

## CHAPTER 5

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# Forests as the Sentient Bridge between German Landscape and Identity

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In 1910, Rudolf Duesberg, one of the major figures in the formation of racial superiority doctrines, anti-Semitism, and the “nature-based” claims and policies of the Nazi regime, published a book titled *Der Wald als Erzieher* (Forest as educator). The main premise of the book was that both the German people and the German forest were the products of the same entity and thus should be evaluated in the same manner. He asserted that forests are the source of knowledge and must be perceived as “educators” for social order. According to him, the order in and of the German forests suggests a valid and comprehensive example for German society to follow. The forests, he wrote, are “deeply rooted, sedentary, [and have] risen to greatness in the struggle with rough climate and through hard work on poor soil,” while German society “forms a model for those institutions necessary for the strengthening of Germanism. In this manner, the forest can become the educator of the German Volk [people]” (Duesberg 1910: 139; Imort 2005a: 67). From a similar viewpoint, Duesberg also criticized the capitalist mode of production and again came up with the same recipe to protect German identity, social order, and landscape. For him, “the dominant laws for the cultivation of a forest apply equally to the rationally organized human community,” and “in this way the forest becomes an educator” (Duesberg 1910: 138–39; Wilson 2012: 194–95).

Not content with the forest’s role in “educating” or identity building, Duesberg also finds in it justifications for anti-Semitism. As Imort (2005a: 69) shows, his views of German forests had deep-seated links with xenophobia.

Duesberg thus used the forest to exemplify the idea that the community, not the individual, was the basic unit of German society. At the individual level, trees served as placeholders in which Germans were to recognize

themselves. At the collective level, the forest community became a simile of the national community. At the political-economical level, the dichotomy of “Germanic” forestry versus “Semitic” husbandry was the base line for drawing racial boundaries between “us” and “them”: idealistic Germans who were rooted in the soil and live cooperatively so as to further the common good as opposed to materialist Semitic nomads who roamed the land in their capitalist pursuit of personal profit.

In a way similar to arguments that glorify the original German character (blood) as being sylvan and deeply rooted (soil), Duesberg pointed out the threats from the fundamental elements of capitalism such as competition, productivity, and monopoly (especially on land ownership). He proposed a connection between these capitalist elements and a nomadic worldview in order to ground his racial claims about Jewish people and culture. According to him, “the basis of the modern state and institutions of public life are neither Christian nor Germanic,” and because “they represent a nomadic, Jewish worldview,” Germany risked its forests and national character being dominated by Jewish culture (Duesberg 1910: 139–52; Wilson 2012: 196; Imort 2005: 68).

Consistent with previous beliefs, enhanced by contemporary and later thinkers, and echoed in national and anti-Semitic imaginaries of forests, Duesberg’s arguments are crucial to understanding how the bridge between nature and nation is built upon sentient agencies.

This chapter seeks to scrutinize both the historical path and the theoretical construction of nationalist and xenophobic imaginaries of German landscape based on sentience. By revealing that connection, it aims to pave the way for interrogating how xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and nation-building discourses interact in a historical context—one which can help us understand similar constellations today, including movements on the global far right.

There are several profound multidimensional theorizations that assert that landscapes mean much more than just their natural components to thinkers, artists, politicians, and nations as a whole. Landscapes are both perceived and instrumentalized beyond their physical existence and form. As Simon Schama (1995: 61) pointed out, “landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.”

It is vital to illuminate the relationship between these understandings so that the interaction between nature (landscape) and nation (national identity) can be resolved and a bridge to sentient landscapes can be seen. As Ernest Gellner asserts, a nation is something “invented” by nationalism, and it requires differentiating aspects of the nation’s character to bring it into being (Gellner 1964: 169). For Schama, the role of landscape as a differentiating and defining feature of the nation brings it into direct

contact with nationalist discourse theoretically and historically. It is also clear that these imagined landscapes “can function as projection screens for manifold cultural constructions, political agendas, and public perceptions” (Zechner, 2011: 19). Therefore, the theoretical framework referenced in this chapter links the historical or cultural dimensions to the social and political fields.

Germans have had quite a special relationship with forests throughout the country’s history. This strong bond provides a unique opportunity to question and resolve the “sentience bridge” between landscape and race (i.e., between nature and nation) in the German case. Called “forest-mindedness” (Imort 2005a: 55), this German affinity for ascribing physical, spiritual, religious, and sentient qualities to natural features warrants attention, as it provides not only cultural and environmental discourses for analysis but also societal, racial, and political discourses. For this reason, investigating the correlation between landscape and elements of nationalism in the German case offers a fruitful perspective on xenophobic landscapes.

