

Conservation, *Naturschutz*, and Environmental Policy in Nazi Germany
By: Jamie Mosel

Today, Germany is a leader in attempts to cut carbon emissions, continuing to emphasize the virtues of environmental awareness.¹ Even so, in Germany the admonitions of many advocates for the protection of nature, or ‘*Naturschutz*’² at the beginning of the twentieth century were met, initially, with considerable indifference; that nature would suddenly require protection ran contrary to centuries of human struggle against seemingly indomitable elements.³ During the latter half of the 19th century, many societies across Europe experienced an intense industrialization coupled with urbanization theretofore unseen. The impact of this transition on natural landscapes was both devastating and visible. Factories, automobiles, and railways intruded upon the face of the land. It is particularly during this time that seminal conservation groups recognized the urgency of protecting a nature that was quickly disappearing.⁴ Gradually, as the consequences for human populations and for the environment became apparent, the necessity to address ecological concerns found recognition by a wider public.⁵

Yet the term ‘green’ is of modern convention, and so to apply it to any historical state beyond its own existence in usage is inaccurate. Likewise, ‘environmentalism’ as the movement it is today, has its beginnings in the 1970s, in the development of “a historically unique combination of ecocentrism and New Left social concerns.”⁶ Despite Germany’s present record, the

1 Lekan, Thomas M.. and Zeller, Thomas. *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*. Rutgers University Press, 2005.

2 Dominick, Raymond. *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871-1971*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. 6.

3 Dominick., 3

4 Lekan, Thomas M.. *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945*. Harvard University Press, 2004. 4.

5 Lekan. 256. For more on this topic, see Lekan’s discussions of the Rhine as the “Sewer of Europe” and measures to decrease waste dumping into water sources.

6 Ibid. Lekan explains that “ecological concerns and antinuclear protests galvanized the emerging Green movement of the 1970s” and were “part of a renewed environmental concern that had previously peaked in the

historiography of German environmentalism, when compared to extensive scholarly investigation concerning American or English historical environmentalism, is noticeably more lacking in documentation.⁷ This is surprising, given that Germany was at least among other European powers like Britain, and Sweden, in its conservation efforts throughout the twentieth century. Moreover, Germany and its related states have provided a flock of influential figures in the fields of biology and scientific thought, among them the nineteenth century naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, the founder of ecology Ernst Haeckel, and botanists Oscar Drude and Andreas Schimper.⁸ The contributions of these scientists and many others derive from a rich German legacy of exploration of the natural world – in the realms of science, as well as poetry, literature, and art. The iconic German writer Goethe worked intimately with nature,⁹ as did Hermann Lons.

However, in one aspect, the history of German environmentalism stands out, in a manner that is at first dismaying: it not only existed within the Nazi regime of the Third Reich, it was incorporated by it. Moreover, like many other institutions and individuals, German *Naturschutz* was not spared complicity. Nazi policies – such as the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz* ('Reich Nature

1950s and 1960s."

7 Lekan, Thomas M., Zeller, Thomas. *Germany's Nature*.

8 Dominick, 38. Furthermore, "by mid-century, German botanists in particular had established a solid reputation for empirical research and professional training in this field had become sophisticated." Still, in any discussion of Nazism and science, the misuse of scientific theories has been recognized. For scholarship of this nature, see Gasman, Daniel. *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League*. New York : American Elsevier, 1971 and also Gröning, Gert., and Wlschke-Bulmahn, Joachim. "Politics, Planning, and the Protection of Nature: Political Abuse of Early Ecological Ideas in Germany 1933-1945." *Planning Perspectives* 2 (1987) but also Guenther, Konrad. *Darwinism and the Problems of Life: A Study of Familiar Animal Life*. Dutton and Company, 1906 who demonstrates this misuse in his own writings.

9 When discussing nature, significant literature employs the capitalized form, 'Nature', to describe the phenomenon of the organic world. While capitalization of this word may be appropriate where it is discussed existentially, or as a concept of inspiration and abstraction, such usage would imply that it is somehow removed and separate from that which is human. Scientifically, human and nature have no distinction; human expression, thought, and the human organism are in fact indissoluble from nature. The division is imaginary. Thus, the capitalization of this term will only be applied as it refers to an abstract concept – an imagined innate, natural, depiction of the outdoors which contrasts the constructed habitation of civilization. For more on this, and an opposing opinion, see Earth Values, <http://www.earthvalues.org/earthcapn.pdf>

