatia", Amir Hodžić, J. Poštić and Arian Kajtezović highlight the critical role of collaboration and peer support for the longevity of the movement (2019: 51). The authors' observation is relevant, in my opinion, not only to the trans community but also to other communities such as women's, feminist or queer communities, which face challenging and complicated situations. The authors specifically reference the post-Yugoslav region, where ethnic tensions and religious influences persist, making it a particularly challenging environment

(2019: 51). They argue: "There is an increase in the organisations of the clerical right, lack of law enforcement, as well as civic and sexual education, and the general presence of instability, corruption, xenophobia and lack of trust in institutions, while NGOs are often not recognized as a relevant factor." (2019: 51). Included in Bojan Bilić's and Sanja Kajinić's edited volume *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics. Multiple Others in Croatia and Serbia*, a book originally published in English in 2016 and republished in Serbo-Croatian three years later, the referenced chapter, similarly to the rest of the volume, doesn't engage with nature or non-human beings. However, Hodžić, Poštić and Kajtezović's insights into trans organising offered me a way to think about solidarity as well as conservative social forces working against it when it comes to my own research and engagement with *Earth for Us*. Before turning to the results of my field work, I will briefly reflect on other local eco communities.

ECO COMMUNITIES IN CROATIA

Nataša Bokan, a Croatian scholar who specialises in rural sociology and agrarian communities, in her work "Eco villages: a sub-political response to unsustainability", argues that in Croatia, the trend of people moving from rural areas to urban centres continues, which has resulted in rural areas being marginalised and economically devastated (2016: 50). However, she continues, the eco-village movement is promoting rural living and sustainable agriculture practices, affirming the value of the land and the planet. Despite the lack of a counter-urbanization process in Croatia, the eco-village movement is reversing the trend by making rural living desirable and economically viable, concludes Bokan (2016: 50). ZMAG association and their recycled Estate educational centre in Vukomerić is the most known and active eco-village in Croatia. According to their website description, they unite organic gardeners, eco-building practitioners,

permaculture designers, social model researchers, and environmental activists, and their main focus is on organic food production, seed preservation, sustainable waste management, renewable energy sources, and eco-friendly house building³. Apart from ZMAG, Bokan also researched several other ecovillages in Croatia. These are the Neocultural Community located in the village of Badličan in Međimurje, Eco village Blatuša in the municipality of Gvozd, Eco village Brač in the municipality of Sutivan and Eco village Rovinj near the town of Rovinj (2016: 50).

Marina Blagojević Hughson is one of the few authors dealing with ecofeminism or topics related to it in the region, and she in her chapter "Ecofeminist ideas in the women's movement in Serbia: gender, social justice and ecology", that is included in the 2012 collection *Ecofeminism: New Political Responsibility* represents an self-reflective view of the history of ecofeminist ideas in Serbia. Her work talks about communities in neighbouring Serbia, but also draws parallels with the region (2012: 167). Her chapter says that ecofeminism in this area should reflect the high degree of agrarianism of the local population and the fact that women in rural areas are still a large part of the population and the key to Serbia's development, but also the region as a whole. She goes on to say that the ecofeminism of the periphery should also incorporate the specifics of the semi-periphery and recognize the great potential power that women have in rural parts of the country. She argues such ecofeminism should understand the transformational power of local rural women's groups in Vojvodina, which are engaged in concrete and direct projects to improve their environment (2012: 167).

³ <https://www.zmag.hr/en/about-us/our-story.html>, accessed in April 2021

Blagojević suggests that ecofeminism, should, instead of merely transferring "knowledge from the centre", focus on listening to local spontaneous environmental initiatives, have the function of empowering women who are existentially most connected to nature, namely women living in rural areas, and have a vision of development which goes beyond the existing neoliberal model (2012: 168).

In her book *Mythical Aspects of Ecofeminism*, Mirela Holy, an ecofeminist primarily known for her involvement in green party Orah, also explores ecofeminism in Croatia (2007: 283) and says that ecofeminism is still a relatively unknown phenomenon, due to the specific historical circumstances in the last fifteen years, due to which everything that has been marginalised in society it had no specific local-political sign. She says that in a situation where general trends were in favour of raising the traditional-patriarchal values of Catholic Croatian society, any criticism of violence and war would be understood as an unpatriotic or unpatriotic act. Especially when we remember that ecofeminism criticised the idea of the homeland as a patriot - fatherland (2007: 284). At the time of the creation of the new Croatia, any idea advocating unification and erasing borders was stigmatised as "Yugo-nostalgic" and undesirable, so ecofeminism remained anonymous (2007: 285). It is interesting that Mirela Holy's book, although published 10 years ago, reflects in many ways today's "mentality" at a time when we can see the trend of retraditionalization and the momentum of the right-wing political option. Ecofeminism remains underrepresented, concludes Holy, in academic circles that are reluctant to engage with the essentialist ideas often attributed to ecofeminism.

When it comes to Earth for Us, other than some brief mentions on feminist media outlets such as Voxfeminae and my previous analysis that serves as the starting point for this thesis, this community is not represented in regional (eco)feminist thought. I believe my analysis of their ecologically oriented way of life and feminist organising principles will contribute to local scholarship as well as potentially inspire future activist efforts.

Chapter 3. Community Earth for Us

BEGINNING

The community Earth for Us has existed in one way or another for so many years. Even though it is now connected to the island Brač, the largest island of central Dalmatia, the seed of it was planted in early 2000s in a small apartment in the city of Rijeka by the three women who were behind the whole story, Mrvica, Luca and Antonela.

Community also exceeds the borders of the island, in the memories and feelings of so many people who have come across it, who connected to the people around it and who have left Brač with new experiences and a different mind set, like I did. In Croatian language the community is called *Udruga Zemlja Za Nas* [Association Earth for Us], and I have decided to write *zemlja* when referring to the place where the community is settled on in the text. The reason I choose to call it in my native Croatian is that the word *zemlja* is filled with meaning. The name of the community has always fascinated me, and it is easy to create connections on many levels, due to its layers and potential meanings. *Zemlja* in Croatian means a lot of things, it can mean Earth, as the planet, or it could be read as ground that we walk on, and finally it can be

land, a small or a big piece of land, a specific land that belongs to one or more people. *Za nas* means simply "for us".

Zemlja za nas is also a very well known lyric from the song "Zemlja" by one of the most influential 80s Ex-Yugoslavian rock bands called Ekatarina Velika (EKV). The songs by EKV were often played during my stays on *zemlja*, and the band was still popular in these areas, with all generations, even though their popularity peaked in late 80s and early 90s, just when Mrvica, Luca and Antonela were in their formative years of teenagehood and early adulthood. I decided to translate the text of the song "Zemlja" to give a more concrete feeling of why the members chose this name.