It is well known that Germans have a peculiar perception of their forests. Historically, forests have been the subject of many thinkers, artists, politicians, poets, and civil activists, who intended to create, define, or strengthen a sentience bridge between German landscape (forests) and nation-based agendas, ranging from defining the ancestral roots of the German nation to legitimizing claims regarding anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and racial purity and superiority. With these issues as a basis, this chapter aims to elaborate on a framework that can offer a clearer understanding of xenophobia and racial claims that derive from natural elements.

To this end, the historical background of German perceptions of landscape must be examined with an eye to the intellectual, conceptual, and sociopolitical breaking points that enabled German forests to be instrumentalized in favor of racial incentives and motives. The historical origins of those breaking points will be discussed first, followed by the theoretical conceptualizations and practical dimensions of the German xenophobic landscape, approached through National Socialist ideology and policies.

## **Historical Dimension: Ancestral Roots of German Perceptions of the Forest**

Although the sentience bridge became heavily emphasized after the nineteenth century, the arguments for it go back to 100 CE. Tacitus, the notorious Roman historian, mentions the forests as the origin of Germanic tribes in his book *Germania* (Zechner 2011: 20). He also defines two crucial national characteristics of Germans that directly relate to the forest in Ger-

many—wildness and freedom—and which were later used by German nationalists and theoreticians as grounds for tying landscape and race together through common characteristics (Feshami, 2020).

Additionally, Tacitus played a vital role in underlining the “legitimate” ancestral roots for othering, so much so that he “emphasized the Germans’ wildness and freedom, comparing them favorably against their more servile and decadent counterparts in the Roman Empire” (Feshami, 2020). According to him, Germans, thanks to their forest-based characteristics, were different from their Roman counterparts. This was not only a conceptualization of national characteristics but also a distinction based on forests. As Imort points out (2005a: 57–58), Tacitus’s claims connecting forests and Germans led Romantics to cast the former as the home of the latter and also as the primary source of Germans’ strength.

The Battle of Teutoburg Forest serves as another historical source for mystification and glorification of the German past through entities in nature. One of the most prominent German heroes, Hermann (Arminius), on account of his victory against three Roman legions in the Teutoburg Forest, was frequently referred to by Romantic nationalist thinkers (Wilson 2012; Imort 2005a). Major Romantic figures pointed out that Hermann’s victory taking place in the woods was not only a symbol of German heroism and opposition to all “foreign” occupation but also of the strong bond between German “destiny” and German forests. It is not surprising that the mythical narrative of this battle was a reference point for critics of Napoleon’s occupation of several German states. As will be discussed later, Romantic thinkers and artists in particular cited the story of Hermann while directly referencing the French occupation. Foreign invasions were critical to the process of understanding the xenophobic landscape perceived by the German Volk.

## **Urge for Unification**

The relatively belated unification process to form the German state was also crucial in linking nation and nature. Before analyzing the role of German landscape, namely forests, it seems beneficial to analyze how the arguments for national unification were expressed through natural entities.

As Wilson (2012) argued, a sylvan discourse sprouted from several German historical roots and myths. First, Germans had a unique reverence for the woods, based solely on their supposedly barbaric historiography. Second, this special relationship was kept alive over a long period of time, providing a convenient source for Nazis to enrich their political discourse. With the rise of capitalist production, the commodification and loss of

forests became another issue animating nationalist figures and organizations and later National Socialists as well. Not surprisingly, this discourse carried a “differentiating” aspect used to build and justify xenophobia and othering. This use is apparent in the example of labeling Jews as the “offspring of the desert” (Zechner 2011: 22), in contrast to arguments about the vitality of forests as a component of German national identity.

According to these arguments, there is a direct relationship between national rootedness and forests. As Wilson notes, “Southern European cultures had already decimated their forest in ancient times and declined as a result” (2012: 5). From this point of view, the discourse not only offers a direct correlation between natural elements and national “destiny” but also lays the foundations for the “sentience bridge.” As will be discussed later, claims regarding Romanticism or opposition to industrialization, urbanization, and scientific forestry were also tied to this sylvan discourse. Moreover, traumatic defeats by France played a decisive role in nationalistic discourse.

Forests were the focal point of the political project aimed at “unifying German-speaking people against the occupation of their Heimat by Napoleon” (Imort 2005a: 57). Realizing the need to unify and to find historical, mythical, and differentiating roots for that purpose, Germans put massive importance on forests on a broad scale. The collective effort to define Germans as a “woodland nation” was carried out by foresters, geographers, historians, archaeologists, ethnographers, and botanists (Wilson 2012: 18), as well as by artists and thinkers. As Wilson pointed out, “Their ideas were echoed widely throughout society, finding resonance in the popular press, in schools, and among hiking enthusiasts. . . . Private citizens and all manner of voluntary organizations—botanical societies, hiking clubs, and the Heimat movement for instance—developed and propagated this new image of the nation” (2012: 18).

