

Women and the Nazi Regime

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my parents, Gaynor and Wayne Cluett, for their steadfast support and encouragement. And dedicated to Dr Andrew Webster for his guidance, wisdom and patience.

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Abstract

The establishment of the Third Reich in 1933 re-shaped Germany into an intensely militaristic, oppressive and intimidating regime. German women were deeply affected by the changes set in motion by the Nazis, which simultaneously encouraged reproduction and domestic life and restricted the education and career opportunities available to them. This was in direct contrast to the preceding Weimar Republic, under which women's emancipation had made massive strides and women had experienced liberation in areas such as professions, higher education and sexuality. The abrupt about-face brought about by the Nazi regime would have had a huge impact on the lives of women.

This thesis examines different aspects of women's lives under the Nazi regime, with the aim of establishing women's reactions and adaptations to the new policies and social expectations. From the racial and pro-natal policies to the attempted fashion overhaul and the restriction of freedoms such as birth control, women from the comparatively modern Weimar era had to return to a less liberated role in society. The central argument of this thesis is that there was a gap between the Nazi expectation of how their policies would be adhered to and the reality in practice. I argue that this gap was deliberately fostered on the part of German women who wished to maintain agency and keep their distance from a regime which sought to pervade every aspect of social, cultural and familial life.

This thesis aims to help establish a clearer view on what life was like for women living in Nazi Germany, as well as how they responded to the ways in which the Nazis wanted them to live and behave. By examining how women responded to the regime instead of

simply what was done to them, this thesis contributes to the knowledge of a growing but still often-overlooked part of the history of Nazi Germany.

Introduction

Nazi Germany has been studied from almost every viewpoint: military, social, economic and political. For many years, however, an important part of the history of the Third Reich was often overlooked – the lives and experiences of the women who lived under the regime. It was only in 1975 that Jill Stephenson essentially broke new ground with her PhD thesis “Women in Nazi Society”, bringing attention to the topic and opening the way for future study. Much has been done since in the investigation of Nazi policy *towards* women and the roles they were expected to adhere to in Nazi society. What is equally important to understand, however, is the perspective of the women themselves. These women went about trying to live relatively normal and comfortable lives under an infamously pervasive and fanatical regime.

It was the final collapse of the Weimar Republic in 1933 that allowed the totalitarian Nazi State to emerge as the new government of Germany. A key point to understand when considering Weimar’s downfall is that the Weimar Republic was not established out of a glorious revolution or a heroic victory for Germany. It was established in 1919 out of pure necessity, as Germany struggled to come to terms with the crushing defeat of the First World War, which had cost them everything from their monarchy to their dignity, not to mention the thousands of casualties, both military and civilian. Detler Peukert wrote that ‘[the Weimar Republic] was the product of complex and painful compromise, of defeats and mutual concessions’.¹ The result was a hastily thrown-together government at a time when Germany was weak and plagued by the after-effects of their defeat in the First World War. The timing was unfortunate, as Peukert

¹ Detler J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, London: Penguin Group, 1987. 6.

points out, because 'the Germans embarked on their republican experiment at the most unpropitious possible moment; a moment when the political and social system was already about to be tested to the limits'.²

What the collapse of Weimar meant for women was essentially a social and political backtrack. The Nazi regime sought to undo the emancipatory changes enacted under the liberal Weimar system, largely to advance their own ideological program, particularly in regards to their pro-natal and gender-separatist policies. The Nazi ideal of 'Aryan' motherhood was at the centre of their policies for women – everything, from marriage incentives to racial education to charity work and government propaganda rotated around this sole maternal axis, eliminating the modern woman's independent sexuality and turning her back into an object of procreation.³ To step from the modern and emancipatory social and political climate of Weimar into the strict, conservative and judgemental environment of the Third Reich was a huge shift, but not one which could erase memories or desires for independence or self-sufficiency from those women who had desired it in a world where it was possible for them.

The central argument of this thesis is that there was a deliberate gap between what Nazi policies and propaganda dictated that they wanted for German women and how these women actually lived during that era. Women tried to maintain their agency and independence under the Nazi regime both by levels of defiance and voluntary compliance. For example, the failure to increase the birth rate (which the Nazis heavily emphasised in their propaganda campaigns) was the result of women wanting to maintain a financially stable (and less emotionally taxing) family, unconvinced by propaganda that tried to persuade them otherwise. They did reproduce, as was

² Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 6.

³ Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, London: Arnold, 2003. 2.

expected of them (thus complying with the Nazis wishes), but not to the degree that it became a strain on their lives or resources.⁴

This is only one example of the agency women tried to retain during the Nazi years – making what decisions were still theirs for themselves and trying to keep the regime from permeating every aspect of life. The Nazi regime relied heavily on self-enforcement, and just as the Gestapo relied on denunciations and tip-offs to locate ‘community aliens’,⁵ so did compliance with other aspects of the regime rely on voluntary involvement and the outward appearance of obedience with the regime’s wishes. Instead of their sole options being menial employment and spinsterhood or bringing up a large family, women were simply able to ‘have a few children in a short space of time and enjoy a more independent social life outside the home and more leisure generally’.⁶ Ironically, the self-policing nature of the Nazi regime gave women the independence which enabled them to establish their own lifestyles.

The sociologist Clifford Kirkpatrick was the first to study the subject of women in Nazi Germany with his 1938 work *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life*. Kirkpatrick researched this while on sabbatical from the University of Minnesota, during which he lived for a year in Nazi Germany. He openly acknowledges in the preface that he faced challenges in gathering information for his work, explaining that

Some informants were excessively eager, and others were reluctant. The eager informants were only too glad to describe the glorious triumphs of National Socialism. Reluctant informants included scientists and administrators willing to give reliable information but unwilling to speak too frankly. Foes of the National Socialist regime often alternated between eagerness to voice explosively their bitterness,

⁴ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, London: Longman Press, 1975. 51.

⁵ Nikolaus Wachsmann, “The Policy of Exclusion: Repression in the Nazi State, 1933-1939,” in Jane Caplan (ed.) *Nazi Germany*, Oxford University Press, 2008. 145.

⁶ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 51.

and reluctance to risk the wrath of the all-powerful Nazi party. Not only were informants primed with propaganda or muzzled with repression but source materials also tended to either offer official propaganda or to be restricted in circulation.⁷

Kirkpatrick struggled in order to create his work. As the events of the Second World War unfolded, evidence emerged of the misleading nature of some of the information the Nazis had given him.

The emergence of women in Nazi Germany as a topic of wider historical interest came only in the mid-1970s. Jill Stephenson and Richard J Evans were the 'pioneers' on the subject. Yet a key historiographical trend in these works is that though the significant policies, changes and incidents are described, they seem to portray women as less active within the regime than their male counterparts. While Stephenson's "Women in Nazi Society" (1975) was one of the earliest cohesive arguments on the topic, she describes the lives and actions of women as if they were passive players instead of active citizens. Decades later, with the publishing of *Women in Nazi Germany* in 2001, Stephenson began to look at the darker and more extreme aspects of women's roles within the regime, from the female perpetrators of Nazi atrocities to those persecuted or those who openly opposed the Nazis.⁸ This exemplifies the evolution of the historiography of women's history – to begin, women were portrayed as passive victims, echoing the historical role they had been assigned before women's history had emerged as a topic, when they were commented on only for their roles in 'political subordination, economic position and 'domestic' responsibilities'.⁹

⁷ Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938. xi.