"This is the land for us, This is the land for all our people, This is a house for us, This is a house for all our children. Look at me, oh, look at me Through the eyes of a child. I see salvation in the land. The voice of the unknown wakes me from my sleep as the branches fondle our bodies. While the shadows make our cover. I hear - come back. I hear - stay. I hear - come back. Allow me. I hear - come back. I hear - stay. I hear - come back. Forgive me. In every defeat I saw a part of freedom. And when it's over. For me, you know, it only started." (Zemlja, EKV, 1987)

Catherine Baker, a senior lecturer at the University of Hull, pointed out the importance behind Ex-Yugoslavian rock bands. She argues that "a mass rock culture of stadium concerts and specialist media emerged in the late 1970s and peaked in the so-called new wave of 1980s rock. Yugoslav rock has been seen both as a means of extending public space and enabling expression outside of official institutions." (2010: 167). Baker notes that this genre was basically a way for people to express themselves freely.

MAGNETISM OF A PLACE, PASSING OF TIME

The community's founding three members, who started this whole story in 2006 on Brač, but in a different location, are Mrvica, Luca and Antonela. When speaking to Luce about the beginning, why they decided to come to the island, she said:

"That life in the city was not very good for us... We, all three, wanted to go somewhere, find a piece of land, settle in the country and create a different way of life. We are all city kids, we had some roots in the villages, but no experience. We searched first in Istria, searched and searched, but it didn't happen, it was pulling us in the direction of Dalmatia..."

So, why an island? First of all, the members of the community have moved away in some way from life in the city. The alternative to the city is represented by their words and desire to *"create a different way of life"*. Different in relation to the city, both in terms of place of residence and way of life. On the other hand, this alternative way of life could be realised on the island.

When speaking to Antonela she explained what this "alternative" was:

"All three of us synchronised in the fact that we could no longer be in the city, that it was all nonsense, we could not find a job in the profession, Mrvica escaped first. Several factors coincided, the nonsense of the city and the fact that a lot of people came to us, and a lot of people were helped by their stay with us in Rijeka. We were excited about togetherness, that we needed to be for each other, that we needed a place to have our own food. Place of tolerance - this is the first name in brainstorming. Then we imagined it as a place in the form of a club

outside Rijeka, where there will be a fusion and a meeting place for artists, creative people, gardeners, permaculturalist, land, culture, art, music, movies, readings."

The idea of finding an alternative way of living does not come as a surprise in a country with history like Croatia. In their article "Nowhere at home: Homelessness, non-heterosexuality and LGBT activism in Croatia" Antonela Marušić, working-class writer and independent journalist, and Bojan Bilić, a scholar behind ambitious project of documenting queerness in the Balkans,⁴ argue that in the last thirty years, Croatia, along with other countries in the post-Yugoslav area, has taken a path that has eliminated many emancipatory social policies of the former socialist regime (2019: 159). They go on saying that "Transitional processes - armed conflict, new state building, clientelistic privatisation, intensive deindustrialization, decentralisation and clericalization - have led to high rates of poverty and unemployment, increasing the number of those in need of social assistance." (2019: 159). Initially, discovering a new way of life was one of the reasons that motivated them to settle on the island, but has it become the community's ongoing lifestyle due to its dissimilarity from the conventional way of living? Although this statement holds significance, it may not accurately reflect the views of all community members as many now consider their island lifestyle as their everyday norm, while urban living appears foreign. The concept of an alternative lifestyle was primarily centred around the activities they envisioned and bringing together diverse individuals who could live and learn from one another. This different lifestyle was fostered in the unique space created on Brač,

⁴ Along with editing previously mentioned volume *Intersectionality and LGBT Activism* that includes the references chapter on homelessness, Bilić authored a monography on lesbian lives and activism in Serbia and Croatia (*Trauma, Violence, and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia*) and edited three more volumes that merge activist and confessional writing with more conventional academic style: *LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space*, *Lesbian Activism in the (Post-)Yugoslav Space* (together with Marija Radoman), and *Transgender in the Post-Yugoslav Space* (together with Iwo Nord and Aleksa Milanović).

which started with the small apartment shared by the founding members in Rijeka, and eventually led to the establishment of a self-sustaining village in less than ten years. The development of *zemlja* on Brač is a fascinating accomplishment, considering it was constructed from scratch. The transformation of one space significantly affects the wider and narrower population, and I see this happening in Brač, with the community being affected by changes on *zemlja*. For instance, if a new house is being built, this usually means someone is going to be living there, dividing the labour load, and contributing with new energy. Similarly, clearing the grass and dry bushes reduces the risk of summer wildfires, making the environment safer for everyone. During my conversation with some of the older members, I noticed that despite being aware of the potential difficulties of island life, they were drawn to the island. They chose Brač due to its location, which they believed made it the easiest place for them to start as "city girls" while still remaining relatively close to Split and not completely isolated from civilization. One of the members, Mrvica, who was not working at the time, took on the task of exploring the islands to find suitable land on behalf of all three. They eventually found Tonko, who owned the land and abandoned stone structure in Stipanska uvala on Brač, through an acquaintance. Tonko is a native islander, the owner of a private land with a stone house in which the women lived in agreement with him when they first came to Brač, from 2006 to 2013. They told Tonko what they needed, and that was a little further from the village, in the wilderness and nature. The conditions were that they had an ordinary house with water and electricity, and "*Tonko had everything but the basic conditions*", as Luce told me with a laugh. She continued; "*That wilderness, that nature, we liked that, so we came and started working, tidying up around the house, raising the roof. Tonko and us, together. And that's where it all started, that story with Stipanska.*"

With this narrative, Luce actually detected one of the central tropes of spiritual ecofeminism. In addition to relocation, moving from the centre to the edge, from the "dominant culture" to the less visible, peripheral and non-dominant, invoking "wilderness" and "nature" unequivocally connects the Brač community with the fundamental ideals of ecofeminist living and shaping new self-sufficient communities. Carslassare talked about the importance of spirituality and change in ecofeminist thought (2000: 90). The community's growth and cohesion would have been different if it had been established in a place with access to modern amenities. Spending winters in a small, 20-square-metre house on Tonko's land helped them face and solve problems rather than run away, fostering a close-knit community. Conflict and emotional labour can't be avoided in such an environment, as they explained to me several times during our conversations.