Therefore, the French occupation was an alarm indicating the need for national unification in order for Germans to survive on cultural, philological, historical, national, and political levels, which were all tied to their sentimental claims concerning landscape and the German forest. It is critical to analyze those claims and those who asserted them and to point out the links they used to create a relationship between nation and nature.

### **Theoretical Dimension: Figures, Arguments, Conceptualizations**

German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte was one of the primary theoreticians who founded his arguments mostly on the “peculiarities” of German identity. In his book *Addresses to the German Nation*, published in

1808, Fichte clearly attempted to acquaint the German people with their different historical, linguistic, and spiritual characteristics. One of the fundamental questions he attempted to answer was, What is the German in opposition to other peoples of Teutonic descent? (Fichte 2008: 100). For him, language is the most important component of the formula to define and differentiate a nation. In other words, the German language is the basis of German uniqueness (Moore 2008: xxiv). Fichte's efforts to create philosophical links between language and identity were founded upon this notion. As he wrote in *Addresses to the German Nation*;

To begin with, and above all else, the first, original and truly natural frontiers of states are undoubtedly their inner frontiers. Those who speak the same language are already, before all human art, joined together by mere nature with a multitude of invisible ties; they understand one another and are able to communicate ever more clearly; they belong together and are naturally one, an indivisible whole. No other nation of a different descent and language can desire to absorb and assimilate such a people without, at least temporarily, becoming confused and profoundly disturbing the steady progress of its own culture. The external limits of territories only follow as a consequence of this inner frontier, drawn by man's spiritual nature itself. And from the natural view of things it is not simply because men dwell within the confines of certain mountains and rivers that they are a people; on the contrary, men live together—and, if fortune has so arranged it for them, protected by mountains and rivers—because they were already a people beforehand by a far higher law of nature.

Thus lay the German nation, sufficiently united by a common language and way of thinking, and clearly enough separated from the other peoples, in the middle of Europe, as a wall dividing unrelated tribes. It was numerous and brave enough to protect its frontiers against any foreign incursion, left to its own devices and little inclined by its whole way of thinking to take notice of the neighboring peoples, to meddle in their affairs or provoke their hostility by harassing them. In the process of time its auspicious fate preserved the German nation from an immediate share in the rape of other continents—the event which more than any other has determined the course of recent world history, the destinies of peoples and the greater portion of their ideas and sentiments. (2008: 166–67)

Formulating his intellectual efforts around the urge to build a “German” identity, Fichte constantly emphasized the importance of unity, which can be realized by Germans “qualifying” themselves as a nation. For this purpose, language is the trademark and specific criterion to define their “German” identity, which “differentiated them from ‘foreign’ elements like the French” (Feshami 2020).

Not surprisingly, Fichte interpreted the French occupation took place between 1794–1814, in an alarming manner, claiming foreign control had devastating repercussions on the morals, values, ideals, cultures, and languages of a nation. “Germandom” offered both the intellectual conceptualization

that would guide the building of the nation and the defining criterion of national identity deriving from the peculiarity of the German language.

Ernst Moritz Arndt, considered to be one of the founders of German nationalism (Mosel 2010: 7), was a decisive figure in the building of a nationalist framework in a sentient manner that encompassed German nature, nation, and identity. Focusing on the moral principles of freedom through claims based on cultural norms, Arndt asserted that those principles should be directly related to one's dedication to and engagement with the public's *consuetudo* (Mosse 1974: 103). In this way, Arndt played a decisive role in shaping both a nation-based natural sentience perspective and a theoretical and historical ground for racial superiority claims that were followed by his intellectual, political, and artistic successors. In a political atmosphere defined by French occupation, he developed a chauvinistic and anti-French vision apparent across all his works—one focused on a unified Germany (Hughes 1988: 27).

This perspective was reflected in Arndt's song "The German Fatherland," published in 1813, which described Germany as a place "where fury exterminates foreign trash" and "every Frenchmen is called enemy" (Arndt 1845: 322–333). Therefore, his intellectual vision was embodied by patriotic devotion to the homeland and was justified by racial and linguistic purity (Kuran 2018: 52). This dual support of his xenophobic perspective inevitably informed his racial superiority claims as well. The passage below reveals Arndt's pursuit of historical rootedness, the "causality" of purity and superiority, and the "othering" of other races.

