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### The Continued Legacy of German Naturalness Contextualized Within a Fraught History and Issues of Inclusion

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# THE CONTINUED LEGACY OF GERMAN NATURALNESS

CONTEXTUALIZED WITHIN A FRAUGHT HISTORY AND ISSUES OF INCLUSION

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Eleanor Grosse

In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis

*Scripps College, 2020*

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## INTRODUCTION

She pauses for a moment, thinking. We are sitting inside an old red stone university building, part of the campus of the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg. Outside the window lays the University's central square, a memorial on one side of it. Rising about a foot off the ground, covered in a thin reflective layer of water, the memorial outlines the structure of the old synagogue. Two young children run through the water sending soft ripples over the sides; they are not really supposed to do that. How this space is used, for respect and contemplation, for enjoyment, and whether these two are mutually exclusive, is hotly debated in Freiburg. She turns back to me "I don't think German people, really the young people, the high schoolers, they do not really see Germany this way. They do not think of the reputation of Germany as still being based on the Nazi's. They think of Germany as, you know, an environmental leader."

Contemplating the place of remembrance and history within German environmentalism has driven the idea of this thesis and its research. My central aim is to capture at least a slice of how Germans today perceive nature, environmentalism, and themselves within the context of a cultural history that contains both a national socialist and an environmental narrative. These two narratives have, during periods of German history, intersected. While I originally thought the influence of national socialist environmental thought would still penetrate Germans' perception of nature, my findings revealed instead that German perceptions of environmentalism and ideas of nature are rooted in a much older story of German naturalness and a proximal closeness to nature. This notion of "German naturalness" is not only connected to German identity, as the women suggests above, but also connected to how other European countries, particularly the French, view German environmentalism.

I also found an almost complete lack of knowledge surrounding national socialist conservation, both in terms of any knowledge of nature ideology in the Third Reich, and the actual creation of protected areas under the Third Reich. Lastly, I found a lack of ethnic and racial diversity within the German parks I studied.

In chapter one of my thesis I give relevant historical background, which deals with the three following issues: (1) conceptions of a German connectedness to nature, (2) Third Reich nature ideology and policies, and (3) scholarly debates on national socialist ‘environmentalism.’ In chapter two I review my research methods followed by my four main research findings presented, respectively, in chapters three through six. In the conclusion I consider the role of environmental history in our constructions of current and future environmental movements.

## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

### *Germany, A Green Nation*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Germany is generally perceived as a global environmental leader. It is not hard to see how Germany earn this title with its strength in the E.U. and ambitious environmental policies. For example, Germany plans to become carbon neutral by 2050, with 30 percent of its energy already coming from renewables (Schreurs, 2016). On a more local level, half of Germany's sixteen states have elected Green Party members into office including historically conservative states such as Baden-Württemberg (Schreurs, 2016). Cities like Berlin have instituted large scale heat waste capture, which powers whole neighborhoods in the city (Schreurs, 2016). Grass roots movements in small towns are attempting to create all their own energy from renewable sources (Schreurs, 2016) and Fridays for Future movements, where high school students skip school to protest climate change, are also widespread in Germany.

However, as Germans themselves will often point out, this environmental leadership is not without its contradictions. As Europe's largest economy, Germany is heavily reliant on the Auto industry (Uekötter, 2014). In fact, twenty percent of Germany's Industrial revenue comes from the Auto Industry (Schreurs, 2016). Around forty percent of Germany's energy still comes from coal and the country still burns brown coal (lignite) which is particularly damaging to the environment (Uekötter, 2014) (Schreurs, 2016). Like most of western Europe, Germany has channeled nearly all its rivers with hugely detrimental effects on riparian ecosystems (Uekötter, 2014).

Nevertheless, environmentalism is a source of national pride in Germany and has even come to shape ideas of Germanness and German identity (Uekötter, 2014). In Europe, Germans

are seen as strong environmentalists not only due to widespread and ambitious climate policies and Green leadership but also because German *culture* is seen as environmentally oriented. One stereotype, seemingly largely unknown in the United States, is that Germans are a people closely connected to nature, specifically to their forests (Imort, 2005). Today this idea of connectedness is attributed to a strong environmental education system and a culture of outdoor recreation (Imort, 2005). In a country as built up and as densely populated as Germany, this notion seems surprising, perhaps especially from an American perspective. However, the idea of Germans being more connected to nature than their western European counterparts' dates to the first century when imperial Roman ethnographers are studying Germanic tribes.

#### *A Historic Narrative of German Naturalness*

In the year 98, Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman Historian, wrote the treatise *Germania*. The text is a historical and ethnographic work on the Germanic tribes, whom the Romans had been fighting for centuries even at that time (Schama, 1995). In the text, Tacitus describes the Germanic tribes as swamp and forest people, and their minimal dwellings as “proclaiming their closeness to brute nature” (Schama, 1995, p. 84). To Tacitus, the dense forests of Germany are of themselves primitive, deplorable, and barbaric, yet, at the same time, unimaginably ancient and awesome (Schama, 1995).

This closeness to nature is also revealed in Tacitus's description of the German religion. For the German tribal people, the woods and nature, such as large oak trees, were “sacred,” and unlike the Romans, Germans “consecrate whole woods and groves, and by the names of the Gods they call these recesses; divinities these, which only in contemplation and mental reverence



they behold.” (Tacitus, 2013, para.12). During burials, Tribal nobles would be burned with special types of wood to reaffirm their connection to the forest (Schama, 1995).

Though generally critical of the German people, calling them uncivilized, their rituals barbaric, and their indifference to property primitive, *Germania* came to define both what it meant to be Roman and what it meant to be German (Schama, 1995). Romans distinguishing themselves in opposition to a perceived uncivilized Germanic people, and Germans later accepted and celebrated this idea of German naturalness and rootedness in the land. As the author Simon Schama elegantly put it, “It was the prose of Tacitus that ordained the conflict, for generations, for centuries to come, on and on: wood against marble; iron against gold; fur against silk; brutal seriousness against elegant irony; bloody-minded tribalism against legalistic universalism” (Schama, 1995, p. 87).

Twenty years after Gutenberg invented the printing press, *Germania* was printed in Venice, then again three years later in Nuremberg in 1473, and three years after that in Leipzig (Schama, 1995). This printing reintroduced the text to Italian and German scholarship and would “lodge [it] permanently in the bloodstream of German Culture” (Schama, 1995, p. 77). In 1458 Enea Silvio de’Piccolomini, who would later become Pope Pius II, claimed the text demonstrated that, although the Germans have significantly improved, they were still far from full integrated into civilized society (Schama, 1995). While the Romans insisted on describing the German’s connection to nature as primitive, in the 1490’s poet and scholar Conrad Celtis shifted the narrative and re-appropriated *Germania* for the German people. Based on Tacitus’s text, he used descriptions of the soldier Herman the German (or, Arminius in Latin), to invoke a uniquely “nature-based” German sense of nobility and national heritage (Schama, 1995).

In the 1500 hundreds the German state and its people became increasingly interested in understanding its own antiquity. Emperor Maximilian lectured at Universities on Tacitus and scholars and artists such as Ulrich von Hutten, became increasingly interested in the role of the German forest (Schama, 1995). Arminius became Herman, the *Urheld* (origin Hero). This intellectual history transformed a what was described by Latin writers as a wild barbarian into a gentle and natural man from German antiquity (Schama, 1995).

However even as early as the 1500 hundreds, as the forest was being defined as uniquely and natively German, it was also being destroyed. To combat this discrepancy scholars began describing the forest as a domesticated place of wealth and fertility. Instead of critiquing the continual thinning of the woods, scholars praised the forest, specifically the Black Forest, for bringing money and prosperity to its people (Schama, 1995).

During the latter half of the 1700's the forest was first used as a symbol of Germanness by writers of the Sturm und Drang literary movement (Imort, 2005). During the Napoleonic rule in Germany in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the forest became a political symbol of united German sovereignty. Writers, artist, and musicians, such as Joseph von Eichendorff, Franz Schubert, Johannes Brahms, Richard Wagner, and Casper David Friedrich presented the forest as a national symbol of freedom from Napoleonic occupation (Imort, 2005). The famous folklore writers, the Brothers Grimm, claimed that the forest was evidence of a collective history that created a unified German identity (Imort, 2005).

During this same time, 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic writers were developing the idea of *Heimat* (Applegate, 1990). Directly translated, the German word "Heimat" means home or homeland, but the term encompasses more than a translation can convey. Prominent German history

professor Celia Applegate describes Heimat as ‘place’, ‘belonging’, ‘identity’, a ‘center of German morality’ and “feelings of belonging together” (Applegate, 1990). In his 2004 book, Thomas Lekan describes Heimat as “a word that signifies a deep emotional attachment to a place” (Lekan, 2004, p.6). In the more recent book *Heimat Goes Mobile: Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film*, Yvonne Franke and Gabriele Eichmanns use the terms “pristine nature,” “Germanness,” “comfort,” “belonging,” “tradition,” and “mother tongue” to describe the meaning of Heimat (Eichmanns and Franke, 2013). Early nineteenth-century Heimat ideology was mostly provincial and used specifically in borderland provinces, most notably the Rhineland (Applegate, 1990; Lekan, 2004). Idealization of the landscape was so strong in this region that there is a specific name for these writings, Rhine romantism. The romantic writer Ernst Arndt argued in 1813 that the Rhine was a uniquely German landscape and should not be treated as a border with France but rather assumed by Germanic peoples (Lekan, 2004). Words such as Heimatpflege (maintenance), Heimatgedanken (thought), Heimatliebe (love), and Heimatkundler (a person knowledgeable and passionate about Heimat, i.e., the local customs and histories) came into common use in the Rhineland (Applegate, 1990). The Rhineland went from a somewhat culturally undefined borderland in 1815 to a clearly distinct provincial identity by the 1870’s (Applegate, 1990). The historian Thomas Lekan has argued that this early provincial form of Heimat ideology was patriotic but not nationalist. Heimat was used to connect groups through their shared experience of the landscape, not through shared wealth, origin, or class (Lekan, 2004).

However, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as ideas of a German nation state were being realized, Heimat became increasingly political and by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century increasingly xenophobic (Applegate, 1990; Lekan, 2004). Heimat organizations, such as

“advocates of Heimatkunst” worked to unite provincial identities, specifically the Rhineland, under the Kaiserreich. However, although the rhetoric of Heimat was uniting, the idea of a shared landscape experience was not. The landscapes in Germany as a whole were too diverse to use as binding criteria for a shared German identity (Lekan and Zeller, 2005). As a result, new ways to define Heimat and Germanness needed to be constructed, and, unfortunately, this is when concept of Heimat began to take a nationalist turn. Similar to so many other nationalist movements, constructing Heimat was based on a German race or ethnicity (Lekan, 2004).