At that first time, in 2016, when I decided to find out more about the Brač Witches, or today's Community Earth for Us, they actually already had a registered citizens association and functioned differently than Luce told me it was in the beginning, more formal and organised. This was done mostly as they wanted to have a land of their own and not depend on Tonko, who was allowing them to live on his land. It was also done to be able to work on various projects with islanders and bring guests to exchange knowledge, to be able to organise events. Additionally, forming a registered association allowed them to raise much-needed funds.

It is important to reflect on the local situation as well. The society in Croatia is perceived as very divided, but also homogenous. Enes Kulenović, a professor at the Zagreb University, in

his article "Brak i Kulturkampf", excellently describes the dilemmas in Croatian society on the example of the referendum⁵ that took place in 2013. Kulenović says that the phrase culture war is a great term to describe how divided Croatian society is around some basic values that should support the building of an entire political community (2013: 14). After analysing the events surrounding the referendum, Kulenović gives an excellent overview of the current (2013) situation in Croatia:

"There are two dominant parties in the political sphere that represent completely different moral worldviews, although differences in public policies and economic policies are very small; avoiding the topic of economic crisis that neither the government nor the opposition can answer by introducing moral questions into public discourse, trying to discredit the left option in power by invoking traditional values that many citizens identify with and are contrary to the ideology of those in power. In addition, there are certain elements that are specific to Croatia: First, the Catholic Church has taken over the role of torchbearer of conservative politics from the hands of the HDZ as a discredited political option steeped in corruption. civic initiatives that were characteristic of the work of liberal and left-wing associations and take on rhetoric that invokes democratic principles" (2013: 18).

Even though the referendum took place years after the community was starting to form on Brač, it was happening just around the time that community decided to buy their own land. I feel these happenings, which left a deep mark on everyone in the society, most probably had a certain influence on the decision.

⁵ A referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage was held in Croatia on 1 December 2013, at which Croatian citizens declared whether they wanted the definition of the existing Family Law to be transposed into the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, as marriage is a union of a woman and a man. Almost two-thirds of the voters who voted supported the referendum question, thus introducing the definition of "Marriage is the living community of a woman and a man" into the Croatian Constitution. I have reflected on this legal change in the introductory part of my thesis, the constitutional change is mentioned again to emphasise its importance. The official version of the Constitution is available here: <https://www.zakon.hr/z/94/Ustav-Republike-Hrvatske>, accessed in May 2023

In 2021, when I decided to write about the community once more, again they functioned differently, due to changes in the membership and the size of land itself. Like Unger who spoke in her paper about the importance of place and how it can affect the dynamics of the community (2010: 175), the place and transition of the original community to a new location determined the new community dynamics. The influence of "place" on the dynamics community was extremely important in the community of women on Brač. While they lived on Tonko's land, next to Stipanska uvala, the future was uncertain and depended on Tonko's mood - that is, he could evict them from the land at any time and his nature, as Mrvica told me, hampered community progress, work and the plans they wanted to accomplish. Because of this, a change of location had to happen, to make sure that what they were working on and where they lived was really under their control. Antonela also reflected on this issue, telling me that:

"Apart from the darkness of cold and humidity in Stipanska, it was clear that Tonko would have his own strange and unreliable ideas, you could not communicate with him in the usual way. He is dear to me and all this together, but this situation always reminded me of the Beggars and Sons. He reminded me of Matan who never let Nusa⁶ put something of hers in his house. Tonko behaved very similarly, whenever they would find me something or if they told me that we needed something, he would bring something, but his own ... So he brought a lid from the trash can instead of a baking sheet. He does not want us to bring the same. It was some weird exchange, great that it had an expiration date."

⁶ *Beggars and Sons* is a Yugoslav drama series filmed in 1971, directed by Antun Vrdoljak, and originally broadcast in 1984 on Radiotelevizija Zagreb within the JRT network. It is based on the novel of the same name by Ivan Raos and depicts the ups and downs of several generations of families of beggars, gallant workers and bag makers born in the Imotski region.

The inability to create something on their own was definitely one of the biggest reasons the community moved away from Stipanska to find another location, and this makes perfect sense when we think about how this community consisted mostly of women, and queer women at that, who came to Brač to lead a life on their own rules. The love and hate relation they had with Tonko is in my opinion and from my overall experience with the members actually a resistance to control. This is the same control they felt in the city, from institutions and bosses, just in the form of a person who is allowing them to create their own paradise, but in some cases, on his own accord.

Place was definitely something that was important when speaking to my informants. Island life, nature life, off grid life... It is connected a lot to the ideas of freedom. While the city is considered as limiting. Is there something about Brač that keeps this community together? Is it a special island, is there something magical on Brač? It definitely is magical for the members of the community and many who visit, in my opinion there is a simple answer, not even related to the beautiful mature or the crystal blue sea. In my opinion the magic of Brač is that life there is slow, and time has a different way of flowing. When speaking to Mrvica, this was clear in a few sentences she said:

"I hated waiting for the traffic lights. I thought about how much time in my life I spend on red lights. I have limited movement in the city. And here in Brač, OMG we live on a small continent where there is no traffic light. This is just a banal example. Also, seeing the stars, there is light pollution in the city. In nature I felt at home, free, and peaceful. In the city I felt like someone placed me in a playstation console and moderated my life. Also, here, our dogs are free, they don't have to be on leash, basic human rights, that someone doesn't guide you every day like

you're a robot. Also, HEP⁷ plumbing, free from it! If the garden lives, also we are free from food dependence. We are far from an ideal self sustainable rate, but there is so much we have done so far."

I loved when Mrvica spoke about the traffic lights. It is true. I remember my own frustration when leaving from Brač to a city, be it my hometown Zadar, or Vienna. Even though the traffic light stops you in the city, the traffic itself never stops. The movements are constant, while on Brač, drives are a joy, especially on the gravel roads going to *zemlja*, passing by olive groves and beautiful meadows. There is only one traffic light on the whole island. Other things are also very much connected to the slowness of life there, even though it might not seem like that. Ability to stop and look at the things around you, not rushing from one obligation to the other, not having to worry about your furry companion, not having to worry about bills and other things, lets you focus your energy on other things, hence making people think time goes by at a different pace. I see this slowness as a big motivator of always coming back, and in the end staying a few days, weeks or even months longer than planned. In the 5 years that I have been visiting the land, I have witnessed so many people coming there for a weekend and ended up staying for a month. Time is weird in Brač. It is not unusual to hear this view of everyday life. In her 2016 article, Bokan says that the topic of sustainability in the Croatian media is still more of a kind of optimistic counterbalance to the disincentive and gloomy sections of daily political events. .It is frustrating to many that neither institutions nor citizens have yet seriously committed themselves to achieving a more sustainable society, and unlike some countries west of Croatia, sustainable development is not a political issue (2016: 46).