⁸ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, London: Routledge, 2001.

⁹ Michael Roberts, "Women's History and Gender History," in Phillip R Schofield and Peter Lambert (eds.), *Making History: An Introduction to the History and Practices of a Discipline*, London: Routledge, 2004. 192.

Following Stephenson, other historians began to add their views on the subject as it evolved, such as Claudia Koonz's *Mothers in the Fatherland* in 1987, and Matthew Stibbe's *Women in the Third Reich* in 2003. Interestingly, while Stibbe discusses the unique historical position of women in the Third Reich while looking at policies and events from a largely impersonal academic approach, Koonz delved more into the human side of the matter, discussing various stories of individual women in Nazi Germany, and locating and interviewing the infamous Gertrud Scholtz-Klink herself. Thus it was over a decade before the 'women's history' movement of the 1960s began to look at the Nazi Regime through the lens of feminist history. In 2002, Vandana Joshi explained the delay as the product of the reluctance of feminist historians to study anything which might cast women in a negative light; 'feminist theory and writing, as young disciplines, did not want to get soiled with the murky past of inhuman crimes and atrocities. Feminists thus maintained an uneasy silence on the topic for a long while'.¹⁰

Michelle Mouton's 2010 article "From Adventure and Advancement to Derailment and Demotion" is, like Koonz, an example of the modern, more humanistic approach.

Mouton located and interviewed a variety of women who had lived and worked under the Nazi regime, noting the vast array of responses and experiences. Frau Schmitt, for example, had positive memories of the regime, as employment at a Nazi-organised kindergarten saved the recent widow and her son from destitution, and enabled her to 'work without sacrificing her role as a mother'.¹¹ In contrast, Frau Müller, a graduate of Law School, found herself unable to achieve her ambition of becoming a judge, as the Nazi regime prohibited women from working in the Civil Service. Mouton details a 'lingering resentment' for the Nazis in Frau Müller, as they had actively blocked her

¹⁰ Vandana Joshi, "Changing Perspectives on the Role of Women in Nazi Germany: The Case of Women Denouncers," *Studies in History* 18: 2, 2002. 209.

¹¹ Michelle Mouton, "From Adventure and Advancement to Derailment and Demotion: Effects of Nazi Gender Policy on Women's Careers and Lives," *Journal of Social History* 43:4, 2010. 954.

desired career path and prevented her from dreams of judiciary service.¹² What these two polarizing cases exemplify is the effect that a woman's individual circumstances and ambitions would have had on her experience in Nazi Germany. While Frau Schmitt found help and positivity, Frau Müller found herself oppressed and unable to achieve her life goals due to her gender. As this thesis shows, women had to adapt their lives around the Nazi lifestyle in order to live comfortably, and that meant advancement or oppression based on one's circumstances, values and motives.

This thesis aims to examine and explain Nazi policies, the impact they had and the extent to which they were practiced by looking at many different aspects of women's lives under the regime. Each of the four chapters examines a different area of women's experience of and relationship to the Nazis.

Chapter 1 discusses Nazi ideas of 'the ideal woman'. The image put forward as the perfect role for women was a relatively simple one – a conservative housewife and mother, dedicated to the upkeep of home and husband. Nazi racial ideals and their desire to re-segregate the two sexes both played into this philosophy, which was heavily emphasized in their policy towards women. The policing of the sexual sphere, marriage incentives and racial policies all but ensured that women were fulfilling their purpose of creating the new generation of 'hereditarily fit Aryans'.¹³

Chapter 2 discusses the issues which affected women's lives that the modern age had brought about (such as abortion and birth control), which the regime felt obligated to police as they clashed with the established ideology. The progressive and liberal Weimar Republic had seen great strides in women's emancipation. The sexual liberation

¹² Mouton, "From Adventure and Advancement," 956-957.

¹³ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 50.

of women, while largely incomplete by today's social norms, was at the forefront of this, and thus a danger to the racially-based pro-natalist movement of the Nazis.

Chapter 3 attempts to explain or at least examine how the Nazi Party could have appealed to women politically. After all, particularly during the elections of 1932, women made up more than half of the population of Germany, and were responsible for a large proportion of the Nazi vote. It was not just about whether women agreed with the Nazi policies towards women – it was the social aspect in this deeply polarized pre-Nazi society that drew in voters. Women were political actors just like men, albeit less politicised in some cases due to the short time since their acquisition of the vote. They voted for the Nazis, just as men did, not because they approved of the Nazi policies towards women but because of their broader aims and policies, which promised a return to a stable and powerful Germany.

Chapter 4 discusses what women were *doing* in the context of Nazi Germany. On a societal level, through work, Nazi organisations or even through education, women were attempting to establish places for themselves in a regime which tried to dictate to them what they could and could not do. In addition, this chapter looks at the wartime mobilization of women, and the implications therein of women's support, both for the regime and the war, when compared with the mobilization effort of other countries such as the United Kingdom.

My research draws from primary sources such as speeches by the Nazi leadership, translations from era-appropriate German magazines and newspapers, and government reports from both inside and outside Nazi Germany. In addition, to gain outside perspective, I have examined articles from feminist magazines and local newspapers

from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The local newspapers in particular give an important viewpoint as they detail information given to and opinions from the working-class, for whom the war was more of an impact than the preceding politics, but nonetheless appear to have shown interest in the lives of their peers in Germany. In addition, Kirkpatrick's work has been invaluable to gain an *insider* perspective on the goings-on in Nazi Germany, as he retained enough distance from the regime as a foreigner to observe and examine without evident bias. The secondary sources I have used include the key works from historians such as Stephenson, Stibbe, Koonz, and others who have written on the subject of women in Nazi Germany, to compare and contrast their viewpoints as well as to gain information on the subject. In addition, to gain a wider understanding I have looked at works on subjects such as Nazi policies about disability and race, Nazi culture, and abortion policy. I have also studied the place of women in Weimar Germany to gain historical context.

Overall, this thesis aims to open the argument that despite the oppressive nature of the regime and the difficulty of the war years, women remained active agents in their own lives, not necessarily embracing or rejecting the regime but rather adapting to it.

Chapter 1: The Ideals

The image which the Nazis put forward as their ideal woman was a relatively simple one; an Aryan housewife and mother, dedicated to the upkeep of her home and the nurturing of her husband and children. In a speech given in 1934, Hitler stated that 'if the man's world is said to be the State, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community, then it may perhaps be said that the woman's is a smaller world. For her world is her husband, her family, her children, and her home'.¹ Nazi policy strongly encouraged marriage and procreation, utilising propaganda and even government loans to incentivise it. The reasons for this were largely twofold. Firstly, a decline of the birth rate (a result of the First World War decreasing the male population dramatically) was a deep concern in Germany, inherited from the Weimar Republic which preceded the Nazi regime, and which the Nazis regarded as the result of a 'sick population' resulting from the societal changes which occurred during the Weimar period.² The emancipation of women in the Weimar Republic seemed only to add to the decline as women chose a career over having children, something which frustrated traditionalists and chauvinists like the Nazis. The problem with the slumping birth rate, especially for the particularly militaristic Nazis, was a lower population when compared to Germany's perceived enemies.³ If Nazi society was to thrive (and dominate) then they needed soldiers to uphold and enforce the regime.