Most importantly, for the purpose of this thesis, at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Heimat movements were also increasingly intertwined with preservationist movements. Germany’s landscape was drastically changed by the industrial revolution in Europe. In the 1870’s two-thirds of Germany’s population was rural, and a mere thirty years later, half of this rural population had moved into cities (Lekan, 2004). Industrialization also drastically changed the forests. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new method of forestry, called “scientific forestry,” was invented in Germany (Imort, 2005). Based on enlightenment ideas of order and uniformity, scientific foresters planted monocultures of fast-growing trees, often Norway spruce, to maximize wood yields (Imort, 2005; Spiecker, 2000). Through the institutionalization of forestry in government bureaucracies and Universities, the scientific method was able to dominate German forestry and drastically change the German landscape. In a fifty-year span, German forests transformed from 30 percent conifer trees to 60 percent conifers by the 1850’s (Imort, 2005). The destruction of naturally mixed forests resulted in a significant loss of biodiversity and caused acidification of soils (Spiecker, 2000).

In response to scientific forestry, a Back-to-Nature forestry movement fought not only for a return to traditional mixed forestry practices but also for a return to traditional “Germanness’

(Imort, 2005). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Back-to-Nature foresters began using the forest as a symbol for the German Volk. Directly translated, “das Volk” means ‘the people’ or ‘the nation,’ but Volk can often have a more nationalistic connotation to it, specifically referencing working class, rural, and ethnically German people (Vick, 2003). Nazi propaganda often used Volk to invoke an idea of the most German of Germans (Bruggemeier et al., 2005). Emil Adolf Roßmäßler, a biologist and founder of the Back-to-Nature movement, argued that the forest represented a uniquely German social structure not present in southern European countries (Imort, 2005). During the Weimar period writers from a range of disciplines used the forest as an allegory for German society, the canopy layers representing social classes, the forest edges serving as a German ethnic border. In 1910, Rudolf Düesberg, an advocate of Back-to-Nature forestry, argued that the German people and the forest together produced Heimat. He believed that German foresters were being swayed towards scientific forestry by ‘homeless nomads,’ by which he meant Jewish people (Lekan and Zeller, 2005). Düesberg claimed that without this influence German foresters would let the forest grow naturally to show respect for the Heimat (Imort, 2005).

This Heimat convergence of Back-to-Nature forestry with national German identity was so prominent by the 20<sup>th</sup> century that preservationist began working with state governments to use Heimat as a propaganda tool to create patriotic pride during World War One (WWI) (Lekan, 2004). In these campaigns, the German landscape was contrasted with the destroyed forests and meadows of France and the German forest (Heimat) was held up as a justification for the sacrifices of war (Lekan, 2004). Ironically Germany’s forests were severely overcut during the first World War for heat and construction. Even after Germany’s defeat in 1918, Heimat ideology did not fade away and regional identity was even strengthened in French occupied

zones such as the Rhineland (Lekan, 2004). Given this historical backdrop, it is not hard to see how the National Socialist Party could seamlessly coopt Heimat, the landscapes, and forestry, into propaganda tools.

### *National Socialism's adaption of 'German Naturalness'*

During their twelve years in power, the Nazi regime ushered in drastic changes to the German landscape (Bruggemeier et al, 2005): first, through massive infrastructure investment, such as the development of the autobahn; and, second, through the continued decimation of forests and towns due to WWII (Uekötter, 2006). Yet, despite this destruction, the Nazi Party's approach to nature is both shocking and contradictory. Nature was treated in propaganda as a resource in war and industry, and as a symbol for 'the German' people, worthy of protection (Imort, 2005). During the Third Reich, the Nazi regime passed some of the most significant environmental legislation in Europe, specifically on animal rights and nature preservation (Closmann, 2005). Although the extent to which these laws were enforced and whether these laws lead to an overall positive environmental outcome is still subjected to debate, it does not diminish the reality of Nazi environmental efforts.

### *Nazi Environmental Ideology*

Extending from earlier notions of Heimat described above, Nazi environmental ideology conceptualized nature in relation to German racial superiority and identity. Conservation was developed not for protect nature and the enjoy of all, but to preserve for the German "Volk" (Imort, 2005) As such, conservation was used to protect not only endangered 'native' species but also local 'native' traditions and cultures (Bruggemeier, et al., 2005). "Das Volk" were invoked

as the most German of Germans with associations of rurality and purity, and in opposition to city life (and the diversity of people that live in urban spaces) (Imort, 2005). This imagery was made explicit as Nazi leaders were often photographed in rural settings (Schama, 1995). The famous Nazi slogan, Blut und Boden (blood and soil), which promoted a “German land for a German people,” was tied to this imagery, and explicitly argued that the racial health of the German people was directly connected to the German land (Gerhand, 2005).

Perhaps unsurprisingly Nazi leaders became obsessed with German origin stories, and in the early 1900’s German philosophers became interested again in Tacitus’s *Germania* (Schama, 1995). Philosopher Eduard Norden, who would later be forced to stop teaching under Third Reich antisemitic laws, called the text the German *Urgeschichte* (origin story) (Mensching, 1992). Readers of these philosophers included *Reichsminister* Alfred Rosenberg, *Reichsführer* of the Schutzstaffel (SS) Heinrich Himmler, and Adolf Hitler himself (Schama, 1995). The Nazi Leaders became so interested in the text that when Mussolini visited Berlin, Hitler asked if the *Germania* manuscript could be returned to Germany. Although Mussolini originally agreed, he rescinded his promise due to Italian outrage (Schama, 1995). After 1943 when Mussolini was removed from power, SS officers were sent to Balleani Palazzo to retrieve *Germania* from Italian possession. When they were refused, officers tore apart the building looking for the document, but were unable to find it (Schama, 1995). This action demonstrates the importance of *Germania* to the Nazi regime as an origin story to define the German people.

While less important to Hitler personally, Himmler desperately wanted the manuscript in Germany. Simon Schama (1995) argues that Himmler was most interested in Tacitus due to his early descriptions of racial purity in Germanic tribes, focusing specifically on the following passage in which Tacitus describes “...the Germans never to have intermarried with other

nations; but to be a race, pure, unmixed, and stamped with a distinct character” (Tacitus, 2013; Schama, 1995). Himmler obsession is evident as he was in fact was the official who sent the SS to steal *Germania* from Italy (Schama, 1995).

Furthermore, as discussed above, Tacitus also described the Germanic people as “indigenous”, and as children of nature, their deity Tuisto literally meaning “from the soil” (Schama, 1995). Tacitus claimed that the decidedly rural nature of the German people exemplified their connection to nature, the opposite of Roman ‘civilized’ city culture (Schama, 1995) (Tacitus, 2013). This idea served to support the idealization of the Volk, the racist concept that racial purity was natural in Germany, and the notion that the German people were as native as indigenous plants and animals to their region, a Nazi attempt to justifying ethnically German ownership over the landscape.

#### *Nazi Environmental Policies*

As one would expect, Nazi environmental ideology was converted into a number of important policies. One of the first laws of the Third Reich promoted animal rights, namely the elimination of animal vivisection (Lekan and Zeller, 2005). Second, the Third Reich promoted organic farming, believing natural foods would lead to a healthy and strong people (Bruggermeier, 2005). Ironically, and very disturbingly, a branch of the Dachau concentration camp used forced labor to plant and maintain organic gardens for the health of an ‘ethnically German people’ (Treitel, 2017).

In 1935, the Third Reich also passed the Reichnenschutzgesetz (RNG), which was one of the most wide-ranging conservation laws in Europe at the time (Bruggemeier, et al, 2005). The RNG allowed entire landscapes to be protected by limiting industrialization of the



countryside and creating defined aspects and areas of a landscape for conservation (Bruggemeier, et al, 2005). With the help of the RNG and regional conservation laws, 800 nature reserves and 50,000 national monuments were created under the Nazi regime (Lekan, 2004). Many of these protected areas still exist today (Uekötter, 2006).

Horribly, the Third Reich's conservation policies were intertwined with its planned extermination of non-Christian and non-ethnically German peoples. For example, after the Polish invasion, the Nazis planned to create one of the largest nature reserves in Europe in the Bialowieza forest (Closmann, 2005). This area was 60 percent Jewish before the Nazis forcibly removed and murdered all Polish and Jewish residences from the planned reserve. The Nazis believed that Polish and Jewish people were not compatible with conservation and could never have the 'appropriate' relationship with nature (Closmann, 2005).

Although many attribute these violent practices with the rise of the Third Reich in Germany, it is important to realize that such practices existed prior to the formation of the National Socialist Party. From 1904 to 1914, Germany created thirty forest reserves covering 74,000 hectares of land in colonized southeastern Tanzania (Sunseri, 2005). German colonizers forced native people out of forests and into towns where they could be more easily controlled and taxed, and divided up the land into categories of nature, agriculture, and towns (Sunseri, 2005). In the German colonial context, indigenous, colonized people were seen as a danger to nature, and laws preventing Tanzanians from entering and using forest resources were instituted (Sunseri, 2005).

Interestingly, German colonialism did not recognize the savannah as nature, as it was dissimilar to the dense structured forests of Europe; instead, the colonial administration only

protected areas with a thick canopy. The colonizers wrongfully believed that the savannah, which covered over half of Tanzania's landscape, was the damaged remnant of dense canopy forests, which native people had destroyed through their agricultural practices (Sunseri, 2005).

### *Nature preserves in Baden-Württemberg*

While not all German conservationists were Hitler supporters, many would overlook national socialist oppression to advance their environmental agenda (Lekan, 2004). In the southern region of Baden Württemberg, a rock Quarry was opened shortly after WWI. The Quarry was placed along Hohenstoffeln Mountain and damaged one of its sides (Uekötter, 2006). Remains of an old castle were also found on top the Mountain, and local protesters claimed the quarry was causing a destruction of Heimat. Ludwig Finckh, a member of the National Socialist Party, led the conservationist effort to shut down the mine (Uekötter, 2006). Finckh wrote, "it is an absurdity to destroy the most eminent mountain of the Hegau in the Third Reich, in an era of reference to the ancestors, of blood and soil and race" (Uekötter, 2006, p. 91). Finckh also questioned the mining company leader's Aryan ancestry. At first, their movement found both resistance and sympathy from Nazi officials. However, eventually Finckh was able to deliver a letter to Himmler, requesting conservation of the Mountain, which was firmly based on Nazi ideology. Using this reasoning, Himmler was able to convince other Nazi officials to shut down the Mine, and, in 1934, the Mountain was turned into a nature reserve (Uekötter, 2006).