⁷ HEP is the Croatian state power supplier.

Also, when thinking of materialist ecofeminism, the slowness of time and the importance of it make sense. The criticism from material ecofeminist relates to the modern way of exploiting nature, women and workers in the fastest time possible, in a way that is considered unsustainable, to accelerate material growth that eventually leads to social inequality.

Maja told me the story of her coming to Brač for the first time and this anecdote perfectly describes why people are enticed by *zemlja* from the very first moment:

"I heard about the Amazons from my friend Lovro... And I told Karla and Sunci, who wanted to shoot a movie about people living on an island the whole year, about them. At this point I was thinking that they were literally living on the land as people kept saying "na zemlji", there were no houses, sleeping on the floor. Considering what my expectations were, this turned out pretty OK! The first time I came with Karla and Sunci, and later on, a few months later, instead of climbing with friends I came here (ZZN) with my bike to have lunch. And did not leave really. Dare later joined so we ended up sleeping over, as people usually do (hahaha) We were returning at 5 am to catch the morning ferry, it was night, we had no bike lights, and I mean, the moon shining over the path, it was really magical. And we realised that Dare had his birthday."

IT TAKES A VILLAGE. OR DOES IT?

The success of this community definitely does not depend on the amount of people living there. Time spent on *zemlja*, living there or participating in all the bigger actions is not what keeps the bond of the people living. This was made obvious to me not just by the things I have heard from my informants, but also my own experiences. I remember spending time on *zemlja* with just one member, Mrvica or Antonela. And I remember being there with 12 of us sleeping all over the place and tripping over each other. Everything still worked out fine and the community endured the ups and downs. I remember one Saturday during fieldwork, it was complete chaos and

nobody understood who was doing what. Maja announced she was coming with her friends, Dare and baby, to grill some fish and do some mulching. Some people were grilling fish, some people were baking vegetables, few of us were mulching and the members who knew how to, were pruning olives. Antonela was worried as we did not make proper arrangements before, and it turned out to be justified later, in a sense. The same day, later, a few friends were invited to eat the grilled fish, but due to not organising everything and people scattering before this, and coming only in the breaks from work, to pick up coffee or eat, the two later visitors were welcomed by bread and vegetables. We were talking days after this about how chaotic everything was, and using this anecdote to laugh. But even though it was tiring, it ended up being an anecdote rather than a painful memory.

The current situation is like this: Although the community officially has about ten members, only three of them currently live and work on the land. This means that when the time comes for big activities, such as picking or cutting olives, a few of them work on their own trees, but also the olives of those who are not on the land at that time. Work obligations are far greater for members living on land, and accordingly a source of some disagreements in the distribution of oil or talks on labour valorization. In the many Slack, email and Whatsapp conversations the issue of valorization was mentioned and put up as a very important topic. Also seriously diligently created excel sheets were made, with the amount of work hours spent and what kinda work is being done here. This was mostly sparked with the separation of the community that was happening in 2017. In that time the members who decided to leave pointed out how much money they invested, and not much was mentioned about the people who spent years working on the olives and making sure that everything was running smoothly. This was taken badly by the

remaining members and I remember that so many emails were exchanged trying to figure out who, how and how much time worked these physical work. To try to separate the community and land without having to owe the other parties money. This stayed important even after the break up of the community, to valorize the work of people who spend more time on *zemlja* and to try to make things fair. Like the lesbian separatist communities in Sandilands' study (2002: 156), the Earth for Us community has developed a unique perspective on the land they live and cultivate based on their shared experiences and values. Additionally, Sandilands' suggestion that these communities may offer a model for rejecting dominant norms and embracing alternative lifestyles is relevant to the Earth for Us community's decision to live off-grid as a way of challenging the dominant values of capitalism and patriarchy and valorise their work in a way they consider fair. When I talked to Antonela about this, she told me this:

"It is our task to realistically set up our own process, what we can do and what we can, and communicate it well. It seems to me that we now have enough knowledge, and that we have awakened. Karla and Maja began to realise their responsibilities, Maja came for a day one day and mulched a lot with her friends. That's it, ever since we started talking about hours and valorization... but it took some time to come to it ever since we started talking. Things are changing, we realised that we have to put everyone in a situation to come and organise something themselves to know how important or difficult it is when it only stands on two people. What fills us is to see what we have made, these trees look like trees. Now you see what the next step is."

Living there full time is needed for sure, as *zemlja* needs taking care of. But not all members can be there all the time. To give an example, for many years Antonela was spending only winters on Brač, as she was working as a seasonal worker in tourism in dubrovnik, while after the recent

break up of ZZN, the ZZNexit as it is often referred to, Mrvica was living alone there for a few months, with other members stopping by when they could.

One person that I talked to, Aneta, spoke about this issue, she mentioned that in the very beginning, when the land was bought, it was weird for her and Jens that they were trying to build something, an eco village at that, and that they were living in Germany at the same time. So in the beginning they were on Brač a lot, and even signed Sena, their daughter, in the kindergarten on the island. Every member has their own view on this, which changes with the changes in their own personal life dynamics. Now the situation is different with Aneta, she now is more in Germany after her husband Jens passed away in 2019, solving legal stuff around the company Jens had, having Sena in school in her native language and in therapy, but comes on the bigger actions related to tending olive trees. She has a plan to come back at one point, though. In this example, and according to the description of the situation with other members, one can see the flexibility and solidarity of the community. In Bokan's work we can read that the basis of the creation of ecovillages is thinking about the way society affects the environment, and with their set of values and actions they design and develop the idea and practice of sustainability. She highlighted the various dimensions of sustainability that Lay (2007) talked about, but for this example I think the most important thing is to highlight the level of sociocultural sustainability. It is about "nurturing a set of values that include the intertwining of social life and nature, nurturing identity and interpersonal relationships, developing consensus, respecting diversity (sociodiversity), developing creative and teamwork" (2016: 54).

What I can conclude here is that the community does depend on people coming, especially when the big activities are ongoing. This is when the experience and know-how of the oldest members really shines through. But it is also the time when volunteers come to help, and the networks of

friends and acquaintances needs to be called upon. While the village and the members would prosper from having more people there it also survives without reaching the "ideal number" of full time habitants with the other members, friends and volunteers coming by.