Protection Act') of 1935 – included those aimed at the conscious conservation of forests and natural areas, as well as a push for animal welfare. It is difficult to reconcile lofty ecological aims with the atrocities of the Nazi regime. How could the same group have such careful, even considerate, concern for the natural world, and at the same time show such complete disrespect for human life? That a regime so thoroughly connected with heinous acts could also claim progressive goals as environmental awareness is unsettling. The fact that these aspects of Nazi ideology are not as incompatible as they at first appear makes a profound statement, in that it is not always possible to draw a clear line between what is “good,” and what is “evil.” It is necessary, then, to examine the degree to which National Socialism pursued *Naturschutz* and conservationist goals from 1933 to 1945. Both conservationists and Nazism pursued the protection of that which they respectively identified as the essence of Germanness on the one hand, but also that which they viewed as vital and threatened aspects of their societies. In order to investigate the ideological ground in which both Nazi policy and environmental policy coexisted, it must be asked: in what ways did the goals of German conservationists indeed align with Nazi ideology. And furthermore, how and in what ways. Lastly, it is important to consider German conservationist’s motivations for embracing National Socialism, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, there is admittedly some risk in elucidating the complicity of conservationists in Nazism. Early scholarship on the topic, such as that of Anna Bramwell argues a connection between Nazi environmentalist thought and present day Green movements.¹⁰ Subsequent scholars almost unanimously object to Bramwell’s claims, particularly the claim that Walther Darre, Reich Minister of Food and Agriculture until 1942, represented a “father” of modern

¹⁰ Bramwell, Anna. *Blood and Soil: Walther Darre and Hitler's 'Green Party'*. Bourne End, 1985. See also Biehl, Janet., and Staudenmaier, Peter. *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*. AK Press, 1995 for an example of extrapolating a link between greens and Nazism.

Greens.¹¹ In the words of Goethe himself, “it is easier to perceive error than to find truth, for the former lies on the surface and is easily seen, while the latter lies in the depth, where few are willing to search for it.” The relationship between Nazism and German conservation movements is not so simple as Bramwell would imply – in the first place, such a relationship involves a preexisting conservationist movement, and in the second, a multitude of changing perspectives and Nazi inconsistencies dictated the Third Reich’s attitude towards conservationists. Thus, current scholarship agrees that any attempt to connect Nazism to a green movement is misguided and likely seeks to diminish present day green activism.

Nonetheless, there was undoubtedly overlap between Nazi ideology, and conservation ideology of the time – which present day German environmental organizations have been slow to acknowledge¹² – and this overlap can be neither belittled nor overlooked. The most recent work, extensive research by Frank Uekotter, must admit that “without much thought to universal principles such as democracy and human rights, the German conservation movement acted on the basis of an exceedingly simple political philosophy: any legal provision and any alliance with the Nazi regime is fine, as long as it helps our cause.”¹³ In his work, the level of cooperation recurs as an unfortunate theme of German conservation during the Nazi regime, and he notes pointedly that although not all conservationists were racist, and not all were Nazi party members, “. . .reactionary and racist ideas floated freely through the contemporary literature: not everyone embraced them, but nobody took issue with them.”¹⁴ Complicity was the price.

In order to understand German conservation within the Third Reich, it is essential to

11 For discussion of where scholars contend Bramwell’s work on Darre, see especially Gesine Gerhard, “Breeding Pigs and People for the Third Reich” in *How Green Were the Nazis?*

12 Uekoetter, 14. This is perhaps one reason for the lack of awareness of German environmental history, as compared to American. Lekan and Zeller also comment on this immediately in *Germany’s Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, indicating that there are surprisingly few professorships in Germany dedicated to environmental history. This in part motivated the publication of their work.

13 Uekoetter, 16.

14 Uekotter, 27.

understand the route of its development preceding the ascent of Nazism.¹⁵ It did not arise spontaneously with Adolf Hitler's Germany, nor did it end with the close of World War II. Raymond H. Dominick goes into incredible detail in describing this maturation process , tracking the environmental movement in Germany over a span of one hundred years – from 1871 to 1971. He examines not only the work of a host of scholars, but also transcripts from environmental conventions and other primary sources.¹⁶ To begin with, it must be recognized that there was no single organized environmental movement, as the term is applied today, until well after 1945. Rather, during the period of the Second Empire, German conservation was made up of a multitude of organizations, pursuing a multitude of goals – from the protection of the *Heimat* ('homeland'), and historical preservation, to bird protection ('*Vogelschutz*'), animal protection ('*Tierschutz*'), and landscape protection ('*Landschaftschutz*').¹⁷ Dominick fittingly compares the development of the German environmental movement to that of a lilac, whose "first tender shoots emerged from the ground at several different points in quick succession. . . [a] growing bush [that] had no dominant, single trunk."¹⁸ It is not until after 1945 that these organizations would recognize the importance of consolidating synchronous, unified objectives.

As mentioned previously, in this vein the term 'environmentalist' is not apt in describing the attitudes of early German organizations. Instead, the term 'conservationist' is more appropriate, and more accurate in encapsulating the broad scheme of goals, and will therefore be used from this point. Dominick points out that in English, the word 'conservation' is colored by the idea of conscientious exploitation. That is, a setting aside of some portion of a larger whole, the rest of

15 Uekoetter, Frank. *The Green and the Brown*.

16 Dominick's contribution to establishing a time frame, in this regard, has been acknowledged by subsequent historians of the topic, including Thomas Lekan, Frank Uekoetter, and Thomas Zeller. Lekan and Zeller, in turn, and also William Rollins have attempted similar histories.