In the Black Forest region of Baden-Württemberg conservationists were attempting to create a nature reserve along the Wutach River, which begins on top of the Feldberg Mountain and leads into the Rhine. The Reich Forest Service turned 1,430 acres along the river into a

reserve but still allowed for a future dam to be built (Uekötter, 2006). Hearing of the success at Hohenstoffeln Mountain, conservationists again reached out to Himmler for support. Although conversationalist never heard back from Himmler (Uekötter, 2006) both examples demonstrate the ease with which conversationalist were able to adapt Nazi ideology to promote their environmental policies.

Most scholarly debate on the topic of environmentalism in the Third Reich is centered around the question, could the Third Reich be considered environmentalists or in any way environmentally friendly? If so, in what regard, on what issues, and to what extent? And how were environmentalists/preservationists actually involved with the National Socialist Party and national socialism? Only a few authors I have found have taken, as their main goal, the exploration of ways in which national socialism affects environmentalism in Germany through time.

### *Scholarly Perspectives on Germany's Environmental History*

Literature on the subject of national socialism's environmental policy largely began in the 1980's. At this time, there were two main schools of thought. First, Anna Bramwell famously argued in her 1985 book *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's "Green Party"* that the Nazi party had a green wing, and this rooted German environmentalism to national socialism (Closemann, 2005). In contrast, the second view by authors such as Raymond Dominck and Karl Ditt argued that the environmental policies of the Nazi regime were not actually tied to Nazi ideology and no systemic environmental policy or ideology of environmentalism was created in

the Nazi state. They specifically refer to the most famous Third Reich environmental policy the RNG and argue that its writers had minimal ideological ties to the Nazis (Closmann, 2005).

Starting in the 2000s scholars tended to take a more nuanced view on the topic. For example, authors Thomas Lekan, Thomas Zeller, Charles Closmann, and Franz-Josef Bruggemeier (2005) argue that there were in fact environmentalist tendencies in the Nazi regime and conservation was certainly used as a tool – something I would argue is important for environmental movements to understand today. However, while many authors agree with this historical interpretation, they find drawing lessons for German environmentalism today problematic. None of these authors address, empirically, whether notions of nationalism or purity continue to influence German beliefs about the environment and their relationship to nature. Another review of Anna Bramwell’s work from 2001 argues that she made “no clear historical or necessary conceptual link between ecologism and Nazism..., but [nonetheless acknowledged] that greens should nonetheless eschew dangerous purity notions if possible” (Stephans, 2001, p.173). Ended this sentence with “if possible” demonstrates the lack of concern or feelings of improbability that environmental movements or policies could draw from racism or xenophobia once more.

This is important, because many authors writing in the last two decades have been very critical of Bramwell, in part because they see her as inciting anti-green movements in the 1990’s (Stephans, 2001; Uekötter, 2006). The pushback against anti-green sentiment is evident in the introduction of Uekötter’s 2006 book where he writes, “If you came upon this book hoping to be told that today’s environmentalists are actually Nazis in disguise, then I hope you paid for it before reaching this sentence” (Uekötter, 2006, pg. 14).

Following with Bramwell's historical interpretation, Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier published two essays together, in 1995: first, they examined the history of xenophobia and racism in natural sciences and forest literary symbology in Germany; and, second, they analyzed how xenophobic ideology around nature is still utilized in contemporary society by alt-right groups and showed how this ideology emerged even outside of right politics. Biehl uses the example of Hubert Weinzierl, who was the head of the League for the Protection of the Environment and Nature (Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz, or BUND), who in 1989 claimed that overpopulation is the central issue prevented meaningfully environmental work in Germany, and "of configuring the landscape of our civilization in such a way that it remains worthy of being called Heimat" (Biehl, 1995). In 2011, the authors republished the piece with an additional essay addressing some of the criticism they received on the original publication. They pointed out that although they had expected to be criticized by right wing or 'deep ecologist' readers, they were surprised to find criticism from liberal environmentalists (Staudenmaier, 2011). Liberal readers argued that the authors unfairly made casual connections between 'fascism' and environmentalism, potentially hurting the environmental movement. Critiques argued the authors were suggesting that organic farming is fascist. In response, Staudenmaier wrote, "My actual position is just the contrary: I want a vibrant and politically conscious organic farming movement, and that means coming to terms with the less pleasant aspects of the movement's past" (Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 79).

Like Staudenmaier and Biehl I wanted to examine the lasting effect of Nazi ideology around nature in Germany, not to in anyway discredit environmental movements, but to deepen them. For my research and my paper is not important for me to argue whether or not the Third Reich 'truly' had an environmental sect, it is however important to recognize that the Nazi

regime did hold clear ideas about the ownership of German nature, who should be in control of nature conservation, and who innately has a superior relationship to nature. Furthermore, there was actual space creation, in the form of over 800 nature reserves, under the Third Reich, many of which were argued for using Nazi ideology and are still in existence today. However, I found no scholarly work examining lasting effect of the nature ideology of national socialism on current perceptions of nature in Germany among the general public.

This gap in scholarship was the original driving force of this project. I constructed my research goals around the following questions: Are there remnants of nationalist tendencies on the way Germans perceive nature in Germany. Does national socialist history in German nature reserves/parks have a lasting influence on visitorship diversity? And is there a lasting influence on who feels ownership over nature in Germany? These questions informed my site selection as well as my interview questions, which were more directly designed to answer questions such as: Who feels ownership over German nature, who is seen as harming nature, who is visiting nature, and do people feel this national socialist conservation history is significant?

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

### *Selection of Sites: Feldberg Nature Park and the Black Forest National Park*

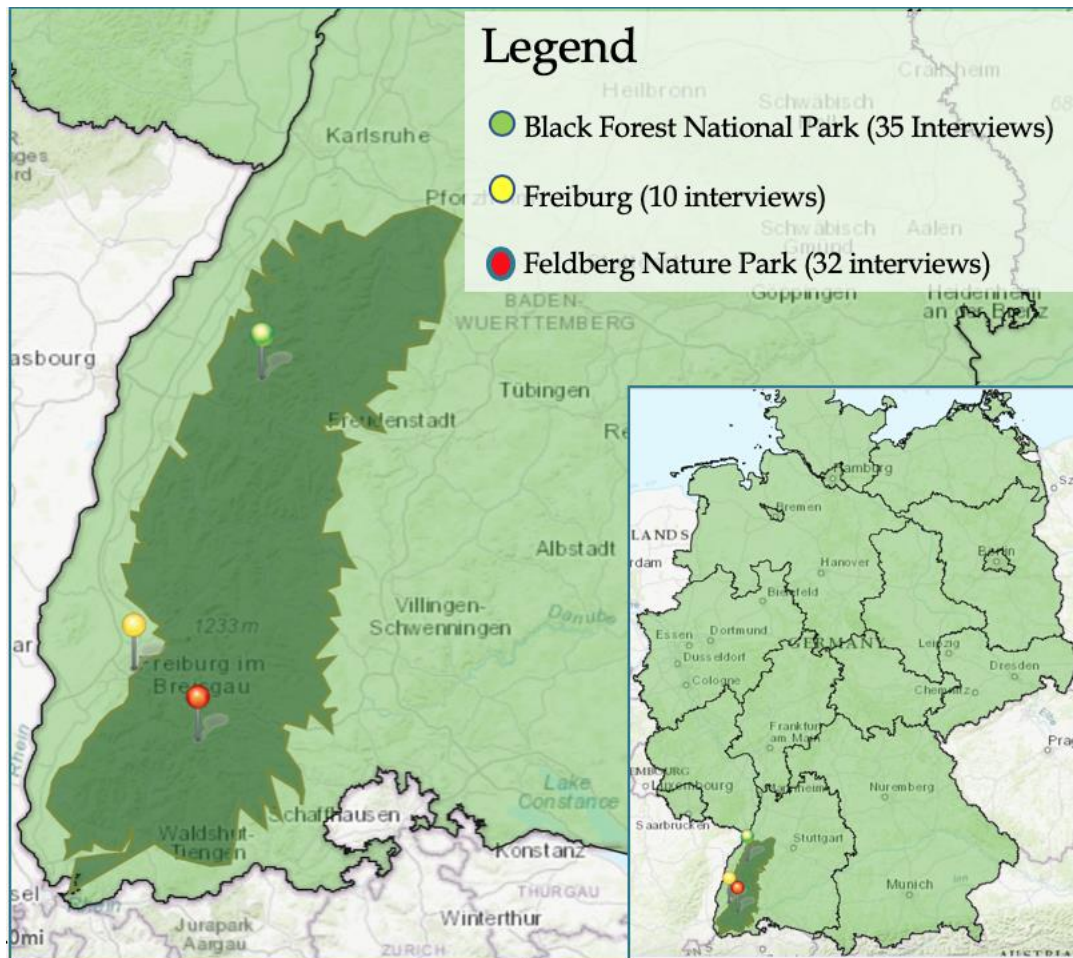
To study how Germany's creation of many nature reserves during the Third Reich may still influence German environmental thinking and beliefs, I choose to compare perceptions of a nature reserve that was created during the Third Reich and a new park without those historical roots. This comparison allowed me to explore two key research questions: (1) Are environmental beliefs based on some notion of *Heimat* purity, and/or beliefs that Germans have a unique relationship to nature and to its forests (*Germania*) present among Germans today? And, (2) if so, were these beliefs (or some aspects of them) more visible in the conversations with park staff and visitors at Feldberg Nature Park—given its creation during the Third Reich—than at the Black Forest National Park?

Feldberg Nature Park is a good case site, because not only is it one of the nature reserves founded during the Third Reich, but it is still a well-known park in the Black Forest and among city residents in Freiburg. The Feldberg Nature Park area is the oldest nature preserve in Baden Württemberg founded in 1937. Located in the southern part of the Black Forest, the Feldberg is the tallest mountain in Germany outside of the Alps, at 1493 meters, and has been a popular ski location since its founding (Heilbronner, 1992).

The Black Forest National Park, in the northern part of the Black Forest, is a good case comparison because it was created very recently and under very different circumstances. In 2012, two years before the park's creation, advocates of the park began to fully engage residents in the region in the developmental process to incorporate local perspectives and to earn local support. For two years, advocates created hundreds of informational sessions mostly

concentrated in the area directly surrounding the proposed park. The entire state of Baden-Württemberg then voted on the creation of the National Park, which led to its official founding on January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2014.