Secondly, the Nazi regime made no secret of its belief in eugenics – they wanted to encourage Aryan marriages to produce Aryan children and thus multiply and cement

¹ Speech given to the NS- Frauenschaft, 8 September 1934. Translated in Lisa Pine, *Hitler's 'National Community': Society and Culture in Nazi Germany*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

² Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 149.

³ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 16.

the place of German racial superiority. One of the most important elements of Nazi belief was that the Aryan race were the rightful people of Germany, and that they were under threat from lesser races, such as the Jewish, Sinti and Romani peoples, whom they ruthlessly suppressed in the interest of 'purification of the body of the nation' along with other 'undesirables' such as homosexuals and the 'hereditarily ill'.⁴ Only by encouraging marriage and procreation in Aryan circles and preventing mixed-race marriages could the Aryans dominate the German population. For Aryan women, therefore, the Nazi expectations were clear; marry an Aryan man, produce Aryan children, and be content with a life of housework and motherhood, setting aside higher education or a career for the good of the country. As Claudia Koonz put it, 'In Hitler's Germany, women provided in a separate sphere of their own creation the image of humane values that lent the healthy gloss of motherhood to the Aryan world of the chosen.'⁵ This was the designated role of women in the Nazi vision of the thousand-year Reich.

Marriage and Reproduction as Duty

According to Kirkpatrick, a larger proportion of Germans were married in 1933 than in 1910, before the eruption of the First World War. Kirkpatrick attributes this to the women who, after the armistice in 1918, 'eagerly married the fiancés who had been spared the slaughter of the battlefield'.⁶ However, post-war conditions had seen the marriage rate drop significantly more immediately after the war's end, such as in 1924 – from 14.5 (in 1920) to just 7.1.⁷ This was due to the vast disproportion of men

⁴ Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991. 3.

⁵ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics*, London: Methuen, 1987. 419.

⁶ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 127.

⁷ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 127.

and women, owing to the extreme losses of men during the war. Generations of women lost out on marriage prospects as there were, to put it simply, not enough eligible men left to go around. What this created was a large group of potential mothers with no prospect of producing legitimate children, while illegitimate motherhood was still frowned upon in both social and religious circles. With the Nazis eager to boost the Aryan population to ensure a large, healthy and dominant German populace, this presented a real problem. Even a completely successful marriage campaign could never fully solve the problem though, as Kirkpatrick pointed out, because even if every single eligible German male had gone and found a bride, an excess of women would still remain.⁸

In the mid-1930s, the pressure to find a spouse was such that some German states in the Third Reich even ran matchmaking services (but only for the 'racially compatible').⁹ For those excess women left unmarried, then, this must have been a bitter lot indeed. In a society which placed such emphasis on marriage, procreation and the joys of family life, to be left a spinster must have felt like a true and painful failure. As Stibbe explains, women who failed to marry faced both chastisement and/or pity in private and public stigmatisation 'for helping undermine the nation's health' and were accused of things like 'racial desertion'.¹⁰ In such circumstances, it was little wonder that some women wound up actively choosing to have children out of wedlock (as discussed further in Chapter 2).

Reproduction (and, officially, marriage) was considered a duty to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the Nazi State and their nation as a whole. For example, *The Times*

⁸ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 135.

⁹ Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany*, University of California Press, 2003. 48.

¹⁰ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 50.

reported on 10 May 1936 that a new rule had been implemented for those wishing to obtain an office in the Nazi Party leadership that any candidates must marry before the age of 26.¹¹ Many members of the Nazi leadership were often in the public eye, and so having these families as a public example of the Nazi family ideal would be beneficial to the Party – a living, breathing example of propaganda, a goal put forward for other families to strive for. Furthermore, to be considered as a candidate for Nazi leadership one naturally had to be Aryan and believe in the Nazi doctrine of Aryan supremacy. As the *Times* article pointed out, ‘failure to marry young must raise suspicions of lack of racial will’.¹² Encouraging marriage in such believers was another means to produce the Aryan children that the Nazis were campaigning so hard for.

According to Jill Stephenson, in 1930 many people believed the system of marriage and family life to be in crisis.¹³ The Nazis attributed this, naturally, to the failure and corruption of the system (ostensibly the Weimar Republic) with ‘politicians standing idly by while the German nation died out’.¹⁴ But with the marriage rate’s increase in the later 1920s (after the initial drop discussed earlier, following the devastating effects of the First World War on the male population) it seemed the institution of marriage was sound, even in the depth of the Great Depression.¹⁵ Therefore it was no longer purely the lack of men that was the problem; it was the choice of married couples to have smaller numbers of children or to remain childless.¹⁶ The First World War and the Weimar Republic had opened doors for women, allowing them to engage in university education and pursue careers if they so wished. And it seems women were under no

¹¹ “Marriage Before 26,” *The Times*, 11 May 1936.

¹² “Marriage Before 26,” *The Times*, 1936.

¹³ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 38.

¹⁴ Käthe Braun-Prager, review of Rosa Mayreder, *Die Krisis der Ehe*, *FiS*, November 1929. Quoted in Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 38.

¹⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 38.

¹⁶ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 39.

illusions that to marry and have children would not hinder them in these goals.

Nevertheless, the Nazis campaigned hard to promote Aryan marriage, even introducing incentives to potential spouses to make the idea of marriage more agreeable. One such incentive was the Marriage Loan, first established by the Nazi government in 1933.

Aryan couples could apply for this interest-free loan of 1000 Reichsmarks (according to Stibbe, this amounted to roughly a fifth of the average yearly take-home pay)¹⁷ in the form of vouchers for furniture and household goods. There were naturally some regulations in place which ensured that the couples provided with this loan were acting according to the wishes of the Nazi regime. Upon her marriage, the woman had to give up work and focus on motherhood, and the amount to be repaid was reduced by twenty five per cent for each child that the marriage produced – so that after their fourth child, the debt was essentially forgiven.¹⁸ By contrast, childlessness or a small number of children would result in penalisation as the repayments would have to be made, while incentives to produce at least four children were given to families who had taken the loan. In addition, there were talks to reduce income tax by 15 per cent per child, and 30 per cent from the fifth child onward, though there are no sources to suggest that this ever came to fruition.¹⁹

Reproduction – the Pros and Cons

What the Marriage Loan Scheme seemed to (perhaps purposefully) overlook was the financial burden taken on by those who chose to have four or more children. The cost of raising to adulthood four children – especially four born in quick succession – would soon far outweigh the initial 1000 Reichsmark loan. One reason that the birth rate did

¹⁷ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 40.

¹⁸ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 41.

¹⁹ "The German Election," *The Times*, 20 October 1933.

not immediately jump to incredible heights - despite the popularity of the Marriage Loan – was perhaps that women in Germany had the foresight to realise the long-term costs. In fact, on average, only one child was born to each couple who had received the marriage loan.²⁰ While the birth rate did rise (from 11 per cent in 1934 to 20.5 per cent in 1939)²¹ it clearly was not the massive increase that the Nazis had anticipated the Marriage Loan scheme would produce.

