

Contemporary Ideas in a Traditional Mind-Set: The Nature Conservation Movement in Post War West-Germany (1945-1960)

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Introduction

In 1945 the American military government initiated a wood campaign in Grunewald (a large forest area in the south west of Berlin), in which 1000 workers felled trees for firewood, which was then distributed among Berlin households (Firewood Procurement 1). Residents in other regions of Germany were also supplied with firewood – or they stole it from the forest, which was considered a “wood crime.” Especially after the first cold winter in 1946/47, the theft of wood increased dramatically. The Allied Forces reacted to the shortage of wood with forest clearing. Conservationists were critical, pointing out that in other parts of Germany, not even the ancient oak trees had been spared (Gallasch 14).

On December 5, 1947 the Association for the Protection of the German Forest (SDW)¹ was founded to prevent the total eradication of the forests across Germany after suffering wartime destruction, overuse and firewood logging. At the inaugural meeting, the organizers called out for people

to appeal to the economic rationality and the political discretion of the victors and point out that, according to the Hague Laws and Customs of War on Land, the victors are only allowed to be beneficiaries of the German national wealth but they are not allowed to touch its assets. The Nuremburg trials have shown that the victors consider it a particularly serious charge when occupying forces exploit the full the economic potential of the occupied country for their own purposes without consideration of international law. One might hope that an appeal to the sense of justice of the English people, who have given the world such concepts as “gentlemanliness” and “fair play,” may not be in vain. As Gladstone once emphasized, we must therefore point out again and again that whatever is morally wrong cannot be good politically. (SDW, “Management Board Meeting” 2)²

In subsequent years, the occupying forces faced harsh criticism from the German people³ for their widespread deforestation practices even though it

¹ Schutzgemeinschaft Deutscher Wald

² All translation from the German are my own.

³ The issue of forest clearing was only one topic among many for the broader public, as is

seems that the Allied Powers, especially the Americans, used the wood resources quite responsibly. Trees were not felled indiscriminately; in fact, the Allied command monitored the clearances closely and by no means did they always allow increases in the firewood contingents (LAB 1). Critics of the so-called “wood crimes” came from all levels of society: forestry commission staff, active conservationists, ministry employees, politicians as well as the general population, and a cross-section of this was reflected in the SDW membership.

The uproar revealed a projected sense of powerlessness and expressed that many Germans felt that they were the actual victims of National Socialism: “seduced by Hitler, conquered in war and finally exploited by the occupying forces” (Engels, Naturpolitik 53). Accusing the Allies of destroying nature fit perfectly into the picture. Moreover, the deforestation meant the destruction of an alleged national cultural symbol. The images, impressions and convictions that were articulated around the forest had their roots in the 19th century. Here, nature had a soul, and the pastoral region was depicted positively in contrast to urban life. The forest in particular was – based on the idea of Germania by the Roman historian Tacitus – declared as the myth of German origin. Nature in general and the forest in particular thus became a national symbol.

After National Socialism, a mythical belief in the forest became obsolete. However in the 1950s, a notion and image of *Heimat* [“homeland”⁴], based on the popular assumption that the German people’s character was shaped by the landscape it had settled, remained widespread. Still, the post-war discourse on nature and the function of the forest was up to date, since it clearly reflected the current political situation.

This article examines the hypothesis that the nature conservation movement in post-war Germany, which included nature conservationists, certain politicians, and concerned citizens, was not only a culturally critical movement, but also had modern aspects that kept it abreast of the contemporary political situation of post-war Germany. To illustrate this duality, this article adopts both a social-historical approach to analyse the social involvement of SDW members, and a cultural-historical approach to investigate the wave of *Heimatfilms* in the 1950s. German research on the history of nature conservation and environmentalism after 1945 has taken off in recent years,

evident for example in the records of the Berlin municipal administration and local newspapers. Forest clearing was thematised here often in relation to firewood, in connection with shortages of combustible fuel, cold snaps, coal supply and the establishment of a central agency for wood acquisition, particularly in reaction to the extreme winter of 1946/47.