17 Dominick. *The Environmental Movement*. 18

18 Dominick. 1

which will be consumed. Such is not the case with the German notion of *Naturschutz*. Dominick explains that “-schutz” implies strictly protection. Another term, *Naturpflege*, meaning “care” or “cultivation” anticipated *Naturschutz*, and correlates more closely to the exploitative connotations of conservation that exist in English.¹⁹ As such, *Naturpflege* encompasses forest management, and more active alterations to an environment, often those that impart a return or benefit for human beings.

The distinction between these two terms is important. Still, during the early 19th century, the two terms overlapped. For German conservationists – be they “foresters, and landscape architects on the one hand. . . or romantics and biologists” on the other hand²⁰ – the two terms were not clear cut; unlike the American understanding of nature, German conservationists did not attempt to protect an abstract notion of ‘wilderness.’ They long acknowledged the extensive impact of human activity. Often, it was this landscape, a “cultural landscape” shaped, and defining, which they sought to protect.²¹ Many conservationists envisioned “the ideal environment as an anthropogenic terrain that blended the natural, cultivated, and built environments in an aesthetically harmonious whole.”²² Dominick identifies that conservationists developed during a time of both *Weltanschuung* (‘agrarian romanticism’) and industrial capitalism.²³ The two ideologies, understandably, conflicted. Yet it is the combination of the two within German conservation that led to the unique German understanding not of an untouched, unchanged wilderness, but of a natural world that shaped its inhabitants, and was in turn shaped by them. Thus, the interchanging of *Naturpflege* and *Naturschutz* is understandable. It is also clear by this

19 Dominick, 6. In his section, ‘Vocabulary’, Dominick provides excellent explanations of a number of German terminologies used prevalently to discuss conservation and environmentalism in the scholarship.

20 Dominick, 7

21 Lekan, Thomas M.. and Zeller, Thomas. *Germany's Nature*. 3.

22 Ibid.

23 Dominick, 20.

definition of nature how concepts of landscape protection ('*Landschaftsschutz*') and Heimat protection ('*Heimatschutz*') became logically intertwined; the protection of the land became the protection of Germanness. It is in this respect that many scholars claim the German conservationist ideas most clearly communed with Nazi racialism.²⁴

As with any culture, perceptions of nature were a far-reaching thread in the blanket of history. Yet Dominick outlines a number of those perceptions that most directly influenced the ethos of *Naturschutz* and are most closely entwined with a long legacy of views on nature. To begin with, a spirit of *Naturschutz* and connections with nature manifested itself in a variety of forms – this spirit is encapsulated in the prolific writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Schiller. In his scientific works, Goethe particularly believed that “nature could only be studied in action and interaction with all of its parts,” and that, as the individual was connected to nature, by extension, the human constituted one of many parts.²⁵ In the evolution of *Naturschutz*, Dominick notes from early on a connection with nationalism. One of the founders of German Nationalism, Ernst Moritz Arndt, is also the author of “A Word About the Care and Preservation of the Forests and the Peasants in the Consciousness of a Higher, i.e., More Humane Law.”²⁶ In 1807, the German naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt, expressed that national character was a reflection of a nation’s climate and geography, both in the temperament of its citizens and its cultural works.²⁷ These views were reiterated by Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl in his work, *National History of the German People*, where he “celebrated rural life, the German forests, and a natural right to

24 These scholars include Frederick Dominick, and Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Alfred A Knopf, Inc. 1995.

25 Tantillo, Astrida. *The Will to Create: Goethe's Philosophy of Nature*. University of Pittsburgh Press. 2002. 5 In Tantillo’s work, Goethe refutes scientists who “placed themselves above or outside of nature,” and thus sought to prove human “continuity with nature.” Goethe also believed that science was not the exclusive pursuit of the elite, but was “for anyone who was willing to observe nature closely.” This is intriguing, given the penchant for Western ideas of progress to separate the human from the more ‘primitive’ realm of nature and also to demarcate the exclusivity of such superiority to the intellectual.

26 Dominick, 22.

27 Ibid.

wilderness.”²⁸ More than that, he pointed to the strong influence of German nature on the national character of its people, and for this reason called for the protection of forests in order to safeguard Germanness. Riehl’s work continued to influence his contemporaries, who extolled the link between German nature and Germanness. The nineteenth century geographer, Friedrich Ratzel popularized the term ‘*Lebenstraum*’ or ‘living space’ and in so doing more concretely linked the *Naturschutz* movement with *Volkish* tendencies. Dominick illustrates a poignant example, in the natural history museum director and conservation leader Hugo Conwentz.²⁹ At a 1913 conservation conference he “repudiated international action” and “insisted that conservation was a national, not international task.”³⁰ Dominick concludes that although there were other overlaps, “only one item seems to have been shared *uniquely* by Nazism and Nature Conservation: the conviction that nature shapes the national character (indicated with the label “blood and soil”).”³¹

These ideas were in close agreement with a spirit of Romanticism. The emphasis of protection, as the century progressed, remained fixed on the aesthetic beauty that nature provided – indeed, the majority of groups were “beautification societies.”³² In 1900, there was an increasing preoccupation with the preservation and protection of the *Heimat*. Celia Applegate discusses the term in depth, admitting that there is no equivalent expression in English to encompass the full breadth of the word, but that it represents a concept of homeland, and a connection to the distinctive qualities of a certain area. Notwithstanding, the connection between

28 Uekoetter, 17.

29 Rollins, William H., *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904-1918*. University of Michigan Press. 1997. 83.