The failure of the birth rate to increase as dramatically as the Nazis predicted revealed something of women's attitudes to this call for the 'mass production' of children. German women did not buy in to a simplistic baby craze – they maintained agency over themselves and their families, making decisions that ensured their family could maintain a stable financial future, shunning the Nazi propaganda which tried to sway them towards thinking of the good of the nation over the good of their families. In 1950, it was acknowledged by Himmler's former Chief-of-Staff, Paul Wolff, that 'even as it was, women vigorously opposed the order'.²² What this tells us is not necessarily a rejection of the regime in its entirety, but a rejection of those parts which threatened or sought to remove a woman's individual autonomy.

Reproduction was the primary expectation of Aryan women living in Nazi Germany; it was not just an ability or a decision but a patriotic duty to contribute to the Germanic people. Of course, this only applied if they mothered children who were racially valuable. The Nazis wanted race to replace class as the 'primary organising principle in

²⁰ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 47.

²¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 47.

²² "Nazi Women Opposed "Mass Production", " *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 17 February 1950. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article140633645>

society',²³ and they made no secret of this fact. Dr. Walter Groß, the head of the Nazi Party's Office of Racial Policy, argued that this was deference to God's will, stating that

What God has separated, man should not bring together. Heaven thought it good not to have only one type of people on the earth, but different kinds, various racially-bound peoples. That is a part of Creation. We bow before this truth and respect the borders. That means that the foundation of our separation of the races is not a matter of politics or economics, but rather it rests on a higher level, to which we in the end are responsible. In our Reich, we are separating that which belongs to us, because it is blood of our blood, from that which does not belong to us, because it is foreign. We are doing that which is right not only for the moment, but for eternity.²⁴

Also established in 1938 was the Marriage Law which allowed the courts to approve divorce in the interests of the 'national community' – for example, if one partner turned out to be infertile or refused to have children.²⁵ Barely one per cent of marriages were dissolved on these grounds between 1938/39 and 1941,²⁶ as the Nazis could (and did) pressure people to get married and have children, but could not prevent couples from marrying for love, a situation in which infertility becomes no less difficult but more forgivable within the relationship itself. Thus it can be inferred that fertility was not as high as love on a woman's list of priorities when it came to selecting a spouse, despite the Nazis' attempted persuasion to the contrary.

Nevertheless, this potential threat to their marriages could only have moved to further drive many German women to reproduce at least once - if not for the sake of adding more Aryans to the great and glorious *Volksgemeinschaft*, then to deflect unwanted attention and to assert the legitimacy of their marriages. As William Shirer (who had himself lived in Nazi Germany in 1934) explained, 'emphasis was put on the role of

²³ Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 4.

²⁴ Dr. Walter Groß, *Nationalsozialistische Rassenpolitik. Eine Rede an die deutschen Frauen*, 1934. Translation available at <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/gross.htm>

²⁵ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 50.

²⁶ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 29.

women in the Third Reich- to be, above all, healthy mothers of healthy children.’²⁷ But to the Nazis, reproduction was not only a woman’s role, it was her purpose. Thus in maintaining agency, the women of Nazi Germany had to maintain a tenuous balance, reproducing enough to be considered to have done their duty, but not enough to put a strain on their family’s finances or lifestyle.

The Three ‘K’s

The Nazi policy for women was officially ‘*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*’, which translates as ‘Children, Kitchen, Church’. This outlines precisely what the Nazis wanted German women’s priorities to be: their children, their home and (to a lesser extent) their religion. Looking at this from a modern perspective, this position seems almost antiquated. In the 1930s, women in many European countries had achieved voting rights, and in Weimar Germany they were eligible to serve in government – huge strides in equality which make the Nazi ideals seem not only out-dated but crude. However, to some a return to the traditional order must have been an appeal to the regime. T.L. Jarman suggested in 1956 that *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* ‘won [the Nazis] much political support from women’,²⁸ but without elaborating on why he thought this was the case. It is important to note the period that Jarman himself was writing from, before the spread of second-wave feminism in the 1960s began to break down barriers once again. *Equal Rights*, The National Women’s Party [USA]’s newspaper, reported on the three ‘K’s as ‘National socialistic propaganda . . . the woman is to be relegated to the place she held, say fifty years ago, in the scheme of German things’.²⁹

²⁷ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, London: Pan Books, 1964. 316.

²⁸ T.L. Jarman, *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany*, New York University Press, 1956. 189.

²⁹ “Feminist Notes. Nazis Favour Kaiser’s “Three K’s”. *Equal Rights* 18:31, 1932. 245.

Of the three 'K's, perhaps the most important to the Nazis was '*Kinder*' - the Nazi glorification of motherhood was notably intense. A popular analogy to childbirth, particularly during wartime, was that of battle: Hitler proclaimed that 'Every child that a woman brings into the world is a battle, a battle waged for the existence of her people.'³⁰ Great emphasis was placed on mothers as Germanic heroines; the government even awarded medals – the Cross of Honour of the German Mother, to prolific mothers, and ordered the Hitler Youth to salute mothers who wore the medal.³¹ Mother's Day, an idea which Germany had adopted only in 1923 from the United States, was made a massive public holiday, celebrated with a national festival about 'how fine and noble it is to be a mother, and how wonderful a thing it is to have a mother'.³² In glorifying and empowering mothers, they gave these women a sense of importance, and validated their purpose as bearers of children for the Reich. Hitler himself stated that

if today a female lawyer achieves great things and nearby lives a mother with five, six, seven children, all of them healthy and well brought-up, then I would say: from the point of view of the eternal benefit to our people the woman who has borne and brought up children and who has therefore given our nation life in the future, has achieved more and done more!³³

But, as Kirkpatrick explains, it was not only breeding for quantity, it was breeding for *quality*: 'A woman's life is held to be full and socially useful only when her children are strong, healthy, intelligent and racially pure'.³⁴ Heredity was just as important to the Nazis as race, in order to ensure that the future German population was as strong, able and impressive as possible. It was for this reason that the Marriage Health Law was

³⁰ Hitler, quoted in Leila J. Rupp, "Mother of the "Volk": the Image of Women in Nazi Ideology," *Signs* 3:2, 1977. 363-364.

³¹ Rupp, "Mother of the "Volk"," 371.

³² 'Reichsminister Dr Frick zum Muttertag am 12. Mai', *VB*, 11 May 1935. quoted in Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 49.

³³ Hitler, quoted in Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 49.

³⁴ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 174.

passed in 1935 so that potential couples could actually be forbidden from marrying if circumstances meant that their children might bear hereditary defects.³⁵ This law added four impediments which could potentially stop a marriage: if one of the partners suffered from a contagious disease which could threaten the health of the offspring, if one of the partners was under legal restraint, if one of the partners was mentally ill, or if they suffered from a hereditary disease. Under such circumstances, there was a very real chance that their marriage could be legally forbidden.³⁶

The second 'K', *Küche* (kitchen) refers not just to cooking but to housewifery in general. It was clear that what the Nazis truly wanted for women was for them to return to their 'traditional sphere' of being a dedicated wife, mother and homemaker. Their reasons for this ranged from logical, to traditionalist, to downright chauvinistic. The removal of women from the workforce was to 'relieve the congestion of the labour market'³⁷ and create more job opportunities for men. The return of women to the home would allow for society to return to the nuclear family pattern that the Nazis desired. Women at home raising children posed no threat to male dominance; it would be a return to the centuries-old model of housebound wife and bread-winning husband. As previously discussed, the emphasis on reproduction had elements of eugenics; it was an attempt to rebuild and bolster the master race. Thus the Nazis essentially tried to kill two birds with one stone: to return women to their 'proper' sphere and bolster the Aryan ranks of the thousand-year Reich by ensuring that these women produced and raised many healthy children.