The Germans are not bastardized by alien peoples, they have not become mongrels, they have remained more than many other peoples in their original purity and have been able to develop slowly and quietly from this purity of their kind and nature according to the lasting laws of time; the fortunate Germans are an original people. For our ancestors we have a great piece of evidence from one of the greatest men who ever lived, from the Roman Tacitus. This extraordinary man who with his prophetic eyes penetrated the depth of the human heart and the depths of nature, the present time and the future, clearly saw the worth of our fathers, and prophesied their splendid future; and so far, history has not contradicted him. But of all things he saw most clearly how important it was for the future greatness and majesty of the German people that they were pure and resembled only themselves, that they were no mongrels; for he saw his Italy, which had once been the mistress of the world, a bastardized canaille, cursed and outcast, defile the memories of the Fabricians and Cornelians and the proud Roman soul bled and writhed because there were no longer any true Romans. (Arndt 1815: 115; Kohn 1949: 791–92)

The urge to define historical roots for building a national identity can also be observed in Arndt's works. In an attempt to create a German

cultural revival, he argued that the cultural characteristics of the Hohenstaufen, a dynasty that reigned between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries near Stuttgart, included freedom, bravery, purity, and discipline (Kuran 2018: 52). His mythical glorification of the German homeland tied with patriotism was one of the most prominent themes in his writing:

Where God's sun first appeared to you, where stars of heaven first twinkled at you, where lightening first revealed to you God's almighty power and where his storm-winds roared through your soul producing holy terror, there is your love, there is your fatherland. Where the first human eye bent longingly over your cradle, where your mother first held you joyfully on her lap and your father burned into your heart the lessons of wisdom and Christianity, there is your fatherland. (Hughes 1988: 27)

German forests were likewise colored by such a patriotic perspective and became one of the most important embodiments of Arndt's arguments. With his intellectual positioning against the French occupation and in favor of a united, "purified" nation, the meaning of forests was crucial for him. His warning that "without its forest, Germany will be no more" (Arndt 1820: 71; Imort 2005a: 60) was a cry for the need to create a shield composed of forests near the French border (Imort 2005: 60).

Another crucial figure in constructing the bridge between the forest and Germandom was Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl. Parallel to the environmental determinist discourse, Riehl suggested a link of sentience between the national character and the German landscape, particularly forests (Imort 2005a: 60). According to Riehl, the fundamental characteristics of the Germans had been shaped by their environment, where the forests were predominant (Imort 2005a: 59). Riehl stated that forests are the primary entity shaping the German cultural and national atmosphere by forging "the strength and character that made and sustained it [Germany] as a nation" (Imort 2005a: 60). As a student of Arndt, Riehl also emphasized the vital importance of forests for German national unity and identity from a sentient perspective that later served as a touchstone for social movements, environmentalists, National Socialist theoreticians, and last but not least, Nazi political figures. Although focused more on an "environmental" point of view, Riehl justified his claims unsurprisingly with a racial motivation. Cherishing nature was central to nationalist ideas:

If you wish to see society reduced to a bland parlor culture, where everything is identical in color and finish, then uproot the forests, level away the mountains, cordon off the sea. We must retain the forest not only to keep our stoves from going cold in wintertime but also to keep the pulse of our national life beating warmly and happily. We need it to keep Germany German. (Riehl 1857: 52; Staudenmeier 1995: 6)



Again, similar to Arndt, Riehl emphasized the role of forests in the freedom of nations. He clearly defined a contrast between the modern Western concept of freedom and the concept of German freedom rooted in, and made possible by, its forests. For him, Germany is “deeply rooted in its wooded wilderness,” and the political freedom of the West is radically different from Germany’s self-sufficiency thanks to its forest (Zechner 2011: 21). Riehl also implied that the urge to protect forests is a differentiating point between Germans and others, which is again derived from a nationalistic perspective. Claiming that preserving the forest was more a patriotic necessity than an economic or silvicultural one (Zechner 2011: 21), Riehl plainly presented the value of natural entities as derived not from environmental or historical concerns but from attempts to justify national unification and racial superiority via othering.

## Changing Times and the Need for Stabilization

Apart from the figures mentioned above, the connection between the forest and Germandom was also common in the cultural landscape of early Romantic thinkers and artists like Caspar David Friedrich, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Ludwig Tieck (Imort 2005a: 57). Their works served not only to aestheticize but also to politicize the forests for the purpose of national unification and the creation of a German identity. In other words, “this reevaluation of the forest was more than just another reorientation of aesthetics; it was also a deliberate political project to unify the German-speaking people against the occupation of their Heimat by Napoleon” (Imort 2005a: 57).

As we have seen, Tacitus’s *Germania* and the Battle of Teutoburg Forest were regarded as starting points for the myth of the German people’s unique affinity with their forests. These narratives provided Romantics with solid ground for praising forests both “as the ancestral home of the German people and the source of strength for their future resurgence” (Imort 2005a: 57–58), especially in times of French occupation. Caspar David Friedrich’s painting *The Chasseur in the Forest* provides a substantial example. Feshami’s (2020) interpretation of the painting discusses the early Romantics’ efforts regarding the mobilization of landscape for the sake of nationalist causes.

Friedrich’s painting *The Chasseur in the Forest* (1814) depicts a lonely French soldier standing on a forest path, surrounded by imposing trees which tower over him. His arms hang at his sides and his shoulders appear slumped, lending him an air of helplessness and despair. A raven sits on a stump in the foreground, portending the soldier’s death in the wilderness.