Figure 1: Map of interview sites with dark green outline of the Black Forest region



### Sample and Recruitment

Based on my research questions, I conducted interviews with three main groups of people: (1) people from among the general population who have lived in or around the Black Forest for at least a year; (2) employees of the Black Forest National Park and Feldberg Nature



Park; and (3) domestic and international visitors of the two parks. Interviewing visitors of the parks—both German and international visitors—provides a glimpse into understanding whether visitors tend to view of the purpose of the parks differently from the general population (who may or may not visit the parks), and whether German visitors' beliefs vary from international visitors. Interviewing employees of the parks provided an understanding of whether administrators tend to perceive Germans as having a unique relationship to the forest, and, if this perception exist, does in detrimentally influence the perception of non-German visitors or non-white Germans relationship to nature.

#### *Sampling and Data Collection for each Group*

I conducted eleven interviews with people who had lived in Germany for at least one year. Most of these interviews lasted around half an hour, but they ranged from 17 minutes to over an hour. I used a snowball method for recruiting and sampling participants. Sometimes I would specifically reach out to underrepresented groups in my study, so create more balanced perspectives. For example, I reached out to several retirement facilities in and around Freiburg looking to see if anyone older than 80, preferably alive during the Third Reich, was willing to be interviewed, and I was in fact able to interview a 92-year-old. Nine of the interviewees lived in the city of Freiburg or the surrounding villages, one lived in the town of Feldberg, and one lived in Ottenhöfen, a small town outside of the Black Forest National Park. The interviewees ranged from ages 21 to 92 with an average age of 50.45. Two of the interviewees were international students, one from the United States, and one from Tunisia, and two of the interviewees had dual German and French citizenship. For this group my interview questions could be divided into three sections:

- (1) basic questions about the National Park and the Feldberg, such as: “Have you been to the Feldberg before? Would you like to go again? In your opinion, who has access to these spaces?”
- (2) Thoughts on German environmentalism, for example: “Do you think Germany’s views on nature are different or special compared to other countries? How is it different? Does Germany have a responsibility to help other countries preserve their natural areas?”
- (3) Questions about national socialism in environmentalism, this section contained only two questions: “Did you ever learn about conservation practice of the Nazi Regime in school (or elsewhere)” and, “Do you think these conservation practices have any lasting impact today?” I would then have interviewees fill out demographic information.

Second, I conducted five interviews with Black Forest National Park employees, and one interview with the Feldberg nature reserve ranger (there is only one). I also interviewed an employee of the Southern Black Forest Nature Park, which encompasses the Feldberg, who I randomly asked for an interview from as part of my visitor interviews. These interviews were the least structured, as they changed, based on the individual’s job. Overall questions generally had to do with how the park/preserve communicates its goals and rules to visitors and local people, and diversity in the visitor base. In the Black Forest National Park employees were specifically asked about the Park’s relationship to local communities, and at the Feldberg employees were asked about the significance of its national socialist founding. Interviews generally lasted 20 to 40 minutes.

Lastly, I conducted thirty interviews with visitors in the National Park and at the Feldberg respectively, for a total of sixty. These interviews ranged from three to seventeen minutes, but generally lasted five to seven minutes. These interviews were not pre-planned, and I would simply ask visitors if they had time at the moment. I conducted interviews in three locations within the National Park (as well as three interviews at a fourth location, which I later found out is technically just outside of the park), and two locations at the Feldberg Nature Park. I would often interview groups of two (sometimes three) people visiting together, but I generally counted these as one interview unless participants answered the questions separately. Sometimes multiple people in a group would offer to fill out demographic data, so I have 69 in my demographic data count.

Base on my demographic data my visitor interviews have a fairly well balanced age and gender ratio, with the largest age group of 58-66 (every age group had a range of 8) at 21.7 percent, and men outnumbering women by a count of 5. Two thirds of my participants identified as having a German nationality, the second largest nationality group was French at 10.3%, which comprises is exactly half of the international European visitor.

Figure 2: Visitor Age Demographic

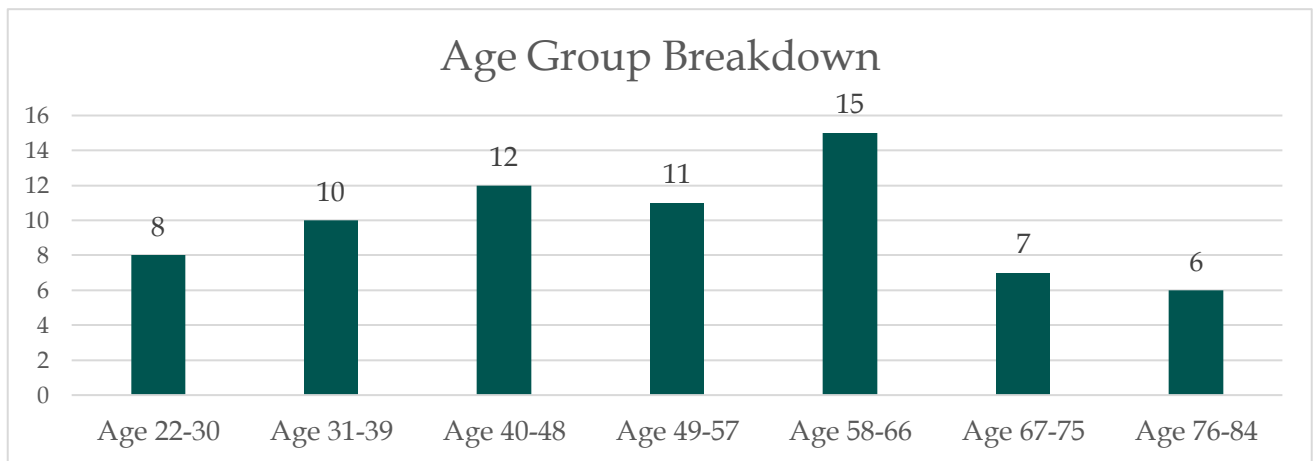
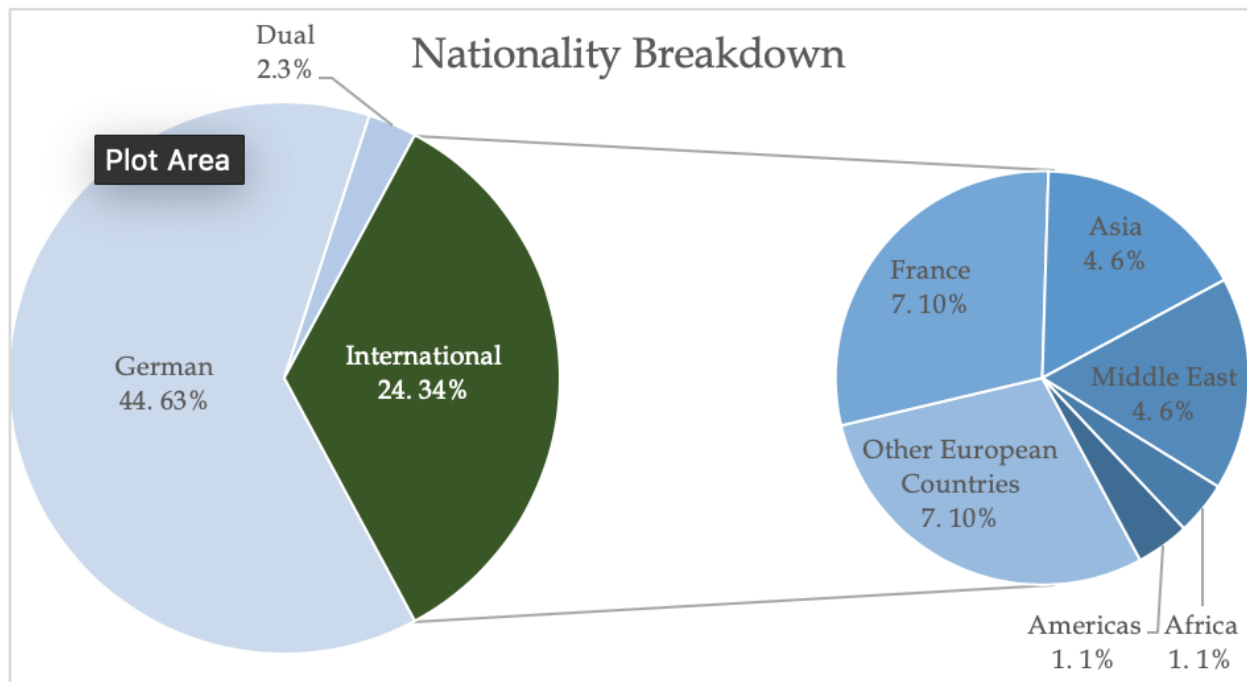


Figure 3: Visitor Nationality Demographic (overall left; international breakdown right)



### *Analytic Approach*

To help analyze my research I used the web-based app Dedoose, which specializes in qualitative and mix method research. Within Dedoose I created ‘codes’ to highlight themes in my interviews, such as “Local people deserve greater access to park spaces.” I would then weight the code on a scale of -5 to 5; negative five being “strongly disagree” that local people deserve more access, and positive five meaning “strongly agree” that local people deserve more access. Some codes were not weighted as I was more interested in the code’s frequency. For example, if a participant responded ‘money’ to the question ‘what are the main obstacles facing Germany [or if the participants were unsure, their home country] when trying to protect the environment?’ I would code their answer under the theme ‘money/industry/capitalism’. Given the limitations of time and space, the findings presented in this thesis do not represent all of the

research findings. Instead, I will present the salient themes that speak most directly to my research questions.

### *Limitations*

Because this methodology relies on in-depth, in-person interviewing, I cannot claim that findings represent the population of any one of these groups. However, what I give up in terms of representation, I attempt to make up in terms of depth of understanding. Because the interviews, especially the longer interviews with the general population and employees of the parks, were intentionally conducted as conversations that allow ideas and thoughts to emerge freely, I hope to have captured a deeper understanding than could be done through a survey. Nonetheless, the findings below should be considered a beginning understanding of how these various groups think about environmentalism and its connection to cultural history, diversity and nationalism in Germany.

As a conclusion of this Chapter here is a quick overview of my results, that will be detailed and fleshed out in the next four chapters. First, in the next chapter I discuss how environmental issues seem to be a top priority for the German public, and how environmentalism helps define the way Germans see themselves and their country. Next, in my fourth chapter, I present my findings on the continued presence and importance of the historical idea that Germans have a connection to nature and their forests, as presented in my background chapter. In the fifth chapter I examine my findings on national socialism. While there seem to be little connection to national socialism or nationalism within German environmentalism today, there is a lack of knowledge surrounding this aspect of conservation history. Finally, my sixth chapter

considers the disparity of ethnic and racial domestic diversity within the Feldberg Nature Park and the Black Forest National Park.