30 Dominick 24. Dominick also mentions here that Conwentz believed mixed forests “inspired poets and painters in ways that monocultured tracts never could.” That is, monocultured tracts injured nature, and so robbed it of its inspiration.

31 Dominick, 114. He also states that in analyzing the post-War period, this “*volkisch* proposition” was not permanent, and diminished after the war.

32 Ibid.

Heimat and nature, she claims, is formative in the ethos of national identity. *Heimat* landscape and uniqueness contribute to the particular make up of a people.³³ Indeed, many conservationist movements centered around establishing natural “national monuments”,³⁴ places of distinct aesthetic and cultural value, to preserve and admire as essential parts of the *Heimat*.

Following the rampant industrialization and subsequent urbanization that took its toll on the beauty of German landscape, “middle-class Germans were among the first in Europe to call on both the state and private citizens to protect their nation’s environment,” transforming “turn-of-the century back-to-the-land impulses into a concrete environmental reform movement that by 1914 included tens of thousands of members located in every German state and province.”³⁵ Although appreciation of nature was touted to be a quality to be shared by the masses, the face of conservationism was undeniably bound up with intellectualism, and to some extent, bourgeois tendencies. For example, in response to increased tourism to areas of natural beauty, many conservationists bemoaned a lack of what they considered true appreciation amongst tourists, as well as the potential damages tourism brought with its advantages.³⁶ Clearly, the overwhelming majority of early conservationist thought was motivated by an aesthetic appreciation for the many expressions of nature. To illustrate, “conservation officials in Bavaria begged that power lines be sited discreetly away from horizon lines and picturesque spots and that architecture of generating plants be blended into the surrounding countryside.”³⁷ In this way, there was a “remarkable readiness to tolerate serious damage to the environment as the price of progress.”

33 Applegate, Celia. *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*. University of California Press, 1990.

34 Uekotter, Frank. *The Green and the Brown*.

35 Lekan, Thomas M.. *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945*. Harvard University Press, 2004. 2-3

36 Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature*. For more on eco-tourism in early 20th century Germany, see especially Rudy Koshar, “Organic Machines: Cars, Drivers, and Nature from Imperial to Nazi Germany” in *Germany’s Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*.

37 Dominick, 29.

Eventually, this aesthetic emphasis was combined with concerns for human health, in light of factory produced pollution and city life.³⁸ In total by 1918, the head of the Prussian Agency for the Protection of Natural Monuments, Hugo Conwentz³⁹ compiled a list of “influential” conservation groups which included 264 groups; among them were those initiated locally (‘Not In My Back Yard’ NIMBY), those initiated by scientific communities, those by professionals (such as foresters and fishermen), public health groups, and outdoors clubs.⁴⁰ Membership in various organizations continued to grow, in some cases even throughout World War I. Although membership suffered for some groups, many slowly recovered, especially following the birth of the Third Reich in 1933.

Throughout the Weimar Republic, conservationists felt considerable frustration, worsened by disorganization as a result of so many different, sometimes unconnected, sometimes overlapping organizations. “Perhaps the greatest disappointment for the conservation community was the failure of a Prussian conservation law.”⁴¹ This failure owed to a number of factors, but primary among them was lack of clarity within the bureaucratic process. Conservation organizations were coordinated through their respective states, and frequently there was poor communication between groups of different states. As a result, many conservationists met the inauguration of the Third Reich with excitement.⁴² The hope was that Hitler and National Socialism would recognize and accommodate conservationist goals, none of which necessarily “translated into sympathy for the Nazis,”⁴³ even when the actions of some conservationists like Shoenichen not only attempted

38 Lekan, 258.

39 Uekotter, 22.

40 Dominick, 54.

41 Uekotter, 49.

42 Uekotter, 50.

43 Uekotter, 51. Uekotter points out that the conservationists did not escape the persecution of some of its members, such as Ludwig Lesser, who “had to resign as president of the German Horticultural Society in 1933 because of his Jewish origin,” as well as prominent professors such as Robert Lais who was “interrelated with the Jews.”

to rally conservationists in embracing the connection between Germanness and German nature, but also had no qualms about publishing anti-semitic writings.