⁴ As Celia Applegate points out: “the term *Heimat* carries a burden of reference and implication that is not adequately conveyed by the translation homeland or hometown. For almost two centuries, *Heimat* has been at the center of a German moral—and by extension political—discourse about place, belonging, and identity” (4).

with a clear focus on the 1970s and 80s. This article therefore concentrates on the period directly after the war, which is still underrepresented. It looks at the images of the forest and *Heimat* that the nature conservation movement produced and considers how the movement interacted with the Allied environmental politics, furthered having the youth as target group and approached gender questions.

The body of this article is divided into three sections. The following section (2) will explore how the myth of German origins developed and how the notion of *Heimat* was constructed socio-culturally in the 19th century. This overview provides the background on the roots of the post-war discourse. Historical sources are not used here but literature is reviewed to create the setting for the following sections. In sections 3 and 4, post-war Germany will be the focus of the article. An examination of the political impact of the SDW will be analyzed to elucidate the social measures taken in reaction to a perceived threat to a national symbol. Which traditional notions were adopted and how did people at the time react to the political circumstances of post war Germany? The final part of this article examines the role of the *Heimatfilm* [“homeland film”] and uses a case study to demonstrate how modern aspects and tradition are also reflected in it. Sections 3 and 4 analyse some contemporary sources (1945-1960) that have received little scientific attention, in particular the SDW’s Jubilee publications, as well as contemporary articles in nature conservation newspapers, the daily press, correspondence with government offices, a speech by a nature conservationist and the *Heimatfilm* “Der Förster im Silberwald.” The latter was based on the *Heimat* novel of the same name by nature conservationist Günther Schwab.

Nation, Nature and the Forest Myth in 19th Century Germany⁵

Beyond the social conflicts and class differences of the industrialization period in Germany – wars, social change and technical revolution – a romantic image of the forest developed in the 19th century at a time of rising nationalism. German writers and scholars attested to a notion of continuity, proposing that Germans at the beginning of the 20th century shared a common identity with the old Germanic tribes (Lehmann 4). Publius Cornelius Tacitus, the Roman historian and senator (ca. 58 CE – 120 CE) reported in his *Germania* on the primeval forests in the Germanic north and the tribes living between the Rhein

⁵ The following overview provides background information and looks at current research on the “forest myth“.

and Weichsel Rivers, along with their habits and customs.⁶ In the 19th century, the German Romantics surrounding Jacob Grimm were the first to academically cite *Germania* as a historical source in their efforts to construct a history of the German people. Subsequently and through the first half of the 20th century, German scholars, folklorists and teachers taught *Germania* as historical fact and origin myth (Mertens 37-101, Schama ch. 2). For Germany, the so-called “belated nation” that was unified as late as 1871, this claim to a constant national identity over hundreds of years old was of particular, unifying significance.⁷

Nature conservation was particularly relevant in this context, as it allegedly protected the roots of the national character and thus the stability of society. The links drawn between national identity and nature by the conservative social theorist, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823-1897), were crucial here. Riehl was convinced that national character could only be preserved through environmental responsibility and conservation. In his writings he turned against the philosophy of the French Enlightenment that saw the fundamentals of nationhood in written constitutions, abstract natural rights and the protection of private property. Instead, Riehl maintained that national character “emerged organically, from the topography and culture of a particular territory” (Lekan 6). According to Riehl, national character was formed by the natural surroundings and the people’s interaction with it. People were emotionally tied to their regional landscape, perceiving it as their *Heimat*. Many conservationists hoped that individuals would feel tied to their *Heimat* as members of a community, as Germans— instead of seeing themselves as citizens of an abstract state structure (Lekan 7). The tie to *Heimat* would be strengthened by walks through the nature, allowing a spiritual connection to the forest, rivers and mountains. The forest in particular, according to Riehl, shaped the German landscape. Fearing that urbanity might supplant the concept of “forest, meadows and waters” [*Wald, Wiese, Wasser*], Riehl launched an attack on the urban civil society as being far removed from nature. Riehl and writers such as Ernst Moritz Arndt criticised the secularisation of the metropolis, and stood up an idyllic mountain forest (Bergmann 1-10, 32-49), portrayed as a place of peace and relaxation and a symbol of human harmony with nature (Lehmann 5).