### CHAPTER 3: VALUING ENVIRONMENTALISM

The German public completes the picture of Germany as an environmental leader. Nearly every German I interviewed expressed their support for environmentalism, placed this issue as a high priority, and held their government to high environmental standards.

One of the strongest patterns I found in my analysis was that German visitors were significantly more critical of the German government's environmental actions (or lack thereof) than foreigners. When German visitors to the national parks were asked the question "Is Germany doing enough to preserve nature?" they would overwhelmingly say no. Even when they had a generally positive view of German environmental efforts, they would often say "more can always be done." International visitors to the German parks, on the other hand, would often answer yes to this question. Although it is natural for international visitors to not speak ill of a host country, it is noteworthy that nearly all the international visitors felt Germany was quite environmentally conscious compared to other countries and did not seem to share this notion of "we can always do more" or "enough is never enough." Yet, even though nearly all German participants also believed Germany was significantly more environmentally friendly than other countries, they wanted more from the German government in terms of environmental support and regulations. Participants often complained of the power of German industry, particularly the Auto industry, whose interests they believed often took precedent over environmental concerns.

Both international and German visitors would compare Germany favorably to other countries around the world. International visitors would often compare Germany favorably to their own country, and Germans would most often compare themselves favorably to Asian countries (5X) and Southern Europe (5X) (It may be important to note that my positionality, as

an American, might account for the lack of comparisons to the United States). Three out of four visitors from Asian countries (two from India and one from Thailand) compared Germany favorably to their own country's environmentalism. German visitors would also sometimes mention Scandinavia as an area with comparable environmental policies or better than their own. This demonstrates how Germans see their own country as an environmental world leader.

German visitors were also more likely to believe that there was to some degree an issue of mistreating the parks they were visiting. German visitors did not seem to attribute mistreatment of spaces to a certain group, but would rather explain specific instances of mistreatment they had witness, such as swimming in the Feldsee at the Feldberg or the Mummelsee in the National Park, which is not allowed. Others mention how mistreatment of nature is always an issue everywhere you go. On the other hand, nearly all of the international visitors I talked to, excluding the Swiss, did not believe there was mistreatment and would often remark on the cleanliness of German natural spaces, often in comparison to their own countries.

When asked the question "What is a major obstacle to environmental protection" nearly eighty percent of Germans answered, "money," "commercial industry," or "capitalism." A number of German visitors complained that although there is a lot of environmental discussion in Germany, there is not enough environmental regulation and explicit environmental policy action. The second largest category was "politics/bureaucracy." Several Germans also mentioned privatization of the German forest, and the resulting mismanagement of these forests, as a primary concern for environmentalism. Perspectives on major obstacles to environmental protection were slightly different among international visitors: they were evenly split between "money/industry/capitalism" and "population increase/increased development/building."



One of the only international visitors to critique German environmentalism was a middle-aged African man (unfortunately we ran out of time to collect demographic information) visiting the Feldberg. When we initially began talking, he was very positive about the Feldberg, saying it was very pretty, however upon deeper reflection he became more critical. When asked the question “Do you think Germany’s views on nature are different or special compared to other countries? How is it different?” he explained how German nature is very built up and surrounded by business. He referred to Germany as an “economy land” and the Feldberg as very touristy. He described how in Africa the animals roam freely in nature, whereas in Germany they seem separated from the land.

Although generally very positive about German environmental efforts, one American woman I interviewed in the Black Forest National Park also discussed the aspect of German nature existing in densely built-up spaces. When asked about obstacles to protecting nature in Germany, she explained that a main issue is population density, and noted that a Park Ranger told her “that this [on top the mountain at Ruhestein] is the only view in this whole park where you won't see a house or a building.” She continued “Whereas the U.S. is so large and many of our national parks are, indeed, in places that are not really populated... Wyoming, Montana, places where not a lot of people live.”

Although both the African man and the American woman mentioned Germany’s “built up nature,” it is interesting to note that their views are quite different. The American woman’s discussion of built-up nature was based on the idea of people encroaching on nature, which is a very American idea that truly wild nature must be largely devoid of people or any remnants of people. In contrast, the African man’s idea of built-up nature was centered on the commercialism

of nature and the lack of large animals. His view of wild nature includes an abundance of animals, but not necessarily an absence of people.

Only one group of German visitors critiqued the built-up aspect of the Feldberg: a couple from northern Germany who had never lived in Baden-Württemberg. They described the German view of nature as “*oberflächlich*” (superficial). They used the Feldberg as a case in point, critiquing the ski infrastructure and the resulting erosion of a cleared slope. They went on to explain their frustration with the number of buildings, particularly the fun house for kids, noting that, in their view, children should come to the Feldberg to play in nature. The German couple is not only critiquing the commercialization of German nature, but also the Park’s endorsement of this particular type of relationship to nature. This emphasis on a relationship to nature would continually show up in all three of my interview groups.

## CHAPTER 4: GERMAN CONNECTEDNESS TO NATURE: A LASTING PRESENCE

One of my most surprising findings was that there is still a clear presence of cultural history in the way Germans understand nature and environmentalism in Germany. This cultural history is rooted in the very old idea (from *Germania* discussed in the Background section) that Germans have a connection to nature and, specifically, the forest, and this connection is not found in their European neighbors. This strong presence of history was made all the more surprising as my research questions were not aimed at drawing out this century old “origin” history. I found this pervasive narrative not only in my interviews with German participants, but also, and more directly so, in my interviews with French participants.

This idea of Germany’s connectedness to nature would often come up in response to the question “Do you think Germany’s views on nature are different or special compared to other countries?” Of the seven French visitors that I interviewed, six mentioned this idea of a German connectedness to nature. One French student told me, “Germans are very connected to nature; it is a part of who they are,” another described Germans as “*naturnah*” (“close to nature”). Only one international visitor suggested a disconnect between Germans and nature, though it was in reference more broadly to a comment that western countries in general were very disconnected from nature.

An American student studying abroad in Freiburg, was also clearly exposed to the idea of German people being connected to nature even though she had only lived in Germany for a year. When asked the question “Do you think there's enough education about how to treat Germany's natural spaces?” she responded, “within the Black Forest region, I think there is a lot [of education]. The forest plays a big role in the culture here. And it also shows up a lot within the

education and how they talk about nature, just within the college systems.” From her perspective and experience, German connectedness to nature is not only a past idea people draw upon, but rather an alive idea that continues to be taught.

Of the 45 German visitors I interviewed, ten (22%) mentioned Germans special connection to nature. Some would mention how hiking (wandern) is a long tradition in Germany, in a way they had not seen present in other countries. For example, one German visitor said, “I think that hiking and walking is a special German, or perhaps also a Swiss, custom. Yeah, People from Asia, for example, don’t really know this.”<sup>1</sup> A Freiberg resident connected this culture of hiking directly to nature protection. “There is certainly a connection between a culture of hiking, walking in nature, and nature protection. I believe that people who are in nature and experience nature pay greater attention to nature protection.”<sup>2</sup> A Feldberg resident responded that Germany’s view of nature is special due to a “Wald Mentalität” (“forest mentality). Besides echoing Germans love of nature, several other respondents also mentioned the uniqueness of the German forest. Two of the national park researchers also mentioned the tradition of hiking in Germany and mentioned Germans’ obsession with their forests.

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<sup>1</sup> “Ich denke schon, dass Wandern und spazieren gehen ist schon eine spezielle deutsche oder vielleicht auch Schweizer Gewohnheit. Ja, Menschen aus Asien zum Beispiel kennen das eigentlich nicht”

<sup>2</sup> „Es Gibt bestimmt ein zusammen hang zwischen der Culture des Wanderns, in der Natur herum gehen und dem Naturschutz glaub ich schon, Menschen die eben in Natur sind und Natur erleben achten eher auf Naturschutz.“

## *Rurality and a Connectedness to Nature*

Unlike the French, about one-fourth of German respondents noted that not all Germans have the same connectedness to nature, and pointed out important regional and rural/urban differences. Nearly all who mentioned this distinction believe that people who grew up surrounded by the forest or countryside have a stronger connection to the land. Five Germans mentioned that people from the Black Forest region have a special connection to their forest and that nature is an important aspect of Black Forest culture.

Indeed, some regional differences emerged in my data. The visitors who reported having lived in the Baden-Württemberg (BW) state for more than twenty years had a significantly stronger belief in this notion of German connectedness to nature, than the German visitors who had never lived in BW or had lived there for less than 20 years. Originally, I thought this finding might be related to age, however, the weight and frequency of mentioning “German connectedness to nature” is surprisingly evenly distributed across age groups.

Only one interviewee believed that people from small towns surrounded by nature, may take nature for granted. Interestingly, Germans who were born in towns with less than ten thousand people were significantly more likely to believe that Germany is doing enough to preserve nature. The group responding most negatively to this question, when taking into account both frequency and weight, were Germans coming from cities with 200,000 or more people.

Surprisingly, Germans from cities with 200,000 or more people were the most likely to mention German connectedness to nature. However, when people from smaller towns mentioned

this connectedness, in general, they seemed to put more emphasis on it, mentioning phrases like ‘forest mentality,’ instead of a tradition and culture of hiking.

However, this notion could be seen as a romanticizing rural naturalness, as rural communities often seem to lay in opposition to environmental efforts. One woman I interviewed who lived in a town just outside of Freiburg described varying relationships with nature between rural and urban people, “So, I think that, if I lived in the Black Forest, and for example was a farmer and my existence was built upon that, then I may deal with nature differently than if I was a visitor coming only to enjoy nature.”<sup>3</sup> While, this participant is not directly saying rural relationships to nature are better than urban, she seems to be painting a romanticized view of rural people in the Black Forest. How many people in the Black Forest actually depend on the land for income? According to the European Commission only 0.9 percent of people in the State of Baden-Württemberg worked in the agricultural industry (0.3 percent lower than the national average) (European Commission, 2019). Whereas according to the Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, the tourism board and official representative of 250 communities in the Black Forest, 114,000 jobs are directly related and 342,000 are indirectly related to Black Forest tourism (Störr-Ritter et al. 2018). If this is considered within the entire working population (ages 15-64) of Baden-Württemberg then tourism within the Black Forest alone accounts for 6.25 percent of jobs within the state (Eurostat, 2019). One could argue that since this tourism is based on the landscape, many Black Forest residents depend on the land for their income, but this certainly

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<sup>3</sup> „Also ich glaub dass, wen ich im Schwarzwald lebe und da zum Beispiel Landwirt bin und meine Existenz da drauf aufbaut, dass ich da vielleicht anders mit umgehe als wenn ich als Besucher kommen und die Natur nur genieße.“

does not seem to be the relationship people have envisioned. Furthermore, Black Forest residents who work in the commercial forestry industry were criticized by several respondents for their environmentally damaging practices, such as monocultures, and the resulting depletion of soil nutrients.