Yet the drastic shift in leadership did not initially bring with it the sweeping changes conservationists were expecting. Indeed, they were given few opportunities. Moreover, Nazi agricultural and industrial objectives, such as the Four Year Plan, stood in clear opposition to conservationist aspirations. In 1933, there was encouragement – within the span of a few months, three animal protection laws were passed. Specifically, these laws were supported by Hermann Goring, and prohibited the unnecessary torment of animals. The reasons expressed by the authors of the laws – that torture of animals “hurts human feelings due to man’s compassion for the creation but [also] because the animal as such needs protection against abusive behavior.”⁴⁴ It reacted especially to vivisection, and outlawed it. For obvious reasons, the enforcement of this law waned. Vivisection was vital to research, and many universities objected. As a result, “the ministry of the interior handed out blank permits to university institutes to conduct experiments with animals and refrained from any closer supervision of experimental practice.”⁴⁵ Experiments continued, albeit clandestinely. Still, “Nazi leaders took pride in presenting themselves as friends of animals,” and Himmler went so far as to state that they were “the only nation of the world with a decent attitude towards animals.”⁴⁶ This was followed by an overall lull in activity, and conservationists began to suspect that National Socialism would not be any more fruitful than the Weimar years. However, with the momentous *Reichnaturschutzgesetz* (‘Reich Nature Protection Act’) of 1935, German conservationists were ecstatic.⁴⁷ The Act was precisely the legislature they

44 Ibid, 55. Uekotter notes that Luc Ferry sees this as the first instance – worldwide – of such reasoning for an animal protection law.

45 Ibid, 56.

46 Ibid. In this section, Uekotter also says that Hitler objected to the prohibiton of pets in 1940 to “save precious foodstuffs”, and he intervened in this case, but did not object when a decree was published that “pertained only to animals in possession of non-Aryan citizens.”

47 Uekotter, 64.

had long awaited, and it seemed that finally there existed the promise of progress. The *Reichnaturschutzgesetz* is important in a number of ways: firstly, even if the belief were unrealistic, conservationists saw the act as confirmation that “if only for a brief moment, their cause had been dear to the heart of the most powerful.”⁴⁸ Secondly, it truly did address many of the concerns conservationists shared, and was in fact a piece of very cohesive legislature -- which is evidenced all the more in its continued use even after the fall of National Socialism.⁴⁹ Perhaps one of the most intriguing, and coveted, portions of the Act was that it not only brought consistency to otherwise disconnected organizations across the empire, but paragraph 24 granted conservation groups permission to appropriate private land that was recognized as ecologically, or culturally significant.⁵⁰ Such privilege could not possibly have been granted under Weimar, or in fact under any other circumstances. The issue of private land had presented a continuing obstacle to conservation efforts up to that point.⁵¹ While significant portions of the act reflected legislation that was drafted during the Weimar period, it took into consideration the protection of landscape, where other fruitless efforts at legislation did not. Explicitly, paragraph 19 allowed the “protection of parts of the country side” against acts that might “deface” nature or the human experience of nature⁵², meanwhile paragraph 20 required that construction managers, such as those involved in the *autobahn*, or German highway system, consult with conservationist leadership prior to action.⁵³ It seemed that National Socialism might not only provide an opportunity to accomplish conservation goals, but that it was also interested in them.

48 Uekotter, 63.

49 Imort, Michael, “Eternal Forest – Eternal Volk: The Rhetoric of National Socialist Forest Policy” in *How Green Were the Nazis?* 62.

50 Closman, Charles. “Legalizing a Volksgemeinschaft: Nazi Germany’s Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935” in *How Green Were the Nazis?* 29.

51 Ibid, 65.

52 Uekotter, 64.

53 Ibid. See also Schoenichen and Weber, *Reichnaturschutzgesetz*, 3n.

Aside from the *Reichnaturschutzgesetz* itself, Michael Imort discusses the extremely symbolic topic within forestry, that of the *Dauerwald*. A type of forest management, it translates to ‘perpetual forest’ and “corresponds closely to what is today called “close-to-nature” forestry.⁵⁴ This method of forestry is in contrast to monoculture and clear-cutting methods, and it emphasizes the sustainability and recognition of the forest not only as a resource, but also as an ecosystem. As such, a variety of tree species, at a variety of ages are cultivated together, creating habitats for other animals, and for other plant species. As Imort points out, “in 1934 the Nazis mandated the *Dauerwald* as the official silvicultural doctrine for the German Reich. . .” in a movement that was “ecologically aware to a degree not seen again until the 1980s”⁵⁵ even if it was partially economic in motivation, as it did seek to enhance production and profit from wood. The adoption of *Dauerwald* methods were, furthermore, pushed by Hermann Goering, who placed *Dauerwald* specialist Walter Von Keudell as the chief of the Prussian State Forest Office.⁵⁶ For National Socialism, *Dauerwald* practices were also highly symbolic, and “its emphasis on the permanence of the collective over the ephemerality of the individual fit perfectly with the vision of a Thousand Year Reich.”⁵⁷ Ideologically, the concept of nurturing native tree species and protecting the health of a forest by promoting its symbiotic nature translated well to similar Nazi aims for the German people – that is, to assist in “reforming the *Volk* according to the laws of nature as the Nazis saw them realized in the *Dauerwald*.⁵⁸ Foresters, in this regard, were given the weighty task of influencing rural opinion to coincide with Nazi ideology.⁵⁹ Imort

54 Imort, Michael. “Eternal Forest – Eternal Volk” in *How Green Were the Nazis*. 42. See also his work “A Sylvan People: Wilhelmine Forestry and the Forest as a Symbol of Germandom” in *Germany’s Nature*.