Through this intellectual turn, the Germans became the “forest people” [*Waldvolk*] of Europe. Other cultures, especially the English and the French,

⁶ Since Tacitus contrasts the honorable customs of the Germanic people with the immoral lifestyle of the Romans, one may assume that *Germania* should not merely be understood as an ethnographic writ, but also as commentary on Roman society at the time.

⁷ As Thomas Lekan points out, “*Heimat* provided a framework for negotiating the differences between national, regional, and local identities in German society, in which Rhinelanders, Swabians, and Saxons retained their provincial distinctiveness while contributing to the German nation as a whole” (7).

may have liked their parks and flower gardens, and the Germans were no exception here. But they also had something unique: the German forest (Lehmann 6). Whereas in England, France or Italy the opinion that human supremacy over nature was unrivalled prevailed, in Germany there was a growing notion that national culture was determined by nature (Johler 86). According to Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, in the wilderness of the Germans' forests lay not only the roots of their national past, but also their strength for the future (Lehmann 6).

Educating the Youth

Following the founding of the SDW in Bonn in 1947, regional branches of the association were opened throughout Germany. SDW members campaigned against economic, social and military influences that could negatively impact the forest. Such negative influences included construction projects in the forest, violations by undisciplined residents, and military exercises of the occupying forces (Borsdorff 2). To implement its political goals, the SDW developed successful networking strategies, especially at the political level and in the municipal administrations, by securing politicians from all parties in important functions of the association. Politicians from local, state and federal levels like mayors, senators, ministers, the federal chancellor and the federal president became board members and patrons not only of the SDW but also of other nature conservation associations.⁸ Notable members included Henrich Lübke, a Christian Democrat and the second Federal President, who was appointed as patron of the SDW in 1961. Hans Ehard, a politician from the Christian Social Union of Bavaria and Bavarian premier, was elected president of the association (Hornsmann 7). Politicians helped further generate publicity for conservationist efforts by writing for association newsletters and brochures such as *Unser Wald* [Our Forest] and *Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege* [Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation].

The SDW wanted to counteract the seeming material values of the world with its own ideal values, above all in the education of young people. Their educational concept, in which nature played an important role, aimed to keep young people away from war, violence, immorality and a loss of values. Children were recruited to plant saplings on the “Day of the Forest” (“Berlin pflanzt Bäumchen”), participate in forest sightseeing excursions, and “Forest Information Week” (Keil 246). The SDW’s attention was not limited to Germany’s youth though. Post-war nature conservationists followed a motto that is more pertinent today than ever – “think global, act local”. The youth camps invited young people from all over the world to participate,

⁸ This public support by regional and national politicians was not limited to the SDW, but extended to nature conservation in general.

demonstrating an international openness (Engels, *Naturpolitik* 56).

The nature conservation movement wanted to distance itself from National Socialism after 1945 because its cultural basis was discredited (Körner 405-434). It is likely therefore that this opening to international groups had strategic reasons and the rejection of the national focus was a form of forced modernisation. In fact, “the youth” per se was seldom addressed, and social gender stereotypes were reinforced.