By taking these early Romantics into consideration along with intellectuals such as Arndt, Riehl, and Fichte, it can be seen how they all helped to popularize a nationalist political project based on forests by representing them “as the spiritual conduit between a heroic Germanic past and a future united Germany” (Imort 2005a: 58). In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the influence of Romanticism, forests were re-defined in a nationalist framework within the sociocultural and political conditions of the period, quite apart from their material reality and meaning. This bridge between landscape and the identity, history, and future of the nation influenced the theoretical approaches and practices that were later embraced by the Nazis (Kuran 2018: 51).

## Völkisch Nationalism and Oppositions

Founded upon premises and mythical arguments from a sylvan perspective, völkisch nationalism represented a unique perception of the bridge between the natural landscape and Germandom. With the contributions of thinkers such as Fichte, Riehl, and Arndt, this nationalist understanding came to play a crucial role in the twentieth century. Still, völkisch nationalism encapsulated more than has been mentioned thus far. Taking into consideration the turbulent times of political uncertainties (foreign occupations, lack of national unity), economic failures (high unemployment and inflation, the effects of the Great Depression, etc.) and accelerating social and technological change (industrialism, urbanization, Enlightenment, modernity, etc.), völkisch nationalism also developed diverse perspectives.

The theoretical ground of the völkisch movement was shaped by Arndt and Riehl via ethnic populism and nature mysticism driven by a severe reaction to modernity in all its senses (Staudenmeier 1995: 7). Völkisch thinkers attacked the values of modernity, linking the “heroic” and “different” past of Germans with present-day attempts to realize national unification and racial purity and “prove” their racial superiority, all based on landscape. “They sought to reconstruct society into one that was sanctioned by history, rooted in nature, and in communion with the cosmic life spirit” (Mosse 1964: 29). Despite this aspiration, their accusations of a lack of national unity and calls to protect the natural landscape changed to attacks on “rationalism, cosmopolitanism, and urban civilization” by blaming Jews for the changes they opposed. (Staudenmeier 1995: 7).

This conservative declaration of war against modernity targeted any kind of progress or change and was justified by nationalist figures’ xeno-

phobic and anti-Semitic discourses. According to Hughes (1988: 142–43), the main characteristics of *völkisch* nationalism were “adoration of heroes and soldiers, the idealization of a rural way of life, romanticization of the past, an irrational rejection of modernity, deep pessimism about the future, and a total rejection of foreigners and foreign ideas.” *Völkisch* nationalism gave arguments concerning racial purity, racial superiority, and anti-Semitism another platform, allowing them to reach a greater audience, both civil and political. With shifts such as the rise of industrial capitalism, urbanization, modernity, and the Enlightenment, German society was precarious and unwieldy, both intellectually and practically. This allowed the theoretical and organizational work of the *völkisch* movement to gain momentum and later strengthen the radical policies and initiatives of the Nazi period (Kuran 2018: 66).

Serving as a bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by transmitting Romantic, anti-Semitic, anti-modern, and anti-Enlightenment perspectives, *völkisch* nationalism meant much more than a temporary sociocultural trend (Kuran 2018: 66). As Staudenmeier (1995: 7) points out:

Reformulating traditional German anti-Semitism into nature-friendly terms, the *völkisch* movement carried a volatile amalgam of nineteenth century cultural prejudices, Romantic obsessions with purity, and anti-Enlightenment sentiment into twentieth century political discourse. The emergence of modern ecology forged the final link in the fateful chain which bound together aggressive nationalism, mystically charged racism, and environmentalist predilections.

Furthermore, *völkisch* nationalism was highly organized, both theoretically and practically, before the Nazis came to power, and this process aligned with another mystical and nature-based discourse—that of Blood and Soil.

## **Enlarging the Bridge: Blood and Soil**

At this stage, it should also be underlined that Blut und Boden (Blood and Soil) mysticism was directly related to the perception of the forest and was fed by many of the figures mentioned so far. Assuming a unity between German national characteristics and German national landscape, Blood and Soil played a major role, especially during the reign of the Nazis, who declared it the official party doctrine. Although more than forests were associated with German national characteristics, Blood and Soil paved the way for the bridge between nation and nature. Figures such as Friedrich

Ratzel, Emil Adolf Rossmäsler, Rudolf Düesberg, and Friedrich von Hellwald offer a useful framework to observe this ambiguous and indistinct transition.