55 Uekotter, 43.

56 Imort, 49.

57 Ibid, 53.

58 Ibid.

59 Foresters were also some of the most passionate conservationists, many of whom understood the forests more intimately than policy makers and even some fellow conservationists. For an example of the sophistication of many German foresters, and a history of the profession, see Heske, Franz. *German Forestry*. London: Oxford

reveals that some foresters were even “reeducated” at *Weltanschauuliche Schulungslager* (ideology camps), and moreover that “foresters shared this ‘honor’ with relatively few other professions such as teachers and university lecturers, indicat[ing] how important the National Socialists thought foresters were as public role models in the rural districts.”⁶⁰ Nevertheless, towards the end of the 1930s, and as war preparations increasingly consumed Nazi objectives, many seemingly environmental acts were pushed aside. Goering, too, left the forests to the chopping block when it came to war preparation and consequently “took measures to ramp up the wood output of the German forest at all cost.”⁶¹ Despite high claims for protection of German forests, as the war progressed and surrounding countries were engulfed, so too were forests. Deforestation rates during the war in forests of captured territories reflected no semblance of the careful preoccupation of *Dauerwald* ecological forestry – they were outright devastating, and “approximately two million cubic meters per year” were cut “in France, but more than ten times that number on the eastern front.”⁶² Still, Nazi activity in the realm of forestry, ideologically loaded though it was, nevertheless addressed ecological concerns within Germany that seem ahead of their time. With *Dauerwald* came a number of “Reich-wide” forestry laws, such as the 1934 Law Against Forest Devastation, limiting cutting to 2.5 percent of an estate, and the Law of 13 December 1934 Concerning the Protection of the Racial Purity of Forest Plants.⁶³ Imort argues that the planning of a Reich Forest Law did have “lasting and ecologically beneficial influence on German Forestry”, despite concessions to the war effort. And yet ironically it is “largely the result of a fundamental reconceptualization of the German forest from a private commodity to a public ecological resource, a process that. . . was facilitated

University Press, 1938.

60 Ibid, 54.

61 Imort, 57.

62 Ibid, 66.

63 Ibid, 67.

by the dictatorship's ability to disregard the objections of private forest owners."⁶⁴ As in paragraph 24 of the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz*, the absorption of private property for the all of society could not have happened in the Weimar Republic, nor in the years after 1945. Thus, in many ways, conservationists experienced a unique timeframe wherein they were able to accomplish otherwise unattainable aims barred them by legality.⁶⁵

Another area where conservationist and Nazi ideology appeared not only to coincide, but also to cooperate, is in the realm of landscape planning. Landscape planning and conservation do not logically coincide through a lens of American environmentalism, but as Thomas Zeller reiterates, "the conspicuous absence of the notion of unadulterated nature from these discussions marked a distinctly continental European approach, but one which resonated with the acknowledgment of human-nature interactions that German conservation embraced."⁶⁶ As provisioned by paragraph 20 of the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz*, the architects of the *autobahn* highway system were obligated to seek the advice of conservationists concerning construction. The conservationist, gardener, and landscape architect Alwin Seifert, as "adviser for landscape matters" to Fritz Todt "selected fifteen colleagues who came to be known as *Landschaftsanwalte* (Landscape advocates)."⁶⁷ This group of men touted the virtues of organic farming, indulged in the trend of hiking,⁶⁸ and in all of their activities "sought to know nature through the culturally rewarding work of gardening and

64 Ibid 63

65 Closman, Charles. *Legalizing a Volksgemeinschaft in How Green Were the Nazis?*

66 Zeller, Thomas. *Molding the Landscape of Nazi Environmentalism* in How Green Were the Nazis? 149

67 Zeller. 152. Alwin Seifert, described by Zeller as "one of the most prominent environmentalists in Nazi Germany," is a perfect example of the role of conservationists within Nazi bureaucracy. Zeller describes how he inserted himself, based on his skill for navigating the Nazi web of power, under the protection of Fritz Todt and Rudolf Hess. Without them, he found his position suspect, but continued to pursue a harmonization between landscape and nature and would after the war very successfully disassociate himself with Nazi atrocities, of the self-purported argument as "the nation's gardener," despite the questionable activities of landscape advocates in Poland.