One teacher reporting on his pupils’ forest project maintains that the boys were generally more “realistic” than the girls, which was why they preferred to address the wood’s economic significance in forestry or calculate the diameter of a tree trunk. One boy was more artistically inclined and prepared “beautiful water colours,” while the “photographer” among them captured the “light falling on the forest floor.” Girls, on the other hand, were apparently not attracted to artistic or scientific aspects of the forest. Overall, they were more practically inclined and thus more interested in the forest mushrooms (Thierbach 5).

As the example of the students in the forest shows, conservationists considered nature excursions to be of particular value. Like Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl and other writers before him, many conservationists saw hiking, bird watching, and other interactions in and with nature as a way for people to visualize, touch and smell their regional landscape, thereby linking individual histories to the collective memory of *Heimat* and creating an emotional tie to the region (Lekan 8). Hiking in group was considered ideal for children and youth education, and an effective way to maintain the established canon of values (Faulstich, “Groschenromane” 212f). Among these values was “orderly hiking,” in which young people in particular were expected to behave in a controlled manner while spending time in nature. According to the Director of Horticulture and District Commissioner for Natural Protection and Landscape Conservation in Frankfurt, significantly less trust was extended to “‘wild’ youth on motorcycles” (Heyer 18).

This quote from 1953 coincided with a shift in the socio-cultural framework for youth at the time. According to media scientist Werner Faulstich, the shift shows the sudden emergence of a new kind of youth (“Jugendkultur” 281) in a new cultural framework. Weekend leisure activities changed and were oriented less on the behaviour of one’s parents as on that of one’s peers. Groups of so-called “wild youth” would drive their motorcycles into the forest, blaring rock n’ roll and boogie-woogie on their transistor radios. Complaints about increasing violence among youth in particular – be it as a result of the war, apparent cultural demise, or Americanization – were indicative of an anti-modern, anti-western self-image (Diner 40), and included the rejection of material values as being soulless, cold, technology-oriented and foreign to the German natural disposition.

Relief could be found in nature. A proper relationship with nature could

strengthen people morally and help them to forget the horrors of war. The blemishing of the landscape, on the other hand, was considered an expression of disorder in culture and society. Respect for nature as God's creation should communicate the knowledge that people are only guests on the earth. Instead of the consumption of nature, people should adopt a contemplative approach to nature (Engels, "Hohe Zeit" 369). Conservationists reacted to the changes in youth behaviour with programs addressing the restorative aspects of conservation aimed at broader segments of society. Officially, the goal was social rehabilitation. Traditions, conservative patterns of order and patriarchal family relationships were associated with the so-called secondary virtues ("Sekundärtugend") such as diligence, loyalty, obedience, discipline, dutifulness, punctuality, reliability, orderliness, courtesy and cleanliness (Lindner 37). These virtues were reflected in children and youth programs that included orderly hiking, tree planting campaigns, and song and dance group performances organized by local heritage clubs ("Im walddreichsten" 263).

The German *Heimatfilm*

According to Heinrich Wilhelm Riehl, by actively experiencing nature, people would identify with their surrounding landscape and thus with a sense of loyalty to their homeland, their *Heimat*. Especially in the post-war society that had been displaced by war, the notion of *Heimat* found its place, and the *Heimatfilm* saw a renaissance as a pattern of identification in a new, stronger federalism. Historian Arne Andersen explains that after 1945, the discourse surrounding *Heimat* and nature was discredited (Andersen 143-157). Yet as the *Heimatfilm* wave reveals, sentiments for the homeland and regional ties were still quite prevalent. *Heimatfilms* are not limited to the 1950s – they were produced in Germany in the previous decades and again since the 1970s – nor are they strictly a West-German phenomenon (the American Western may also be considered a *Heimatfilm*).

