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978-0-521-61277-7 - The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany

Frank Uekoetter

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The Green and the Brown

This study provides the first comprehensive discussion of conservation in Nazi Germany. Looking at Germany in an international context, it analyzes the roots of conservation in the late nineteenth century, the gradual adaptation of racist and nationalist language among conservationists in the 1920s, and the inner distance to the republic of Weimar. It describes how the German conservation movement came to cooperate with the Nazi regime and discusses the ideological and institutional lines between the conservation movement and the Nazis. Uekoetter further examines how the conservation movement struggled to do away with a troublesome past after World War II, making the environmentalists one of the last groups in German society to face up to its Nazi burden. It is a story of ideological convergence, of tactical alliances, of careerism, of implication in crimes against humanity, and of deceit and denial after 1945. It is also a story that offers valuable lessons for today's environmental movement.

Frank Uekoetter is a researcher in the History Department at Bielefeld University, Germany. He is the author of two monographs and editor, alone or in part, of four collections. He is also author of articles published in *Business History Review*, *Environment and History*, and *Historical Social Research*.

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Acknowledgments

This book is the product of an intellectual journey that had far more resemblance to a roller-coaster ride than I, or anyone, could have imagined when I came to the topic in 2001. At that time, the German minister for the environment, Jürgen Trittin, pushed aggressively for a conference on the topic, a remarkable move given the fact that public interest in the Nazi past of conservation was almost nonexistent. The task of organizing this conference fell to Joachim Radkau, historian at Bielefeld University, who turned for help to a doctoral student who had just finished his dissertation – in other words, to me. The result was a symposium on “Conservation in Nazi Germany,” which took place in Berlin in July 2002. The first conference of its kind, it attracted a surprisingly large number of participants, along with intensive coverage by the media, demonstrating that the issue was clearly more than an academic topic. I am greatly indebted to the speakers at the Berlin conference who helped to make the symposium such a rousing success. At the same time, the conference volume provided a great opportunity to reflect on the state of research and the general approach to the topic. While this book differs from the conference volume in many respects, and seeks to break new ground in some, it clearly could not have been written in this form without the work of seventeen formidable academics.

In writing this book, I enjoyed encouragement and support from more people than I can mention here. Donald Worster inspired this book and guided it, together with John McNeill, as series editors, toward its completion. Their comments were a great help in revising the manuscript, as were the remarks of an anonymous third reviewer. It was a pleasure to work with Frank Smith and Eric Crahan at the Americas branch of

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Frank Uekoetter
Munich, September, 2005

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Abbreviations

BArch	Bundesarchiv
DLA	Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach am Neckar
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GLAK	Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe
GStA	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin
HStAD	Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf
HStADd	Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden
HStAS	Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart
KAW	Kreisarchiv Warendorf
KMK	Kreisarchiv des Märkischen Kreises, Altena
LASH	Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Nazi Party)
RVH	Reichsbund Volkstum und Heimat
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protective Detachment)
StAB	Stadtarchiv Bielefeld
StAD	Staatsarchiv Darmstadt
StAF	Staatsarchiv Freiburg
StAL	Stadtarchiv Leipzig
StAN	Staatsarchiv Nürnberg
StAR	Stadtarchiv Reutlingen
StAT	Stadtarchiv Telgte
StAW	Staatsarchiv Würzburg
WAA	Westfälisches Archivamt Münster

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A Note on Vocabulary

Writing a book in a language that is not one's native language is never easy. But writing a book on the Nazi era in the English language presents a challenge all of its own. No one who has never tried it can truly understand the trouble and pain that one encounters in translating the vocabulary of the Nazi era. The trouble starts with words like *Heimat* that encompass an entire cosmos of meanings that no word in the English language can really capture – and it ends with phrases like *Reichskommissariat für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*, a true monster in terminological and other respects. Trying to bring out all implications of this terminology in another language is bound to produce frustration – or, alternatively, gigantic footnotes whenever one of the ominous words pops up.