The “ethnised forest” (Köstlin 2000; Zechner 2011: 21) perspective profoundly influenced contemporaries of Arndt and Riehl and served as a sentient and historical ground to build xenophobic claims. Friedrich Ratzel, for instance, founded his claims about the intersection between nature and nation solely on Riehl’s writings. According to Ratzel, recognizing the mutual influence between people and environment was crucial. Working from this, with an environmental determinism approach, Ratzel argued for protecting the purity of nature (Dominick 1992: 23–24), not from an environmentalist standpoint but from a nationalist, othering perspective. He glorified and distinguished Germany, in contrast to Austria-Hungary and France, as a “land of forests and pastures, of green landscapes from one end to the other” (Ratzel 1909: 5; Wilson 2012: 20).

Defining German forests as more than their material being was also the main concern of other crucial thinkers such as Rossmäsler and Düesberg, who took the sentient landscape perspective a step further. For instance, Rossmäsler studied the “social life” of trees and tried to create a correlation between forests, class divisions, and national unity. According to him, the forest is “a beautiful and powerful union of forms and phenomena, in which no part is completely the same as any other, but in which nonetheless everything completely harmonizes in a sublime unison, plucking at the chords of every unspoiled breast” (Rossmäsler 1863, quoted in Wilson 2012: 181–82). Claiming the forest is “an integrated, organic unity” (Heske 1938: 42), Rossmäsler too made a landscape-based justification for the call for national unity.

Friedrich von Hellwald was another important figure. His main contribution to the process of “nation building via landscape” was introducing the social Darwinist discourse of forests, employing a racial perspective that he used to justify othering. Considering the forests as a model for society, Hellwald appreciated the Darwinist concepts of “struggle between species” and “drive for dominance and territory” as natural phenomena. Linking nature to the nation, he “encouraged a racialized understanding of the sylvan metaphor with implications for human society” (Wilson 2012: 187).

The social Darwinist perspective was promoted in German society with the comprehensive studies of Raoul France, who focused on decoding nature to extract lessons from it and apply them to social issues (Wilson 2012: 190). His perspective on human-nature relations derived from a monistic worldview inspired by Ernst Haeckel. Emphasizing unity between

human and nature, France focused on the two main concepts of Darwinism—cooperation and competition—to identify and solidify a sentient bridge between human life and the forest. According to France, “the union of competition and cooperation is the law of the forest and thus a likeness of human life” (1908: 7; Wilson 2012: 190).

France’s approach, which served to build an ethnicized forest, made racial deductions via social Darwinist claims regarding forests. His metaphorical statements about non-native plants clearly assume they are at a disadvantage trying to fit into German forests, using a German forest analogy to justify the exclusion of “outsiders” and “foreigners.”

## Practical Dimension: Nazi Era

### *Widening the Ground for Xenophobic Claims: Political Practices*

The Nazi period stands out as a decisive turning point in the perception of landscapes as xenophobic. The Nazis embraced the historical views that connected German forests and the German national character, and which gave the forests sentience, bringing them to the forefront of German society using National Socialist ideology. The Nazi era represents a critical turning point regarding nature-nation relationships because it added to the landscape’s sentience a layer of xenophobia with legal, administrative, political, and institutional dimensions.

With Blood and Soil mysticism becoming the official doctrine of the Nazi regime, and *Dauerwald* its mainstream silvicultural strategy and propaganda theme (one backed up by institutional and legal changes), claims of racial superiority and purity grew on the expanding foundation of sentient landscapes. The fundamental reason for those developments and race-based claims lay in the fact that the claims in question were processed not only through German forests but also through the German natural landscape with a holistic perspective. In this context, Walter Darré stood out by advocating for organic agriculture and for farmers to take into consideration German identity and culture. He emphasized the abovementioned opposition to urbanism, Enlightenment, modernism, and industrialism, and their corrosive influence on German national identity. Darre’s arguments and actions as a political figure are quite important in an examination of the Nazi regime’s perspective on nature-nation interaction.

Darré, who joined the Nazi Party in 1930, was the very person who convinced Hitler that the party should solicit peasant and farmer support

to get more votes in elections. With the success of this strategy, he made rapid promotions within the party and became Minister of Agriculture in 1933 (Bramwell 1985). At only age thirty-eight, he succeeded in taking control of all agricultural organizations in the nation and received the title of “Reich Peasant Leader” (Frei, 1993). As one of the leading actors in Nazi ecology, Darré’s efforts both in the Blood and Soil propaganda process and in the agricultural policies of the Nazi Party were considerable.

His most fundamental theoretical argument was that peasants are necessary for the unity of the German race and to fulfill the Blood and Soil ideology. According to him, peasants are the “conveyors” of German historical genetic heritage, the source of youth for the German nation, and the backbone of national defense (Dominick 1992: 94). They are vital to maintaining the existence of the German nation and its cultural heritage.

Throughout his career, Darré was concerned with the problems of peasants and made arguments connecting nationalism with rural values. He saw the unity of Blood and Soil as a solution for protecting peasants from racial extinction and national disintegration (Lekan 2004). The basis of legitimacy for the implementation of Blood and Soil ideology as an official state policy was formed by Darré.