The central figures of the *Heimatfilms* in post-war Germany were not farmers, knights and maids, but forest rangers and hunters. Plots were set in remote yet spectacular landscapes left intact by the Second World War, such as the Black Forest, the Alps and the Luneburg Heath. The word "forest" or associated terms were often an important component of the title. The success of the German *Heimatfilms* began with the first German post-war colour film *Schwarzwaldmädel* [*Black Forest Maiden*] in 1950. Further successful *Heimatfilms* included *Grün ist die Heide* [*Green is the Heath*], 1951; *Der Förster vom Silberwald* [*The Forest ranger of Silberwald*], 1954; *Das Schweigen im Walde* [*Silence in the Woods*], 1955; and *Und ewig singen die Wälder* [*The Woods Sing Forever*], 1959. Altogether more than 300 films were made in this genre in the 1950s ("Deutscher Film"; Urmersbach 103ff).

Whereas *Grün ist die Heide* is considered the "prototype of the

Heimatfilm” (von Moltke 79), I have chosen to analyse the film *Der Förster im Silberwald* for its special focus on nature. The film was originally planned as a documentary on the Austrian landscapes as biotopes in need of protection against industrialization. The dramatic action was added later, thus embedding the natural images in an entertaining frame. The screenplay was written by the Austrian writer, environmentalist and former Nazi Party member, Günther Schwab.⁹

With 22 million viewers (Bliersbach 102), the film *Der Förster im Silberwald* was one of West Germany’s greatest box office hits. The plot is simple: Hubert Gerold is a forest ranger who was displaced from the eastern provinces (where he had once played the organ at an estate and mastered the skill of shooting), and has now found a new home in the Austrian mountains. Turning out to be one of the first environmental protectionist characters in German-Austrian cinema, he attempts to prevent economically motivated logging in his local forest. While doing so, he falls in love with Liesl Leonhard, the granddaughter of one of the village elders.

The German *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s bears some qualities that are not found in *Heimatfilms* from other periods or cultures. Many of the films address the issue of displaced Germans, thus displaying a somewhat modern reaction to actual social developments. While they did not refute the National Socialist glorification of farmers, they did adapt to the new state of the nation – such as with the theme of the displaced persons – which lends the genre a sense of timeliness. This aspect of the *Heimatfilms* is demonstrative of the close link between a sense of homeland and migration: it is the loss of one’s homeland that first enables one to reflect upon it (von Moltke 231, Doning and Scholl-Schneider 23). The *Heimatfilm* presents the territories of the Heath, the Rheingau, the Bodensee, the Alps and – in *Der Förster im Silberwald* – the Styrian Mountains as *Lebensraum* [“living space”] for everyone. Often, in the classic constellation of father or other older person and young woman/young man, at least one of the protagonists has come from elsewhere. This character remains a foreigner until he or she is eventually fully integrated (often through marriage) into the new host society. In my film example, this role falls on forest ranger, Hubert Gerold.¹⁰ The plot reflects the German post-war situation: in the

⁹ In 1960 Schwab founded the “World Union for Saving of Life” [Weltbund zur Rettung des Lebens] (WRL), which was renamed in 1963 to the “World Union for Protection of Life” [Weltbund zum Schutze des Lebens] (WSL). Soon it became active in 32 countries, its directive, to “protect life on earth.” In 1960, the “German Section” [Sektion Deutschland] (WSL-D) was founded. Its first president was former Nazi and euthanasia advocate, Dr. Walter Gmelin. Membership grew rapidly and from 1970 the WSL was an influential power in the growing ecology movement. In 1985 the WSL-D was banned from the international association due to rightwing activities. At the beginning of 2001 the WSL-D announced its dissolution (“Weltbund”).

¹⁰ Johannes von Moltke also posed the thesis that displacement is a major theme of many *Heimatfilms*, and has focussed on it in his book (von Moltke 83).

year 1950 alone, the western rural population increased by some 8 million displaced persons and 1.6 million refugees from the former German eastern territories, Czechoslovakia, and the south-eastern European countries, the Soviet Occupation Zone and the German Democratic Republic (Schildt 13).