The relationship between the Party and the Churches was a tenuous one. '*Kirche*', it

³⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 41.

³⁶ Mariken Lenaerts, *National Socialist Family Law: The Influence of National Socialism on Marriage and Divorce Law in Germany and the Netherlands*, Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2014. 95-96.

³⁷ Jarman, *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany*, 189.

seems, was only part of the phrase to lend it appeal, as women were the foundation of organized religion in Germany, staffing hospitals and charities, welfare programs and schools.³⁸ Hitler certainly seemed to use religion to further his means when it suited him, emulating the tenor and fervour of religious preaching to exclaim his plans and promises for Germany as if he were a true prophet, even in one speech in February 1933 praying openly in front of the crowds for 'power and glory. Amen'.³⁹

Yet it seemed faith and Nazism could never go comfortably hand-in-hand; Nazism left no room for autonomy, something the Protestant Church had come to expect. Between 1933 and 1945, only 250 ministers joined the party, while 200 others took a stand in 1934 and broke away from the now-Nazified Protestant Church to form their own Confessing Church, which insisted that religion should remain separate from State.⁴⁰ When Hitler met religious resistance, he famously lost his temper, postulating that 'Christianity will disappear from Germany just as it has done in Russia . . . the German race has existed without Christianity for thousands of years . . . Just as the Catholic Church could not prevent the earth from going around the sun, so churches today cannot get rid of the indisputable facts connected with blood and race.'⁴¹ The outburst was a glimpse of Hitler's true feelings towards religion: an obstacle, to be absorbed or abolished by the Nazi State, but not above or independent from his Party or his Reich. How Protestant women would have felt about this proclamation would have varied based on where their loyalties lay in the spectrum between church and country.

Catholicism found itself on a different but similar route; a minority in Germany, they

³⁸ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 224.

³⁹ Max Domarus, *Hitler: Reden Und Proklamationen 1932-1945* / speech of 10 February 1933 1:358. Quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 225.

⁴⁰ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 230.

⁴¹ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 230.

and the Nazis existed amicably but not unified for a time, while the Vatican remained deafeningly silent. There was no split of leadership as the Protestants had seen, but neither did they condemn the rash of political murders, with some of their own priests among the dead.⁴² The Catholics seemed to distance themselves from the regime, barely navigating the conundrums presented when Nazi reproductive and eugenic policy clashed with their own teachings, or when both church and state demanded unwavering loyalty. Yet, as Koonz points out, when it came to Catholic women, the same pattern of distance and resistance examined in this thesis seems to emerge –

while many Protestant women temporized and filtered ‘good’ from ‘bad’ in Nazi doctrines, Catholic women had been raised with absolute principles regarding their sphere . . . when the ‘walls’ of the church eroded, many women rebuilt them around their own *Frauenland*, within which they fought to keep their faith free from paganism and their families far from Nazi indoctrination.⁴³

Religion, despite being (on the surface) part of the regime, chafed against the attempted permeation of Nazi ideals into every aspect of German life, and in some cases led to the decision to retain autonomy from the Nazi regime, as much as was possible. While Protestant women faced less of an immediate conflict of interest, both they and Catholics would have struggled to fully reconcile their religion with aspects of Nazi rule, further necessitating their distance from the regime.

Fashion as Representation

Another method of controlling women established by the Nazis was by way of promoting standards of dress. Women in Nazi Germany were strongly discouraged from dressing in foreign fashions. Despite the common and widespread view that women’s

⁴² Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 282.

⁴³ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 306.

fashion was (and is) intended to be alluring (and hence implicitly promiscuous), clothes which 'distort or exaggerate the lines of the body' were seen as a sign of 'alien influences, in which the showing off motive is inherent'.⁴⁴ The Nazi reasoning for this was that the Nordic people had a different idea of beauty to other races. While the southern ideal of femininity was the 'youthful beloved', the Nordic ideal was the motherly woman.⁴⁵ Certainly, promoting motherliness as beautiful was part of the overarching Nazi scheme to create a gender divide and emphasise procreation as the people's – but particularly the woman's – duty to their country. In addition, clothes which distorted the female figure into a male shape – emphasis on broad shoulders and narrow hips – were seen as promoting 'sex confusion', and 'the decadent influences of an alien race.'⁴⁶ These clothes were seen as disruptive to the procreation movement and were therefore frowned upon.

An article in *Das Schwarze Korps* elaborated on another factor which influenced the Nazi opposition to international fashion, explaining that Reich Organizational Director Dr. Robert Ley deemed the seasonal change of fashion as an attempt to 'manipulate women's natural desire to be beautiful in order to foist their newest creations on women by leading them to believe these are the only fashions that are suitable to them'.⁴⁷ Dr Ley expressed that this 'fly by night' notion of beauty must be eliminated. He advocated a fashion for the German woman that is 'truly beautiful but at the same time demonstrates enduring substance'.⁴⁸ Ley also claimed that the continuously-transforming fashion scene was wasteful, as it 'depreciated the value of textile industry products' as out-of-season garments, no matter the quality, were sold cheaply as they

⁴⁴ "Fashions For Nordic Women," *The Times*, January 7, 1935.

⁴⁵ "Fashions for Nordic Women," *The Times*.

⁴⁶ "Fashions for Nordic Women," *The Times*.

⁴⁷ "Das geht unser Frauen an," *Das Schwarze Korps*, 26 July 1939. Translated in Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, University of California Press, 2013.

⁴⁸ "Das geht unser Fraun an", *The Third Reich Sourcebook*.

were no longer in high demand.⁴⁹

The author of the *Schwartzte Korps* article asserted that ‘The ideal standard of beauty today is no longer determined by the beauty of the mother and of woman as man’s companion, but rather, more or less surreptitiously, that of the handmaiden.’⁵⁰ That is to say, modern fashion and beauty standards did not represent women as a man’s companion and mother to his children but rather as a subordinate, or even a plaything. In spite of the Nazi view that women should exist in separate spheres to men, they claimed that this made them no less equal; Hitler stated that men and women must ‘mutually respect and value each other when they see that each performs the task that has been assigned by nature and Providence’.⁵¹ This reasoning was what prompted the Nazis to encourage a return to a more folk-inspired style, such as the dirndl dress and other peasant clothing, which were traditional and seen as more respectable than the objectifying modern fashions.

The main problem with this was that this so-called ‘German fashion’ was encouraged but never clearly defined. Hitler never took a public stance on what the ideal mode of dress should be – ‘conservatism’ and ‘traditional’ were tossed around by the Nazis, but never clarified – thus the perfect method of Nazi dress remained a vague impression. Perhaps because of this, Nazi-influenced fashion never managed to gain a full hold over Germany. German women, especially in large cities such as Berlin and Hamburg, ranked among the most elegantly dressed in Europe, particularly during the interwar period.⁵²

However, the ambiguity towards ‘ideal’ fashion did not stop the Nazis taking aim at

⁴⁹ “Das geht unser Fraun an”, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*.

⁵⁰ “Das geht unser Fraun an”, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*.