### *Contradictions of a Rural Naturalness*

Despite this shared notion that rural Germans have a deeper connection to nature, there have been and continue to be obvious tensions between the Black Forest National Park and the rural people surrounding the park. This tension was clear when I spoke to local people and was recognized in my conversations with park employees. All five of the national Park employees mentioned that originally local people were not in favor of creating the Black Forest National Park.

One of the researchers I interviewed had worked for the National Park for all five years of its existence and had actually worked to create the park in the first place. He described how ten people including himself had conducted six-hundred information sessions around what is today the National Park region. The National Park was voted on by the entire state of Baden-Württemberg, but the park was concerned about gaining support from locals in the areas directly surrounding the park, since they were the most resistant to the idea. I was told by the employee that within the state, around 60-70 percent of people were in support of the park, however within the direct vicinity only twenty percent of people supported the Park's creation. Several researchers also noted a specific difference in perceptions of the Park among urban and rural residents. For example, the researcher who helped create the park noted that they didn't have any resistance from cities such as Freiburg in the state.

The Park researcher noted that there was also a divide between the historic border of Baden (the east side of the state) and Württemberg (the west side of the State). In his view, because the east is still “very dependent on the forest,” many residents view the National Park as a waste of resources. The local community is also suffering a bit economically. A park researcher remarked that many of the sawmills founded in the 1950’s and 1960’s have gone out of business, unable to compete with large corporations. Whether true or not, the park researchers believe that local traditions related to the forest emerge out of this economic disparity and longer-term poverty in the region. This is important because part of the conflict might also be overlaid with class and educational differences: park administrators may believe locals perhaps backward, whereas locals feel undermined and perhaps demeaned by outsiders. Interestingly, a National Park researcher who studies the demographics of visitors to the National Park, mentioned that mostly higher educated people visit the Park.

The National Park forbids the collection of deadwood from the forest floor because it is bad for the ecology of the forest. Deadwood not only creates important and diverse habitats for animals, but it is also important in replenishing nutrients to the soil.

Locals are particularly frustrated with the Park’s refusal to allow the collection and use of forest deadwood, because locals have a tradition of collecting deadwood to “clean the forest.” Locals view this tradition as both good for the forest and as a good utilization of natural resources since they would also use deadwood as firewood. To locals, leaving deadwood to rot in the forest was seen not only as wasteful, but unclean and uncaring.



As a result, the issue of how to care for deadwood became a major source of conflict between locals and Park administrators and was mentioned repeatedly—clearly an ongoing issue—in my interviews.

Deadwood was a common theme both in my interviews with National Park researchers and with local people. After interviewing one local in the National park, her husband (who was against the creation of the park) turned to me and pointed at a dead tree behind us and said, we would never have let that be here. Another local woman I spoke to explained how local people cared for the forest by cleaning out the deadwood. One social scientist at the National Park described to me how she found a similar response when she conducted interviews of older (80+) local people: “And what we have learned from the interviews is that after the Second World War, they had to use everything from when they were kids. Like small kids. They were sent to the woods and had to collect everything, like every leaf or every little thing to, to get for heating or for cooking or something. And we always heard the word the wood was clean and very sauber. Now it's, it's dirty.” She went on to say how local people would even describe not using and cleaning the forest as a “Sünde,” a sin<sup>4</sup>.

This sentiment was echoed by another National Park employee responsible for relations and communications with local businesses around the park. He said, “To them it was a virtue to have a clean and orderly forest, and not leaving perfectly good firewood lying around and ready for decay, and also to collect blueberries, and not to do that was sort of a... Sin is too strong, but it was not good.” Originally, the National Park allowed some of these cultural foraging practices

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<sup>4</sup> This interview was conducted primarily in English but also German.

to continue, such as collecting blueberries and mushrooms. Certain areas of the Park allowed people to collect a certain weight of mushrooms and berries (not enough for commercial uses but enough for a family). However, the National Park employees told me that confusion as to where these areas were located and the amount of collecting allowed, led the Park to disallow foraging entirely. Before talking to the National Park employees, I noticed this confusion in my interviews with local people, some believing foraging was never allowed, and some believing it was allowed to a certain extent, but to what extent they were unsure. Even among the employees there seemed to be confusion surrounding these rules.

Interestingly, although National Park researchers want to keep the deadwood for ecological reasons, they still seem to hold on to some of the locals' traditional ideas. While some of the National Park researchers would describe the idea of "cleanliness" of the forest from a local perspective, others would acknowledge the innate untidiness of a natural forest. For example, when describing the history of litter racking in the Black Forest region, one natural science researcher explained how "Everything was always used, and everything looked then very tidy." When a social science researcher was discussing the history of the Black Forest, she used similar language saying, "And so this is all very... how do you say... tidy? So, it's very in order. And now it's more or less chaotic and they cannot understand why we leave a fallen tree in the forest". While, of course, both of these researchers believe deadwood should remain in the forest for ecological reasons, they also understand and perhaps still hold (given their German roots) this concept of a clean versus dirty forest. Almost as if they were saying, "although the deadwood makes the forest disorderly and dirty, it is important for ecosystem functions."

One of the main ecosystem functions of deadwood is as a habitat for insects. However, local people, particularly those in the wood industry, take issue with allowing species like the

bark beetle infesting the deadwood because it can damage commercial wood. One of the park researchers commented that this was another major issue of conflict related to Park policy around the use of deadwood. When describing this issue, he explained, “Because of course if you *don't take care of these trees*, of course they, they die and then they just, you know, they stand as, as a dead tree”. Hearing the language of ‘care’ from someone from the outside describing local perspectives, suggests he still has a cultural and historical understanding of what it means to take care of trees and a forest. Of course, ecologically he knows that removing deadwood is damaging to forest ecosystems. Yet, he describes leaving the deadwood *as not taking care* of the trees, mimicking the language of the local women I spoke with. While it is difficult to analyze the word choice of non-native speakers (since the researchers spoke English with me), his use of the term ‘care’ several times in the interview was used always in the context of ‘concerned or interested, or considerate of/to think about’, which suggests that his word choice of “taking care” is significant.

## CHAPTER 5: LOSING KNOWLEDGE: NATURE AND A NATIONAL SOCIALIST HISTORY

The connection to an older cultural history seems to hold a much greater presence than any remnants of national socialist or nationalism in German environmental thought.

When I set out to conduct my research, I was looking for three possibilities, which might suggest that a form of nationalism in German environmental thought might still persist. First, a national feeling of ownership over nature in Germany. Second, privileging access to nature for Germans and a desire to limit access for non-Germans. And, lastly, a belief or sense that only ethnic Germans have a unique connection to nature, and immigrants or internationals have an inappropriate relationship to nature.

### *Local Ownership and Universal Access*

I did not find any significant differences of perceptions of nature, ownership, or diversity among the visitors I talked to at the two Parks—one created by national socialist and one recently created. Interestingly, more German visitors at the National Park mention a German connectedness to nature than at the Feldberg Nature Park. However, there are many factors which could account for this discrepancy.

First, I will address my first and second possibilities for suggesting a continued tendency towards nationalism in perceptions of German nature. None of my interviews with German residents or visitors to the Parks suggested that the Parks belonged to some notion of a “Greater Germany” or the “German people,” nor did they express any desire to give German nationals greater access to the Parks. In response to my question “do you think local people, perhaps from surrounding towns, should have greater access to the Park than tourists or other people?” the

German visitors were far more likely than international visitors to believe that local people did *not* deserve more access. German participants would often emphasize the importance of everyone having equal access. Interestingly, local people also believe they do not deserve greater access to the Park, often saying they already had easy access. Furthermore, no one suggested limiting access among international or domestic tourists. That said, French and German tourists were much less in favor of equal access in terms of varying levels of physical abilities, as they believed nature would be negatively impacted.

However local people did express a belief that they should have more decision-making power over policies pertaining to the National Park. For example, one participant I interviewed from the town of Ottenhöfen, right outside the National Park, expressed frustration that the entire State was able to vote on the creation of the Park. He remarked how “even people that are not involved” were able to vote, for example, “you know in the Bodensees, they have nothing to do with the Black Forest, or with the National Park.” This sentiment demonstrates local or regional feelings of greater ownership towards proximal nature, but not a sense that nature is for “Germans” as the National Socialists argued. The fact that park officials also focused on local support when they only needed a majority statewide, also suggests that they see local people as having a unique and perhaps somewhat privileged voice over proximal natural spaces.

Regional ownership came up in my other interviews as well. When respondents found out I would also be interviewing people in Freiburg, they were quick to point out that Freiburg was not part of the Black Forest. Freiburg rests at the bottom of the Black Forest foothills, but is often

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<sup>5</sup> Lake region in southern Baden-Württemberg bordering Switzerland

listed as a city in the Black Forest by German and international tourist sites (Störr-Ritter et al, 2018). Nonetheless, people told me that residents of Freiburg would not really know or understand the Black Forest. There are clear regional distinctions in perceptions concerning decision-making and which Germans are allowed to claim understanding of the Black Forest.

### *Criticisms of Environmental Issues Outside of Germany*

While I did not find any suggestions of nationalist tendencies in terms of ownership or access to nature, I did find suggests that some Germans suggested international people have an inappropriate relationship to nature. Although these criticisms of internationals are not necessarily nationalistic in nature, they are somewhat concerning nonetheless.

German participants would only compare Germany's environmentalism favorable to poorer regions of the world, most commonly Asia and Southern Europe. However, only one German participant mention poverty as an important environmental issue (or mentioned poverty whatsoever). Interestingly, none of the German participants compared Germany to France, whereas of the seven French participants six compared German environmentalism positively to French. The only French participant that did not draw this comparison also identified as having a German nationality.

Much of this criticism was centered around mismanagement of trash in places like Asia and Southern Europe, as well as, but to a lesser degree, damaging agriculture in Southern Europe. Several lamented that many Germans buy produce from southern Europe. Some were harsher, one woman saying, "In Brazil for example there is no nature protection, they destroy everything." One woman I interviewed in Freiberg believed that the German education system lead to more environmental practices by German people. She explained, "I have noticed that

when children from other countries come, and now a lot are coming, they throw everything everywhere, and the German children really do not do that.”<sup>6</sup> In general, younger German participants (below the age of forty) were significantly less likely to draw these negative comparisons.

One Freiburg resident, who is a teacher of national socialist history, believed Germans had somewhat of an obsession over trash management.