68 There was a considerable hiking movement at beginning of the 20th century, which was connected to early conservationists. For more on this, see Williams, John Alexander. *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism and Conservation, 1900-1940*. Standford University Press, 2007.

landscaping.”⁶⁹ Characteristically, these landscape advocates were forced to compete with civil engineers, despite the provisions of the *Reichnaturschutzgesetz*, to assert their suggestions in construction and were left primarily to their own devices in defending their positions. It is arguably also within the concept of landscape construction that conservationists are most visibly connected to Nazi inhumanities. As the war began, and Germany proceeded to overtake territories, landscape architects had a rare opportunity “to partake in the monumental efforts to Germanize the landscape in the occupied territories.” Uekotter points out that Seifert and Todt often claimed to have more power than they actually did in these new territories, the SS leaders exerting the most control over the fate of occupied territories, and Seifert was relegated more strictly to road planning. Nevertheless, Zeller acknowledges that Seifert was not only aware of Himmer’s “sludge experiments . . . in Auschwitz” to generate gas from the waste of prisoners, but even “kept abreast of progress on these model plants.”⁷⁰ More striking still, Zeller states that a member of Seifert’s *Landschaftsanwalte*, Werner Bauch, “worked in the camp for the SS.”⁷¹ In any case, landscape construction became quickly tied to “landscape cleansing”⁷² and so in Poland and eastern occupied territories, endemic culture was eliminated through altering landscape to fit German aesthetic sensibilities and character; annexed eastern areas were emptied of their

69 Ibid.

70 Zeller 159

71 Zeller 159. In this vein, Frank Uekotter points out in “Polycentrism in Full Swing: Air Pollution Control in Nazi Germany” in *How Green Were the Nazis* that “in 1943, the building department of the Auschwitz concentration camp wrote a letter to the Prussian Institute for Water, Soil, and Air Hygiene. . . it asked whether the institute would be ready to write an expert report; the project in question was the ‘construction of a heating plant at the Auschwitz camp.’” Industries, and sites of new construction were required (though not always forced) to seek the approval of the Prussian Institute for Water, Soil, and Air Hygiene. Uekotter continues, “the institute, eager to get as much work as possible in order to demonstrate the indispensability of its staff, was generally willing. . . it asked for a map that showed the environs of the projected plant within a radius of five kilometers.” The report was never written, and probably because of the request. Uekotter notes that it is not definite whether “the ‘heating plant’ was in fact a crematorium”, but that the letter was “written at a time when the SS started to use the large crematoriums at Birkenau.” His horror is understandable: “to even think of air pollution control in the context of these camps is grotesque.”

72 Wolschke-Bulmahn, Joachim. “Violence as the Basis of National Socialist Landscape Planning” in *How Green Were the Nazis*. 244

inhabitants – through murder and deportation – to make way for eventual German settlement.⁷³ It is clear here, how ideas of ‘*Lebensraum*’ and the idea of national identity through nature coalesced within German conservation and within Nazi ideology, resulting in the complicity of landscape advocates such as Alwin Seifert, and Hugo Conwentz’s successor to the Prussian Nature Conservation Agency, Walther Schoenichen,⁷⁴ in what Wolschke-Bulmahn condemns as “their own unique way in the implementation of the “final solution.””⁷⁵

Simon Schama dramatically extols this same relationship between ideologies, adding to it a certain mysticism: “the Nazis belief in a relationship between their alleged superior racial qualities and the German landscape – the ideology of Blut and Boden (Blood and Soil) – “ he argues, “created a sinister bond between barbarism and reverence for nature in the Third Reich.”

⁷⁶ He demonstrates well what scholars like John Alexander Williams write to contend: that in emphasizing Blood and Soil, somehow conservationists and Nazism alike sought a pre-modern, “back-to-nature” movement for the *Heimat*. Williams, in turn, returns to the topic of the *Heimat*, discussing the important place protection of nature occupied for bourgeoisie conservationists, and highlighting that conservationists understood their movement to be necessarily modern.⁷⁷

The involvement of Seifert’s landscape advocates in establishing new German landscape in occupied territories illustrates this point: although they admired the past, they did not see any

73 Ibid.

74 Charles Closmann in “Legalizing Volksgemeinschaft” explains that even as many conservationist were truly passionate about nature protection, some, like Schoenichen, who “attempted to create a huge national park in the Bialowieza Forest, an area occupied by Polish and Jewish villagers” and thus involved themselves in human injustices, did not apparently recognize “the moral problems and intellectual contradictions by removing or murdering the local inhabitants.” 34

75 Ibid. 245.

76 Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1995. 119. Schama’s work reads much more like a novel than history; it alternates between an almost story-teller method of explaining events, leaving the impression that his intended audience is not scholarly. Still, in some respects, such as its discussion of the late 20th century artist Anselm Kiefer in reaction to Nazism and Environmentalism.

77 Williams, John Alexander. “The Chords of the German Soul Are Tuned to Nature: the Movement to Preserve Natural Heimat from the Kaiserreich to the Third Reich.” *Central European History* 29, no. 3 (1996): 339-384

discrepancy between conservation and aesthetic alteration.