Another basic theme of many *Heimatfilms* is the opposition of city and countryside as well as the reconstruction of gender stereotypes. Even though von Moltke writes that the *Heimatfilm* “testifies to the genre’s role in reconstructing a ‘moral masculinity’ and a ‘girlish femininity’ as socially sanctioned stereotypes” (von Moltke 82) he does not analyse them in his chapter on post-war *Heimatfilms*. Therefore, I will focus on this in the following. In *Der Förster im Silberwald* the protagonist Liesl, a sculptor from the city, has come to the countryside to visit her grandfather, who repeatedly tries to convince her that country life is the only true life. Here, nature conveys a conservative canon of values; hardly has the granddaughter arrived in the rural setting when her urban attire becomes taboo. She immediately dons a dirndl, the traditional green skirt and jacket, as trousers seem to be for men only. Another example: Liesl goes skiing in the mountains and the forest ranger becomes incensed by the urbanite’s ignorance as she is scared of wildlife. “Then you’ll just have to properly educate us city dwellers,” Liesl says. The willing submission of the young city woman to re-education in order to become a better person underlines both the moral superiority of the countryside to the city as well as that of men to women. It is the country life, hiking in nature, and of course forest ranger, Gerold, who ultimately marries the protagonist, which leads Liesl to the self-realization that an independent urban life as an artist does not suit her. In the end she understands that true happiness exists in the countryside, in nature, at the eagle’s perch, in hiking and as a wife at the side of Gerold.

It is only with the help of nature that the film’s protagonist can arrive at the self-realization of the correct life, find the true site of her home, her *Heimat*, and her own fulfillment as a woman. Indeed, many conservationists saw in the forest an access to spirituality.¹¹ Nature, and in particular the forest, was seen as unspoiled, despite the fact that it was a cultural landscape. It was this image of unspoiled nature that made it possible to speak of metaphysics of the forest that

¹¹ This notion of a spiritual forest was taken up by Elias Canetti in his anthropological work, *Crowds and Power*, where he noted that the significance of the forest for the Germans satisfied a need for spirituality as well as order. He saw in this meaning of the forest a uniquely German phenomenon, thus supporting the discourse on the Germans as a forest people into the 1960s when his book was published. For Canetti, the trees in the German forest stood clean, distinct, rigid and firmly rooted in parallel formation to one another. They recalled soldiers: loyal, truthful and upright, grown straight and yet various in height and strength. Together the trees not only formed the forest, but also symbolized an army. In this connection between forest and army, Canetti saw the German national symbol. The forest not only offered superior protection, but also access to spirituality and metaphysics. For the forest visitor, looking up to the treetops was like looking up to the heavens as the forest became a church, a paragon of one’s devotion (92f, 185ff).

could offer answers to difficult questions. In 1953, Hermann Schurhammer, initiator of the Wutachschlucht Nature Reserve, described hiking in his article “Why We Hike” as inspired introspection during which the hiker comes into dialogue with nature and can thus comprehend *Heimat* with all his senses: “We learned that the universe and nature are full and alive in all corners big and small. [...] We saw that we humans are only one part of creation, a speck of dust in the entire cosmos” (46). However, the understanding of what nature can offer, what contemplative benefit can be derived from it, is not inherent to mankind. We must acquire this insight through a process of maturity. Schurhammer explains that as the hiker moves through nature, he reaches a higher state of self-awareness with the knowledge that *Heimat* is what is most important for him and his brothers.¹²

Heimatfilms also address the hegemony of ideal values over material values, and ideals were, as mentioned above, vital to achieve the conservationists and other restorative powers goals in the post-war era. This priority is addressed at various points throughout *Der Förster vom Silberwald*. For instance, Liesl’s fellow sculptor and admirer from the city goes poaching in the mountains. When the forest ranger catches him and he tries to solve the problem with a money bribe, the forest ranger makes it clear that not everything in the world can be bought, especially not the country folk who still keep their ideals.