“I heard this sentence from an American, ‘the Germans believe in the yellow bag like a religion.’ I find that good. I believe, that the term fascism applies in this instance, because the whole day we have in your heads, that we are guided by nature protection. Our minds are colonized by it, partly rightly so, but sometimes,..., ‘I’ll also clean this and should I also do this’, and that is too much. We are not considering social justice many more, instead we are only thinking about plastic. This is, I believe, eco-fascism...” [His wife continues] “Without so much plastic and so many things, and so many clothes, that were made somewhere cheaply, just to throw away, there would be less injustice.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> „Ich merk, dass wenn Kinder aus andern Ländern kommen, und es kommen jetzt ganz viele, sie schmeißen alles einfach weg, und das machen die deutschen Kinder eigentlich nicht.“

<sup>7</sup> Ich habe von einem Amerikaner den Satz gehört, die Deutschen glauben an den gelben Sack im Sinne einer Religion. Das fand ich sehr gut. Ich glaube, dass der Begriff Faschismus in diesem Sinn zutrifft, als wir den ganzen Tag im Kopf haben, wir werden gelenkt durch den Gedanken des Naturschutzes. Also unsere Gedanken sind besiedelt davon, zum Teil zu recht, aber manchmal, ..., putze ich noch diese und sollte ich noch dieses, und dass ist zu viel. Wir handeln nicht mehr über soziale Gerechtigkeit, sondern nur noch über Plastik. Das ist, glaube ich, Öko-faschismus.... [woman] Ohne so viel Plastik und so viel Zeug, und so viel Kleider, die irgendwo billig hergestellt werden, zum Wegschmeißen gäbe es weniger Ungerechtigkeit

As this man believes, the deep concern may Germans hold for environmental efforts, may in fact be obscuring them from considering some of the root causes of environmental degradation. Germans are perhaps in danger of losing sight of the intersections of environmentalism, such as poverty, racism, and colonialism. It is important to consider not only the consumerist damages towards nature, but also the direct and subsequent damages towards humans.

### *Lacking Knowledge*

When I asked a more direct question about national socialist conservation, mentioning the fact that the Third Reich founded the Feldberg Nature Park, I discovered a general lack of knowledge surrounding this history. Of the 88 people I interviewed in Germany, only two seemed to know about any association the Nazis had with environmentalism or any environmental policies passed during the Third Reich. This finding made me question whether the accusation launched at authors Bramwell, Staudenmaier, and Biehl for inciting an anti-green sentiment because they highlight the historical association's potential relevance today is overblown. Perhaps this discourse is primarily confined to academia? My interviews suggest that the history is unknown to the general public, and even upon learning about the history, the general public believes that the association between Nazism and conservation is irrelevant to the environmental movement today.

In their added Chapter published in 2011, Biehl and Staudenmaier address some of the criticism based on their earlier publication, that they feed an anti-green movement and that suggesting there could be a lasting influence of national socialism on environmentalism was labeling the entire movement 'fascist'. Personally, this chapter resonated with me. I was met



with a similar kind of criticism among some of the older respondents, when I asked the last question in my longer interviews: “Do you believe that the fact that the Third Reich created thousands of nature preserves in Germany, such as the Feldberg, has any impact on the way these preserves are viewed today or on who feels welcome in these spaces?” Some of the older respondents (50+) seemed visibly upset by the question feeling that the question was misplaced, and that I was intentionally and unnecessarily attempting to be provocative. A few people even thought I was suggesting that employees of nature preserves created by the Third Reich were Nazi’s in disguise. In contrast, younger respondents seemed perfectly comfortable and thoughtful in answering this question, and most believed there was no impact.

#### *Perceived Relevance of National Socialist Conservation*

One might argue that the lack of knowledge about this history, explains why my respondents did not believe that German environmentalism is rooted or connected to this legacy. However, a respondent, who did know about this history, believed instead that German environmentalism is rooted in a much older cultural narrative related to German connectedness to nature (as reviewed in Chapter 1 and discussed in the previous findings chapter). He explained “I think, if you look at it historically, the nature movement is much older than National Socialism,..., that was all before the Nazis, but the Nazis seized it. And I think because all that was before, maybe it's not connected to the Nazis.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Ich denk mal, wenn man das geschichtlich sieht, die Natur Bewegung ist ja viel älter als Nationalsozialismus,..., das gab es ja alles schon vor den Nazis aber die Nazis haben das an sich gerissen. Und ich denke, dass, weil das schon vorher war, ist jetzt vielleicht auch nicht so mit den Nazis verbunden.“

Specifically, within my visitor interviews, of the thirty participants I interviewed at the Feldberg none seemed to have ever heard of the Nazi party's environmental laws or any conservation projects during the Third Reich. Similarly, at the National Park when I asked the less direct question of "have there ever been problems with German environmental movements today or in the past?" No one believed there were problems today or in the past, their concern was that environmentalist were not always listened to enough today or in the past. Usually if people did have some knowledge of German environmentalism, it began in the 1960's. Although respondents referenced a much older ideology related to nature and Germans' relationship to their forests, they did not perceive this ideology has having any past association with National socialism.

Furthermore, when visitors during the Feldberg interviews and in my longer interviews in Freiburg were told of the Nazi history of conservation, particularly in relation to the Feldberg, the vast majority of people did not think this connection held any significance today, regardless of Nationality. Some interviewees argued that because the Nazi Regime so drastically changed the German landscape, creating landmarks like the autobahn, not all of these changes hold lasting relationships to national socialism today. When I was interviewing a couple from India at the Feldberg, the husband in response to my question said, "history is history, just look at the car industry you don't think about Nazis when you drive a Mercedes and everyone still wants a Mercedes." An Israeli woman who was traveling with her family said "No, why would it?"

Many German visitors believed that because people do not know the history it does not have an influence on how the park is perceived or who feels welcome. In addition, I would also often hear from Germans and non-Germans that because the Third Reich was such a long time ago it does not have an influence on how people see spaces today. A few people mentioned that

perhaps the generation that experienced the war might still connect spaces like the Feldberg to the Third Reich. However, one man I interviewed explained, “I think most people don’t know anything about that, yeah...I also didn’t know that, therefore it did not influence my perception. But I know that in other Regions, for example the Röhn, where there are some Monuments which look very similar to when they were founded in the Third Reich or National Socialism. And I think that changes how people view the landscape.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, while most believe knowledge of this history is unimportant, a few differed from this belief suggesting that an awareness, or visual reminders of national socialist history, does and would change the way the landscape is viewed today.

However, not everyone was even willing to believe this history existed. I interviewed a Frenchman who, with his German wife, has been running an inn next to the Feldberg Preserve for the last sixteen years. When I began to ask him a question about the Feldberg’s creation in the Third Reich, he began shaking his head saying “No, the Feldberg was already well known before that.”<sup>10</sup> I tried to be more specific about what the Nazis created in the Feldberg, giving the example of the Ski hill and the creation of the “Naturschutzgebiet” (nature park), but before I

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<sup>9</sup> “Ich glaube die Meistens wissen das gar nicht, also...ich wusste das auch nicht, des wegen hat es meine Sicht da drauf nicht beeinflusst. Ich kenn das, aber aus andere Region, zum Beispiel in der Röhn, wo eben solche Denkmaler stehen die sehr danach aussehen wie wen sie eben im Dritten Reich oder Nationalsozialismus erstellt wurden, und dass verändert schon den Blick auf die Landschaft, find ich.“

<sup>10</sup> “Neh, der Feldberg war schon vorher schon bekannt“

even finished my question, he was shaking his head again. He said, “They said nothing, they did nothing.”<sup>11</sup>

Of course, some residents of the Feldberg are aware of the role of the Nazi regime in the creation of the Park. One fifty-eight-year-old man, who was born in the town of Feldberg and lived there his whole life, did believe the Nazi creation of the Park had a lasting impact, but not in terms of an enduring ideology. Rather, he believed it marked the beginning of tourism on the Feldberg.

The Feldberg Ranger as well as an employee from the Southern Black Forest Nature Park (which encompasses the Feldberg), both knew of the Feldberg’s history in the Third Reich. When I asked the Southern Black Forest employee if he thought the fact that the Nazi’s created so many nature preserves could have a lasting influence on how people see the Park today, he responded “So the Feldberg Nature Park was founded in this time...no, that does not influence it anymore. So, that was a national time back then, that means that, we as Germans have special, amazing sites and they must be preserved. No, there is no connection anymore”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the other Feldberg ranger was also aware of the Park’s history and believed there was little lasting influence today.

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<sup>11</sup> „Sie haben nichts gesagt, sie haben nicht gemacht“

<sup>12</sup> „Also das Naturschutzgebiet Feldberg ist genau in dieser Zeit gegründet, eigentlich nein, das hat keinen Einfluss mehr drauf. Also, das war damals eine Nationalen Zeit, das heißt das besondere, wir haben als Deutsche besonders tolle flecken und die muss man erhalten. Nein, da gibt’s keine Zusammenhänge mehr.“

“We also had lots of tourists before the Second World War and so the Nazis decided to leave a small hole in the nature reserve so that skiing and things like that are possible. But that does not have so much to do with the founders.

In some states in Germany, nature protection started a bit earlier and only in Baden Württemberg did it started with the Third Reich. I think it starts there, but it also changed a bit, so we don't have roots in this time, and we don't have the feeling that we are still rooted there or that it influences the ways we protect nature, I don't think so. Because similar landscapes are also protected in areas in countries which don't have this history. And also, when you speak with a range of other countries, we have similar management practices in nature protected areas. So, it gets more, more and more similar throughout Europe I think.”<sup>13</sup>

The Feldberg ranger argues that since the park has become heavily influenced by European and other international environmental standards, and the Feldberg does not look any different from other nature preserves in Europe, it is clear that the Park has no lasting connection to the Third Reich. This international influence was very evident to me coming from the United States. Both Parks mentioned that U.S. National Park Service and its system of National Parks had influenced their programming and the design of their visitor centers. Another similarity between the U.S. and the Feldberg is the lack of recognition for their tenuous histories. National Parks in the United States rarely address the true history of colonization that occur on that land, and at the Feldberg I could find no information about the origins of the Park aside from naming the year.

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<sup>13</sup> Grammar edited for clarity

While vastly different histories, it is important to consider how places address or ignore their history.