Therefore, it seems that a few notes on my choice of words are called for. Whenever I encountered a word that has no direct equivalent in the English language, I have chosen the word that, in my opinion, comes as close as possible to the German original. When the word or expression appears for the first time, I have added the German word in brackets, clarifying the terminology for the Germanophone reader and reminding all others that the word's connotations in the English language may be deceiving. This approach may be prone to misunderstandings, and it inevitably suggests to English readers that they may miss a few fine points of the story, but it is the best one that I am aware of. Also, I have used the German expression for some organizations and institutions without offering a translation. In all these cases, the role of these institutions becomes clear from the context, whereas the precise meaning of the German words is of no relevance for an understanding of the story. The poem on page 164

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has intentionally been printed in both languages, and I will make no attempt to claim that the translation is anything but inadequate.

In addition to these general remarks, it seems advisable to say a little more about a few specific words. I have used *conservation* and *nature protection* as synonyms in this study, and I made no distinction between conservation and preservation: all of these words are the English equivalents of *Naturschutz*. Thus, any allusion to American concepts of resource management (“wise use”) would be misleading. As the narrative shows, even the use of nature as a tourist attraction was met with scornful disregard in the German conservation community. The word *Naturdenkmal* (natural monument) means an object of relatively small scale – e.g., a tree or a rock – that conservationists deemed worthy of preservation; no German bureaucrat would have thought of an object the size of the Grand Canyon as a natural or national monument. The first German conservation office, the *Staatliche Stelle für Naturdenkmalpflege*, thus signaled its penchant for conservation *en miniature* already in its title. I have not translated *völkisch*; the word is translated as “folkish” in the American edition of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, but that word clearly sounds far too harmless for a mixture of chauvinist, racist, and xenophobic ideas. I occasionally speak of a German *Volksgemeinschaft*, a word that literally translates into “community of nationals” or “community of the folk,” but such a translation would mute the dual implications of the word: it was egalitarian in that the term transcended barriers of class and tradition but also racist in that it admitted only those of Aryan origin into the “national community.” The same holds true for the corresponding term *Volksgenosse* (National Comrade), which designates a member of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

In some cases, the search for an English equivalent was simply hopeless. According to the dictionary, *Führer* translates into either leader or head, but both words give a terribly inadequate impression of Hitler’s pivotal role in Nazi politics. The organization *Kraft durch Freude* is mentioned with the addition “tourist association” to describe its work, but the concept that the name implied is impossible to convey in a similarly brief form; briefly, *Kraft durch Freude* linked the promise of pleasant experiences during one of the tourist trips that the Nazis offered many Germans for the first time with a reminder that these trips were ultimately intended as an uplift of the individual’s work ethic in the service of the nation, thus connecting individual relaxation with national strength. The concept of *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe that was so central to Hitler’s thinking means more than “living space,” the literal translation, because the Nazi notion of *Lebensraum* was based on the racist concept of a hierarchy of

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racism, where the Aryan race was destined to subjugate the inferior Slavic people. *Heimat* was already a complex word before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, soon after which the German media began to translate the United States Department of Homeland Security as *Ministerium für Heimatschutz*. *Heimat* alludes to a place of indeterminate size where one feels at home; often (but not necessarily), *Heimat* alludes to a home *region*, and the *Heimat* protection movement was always a strong defender of regionalism. At the same time, *Heimat* is filled with romantic associations, and the word evokes associations of coziness.

Gleichschaltung was a process during the first months of Nazi rule that sought to “streamline” those parts of German society that implied, like trade unions or states’ rights, a threat to Hitler’s dictatorial powers. However, the process soon led to the reorganization of countless civic organizations, with the goal of creating one national organization in the place of the previous pluralism. *Dauerwald* is a silviocultural doctrine that allows trees of different ages to stand next to each other; I refrained from a translation in part because Aldo Leopold used the German term in his essay on “Deer and *Dauerwald* in Germany.” The word *Weltanschauung* describes a holistic worldview based on a certain set of key principles, with the Nazis, of course, opting for racist principles; *Weltanschauung* is one of the words that entered the English vocabulary because of the Nazi experience. Finally, I chose not to translate *Gauleiter* because the position was more complex than a simple term could capture. *Gauleiters* were leaders of the NSDAP in one of its forty-two German districts, but in addition to party chairmanship, *Gauleiters* often took up further tasks, acting as ministers, prime ministers, or Reich Commissioners (*Reichsstatthalter*) for a certain state. The extent of the *Gauleiters*’ powers was significant, but they depended strongly on the specifics of each individual case.