One of Darré’s main concerns was for the health of the soil, which enabled the implementation of organic farming methods. Describing the soil as a living organism, Darré argued that degradation of the soil disrupts the vital cycle of nature (Bramwell 1985). In parallel with his concern for soil health, Darré also undertook a great responsibility for integrating organic farming methods into national agricultural policy. With this political move, which he called “farming according to the laws of life,” Darré was able to lead the institutionalization of organic farming and its nationwide spread, and he became the main actor in the Nazi government’s support for agricultural planning via organic farming (Staudenmeier 1995).

One of the most prominent political figures of the Nazi Government’s environmental wing, Darré also provided some striking insights and arguments about the impacts of cities and urbanization on rural values, villagers, and national consciousness. Describing big cities as machines vacuuming up the villagers from rural lands, Darré accused urbanization of tearing apart the ties between people and the soil. With the restoration of the unity between Blood and Soil, villagers could be reconnected to the land, and thanks to this, national solidarity could be rebuilt (Lekan 2004). What underlies Darré’s arguments about agriculture, environment, antiurbanism, and peasant problems and values is strikingly related to his belief in the supremacy of the German race. When the subtext of the exaltation of peasantry and rural values, the emphasis on organic farming

methods and soil health, and antiurbanism are examined carefully, the results show that they derive from a racist framework. Darré's advocacy for healthier soil and strengthening the ties between villagers and the land is an attempt to achieve racial purity and integrity. Darré's political moves to protect peasantry and peasant values from racial extinction and national deterioration do not arise from an environmental consciousness. The antiurbanist Darré also claimed that Nordic blood is polluted by foreigners mixing with native-born people in Nordic cities. He thought the only hope of preserving racial purity was to preserve peasant farmers and their land as the "reservoir of the best German blood" (Dominick 1992: 95).

Darré's key political position and close relationship with Hitler made him crucial not only to the process that enabled Blood and Soil mysticism to be put into practice but also to the growing perception of xenophobic landscapes, regarding soil (organic farming), farmers, and rural values. Although labeling his ideas and arguments as xenophobic might seem inexact, Darré played a major role in the process of constructing a bridge between the German nation and nature. This made racial purity and superiority, which were rooted in and derived from natural entities and processes, Darré's main themes. His warning that "to remove the German soul from the natural landscape is to kill it" (Darré 1938: 86–87; Dominick 1992: 95) reveals both the bridge he worked on and his theme.

### *Dauerwald*

In this context, there is another crucial figure whose approach played a vital role in the perception of nature based on racial claims such as purity and superiority. Alongside the Blood and Soil mysticism that became official Nazi doctrine was *Dauerwald* (meaning "sustainable forestry" or "eternal forestry"), a program put into practice by another prominent Nazi figure, Alfred Möller. *Dauerwald* represents the peculiar relationship Germans had with their forests during the Nazi era, but it also offers a data set that limits the extent to which the politics of landscapes can be perceived as xenophobic and even fascist.

Möller, a member of the Prussian Forest Academy, put *Dauerwald* forward as a new alternative to scientific forestry management. This German nationalist and nature conservationist view was directly related to the sentience perspective, which was derived from antimodern, anti-Enlightenment, and anticapitalist views. The basis of *Dauerwald* was to create and implement an alternative system of forest management based on a more nature-oriented approach rather than on economic interests or scientific

factors. In this way, a more diverse forest structure would be formed, and the focus would shift from economic gains to quality and sustainability (Imort 2005a: 71), which fits perfectly with the perception of the German forest as sentient. It should be noted that this “anti” perspective that is in favor of diverse forest management directly contradicts unidimensional, profit-centered, and “efficient” forestry.

Dauerwald quickly emerged as the primary forest management system for the Nazis. Hermann Göring, who had strong ties with völkisch nationalism and was one of the most important actors in the Nazi regime, made legal, political, and institutional efforts to realize Dauerwald nationwide, and his thoughts about nature-nation interaction also reveal the sentient bridge in the political realm. Underlying the implementation of Dauerwald were race-based arguments and political linings, and the program was perceived by the Nazi government as extremely fertile ground for Nazi political ambitions and propaganda, while also pointing to the intellectual legacy concerning theories of race that were part of National Socialist ideology. With this propaganda process, the sentient bridge between the German forest and German identity, which was beginning to be built long before, was advanced to the next stage by the Nazi regime in general, and by Göring in particular. His desire for the forest to be a main factor in the creation of national identity (Göring 1939: 245-255, quoted in Zechner 2011: 22) reveals the fundamental motivation behind Nazi forest policies and propaganda claims.