AN INDIVIDUAL IN A COMMUNITY

While talking to my informants, I noticed a "mixture" of different forms of communities that Bokan talks about in her work (2016: 48); at the same time it is a commune, a group, a cooperative. Earth for Us is a community that believes social structures can be formed through consensus rather than being inherited. It is both an eco-village and a commune, providing a space for its members to create and decide on their own social patterns and structures. For the women who left the city to join the community, this was an opportunity to be part of something they built themselves, rather than following existing structures. This ties back to the idea of creating a new way of life. The community is defined by its members, and as each individual has different needs, the structure of the community changes accordingly.

The importance of individualism, but also togetherness was emphasised throughout my conversation with Mrvica and one of the questions that was in my head during the conversation was how the ideals of unity and individuality are defined and balanced within the community, on the way to establishing a common culture. Is it within an inclusive and supportive environment for all participants? Holleman in her work, wondered "Is too much individualism getting in the way of forming a cohesive community, able to work toward common goals and reach for a shared vision; or is too big a drive toward communitarianism overshadowing the personal expression of, and understanding for, individual differences that inevitably exist within a community?" (2011: 2). Through their stay on Zemlja and informal conversations with other

members, it showed that both dilemmas are intertwined through their relationship dynamics and history of forming this community, depending on the current situation of the community or depending on the current mood of the community member individually.

In a similar vein to Holleman (2011), my interviewees also grappled with the tension between individuality and communal values within their community. While modern society often celebrates diversity and individuality, As Holleman mentions, there are times when these values can create problems. Conversely, a strong sense of community can provide a sense of empowerment, but it can also be constraining in certain contexts. (Holleman, 2011: 5) Why, how and when do these tensions arise? In the case of Earth for us, prompted by the experience of Stipanska, women decided to start their new story not ignoring these problems, but directly recognizing them, and solving so that on earth work, cooking, agreements and financial decisions work together, and at the end of the day they can still retreat into solitude which is an obvious natural human need. When speaking to Mrvica, we discussed the importance that community has for her. The way she sees her individual self in relation to the community is affected by many important things that overlap. One thing is feeling a diversion toward the typical nuclear family, and the other one is a common worldview. In her words:

"But, I do not believe in nucleuses, but rather I feel that I function much better in this type of community, accidental, natural and organic. Worldview is also pretty important, that people have similar beliefs, and how they think the world and life should be like, that on the basic human vibe they understand each other and love each other. Much more we can as individuals grow when we are surrounded by different people than just blood relatives."

Individuality and different views have challenged this community more than once. One of the recent examples is the split of the community that happened after Mrvica and her partner Ivana broke up. This ended up being a long process of not just a partner break up, but a legal ongoing battle and process of dividing land, and every small thing on *zemlja*, including menial things like big cooking pots and the plastic cover that is used to collect rainwater.

Maja spoke about this as well. She said to me simply this: *"Chaos is necessary for this what we are doing here, there is no hierarchy, each voice is equally important. It is impossible to 'fix' this. So there are quiet periods, better fluctuations and so on but..."*

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN

While speaking to Aneta, she had told me that a short while before her husband Jens died suddenly from a heart attack, they were ready to move back to Brač, to work on land. She said:

"At this moment now with Corona and after Jens died, I am completely alone, and I want even more to go back to the community. It means a lot to me, when I came the first year, when we worked like crazy, and criticized each other, I was thinking OMG what did I get myself into, zajednica is a no go, fuck off zajednica. And I cried a lot, and even a few times when I got back it wasn't easy, but now looking from this point of view, I am totally ok with fighting, misunderstanding and hectic times, just to be with the community. Brač, the weather, the blue skies, the sea, it means a lot for the soul as well. I see the near future in Brač, waiting until Sena is 18 to be a bit more free."

While speaking to her, I noticed how important emotional support is. While going through a very difficult time in her life, Aneta was happy that the community was there. One of the members was mentioned as the one that was there the most, and that she feels keeps the whole community together, Mrvica. Antea said this:

"I think Mrvica, to us all, I think she is like a little wonder(...) But I think that Mrvica is the only person who if she leaves, I am sure that the community would fall apart." This feeling of wanting to go to the community when we approach a wall in life was very much familiar to me as well, as I have personally experienced it also. When speaking to Maja, I asked her if she thought that the reason this community has not fallen apart is the fact that it is a (mostly) women community. She agreed and told me that she was simply just waiting to find Zemlja: *"I was so needing female energy. Me, my sister and mom were the only thing I had. I was hanging out with guys mostly before, and here I got a boost of women's energy which really felt good to me."*

When speaking to members, but also from my own experience, I got the impression that the whole big chunk of what keeps this community together is the immense amount of emotional labour and support. It is the essence. Justin Van Ness and Erika Summers-Effler emphasise the importance of emotions in social movements, and I think their conclusions are valid in the case of this small community as well. The argument made in 2018 (p.413) suggests that although previous literature on participation emphasises the role of social connections and community groups in attracting, involving, and keeping members, there is insufficient focus on the emotional value that underpins these affiliations. Van Ness and Summers-Effler continue that while scholars such as Whittier and Taylor and Bernstein have recognized the importance of collective identity in social movements, the emotional mechanisms that lead to the formation of shared identity are frequently neglected, despite the fact that they are crucial in explaining how and why collective identity can be harnessed for mobilisation, a gap that parallels that of research on social networks (2018: 414).

This seemed like it fits in with what I discovered while talking to my informant. Especially at the point in time where the community does not really prosper much or has any financial gains. Mrvica told me:

"I mean especially now at this moment, people don't come here because we have an abundance, fruits, veggies. We don't have to work, we are lying down and just picking the fruits ahahaha, it is so good and we are free. There is so much work, physical, intellectual, emotional etc. But people come here exactly because this is a safe zone (the idea from the beginning) and people around you love you for who you are, accept your flaws, and are honest to each other. When the time comes and there is a situation, we all have some problem, and the way conflicts here are solved gives people a feeling of safety - in the sense that no one is punished or sanctioned because they don't know something or cannot do something, or they have not arrived at a point in life. If you are surrounded by people who are still there for you and are willing to point out your flaws in a gentle way, that is very important. And we are more gentle in our communication, even if we fight bad, pull each others hair and so on... and when we sleep it off, we kinda get it that our ego is not worthy of big stuff like this falling part just because we are called out or we are not in understanding of each other in a certain moment."