⁵¹ Speech given by Hitler to the Meeting of the National Socialist Women’s Organization in Nuremberg, 1934. Translated in Rabinbach and Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*.

⁵² Irene V. Guenther, “Nazi ‘Chic’? German Politics and Women’s Fashions, 1915–1945,” *Fashion Theory* 1:1, 1997. 33.

international fashions. An article in the *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1927 decried modern European fashion as 'a satanic mockery of womanhood' through which German women were 'unlearning the joy of human beauty with too many visible crooked legs and flat feet in lopsided high heels and stockings that only last two days'.⁵³ Once the Nazis came to power, blame for this blasphemous distortion of the sacred image of woman was, naturally, laid entirely at the feet of the Jews.⁵⁴

Overall, looking at the expectation versus the result of these policies and how women adapted to them shows a distinct gap. Women did not fully embrace these proposed changes, instead choosing to fit their lifestyles around them (as was the case with reproduction), take advantage of them (the Marriage Loan scheme) or outright ignore them as much as was possible (the Nazi view on modern fashion). Women did not so much change their lifestyles into the Nazi ideals so much as adapt to fit both their lives and the Nazi ways together into something which did not openly defy the regime's expectations but also did not adversely affect their own preferred ways of life.

⁵³ Edith Gräfin Salburg, "Die Entsittlichung der Frau durch die jüdische Mode", *Völkischer Beobachter*, June 18 1927. Cited in Guenther, "Nazi 'Chic'?", 34.

⁵⁴ Guenther, "Nazi 'Chic'?", 34-35.

Chapter 2: Issues of Modernity

One of the main goals of the Nazi regime was to reverse the strides towards modernity which had been made during the preceding Weimar republic. Significant changes in gender and class relations had been caused by the First World War, such as the universal suffrage granted by the Weimar constitution and the mobilisation of women during the war effort, which granted them employment and thus a sense of independence, creating a new dynamic other than the traditional male 'breadwinner' and female dependents. This was an affront to common decency in Nazi eyes, as it shunned tradition and established a different and often clashing new type of gender relations.

But Weimar gave the people more than just the evolution of women's social standing. The First World War gave way to the arrival of modernity in Germany, and largely because of this birth rates dropped, likely because of married couples' decision to remain childless.¹ Contributing to this were a number of factors: the disproportion of men to women following the war, the desire of women to pursue careers (an option that had been open to very few before the war) and the ongoing financial crises which made large families more difficult than ever to maintain. Whatever the case, the Nazis worked hard to achieve a return to the tradition of large Aryan families, to outnumber their perceived enemies and bolster the population of the German people. But a large family and a life lived at home were not necessarily what women living under the Nazi regime wanted for themselves, and lapses in judgement as well as (in some cases) rebellion against such restrictions are a part of human nature. Despite their

¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 51.

domineering policies, the Nazis could never hope to obtain complete control over every individual.

Weimar's Progress

Weimar Germany made remarkable strides in managing sexual health. The government established publicly-funded marriage, sex, and birth control clinics which, according to Anita Grossmann, were used by physicians and social workers as laboratories in which they could 'implement and contest the politics of medical sex reform.'² The experiences these doctors had in these clinics 'both radicalized their commitment to reform of the laws restricting abortion and contraception, and increased their attraction to eugenic sterilization'.³ What this essentially meant for women was that despite the anti-abortion attitude of Weimar (largely from the teachings of the Christian Church to which the Republic still ascribed) more options were open to them than before, as the spread of birth control and knowledge about sexuality meant that they had more bodily freedom because sex no longer involved so great a risk of the intrusion of an unwanted pregnancy. Therefore it could be argued that, at least from one standpoint, Weimar policies were better for women than Nazi ones.

This did not mean, however, that Weimar Germany encouraged or even accepted premarital sex; the 'fallen woman' remained in disgrace, traditionally seen as an 'outcast from society'.⁴ What it *did* mean was that married women engaging in perfectly acceptable marital relations could produce, as Grossmann puts it, 'healthy

² Anita Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950*, London: Oxford University Press, 1995. 46.

³ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 46.

⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 57.

offspring at well-timed intervals'.⁵ Thus marriages and families would not be strained by reproducing beyond their means, and couples were given a method of choice. These clinics were widespread and easily available. Kirkpatrick states that forty-nine out of ninety-eight German cities with a population of more than 50,000 had what he dubbed 'marriage advice clinics', while many cities had more than one and Berlin itself had sixteen.⁶

The issue of abortion was discussed at length by the Weimar government. David, Fleischhacker and Hohn explain that the efforts to liberalize abortion post- First World War were 'part of a concurrent effort to improve sex education and make contraceptives more readily available to the general public, particularly to workers families'.⁷ Large, unmaintainable families, pre-marital or extra-marital pregnancies were ancient problems which had long blighted women's lives, but many governments refused to consider legalising abortion because of the religious controversies and cultural taboos surrounding the practice. According to Jill Stephenson, the Communists saw population policy as a nationalist irrelevance, 'another way of perpetuating the misery of the working class'.⁸ Therefore the KPD, the Communist Party of Germany, campaigned for the lifting of the restrictions on abortion and the spread of contraceptive advice while other parties such as the Churches and the Centre Party did not budge on their refusal to tolerate abortion.⁹ Others argued that to completely outlaw the practice was to force women to turn to illegal abortions performed by, as Kirkpatrick put it, 'unscrupulous and incompetent persons who are responsible for a

⁵ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 46.

⁶ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 169.

⁷ Henry P David, Jochen Fleischhacker and Charlotte Hohn, "Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany" *Population and Development Review* 14:1, 1988. 86.

⁸ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 57.

⁹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 57.

terrific loss of life and health'.¹⁰ However, the issue was never resolved nor was much progress made during the Weimar era. Therefore prevention of an unwanted pregnancy was key, as termination was (from a strictly legal standpoint, at least) not an option for women who found themselves facing an unwanted pregnancy.

The Nazi Turnaround

On 6 May 1933, only months after Hitler had assumed office in January, the Nazis began their campaign against the reforms that the Weimar state had instituted. The 'marriage advice clinics' were shut down, Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexology (located in Berlin) was destroyed, as was much of the educational material pertaining to sex, and leading figures in the birth control movement were arrested or forced to flee.¹¹ This occurred for two reasons. One, as is evident, was the threat that such facilities posed to the encouragement of reproduction on a large scale. To have information and contraceptives freely available was counterproductive to the Nazis' intended goal of significantly boosting the Aryan birth rate. The second reason was simply that such facilities and information were offensive to the conservative viewpoint. Hitler had ascended to power promising the 'moral revival of the German people'¹² and now he intended to follow through on this promise, not least by abolishing such scandalous institutions as birth control and family planning clinics. Therefore the clinics were denounced by the Nazis as 'an agency dealing exclusively in contraceptives'¹³ (which was in fact only one of numerous functions) and destroyed. Here we see Nazi anti-modernity at play; the freedom of sexual choice and the ability to prevent pregnancies which had been available to the German populace were now denied, as they

¹⁰ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 161.

¹¹ David, Fleischhacker and Hohn, "Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany," 90.

¹² Robert G. Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8:3, 1998, 436.