Ironically, given my point above, an important distinction between the United States and Germany is that Germany in many ways has recognized and taught the dark sides of its history. This notion of Germany having already acknowledged its Nazi history was brought up in my interviews. A German woman visiting the Feldberg believed Germany already had enough places to remember the horrors of the Holocaust, giving the example of Dachau, and the people visiting nature preserves are not interested in learning about how national socialism was involved in this history. Recognition of a Nazi history would likely not mean a memorial for the Holocaust, but rather an informational plaque or exhibit in the main visitor center. But clearly many visitors are not interested in learning more about this history and would not like to be reminded of it when they visit the Feldberg. However, what does it mean that the Nazi ideology and physical creation of protected areas, has been essentially left out of the educational system and Germany's official remembrance of the Third Reich. What does this mean today as environmentalism is becoming the largest sociopolitical movement in Germany, Europe, and arguably the world? How can you understand the importance of intersectionality within a movement, without knowing the history of exclusion and erasure?

## CHAPTER 6: LACKING DIVERSITY WITHIN GERMAN PARKS: DOES IT MATTER?

Based on my demographic data and my interviews with employees there is a lack of domestic ethnic diversity at both parks I studied. Additionally, there is a lack of concern and initiative for rectifying this disparity in visitorship.

In general, the German people I interviewed did not believe lack of diversity was an issue in German natural spaces, or they said they did not know. Interestingly one woman from Freiburg I spoke to said she did not believe ethnic diversity was an issue in the parks, but she did in fact seem to believe there was a lack of diversity. She seemed to attribute this lack of diversity to a German connectedness to nature. She explained, “Maybe it is also that the many people that come from Syria and Africa, that now come as refugees, they don’t know this at all from back home, that someone would take a trip into nature. They do not do this often. The new arrivals, they just moved here; they need a little longer until they will easily go into nature. They go to the park and they go to the Dreisam,<sup>14</sup> but they do not go to the Feldberg.”<sup>15</sup>

In my discussion with the Feldberg Ranger, who had worked at the Feldberg for over thirty years, I asked him about his perception of ethnic and racial diversity within the park. “When I started at Feldberg, we only had German tourists. It was a typical place where people from Germany are spending their holidays and I also think there are more white Germans than

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<sup>14</sup> A river that runs through the city of Freiberg

<sup>15</sup> “Vielleicht ist es auch so dass die Viele aus Syrien und Afrika die jetzt als Flüchtlinge gekommen sind, die kennen das gar nicht von zu Hause, dass man einen Ausflug in die Natur machen. Die machen das oft nicht so. Also die neue zu gezogenen also sie brauchen länger bis sie einfach in die Natur gehen. Sie gehen in den Park und sie gehen an die Dreisam aber sie gehen nicht auf den Feldberg.”

immigrants. I don't know if any research had been conducted... We also have immigrants, in the nature reserve, but I would say not as much as Germans.”<sup>16</sup> While there are no formal ethnic or racial diversity studies that I could find in any nature reserve in Germany, a thirty-year perspective gives a fair amount of insight into visitor demographics.

Of the National Park researchers, three of the five believed the National Park lacked representative ethnic diversity. The other two were unsure. The Feldberg Ranger noted a lack of ethnic diversity among German visitors, though increased diversity among international visitors. One National Park social science researcher attributed this disparity to a deeper structural racism throughout Germany. One might also assume it is an issue of location. The National Park and the Feldberg Park are in rural areas, but both are only an hour away from larger cities in BW, and public transportation is available. These observations by park employees are also supported by my demographic data. Of the 60 Park visitors I interviewed, none identified as having both a German nationality and an immigration background outside of Europe. Only two visitors (3.3 percent) had immigrated to Germany, whereas 11 percent of the state of Baden-Württemberg are immigrants (Baden-Württemberg State Ministry).

While no researcher at either Park is studying the ethnic diversity of visitors, the National Park has conducted some programs for refugees in the nearby towns. However, these events are not continuous programs or classes. The resident of Ottenhöfen, a town just outside of the National Park, that I interviewed taught English and music to children of refugee families that lived in the town. During our interview two of the little girls excitedly ran into his house to tell

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<sup>16</sup> Grammar edited for clarity



him a story. I asked him if the refugee families had any interest in the National Park, or if he knew of their opinion of the Park.

“I think they are busy with other things. Fighting for ... surviving. Even in a country like Germany they still ... Look at this guy [he points through the window of his house], this is the father of the girls you just met. I don't think that he's very interested in knowing about the National Park because he's looking forward to how to get his family going. See? I don't think that he even knows that there is a National Park.”

Clearly this man believes many refugee parents do not feel they have time for leisure activities. But what about their children? Perhaps more child-centered long-term programs in the National Park would help develop more representative diversity within the Park from the surrounding towns. While it seemed clear to employees at both the National Park and the Feldberg that the Parks lacked representative ethnic diversity, no research was being conducted or planned to determine the possible causes behind this disparity.

Even in diverse cities there seems to be a difference in the use of greens spaces. When interviewing an international student from Tunisia, who had spent her last four years at the University in Freiburg, she mentioned a separation in some of the city parks.

“Because for example, you can look, even Freiberg is supposed to be a very inclusive city and then you can just see how parks sometimes are kind of divided or even sub... Or even the same part. You just find different areas where people mix. Like, for example, in the... the one in Stuhlinger, it's kind of, you know, known just for... ghetto blah, blah, blah. Or just where we can buy weed and stuff like this. So, people even when they just go to

chill, they make sure that they just like distinguish from the black people sitting there. Separation is kind of socially internalized sometimes I have the feeling.”

In my shorter interviews with Park visitors, some feelings of separation within Baden Württemberg in general also came up. In the National Park I spoke with a Palestinian man who had spent several years in Austria and 18 months in Germany. Without any prompting related to the issue of diversity, he began discussing the German fear of foreigners. He said “People in general have a little bit of fear towards foreigners. You find that here in Germany, and in Austria as well.”<sup>17</sup> He continued on to say that in Southern Germany there seem to him to be an acceptance of other cultures. When I asked him about this acceptance he replied “Acceptance means maybe saying ‘Hello’,..., and ‘Leaving us in peace,’ That is what acceptance means. But laughing [together]... the German culture is always official.”<sup>18</sup>

At the Feldberg I had a similar conversation with an African man (unfortunately I was unable to collect his demographic information, so I do not know his country of origin), who had been living and working in Germany for a few years. When I asked him if the national socialist history may influence how the Feldberg Nature Park is perceived today, he said “you still feel *this* in the area.” He mentioned how he often felt people would not really smile at him and not really laugh with him. He linked this feeling specifically to xenophobia. While most of the international people I interviewed in the parks did not mention a feeling of unwelcomeness, it is

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<sup>17</sup> “Die Leute haben ein bisschen angst für die fremde Leute, dass ist hier, in Deutschland gibt das, in Österreich auch“

<sup>18</sup> “akzeptieren bedeutet vielleicht ‘hallo’ sagen,..., und ,lass uns in ruhig‘ das bedeute akzeptieren. Aber die Laichen... die deutsche Kultur ist immer Offizial“.

noteworthy that the two interviewees who did were the only visitors of non-European descent who had lived in Germany for extended periods of time and were not simply on vacation.

Interestingly, none of my respondents—in Freiburg or the National Park—said they felt uncomfortable in natural spaces in Germany, including those who mentioned they did not feel completely accepted. A Black/Asian American student, who was at the end of her year studying in Freiburg, had a generally positive perception of German race relations, especially in comparison to the United States. She explained, “There is not much learning that's happening in America. But in my opinion, Germany is looking to learn and it's learning quite well. Therefore, the entire global world has a lot to learn from them. That's my two cents.” When asked if she believed the Feldberg’s Nazi history had any influence on who feels welcome in these spaces today, she responded “I would say yes, probably for some people, but as an international woman of color, I've accessed that Park. I felt welcome in that Park”.

So, if most people of color seem to be comfortable in German nature, where does this lack of diversity come from? It could be due to larger systemic issues, but more research needs to be done. What is clear is that much of the white German public does not consider diversity an issue in environmentalism or green spaces. Nonetheless, considering environmental justice seems to be a relatively new field in Germany, it is important that Park employees are noticing disparities in ethnic and racial diversity, and creating inclusive programs such as those mentioned above for refugees.

## CONCLUSION

Based on my research in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg, four main findings emerged. First, German people care deeply about environmental issues and want more environmental action from their government. Second, German perceptions of their relationship to nature are connected to a historic cultural narrative of a German connectedness to nature. Third, while hundreds German nature reserves were created and developed under the National Socialist regime and there was clear strategic intent to connect Nazi ideology to the cultural environmental history embedded in *Germania*, much of this knowledge of national socialist conservation and its nature ideology has been lost among most of the German public I spoke to. When I explained and asked about this history, I was told—almost universally—that this history is irrelevant today. Fourth, there is a lack of domestic ethnic diversity within both of the Parks I studied, and some concerns about racial segregation (or at least “separateness”) in city green spaces. That said, no one from non-white European decent, mentioned feeling unwelcome in the National Park or Feldberg Nature Park, and did not indicate that the lack of diversity was a pressing problem.

The German public’s commitment to environmental efforts as well as the presence of a deep cultural history of “German connection to nature” suggests a resilient and steady foundation on which further environmental movements can be built and carried. Valuing a connection to nature, the landscape, and especially the German forests, is an important aspect of diverse environmental thought in Germany.

And, yet, my findings compel me to ask: does the lack of knowledge of national socialist conservation history matter? Is it regressive to focus on this history, given that German environmentalism does not seem rooted in Third Reich ideology? I would argue that this lack of

knowledge is important because it prevents Germans, who are otherwise a very environmentally conscious public, from thinking critically about xenophobic aspects of past and current German environmental movements when domestic ethnic diversity is severely lacking within natural spaces in Germany.

It is difficult to truly value diversity if you do not know experientially or understand—even intellectually—what is lost without it. Similarly, it is incomplete to criticize other country's environmental actions (or lack thereof), if you do not know or consider histories of colonization, poverty, and racism, which often fuel the degradation of nature. I argue that environmental histories, and the public's belief in their relevance or irrelevance, matter. They matter precisely because they force us to consider who was excluded in the past, and who is included in environmental movements today. As such, it is important to see the possible connections between my third and fourth findings summarized above. Perhaps lack of attention and concern towards improving environmental diversity in German natural spaces is related to lack of knowledge about Germany's full environmental history and a belief that the most problematic parts of this history are irrelevant?

These concerns are not specific to Germany. They represent a larger global issue of reconciling past, present and future environmental injustices. As Germany moves forward as a global environmental leader, there must be a recognition that environmental movements are not necessarily inclusionary and do not exist in a space free from the threats and encroachment of xenophobic beliefs, feelings, and tendencies toward nationalism. An understanding and continuous teaching of the past is an important step in fighting off these threats as the environmental movement inevitably grows and strengthens.

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