When speaking to Antonela, she came back to the importance of constant work on ourselves and the necessity of meetings and talking. The synchronisation meetings are one example of how members of a community can work on their issues. There are many smaller synchronizations during the year, when big actions are taking place, but there are also 4 bigger meetings per year where every member is expected to be, before in person, now a hybrid model is accepted. On the bigger meetings various issues are resolved, such as spatial planning, future

activities, discussion when a new member wants to join and conflict resolution. These meetings that the community has now is a remnant from Stipanska bay, when they worked on their relationships, conflicts, problems by facing it together. She said:

"But with great willpower, we came to the point where we found a way to function in the sense that we emptied ourselves once a week, levelled ourselves, and all of us hugged nicely through these synchronizations. Once a week we have to sit opposite each other and talk, it's hard for me, so to figure out that border between you and other people, it was easier for some, harder for some... we were very naked in front of each other, and when people get to that stage because it's a level you don't get to with other people, it's Stipanska's sociological experiment. You come to interdependence, but on the other hand we have come to understand our pathological minimum."

ZEMLJA ZA NAS - EARTH(LAND) FOR US

Out of fear of discrimination and concern for their own safety, LGBTIQ people often gravitate towards safe friendly communities, from activist groups, art colonies to sports associations, so that they can continue to participate in various social activities within a safe environment. Or they create a safe space.

The community was formed by three queer women. Women who were looking for a different way of living, a place for them and their friends to feel welcome. Even though I must emphasise that this community does not define itself as a lesbian, or even women only community, many of the members and their friends are exactly that, queer women. And in creating a place that is according to their own ideas, they also created a safe space for LGBTIQ+ people. Brač, due to Luce, Mrvica and Antonela, and the whole wave of people that followed them, has become the queer island of Croatia, in my opinion, which was not the original

intention at all. With Earth for us being one place that attracted not only them, but their queer friends, it became a place to be and to meet safely with queer friends. Something like a gay bar in the capital, but on the seaside, which is usually not the most open place toward gay people. When speaking to Mrvica, she said:

"Also, we were kinda black sheep, discriminated against groups of people - and this was a reason to do mutual empowerment. I think already in Rijeka we understood that the whole city thing was pointless, and it was time to take care of each other. And we kinda knew that city would not give us this, we were already running away from the city a lot at that point, and conversation started then where will we all feel ok, all of us lesbians, gays, our dogs, hahah... We were looking for a safe space. It seemed logical to us in nature, because we didn't feel natural in the city. My first nervous breakdown I got was in the city. The surroundings I was in were not healthy for me, not just sexual orientation, but also all the jobs... The way things function did not resonate with how I think life should look like." She also added at one point of our interview another important thing: *"Being a (mostly queer) women community is the advantage and strength of the community, when we are together we feel stronger, due to being women, but also due to sex orientation, most of us here are either bisexual or homosexual. This emotional aspect of the whole story is natural to us women, that it is so important for us. We found strength in this."*

Despite major changes in societal attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTIQ) individuals over the past ten years, research by various civil society organizations and public testimonies shows that there is still a significant level of discrimination and various forms of sexual abuse. These discrimination can be various micro-aggressions and spread to systematic and institutional abuse. Unfortunately, despite sensitising the public about the rights of LGBTIQ

people and sharing their experiences since the beginning of the pride parade in Croatia, it seems that there is still much room for work, both in the private sphere and in public institutions.

In her research, Butterfield pointed out the differences at the level of rural and urban areas in Croatia. She said that when asked about the differences, many of her interlocutors pointed out that "life, for example, in Zagreb or Rijeka, differs in many ways from their lives in rural areas or small towns they come from, which is driven either to leave them or to stay, depending on how they felt in their environment" (2019: 273). In her research on homosexuals in rural Croatia, Butterfield also discussed Dalmatia, the region where the island of Brač is located. Butterfield says that the discourses about the homophobic "nature" of the Dalmatian region are very pronounced in public opinion, but also with the people she questioned. (2019: 281) Numerous factors influenced this, but these ideas, says Butterfield, came to light especially after the violent attacks on the first Split Pride Parade in 2011, organised by the Zagreb lesbian group Kontra and the Split feminist group Domine. The procession, which advocated for the rights of same-sex couples and families, took place on the waterfront in the city center, facing thousands of violent protesters who threw stones and shouted "Kill fagots!" (2019: 282).

Even though *zemlja* is a safe space, created by queer women, community Earth for Us or the members definitely do not define the community as "Lesbian". When speaking to Antonela, she said to me:

"We are still very unusual here, because of the way of life, that we talk loudly about differences, and we do not hide who we are, what we are, in everyday communication with people, it is different to do it here or somewhere else. Here, though, people think gays are something else. It won't be gay Brač here for a long time. In particular, it was important to me not to declare

ourselves as a minority, with a sexual orientation, because I think it is unfair to take one thing out of context, as a Sexual orientation. I think it's important to work on everything at once because when they see us either individually or in a group, the Bračans saw messy, dirty, funny Amazons who are Satanists, lesbians, whatever. But after two olive harvests it was different, and they talked like this: they are on their own but they are valuable. It's one thing that united them, they don't care if we're lesbians or anything else. Some other things, they now see through the prism that we are honest and diligent. Better in small places, that we just started with everything, not one by one. We seek tolerance for all."

So in the tellings of Antonela, we can see the other dimension of this. It is not only the community members and their friends who come to Brač, the native islanders need to be considered as well, and in the opinion of Antonela, the labels of sexuality would be something that would be in the way of creating a connection on a wider level, with the rest of the island people, and they live so closely with them and depended a lot on working in local fields and olive grooves when they first arrived. As I mentioned earlier, the association Zemlja za nas has achieved various forms of cooperation with the islanders of Brač, both privately working on their land and at the level of local communities and institutions since they founded the association and thus had the opportunity to write projects. In 2014, they organised a public forum entitled "Self-sustainability on the island of Brač", which was held at the Gallery in Nerežišće. The forum was organizationally supported by the Municipality of Nerežišće and the local Tourist Board, and the program was diverse. In 2015, the association and the Local Volunteer Center Brač organised an action of cleaning and arranging the beach Lovrečina, with special emphasis on the remains of the church from the sixth century. The response of the people of Brač, according to the women, was not significant at that time. However, there was a change in the next big project. It was the

last big project, the construction of vapnenica⁸, that they worked with the neighbours of Brač. The construction of the limestone started on April 21, 2016 in cooperation with the Elementary School Pučišća, associations USSOB, ANTROPOP, the Association for Island Development Brač and the association Dragodid which has been protecting and promoting drywall heritage for many years. It was about the cooperation of almost the whole island. And also something that might not come to them if they did focus only on that one aspect of their lives, sexuality.