¹³ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 169.

threatened the Nazi desire to return to the nuclear family lifestyle. A woman, even if she *was* married with few or no children, might be inclined to seek other forms of occupation, such as to go out and work; therefore it stood to reason that such practices as birth control were to be discouraged. Yet, as has been previously stated, there was no great increase in births – women retained their agency and made their own decisions on that front, possibly because of the knowledge they had retained from the Weimar era, despite Nazi efforts to eradicate it.

Influencing the Youth

The Nazis wielded a lot of influence on those just achieving sexual maturity in the era of Nazi dictatorship; the teenagers. According to Robert G Waite, ‘a preoccupation with youth, and especially their moral and sexual development, was widespread, shared in varying degrees by political leaders, representatives of the Ministry of Health, police officials, and the Hitler Youth organization.’¹⁴ The main reason for this was the belief that these youths must be indoctrinated and educated on the importance of ‘racial hygiene’ in regards to procreation – to understand that part of their reproductive ‘duty’ was to ensure the racial value and viability of one’s partner. Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf* that ‘If, as is the first task of the state in the service and for the welfare of its nationality we recognise that the preservation, care and development of the best racial elements, it is natural that this care must not only extend to the birth of every little national and racial comrade, but that it must educate the young sapling to become a valuable link in the chain of future reproduction.’¹⁵ It was up to the leaders, not only Party leaders, but youth organisation leaders, police and the Ministry of Health to police, guide and teach these youths about such matters. Not only this, but they had to ensure that the sexual

¹⁴ Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 434.

¹⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 451. Quoted in Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 202.

acts committed by the newly-maturing generations did not transgress the established levels of acceptability, thus attempting to combat the undesirable sexual issues before they began to emerge in the newly-matured generations. Waite states that the Nazis had every reason to be concerned with German youth, as the mid-1930s saw problems such as promiscuity, venereal disease and homosexual acts increasing steadily.¹⁶

What this meant for women (and those only just entering womanhood) was an emphasis on the racial compatibility of a mate as a priority, while love became less of an important factor. Should a racially valuable woman choose to marry an asocial (not valuable) man, she was a race traitor and a disgrace. Some went to the extreme in this view, such as Julius Streicher, who claimed that intercourse with a Jew would poison the blood of an Aryan woman, so that she would not be able to bear Aryan children.¹⁷ Promoting this fearful and prejudiced mind-set would combat two issues at once – promiscuity and racial incompatibility. If girls and women were led to regard sex as a matter of reproduction, they would likely abstain from engaging with less desirable partners, and would also naturally seek a racially compatible partner.

Abortion

As it was not only a taboo but an enemy of the birth rate which the Nazis sought so desperately to improve, abortion was heavily criminalized under the Nazi regime. Women who sought unauthorised abortions, and those who helped them achieve this goal, could receive the death penalty from 1943 onwards, especially if the perpetrator, in doing so, had 'damaged the needs of the *Volk*'.¹⁸ The Nazi ideals rotated around the idea of community needs above personal good, that is to say, that one's own ends were

¹⁶ Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," 435.

¹⁷ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 41.

¹⁸ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 157.

secondary to the needs of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. To abort an Aryan child, no matter how unwanted it was or how incapable the mother would be to raise it, was an act of ultimate selfishness. Nazi leadership retained the staunch position that every Aryan child, legitimate or not, was needed by the nation, and thus to sacrifice the birth of one for personal reasons was a grave offense against the Party, the community, and Germany itself. Hitler himself was publicly opposed to abortion and contraception because of the effect that this freedom of choice had upon women, claiming that 'Women inflamed by Marxist propaganda, claim the right to bear children only when they desire, first furs, radio, new furniture, and then perhaps one child.'¹⁹

A decade earlier on 26 May 1933 laws were established to prevent the advertisement or recommendation of anyone who could perform abortions or procedures which could serve as abortions – punishable by a fine and/or a prison sentence of up to two years.²⁰ Such laws were doubtless put in place to deter anyone from acknowledging the existence of or advising others about the existence of back-alley abortionists, therefore cutting off one of the ways through which a woman could discover and use such 'services'. Kirkpatrick claims that 'the reduction in abortions in 1934 was as spectacular as the increase in births'. He was correct from a statistical standpoint – requests for the interruption of pregnancy fell from 34,690 in 1932 to 4,391 in 1937.²¹ But these were public figures, so we might consider the very real possibility that many abortions (especially those now deemed criminal) were not reported.

For the others, such as Jews, Romani and mentally ill peoples, the reverse was true. As with the forced sterilization which was and remains an infamous example of the

¹⁹ Potts, Diggory and Peel, *Abortion*, 382.

²⁰ David, Fleischhacker, and Hohn, "Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany," 90.

²¹ David, Fleischhacker and Hohn, "Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany," 93.

inhumane practices carried out by the Nazis to achieve their eugenic ends, people for whom the regime held little value were not penalised for performing or having abortions – after all, their offspring were unwanted by the regime and only filled Germany with undesirable citizens. No laws were ever put in place which forbade ‘racially undesirable’ people from terminating unwanted pregnancies. For example, Potts, Diggory and Peel discuss a case in 1938 in which a Jewish couple were acquitted of attempting to obtain an unlawful abortion because the Nazi criminal code prohibiting such practices simply could not be used for the protection of a Jewish embryo.²²

Interestingly, though less than 5% of physicians in Nazi Germany were women, according to David, Fleischhacker and Hohn, the majority of physicians arrested on charges of abortion were female.²³ They explain that many female physicians were married gynaecologists, and with Nazi legislation preventing them from practicing (except in their husbands’ practices, according to Koonz),²⁴ women would have continued working behind closed doors.²⁵ Here again is evidence of female resistance against the regime, and possibly on the part of these women, a sense of gender-based compassion springing from understanding of the desperate position of their patients.

Unviable Offspring

What the Nazis truly wanted from women was for them to produce a large pool of healthy, racially and physically sound offspring. What, then, became of those children who were born with defects, be they hereditary or otherwise, which rendered them less

²² M. Potts, P. Diggory, and J. Peel, *Abortion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. 381-382.

²³ David, Fleischhacker and Hohn, "Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany," 93.

²⁴ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 186.

²⁵ David, Fleischhacker and Hohn, "Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany," 93.

than desirable to the Nazi order? A speech by Emilie Muller-Zadow, a member of the National Socialist Women's Organization given in 1936 sheds some light on the attitude towards these offspring;

In the post-war period a real mania prevailed in clinics and institutions to keep premature babies or infants with the most serious hereditary diseases alive for a shorter or longer time in incubators and with the most sophisticated measures, even those babies whose chances for a full life every doctor judged as next to nothing. These experiments cost great amounts of the national wealth, while in the homes of the unemployed, normal children died from a lack of bare necessities.²⁶

The implication was that that 'unviable' offspring likely did not receive much in the way of postnatal care under the Nazi rule, or if they did, it was against the party's wishes. The emphasis on health in offspring was great, and those who did not fit this criteria were often murdered, especially (according to Michael Obladen) those with traits such as 'idiocy, mongolism, micro- or hydrocephaly, malformed limbs, head, or spine, and palsies'.²⁷ One must consider what this would have meant for the mothers of such children; it is highly unlikely that a birth defect, hereditary or otherwise, could have stifled the effects of mother-child bonding. Thus the Nazi policy which dictated the withholding of help which could have prolonged the child's life would have seemed monstrous to those faced with losing their children.