Importantly, Lekan, Bruggemeier and Zeller assert that “Nazi leaders represented a ragbag of opinions, not a unified ideology. Rarely did Hitler forge a comprehensive approach to a problem or push a clear legislative agenda...”⁷⁸ Environmental legislation was no exception. While conservationists were initially encouraged by the passage of the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz*, such a dramatic act contrasting greatly the widespread frustration and disheartenment at the lack of effective legislation during the Weimar period, conservationist goals were soon to be overshadowed by the demands of the war.⁷⁹ Even so, by emphasizing the necessity of nature to the persistence of Germandom – that is, the importance of “Soil”, as well as “Blood” – conservationists hoped to push forward their own goals of nature protection. In this, they did not always avoid cooperation with racist and inhumane Nazi ideology. In some cases, such as aspirations to transform the Polish landscape, neither did they escape a hand in the implementation of that ideology.⁸⁰ The cooperation between Nazism and conservationists reveals a story of individual involvement, opportunism – both for conservationist causes as well as independent benefactors – and a despairing lack of questioning of Nazi inhumanities.

Following the war, conservationist leader Hans Klose hastened to reconnect the many personages and organizations of German conservation. Controversially, Klose took advantage of the fact that he had never actually joined the Nazi party “to write reports and affidavits that conservation advisors could present to denazification boards to win the desired clearances.”⁸¹

78 Brueggemeier, Franz-Josef. *How Green Were the Nazis?*

79 Uekoetter, Frank. *The Green and the Brown*

80 Wolschke-Bulmahn, Joachim. “Violence as the Basis of National Socialist Landscape Planning in the ‘Annexed Eastern Areas’” in Brueggemeier, Franz-Josef. *How Green Were the Nazis?* Of additional sensitivity is the issue of certain National Parks. In the same vein, matters of deportation, and extermination are not without parallel in the emptying of American parks of original American Indian inhabitants. The interesting matter of German Forestry was particularly bound to ideology, through the use of propaganda, and comparison between native forests and the true German race. For this, see Imort, Michael. “‘Eternal Forest – Eternal Volk’: The Rhetoric and Reality of National Socialist Forest Policy.” In Brueggemeier, Franz-Josef. *How Green Were the Nazis?*

81 Uekotter *The Green and the Brown*. 186.

Some sought to develop the post-war conservation movement into a route to “peace and reconciliation.”⁸² This did not happen. Instead, a more unfortunate attitude gradually consumed German conservationist thought – “there was no need to rethink the ethos of conservation because there had been no noteworthy connection between conservation and the Nazi regime.”⁸³ Movements proceeded to engage in restoration, especially reacting to the devastation caused by the war. As Uekotter understands, despite silence on the issue of the conservation movement during the Third Reich, evidence of its complicity manifested in conservationists own post-war reservations; during Nazism, “for the first time, conservationists had affiliated closely with a political movement – and that political movement then set off a war that claimed tens of millions of lives.” Thus, conservationists gripped tightly to non-partisanship in the post-war years. It was an unspoken truth, that “the conservation community knew it had burned its fingers.”⁸⁴ As the environmental movement began to grow, it incorporated both the “political left as well as the right”,⁸⁵ but it did not discuss the traumatic experience of the Nazi period, or its own connections with it. Finally, in 2002, “the German minister for the environment Jurgen Trittin opened the Berlin conference on conservation in Nazi Germany.”⁸⁶ There remains, nevertheless, much work to be done before the experiences of German conservationists during National Socialism emerge in full.

It is difficult for modern environmentalists, German and international, to face up to the history of the German conservation movement during World War II as this confession continues to surface. Clearly, conservationists were involved. Sometimes, this involvement was benign, but even if literal acts of murder were not always the result, the incorporation of conservationist

82 Uekotter, 190.

83 Uekotter, 192

84 Ibid, 193.

85 Ibid, 194.

86 Ibid, 201.

thought in Nazi Germany undoubtedly contributed to racist and nationalistic ideologies.

Moreover, Nazi views on the importance of conservation shifted throughout the reign of National Socialism -- in many ways effected by the differing “ideology, interests, personnel, internal structure, and styles of working”⁸⁷ of the Third Reich. Conservationist aspirations were embraced or neglected in accordance with these variables, especially becoming overshadowed by war efforts. Yet those aspects of conservation which Nazi ideology took into itself, such as the connection between nature and national character, contributed at least partially to the espousal of conservationist goals. For both parties, it was a relationship of opportunism. *Naturschutz* was compatible with the National Socialist aim to ‘better’ its population, and implemented to further the parties own aims. Nevertheless, the environmental acts of the Nazi party must be recognized, if for no other reason than to caution future environmental movements against the adoption of indifference and opportunism at the neglect of morality.

87 Uekotter quoting Peter Huttenberger. “Polycentrism in Full Swing.” 102.

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