NOSTALGIA - A PAST ERA REVIVED

In the words of Kirsi-Maria Hytönen, a postdoctoral researcher at University of Jyväskylä, nostalgia "is a longing for the past, the safe and familiar world where things are better. Nostalgic narration has been compared to a search for a lost paradise" (2013: 96). This resonated with me when hearing the stories of Mrvica and Armina. Childhood is one more motif I heard much about, when asking about the reason why community living seemed like a good option for the members. When speaking to Mrvica she told me that she thinks it is connected to the fact that she grew up in a women's household. She lived in a small apartment with her mom, two women tenants. When remembering childhood memories, the visual of a nostalgic village side appeared. Mrvica explained that the tenants she and her mum were living with, often invited them to their village, and that she fondly remembered weekend visits to the village in Žumberak:

"They were a pretty self-sufficient community, they had everything, just not sugar and oil. They had cattle, wheat, and a garden... And every night after work in the field there was so much

⁸ Vapnenica or japnenica, is a simple drywall construction for the traditional production of lime from stone. They are present all along the coast and wider in the Mediterranean, but the need for their construction and generally the need to obtain lime in this way has almost disappeared in recent decades due to the availability of modern materials. <http://www.dragodid.org/obnovila-se-puciska-vapnenica/>

wine, live music in one of the houses and a spontaneous party. And it made me so happy. When I had to move back to the apartment... I was like why."

Armina also talked about finding in this community something she felt before in her childhood and young age. While talking about the reasons she joined the community she mentioned that she has so many reasons, millions of them:

"I don't know. I love being alone, and I know how to be alone, but I was also always in a pack, working with many people, I was surrounded by people. I think I started to believe in community, or creating communal projects, from the war, when we were in a shelter so small with 20 people. Everyone slept together. One apartment did the cooking for the entire building. So when i was a child, 11,12, during this war period, I learnt this communal way of living. You learn to share. Everything is very public, be it snoring or fighting. So later, after the war period it was very active, there was so much to do. Through the activist practices I learned what matters to me, politically, spatially... With my body I was in the whole story and my family situation was never stable, so through my friend I fulfilled what I did not have at home. There was food or whatever, but no closeness. I was basically a roommate with my parents, from a distance. In Venice also, there were people who I was doing something with. So when I came here, I felt a similar feeling, something that I already know. This is probably the 4th collective I work in. There are more reasons."

THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL RELATIONS ON COMMUNITY: THE STORY OF THE ZZNEXIT

One other thing central to community is relations between people. In 2018, a split happened on the land. After Mrvica, one of the founders and her previous partner Ivana broke up. The split made the personal relations difficult, and divided the members, not just the relationship between

Ivana and Mrvica, friendships were broken and plans ended. This wound up in the fact that four people left the community. And this also changed the way land and ownership looked like, the land size was cut almost in half. This is often mentioned as the "ZZNexit" jokingly referring to Brexit.

When I was speaking to Mrvica, she mentioned this event when I asked her how often she had crises. She said this:

"But during the time of 15 years I went through many crises. I thought that the community would fall apart, and being left alone on the land, when everyone left and when ZZNexit happened, I realised that I am here because I cannot go back. The system is mean, perfidious, and it moves us away from the idea that we can be free."

I wanted to push this topic a bit more in the interview, as Mrvica has been living in the community, in one way or another, for the last 15 years. So I asked her if she ever thought of giving up. She told me this:

"I never wanted to leave, sometimes I would be tired and my enthusiasm would drop, but the universe supported me in the crises. I stayed because a lot of things got in place, people started returning, staying, and the situation with Corona did a big positive thing for the community. It shook things up, and people started thinking about horror scenarios. We realise that something is happening on the planet, and you think there is time, but this kinda makes things faster."

It is clear in the example of the split that happened after the break up that all human interaction influences the community, no matter if they are personal, they do end up reflecting on the bigger level. She told me this:

"And after the break up, what had happened, happened, some people were pulled to her side. And the people now here, they decided not to take sides but think of it as a completely normal"

thing, that someone is breaking up and that they cannot any longer be in the same kind of relationship. But no matter the kind of relationships of people, not only love relations are not the only ones that can destabilise a community, this also happens with friend relationships. I think the ZZNexits left because many other things, it was more clear that Ivana and Lana think of this place as a something like a company, some place that will be model how collectives function and copy it on this one, in the sense of hierarchy, decision making, investing from capital to energy. And everyone else that went into this story, we never imagined it like this. And even today when I think about projects, grants and so on, I often question and dread if it is very risky and think that we might go into a way of functioning that we do not really want to go in, or that mattered in the beginning. And that is that people feel welcome no matter what or how much they have to offer, materially or any other capacity."

In this part of my talks with Mrvica I got the most clarity about some of the questions I had when starting this paper, even though it answered more the question of what made people leave the community, not so much on why they stay. There are a couple of layers here to consider. One is the ability to adapt, be open to the opinions and decisions of others, even if they do not sometimes reflect our own. One is the idea and visions of a place. A community like this cannot develop by a plan, it is fluid and changes so much. It is important to let go and accept it. Some people simply cannot.

I spoke to Aneta about this situation. She told me that all the interpersonal difficulties were totally normal, human. She attributed it to individual responsibility, that simply people who are in a community like this need to work on their own personalities:

"But it is great, it is the only way to learn. Sometimes it hurts, but if there is a moment you fight you learn to do it differently next time. I know people who live in the city, and people have their

own space, they are alone and with them, they are in their own systems and it is difficult to be with them alone. There is no one to counter your ideas and thoughts. There is order, cleaning the house, then people talk about who worked more, etc. Community living really is aimed against ego."

Aneta told me that until the end she still thought it would not be so difficult, that the exit is not going to be a total or final one. She still held hope that it would somehow smooth over:

"I even wrote a concept for eco tourism that included Sanda and Ivana, and yeah, I did not know that she was so serious about leaving, that she was so disappointed in Mrvica. It is not easy to answer this. We all kind of hated each other at that moment, the division is now OK, but we were all "in the air" at that moment. I mean now, with new people coming, new energy we did it in the end, so that the community managed to get through again."

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

In their work, from the beginning to its present form, members of the community have encountered many obstacles. It took seven years from the point that they were initially on someone else's land to finding the current location with an acceptable price per square meter. Even after finding the land, there are legal "entanglements" that prevent them from building a more serious building, such as the volunteer centre they are planning, because they bought agricultural land on which it is not legally possible to build.