Dauerwald, declared the official forestry policy of Nazi Germany by legal decree in 1934, basically defined forests as a holistic organism rather than a collection of trees. Accordingly, its principles were shaped by applications focused on diverse silviculture. For instance, Dauerwald favored natural regeneration over planting, multilayered structure over uniformly tall and even-aged stands, and the selection of different plant species over monoculture (Imort 2005b: 47). Despite its innovative forestry methods, its appearance and use in the political arena was the direct product of propaganda and the racial claims of Nazi ideology. Under Göring’s leadership, the intersection between völkisch nationalism and the idea of a sentient German forest and corresponding forestry practices was the driving force behind Dauerwald’s popularity during Nazi rule. Connecting organic forestry techniques and Germany’s “organic” heritage for National Socialist political purposes, Göring took legal, administrative, and institutional steps to make Dauerwald mandatory for the entire Reich (Imort 2005b: 48). Göring established and led a new Reichforstamt, giving it authority on a national level with the Law of July 1934 Concerning the Transfer of Forestry and Hunting Affairs to the Reich.



Imort (2005b: 52–53) lists the intersections between the theoretical and practical elements of the Dauerwald approach and Nazi ideology as follows:

- Only native, site-adapted tree species were allowed to be a part of the Dauerwald forest; similarly, only those Germans that were of the “proper” racial heritage could be *Volksgenossen*, or members of the national community.
- Individual trees played an important role as components of the Dauerwald forest, but they did so at their “proper station,” with some dominating and others serving within the greater organic whole; similarly, every *Volksgenosse* was assigned to a task and a position that most benefited the corporatist *Volksgemeinschaft* [people’s community], rather than himself or herself.
- The best trees in the Dauerwald forest were to be privileged in terms of light and space so a greater share of the growth might accrue to them; similarly, those *Volksgenossen* of the “best race” were to receive incentives and rewards for child rearing and other ways of “serving the nation.”
- Selective cutting, thinning, and pruning ensured that the stand was continually improved in terms of phenotype and “race”; similarly, those individuals who did not fit the National Socialist vision of “race” were to be “removed” from the collective of the Volk.
- Selective cutting meant that while individual trees were removed constantly, the stand was never cleared entirely and the forest as a whole was perpetual; similarly, while the individual *Volksgenossen* were dispensable and lived only for a relatively short time, the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a whole was perpetual, or, in Nazi parlance, “eternal.”

One place where these intersections can be determined most clearly are the statements of Göring and several proponents of the Dauerwald approach. According to Göring, “forest and people are much akin in the doctrines of National Socialism.” In this ideology, “eternal forest and eternal nation are ideas that are indissolubly linked” because “the people is [sic] also a living community, a great, organic, eternal body whose members are the individual citizens” (Imort 2005b: 54). As A. W. Modersohn, another Dauerwald proponent, claimed, “the Dauerwald idea has much in

common with our National Socialist idea of life, of the state, of race, blood, and soil. . . . Ask the trees, they will teach you how to become National Socialists!" (Modersohn 1939: 602–3; Imort 2005b: 54).

Not surprisingly, the implementation phase of Dauerwald silviculture, brought to the fore through propaganda, was pushed into the background by other priorities of the fascist regime. Despite the fact that the Nazi regime cultivated forests in the process of constructing a bridge between National Socialist conceptualizations of race and the German Volk (Imort 2005b: 68), economic development, autarky, and warfare clearly overrode the practical implementations, legal arrangements, and administrative organizations of silviculture. Therefore, Dauerwald was merely used as a propaganda tool for the Nazis, who were clearly in search of political gains and justification for their racial arguments, just as they were in their ecological conceptualization and practice of Nazi ecology. They regarded environmental protection as a rich source of propaganda resources, as it had historically helped them remain in power (Kuran 2018: 89), which is also the case for Blood and Soil and Dauerwald.

## Conclusion

The implications of the historical, theoretical, and practical dimensions of the sentient bridge built to tie German forest to national identity can be listed as follows:

- There is a historical link between German forests and national identity. Views on this link were expressed more strongly and comprehensively as time progressed, especially when the notion of the nation-state was invoked. The justifications for those views were directly linked to racial superiority, racial purity, and xenophobia.
- Natural landscape, forests in this case, was considered to be the main factor, facilitator, and ground for the conceptualization of and justification for the sentient bridge.
- This sentient bridge, whose foundations were laid between natural landscape and the nation through forests, was historically built on nationalist, particularist, and othering claims, and it reached its peak under Nazi rule.
- The sentient bridge in question was also used as the main impulse and source of motivation for political propaganda, embodied in the examples of Blood and Soil and Dauerwald. Therefore, this per-

ception of the German forest stands out as a case of the xenophobic landscape concept.

As a result, the construction of the sentient bridge reveals and summarizes the historical, intellectual, and political factors that played significant roles in the interaction between landscape and xenophobic views, not only on conceptual and perceptual bases but also in practice through German forestry.

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