At the 1952 national meeting of the Association for the Protection of the German Forest (SDW), conservationist Hans Thierbach prioritized ideal values over material values in his speech entitled “Forest and Man:”

Much has been taken from us through the lost war, but we still have our nature. And nature doesn’t disappoint us but gives us in return far more than what we put into the earth, its flora in the form of love and work. The last war has shown us a thousand fold that in the end it is not the material things that constitute inner richness, but it is the ideals that make life worth living. More than ever in our “talked-apart,” four-zone Germany, we need values that bring us together again. (6f)

Following a lost war, hunger, and destruction, nature conservation offered nature as model and guide to convey certain values (Friedensburg). Yet already at the turn of the 20th century, conservationists had seen nature as an absolute, complete, comprehensive and timeless. This applied particularly to the forest. From such a standpoint, nature alone was ready in advance to hinder Germany from Americanization, urbanization and mechanization of society (Chaney 328-338). Anti-American sentiments were especially manifested in the rejection of material values, anti-capitalist resentments and criticism of the

¹² Schurhammer did not address women; the hiker is male. Women are mentioned only in the context of a female principle, i.e. Mother Nature, through which the male wanderer navigates.

perversion of American youth culture. Yet on a different level, there persisted a certain fascination with the USA. German conservationists admired their American counterparts and considered their conservation movement to be more advanced; in doing so, they did not reject progressive thinking as such, but rather attempted to re-evaluate it in a cultural-critical light of their own (Engels, *Naturpolitik* 86).

Conclusion

The nature conservation movement in post-war Germany was not only motivated by cultural criticism of the immediate historical context, but had also modern roots. German conservationists' images and constructs of nature, particularly the concepts of "forest" and "*Heimat*," as well as their civic involvement, their reaction to allied politics, and their gender models reflect the influence not only of the debate between German nature conservationists and the Allied Powers over forest clearing, but also of the discourses from the 19th century about the myth of the German people, the forest and the notion of *Heimat*.

The German post-war discourse surrounding nation and nature and the function of the forest accommodated to the contemporary political situation. Modern ideas and developments were not dismissed outright; rather, conservationists and other concerned citizens attempted to reinterpret them from a cultural criticism perspective, stressing German ideals with anti-American and anti-materialistic strains.

The fact that nature conservationists were abreast of the contemporary political situation is also seen in the SDW's choice to target international youth. Integrating international youth into their programs represented a shift away from nationalist attitudes and an opening up to an international movement in a positive and cooperative way. For conservationists this did not contradict the concept and image of *Heimat*, for a popular notion of the concept remained relevant even though the mythical belief in the forest had already seen its day.

From a cultural perspective, the forest maintained an important function – after the war it even experienced a revival, as evidenced by the wave of *Heimatfilms* that followed. Such films centred on forest regions that were untouched by the ravages of war and the central roles were played by forest rangers instead of farmers or maids. *Heimatfilms* depicted a Manichaeistic view of the world divided into good and bad, country and city, ideal and material values. Although the films did not refute the National Socialist glorification of farmers, they did adapt to the new state of the nation, which gave the genre its sense of timeliness. The post-war *Heimatfilms* thus did service to Germany's nearly 10 million refugees and displaced people.

As seen in both *Heimatfilms* and the youth politics of the SDW, the gender stereotypes of previous decades persisted in post-war Germany. Women

were often not addressed at all, were considered to be more practically than intellectually inclined and were functionalised in such concepts as Mother Nature. As seen in the *Heimatfilm* discussed above, the female protagonist, coming from the city, needed to be re-educated by nature and the male forest ranger.

Reality in post-war society was not quite congruent with the image of women in *Heimatfilms*. At first glance, it might seem that social structures were re-established in the 1950s, especially because by then men had returned from war. Nevertheless, a large percentage of women remained alone and were the sole family providers. We may thus assume that women became more self-aware and independent; and that this was an irreversible process (Grosskopff 162).

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