It was Erbaugh (2002) who spoke of the barriers of institutionalised structures, which stand in the way of communities and the general distrust of the capitalist system and the values woven into it, as a reason for women's communities to opt for off-grid existence. Interestingly, in the case of the community, after moving away from the completely off-grid way of life on Tonko's land, these problems returned from which they initially wanted to move away. Here it is worth

remembering why some members call for a complete change of the social system and bureaucratic capitalist institutions, which does not make it easier for alternative communities like the Earth For Us Association to exist. Also, since they are pioneers in terms of this way of life and construction, they also have problems with legislation. That is, they cannot get building permits because the land is agricultural, and if they changed the function of the land, they could no longer use it for agriculture. There are many such "tricks" that hinder them in some projects, but such obstacles have not diminished the enthusiasm of the members. Mrvica raised the issue of legalisation:

"At one point maybe we will have legalised this whole thing. This does not really frighten me but I realise that at one point the system might come by and ask what this is. We created a whole village without an address, afterall. I see this as a potential issue, what will happen when someone asks this question."

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

According to Bokan, ecovillages, no matter how rare they are when compared to other types of communities, certainly represent a model of sub-political action and local, decentralised, environmentally conscious and socially possible development. According to the author, they contain the potential for a better quality of life for many social strata that are mostly impoverished and pushed to the socio-economic margin or discriminated against (2016: 66). What is the potential of *zemlja*? When speaking to everyone, I asked them how they see the future, with so many changes happening and difficulties. And I got many different answers. I considered this especially important as I feel the future views also show a level of like mindedness. Even though the answers were different it was interesting to hear how the place remains in the thoughts of everyone, even though the people might change. Van Ness and

Summers-Effler in their work mention a quote by Gupta from 2009 that argues that "small incremental victories can generate feelings of hope which keep activists oriented to the future with anticipation for more victories. Activists can also develop emotional ties to places which provide continuity through changes in social network structures." (2018: 416)

When speaking to Aneta, I understood that her idea for the future is that more people live there, with their own houses. Not legally of course, but that they at least have some licences or approvals from the local government. This part was the reason for many disappointments in the start, this trying to find a loophole in a system that does not cater to this way of living. To take care of the legal situation, would ease their minds and mend their fears. Aneta had a vision. She said that her idea is:

"To have a workshop house, a place where people can sleep but where it is an open spaced safe nice space where we can do yoga, dance, or whatever. I would like to see us go into healthy things that can help the soul and body. Plus nature gives so much there. And that we can have an easier life, so that in the future we don't have to work so much physically, so we can find a way to handle this differently. It is still a process."

Armina on the other hand says the future for her is too difficult to think about this. Armina also has her child Timur, who is in school, to think about when deciding about her future and stability. *"I do not know. But I love it here, and if there is a crisis I think I would stay here. Even if I was not in the community I would like to stay on the island."*

Here we come to go beyond theory. What does it mean to live ecofeminism, therefore, to get out of academic circles that can often be privileged and elitist, and really apply the principles of ecofeminism in work within the community, and on land, especially on an island like Brač, where all land products, from olives to dairy and other local products are most often intended for

expensive shelves of gastro shops or duty free shops, for tourists with deeper pockets. With regard to the future of the members of the community, I see the potential for sustainable development in a capitalist society, but also the reality that the path to complete self-sustainability and independence from the outside world is still a long way off.

With Mrvica I spoke in the most detail about her vision of the future. This may be also due to the fact that Mrvica is definitely one who started this whole story and went through so many years of ups and downs. She told me this:

"I thought about this a lot, especially when there was a point when I was scared that everything was falling apart and that everyone was leaving. Community is a living organism, and it is natural that is changing. That includes some people coming and going. And this is where our strength is. That we need to be open to new people. And I am always happy when we have new people, when someone comes and when they say that they feel happy and accepted. Who gets inspired and encouraged to go on a similar way, or join this community. In the end I think about a path, rather than an end."

Mrvica however also mentioned that she'd love to see people of many generations here at one point of time. She envisioned about 8 people living on Zemlja, people who will be here at all time, with hopes that the frustrations and problems they have now here would be smaller. It would be easier. *"So that we have kids, old people... Maybe we are the first seniors here hahaha"*

I did wonder what the members have in common when they do think about what ZZN is supposed to be, and what it means for each person. Mrvica told me this:

"I think that due to us being completely different creatures, not sure that I can say yes we all think the same, kinda sounds like a sect. I am happy that we are different and question each

other. On the last Veliko Vijece, we had this topic on how we see this place, and really nobody thinks this should be this new age retreat bullshit, that makes us money. But for me, with our work we can be self-sustainable. I think we are more harmonised in the vision of what we are shaping this place."

Maja's thoughts are similar to Amirna. For her community happened with no planning. She said that she:

"...was never attracted to the idea of community, it was even unnatural to me. But there were so many people that I really liked in many ways, and that attracted me. Even now, some moments of community are chaotic, and it is too much for me (shaking aaaaah). It depends, on who here is, there are a lot of factors, if it is stressful it is more difficult... But recently, sometimes even when there are a lot of people, we are somehow getting along! When it comes to the possibilities of the community falling apart - All things are processes, even in the city, and everything has an expiration date. What does ending mean? Process is, some people, I mean while they are here they enjoy it and make the best of it. I don't feel good talking about this place in 10 years and saying that it failed you know."

Armina concluded her thought about this topic following to Maja:

"There is a fear, a normal fear of breaking, that things will fall apart. But it is healthy. I can imagine that in 5 years I am no longer here, but that others are still here, and that step back kinda helps you think what you want how you want it. I dunno. I would not like to be addicted to just this place, it would be dangerous for future and future members."

Chapter 4. Conclusion

In my opinion, no ethnological research can be really completed and give a final claim, especially when it comes to small communities whose structure is fluid and changeable. Earth

for Us is such a community. To come back on the initial questions I started with, what sustains this community, the answers are layered. One common thing is definitely a shared worldview, love towards nature, building something with your own hands, but what I noticed when speaking to almost everyone is the importance of emotional support and willingness to work on yourself and bury the ego for a common goal. A funny anecdote to support this: While writing this thesis, we were all informed that there is a zine being done on another island collecting community living experiences, so a few members of community Earth for Us participated in writing a joint document that tells their story, from their perspective. And while reading this a few days later, I stumbled onto this quote which I decided to use to close my thesis. It does not have a single author and tells the story of what it all means:

"We learned a lot through life with other people, islanders and everyone who came and went from the community, and from nature and animals, through life with other people, islanders and everyone who came and went from the community, and from nature and animals, , and our biggest challenge was to set boundaries and create space and time for ourselves -. We consider the basis of the success of this community, in addition to physical, and emotional work, which usually remains invisible, invested in the creation and growth of this community, which has been transformed countless times."

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