In addition, in the same movement which sought to eliminate racial elements from the German populace, the Nazis sought to remove hereditary defects from the reproductive pool by prohibiting the affected from having children. In June 1933, Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick tried to outline the so-called dangers of people with disabilities

²⁶ Emilie Muller-Zadow, "Mothers Who Gave Us the Future," 1936. Published in Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle (eds.), *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*, London: Routledge, 2002.

²⁷ Michael Obladen, "Despising the Weak: Long Shadows of Infant Murder in Nazi Germany," *Archives of Disease in Childhood. Fetal and Neonatal Edition* 101:3, 2016. 190.

reproducing, through such logic as 'feeble-minded people have more children than the racially superior, and thus the quality of the German people was declining dangerously' as well as linking criminals and various other outsiders to physical and mental disabilities.²⁸ This infers, if not confirms, that disabled children were not wanted because they were considered less valuable to the Aryan race than physically and mentally healthy children. The Nazis encouraged hostility towards disability, be it mental or physical, because the afflicted were not desired by the public.

According to Obladen, the systematic extermination of unviable infants was often done in secret, with sedatives 'applied in a dose depressing respiration which led to a slow death disguised as natural.'²⁹ Obladen claims that 'A hundred physicians were directly involved in killing, and many more including eminent paediatricians in reporting infants'. The issue took a long time to come to light because it was carefully concealed, and records destroyed on the regime's collapse. While prosecutions were opened, few verdicts were ever passed.³⁰

Illegitimate Motherhood

In the 1930s and 40s, illegitimate motherhood still possessed something of a social stigma. Religion, social and family expectations all contributed to the widely-held belief that children should only be born within wedlock, to uphold 'traditional family values'. But despite the Nazis' claim that they themselves were a deeply pro-'family values' movement, it seems they did not shy away from undercutting these values when it benefited their ultimate aim of multiplying the Aryan population of Germany. Running

²⁸ Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. 75.

²⁹ Obladen, "Despising the Weak," 190.

³⁰ Obladen, "Despising the Weak," 190 - 193.

parallel to the forced sterilization of the 'racially undesirable' people was a movement to bolster the reproduction of the healthy Aryan populace through any means necessary, even those which went against religious, societal and family values. In a brief article in the *Singleton Argus* [New South Wales] in 1940, it was claimed that the SS had decreed that 'every woman should have a war baby'; that even those who had stopped having children were being encouraged to reproduce in order to 'populate the colonies which Germany will take from Great Britain'.³¹ But the article makes no mention of the true lengths which certain members of the party wished the German populace to go to in order to produce Nazi Germany's ideal population.

On 28 October 1939, shortly after the war had broken out, Heinrich Himmler released a controversial directive to members of the SS. He states that

Beyond the limits of bourgeois laws and conventions, which are perhaps necessary in other circumstances, it can be a noble task for German women and girls of good blood to become even outside marriage, not light-heartedly but out of a deep moral seriousness, mothers of the children of soldiers going to war of whom fate alone knows whether they will return or die for Germany.³²

Thus the 'good' genes of unmarried men and women would continue to another generation, despite the moral objections of those bound to tradition, and the war need not deplete the birth rate in the same way that the First World War had. Himmler claimed that during that war, German soldiers 'decided from a sense of responsibility to have no more children during the war so that his wife would not be left in need and distress after his death.' Himmler went on to say that Nazi soldiers need not fear such

³¹ "Nazi Women Should Have War Babies," *Singleton Argus*, 23 February 1940. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article81966250>

³² "Geheimerlass des Reichsführer-SS für die gesamte SS und Polizei" 28 October 1939, reprinted in Norbert Westenrieder, *Deutsche Frauen und Mädchen!* Düsseldorf, 1984. Translated in Jeremy Noakes (ed.), *Nazism, 1919-1939, Vol. 4: The German Home Front in World War II*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998. 368-69.

repercussions, because of regulations put in place. Firstly, there would be special delegates chosen by Himmler personally to assume guardianship in the name of the SS of all those children, both legitimate and illegitimate, of 'good blood' whose fathers had been killed in the war. Secondly, during the war, in the absence of the father, the mothers and children would be taken care of by the SS.³³ While this certainly could calm the fears of married men who were hesitant about further reproduction burdening their wives during the war, it did not remove the qualms about deliberate illegitimate reproduction.

Himmler himself faced backlash for his 'procreation decree' once the public became aware of it, and was forced to publish a response in January 1940 (though evidence seems that beyond that, little was done to resolve the outrage caused by the matter). Society, be it churches, politicians or simply those of conservative views, refused to accept Himmler's population policies which flew in the face of their traditional moral values. Himmler's statement was not an apology by any means; rather he addressed the 'misunderstandings' that the public had about his original decree. For example, he argued that encouraging couples to reproduce 'beyond the limits of bourgeois laws and conventions' did not mean that single men could approach married women. He points out rather bluntly that 'two parties are needed for seduction: the one who wants to seduce and the one who consents to being seduced.'³⁴ Himmler then went on to state that 'German women are the best guardians of their own honour'.³⁵ This could be read to mean that it was up to German women to preserve the integrity of their marriage, and the blame for failing to do so fell squarely on them. What this seems to tell us is that while Himmler was encouraging unmarried women to engage in reproduction out

³³ "Geheimerlass des Reichsführer-SS für die gesamte SS und Polizei," translated in Noakes, *Nazism*, 1998. 369.

³⁴ *Aus deutschen Urkunden 1935-1945*, translated in Noakes, *Nazism*, 372.

³⁵ Noakes, *Aus deutschen Urkunden, Nazism*, 372.

of wedlock for racial reasons, he was not encouraging deliberate promiscuity or a loosening of the moral rules imposed on women. Thus it seems that 'family values' were not being *totally* abolished by this proposed movement.

Himmler concluded his statement by addressing the SS, saying

It is up to you SS men, as at all times when ideological views have to be put across, to win the understanding of German men and women for this sacred issue so vital to our people and which is beyond the reach of all cheap jokes and mockery.³⁶

This could be an insight into public opinion on the matter – both the outrage which prompted the statement itself and his closing words suggested an overwhelmingly negative public viewpoint on Himmler's scheme. An article in New South Wales' *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* from February 1950 backed up this conclusion; it discusses a trial in which seven Germans were charged with alleged participation in Himmler's 'mass production' programme (meaning, of course, the 'mass production' of Aryan children). Himmler's former Chief-of-Staff, Paul Wolff, claimed in the trial that women opposed the order outright.³⁷ This speaks of a rejection of those parts of the regime which threatened or sought to remove a woman's individual autonomy and/or threaten her social standing – women's places in society were more important to them than the wishes of the regime in this regard.

In the case of the issues of modernity, then, the Nazis very clearly sought a return to more conservative, traditional roles. The emphasis on motherhood which was essentially the focal point of Nazi policies for women meant that the freedom of choice brought about by the beginnings of sexual liberation had to be erased. But while the

³⁶ Noakes, *Aus deutschen Urkunden, Nazism*, 372.

³⁷ "Nazi Women Opposed "Mass Production", " *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*.

Nazis could drive abortion underground, limit access to birth control and attempt to police potential couplings based on the racial and physical health of any theoretical children that could be produced, they could not undo the ideas which had sprung forth as a result of the push towards modernity that had come about in the Weimar period, nor could they keep women from retaining and using this knowledge to their own ends.

Chapter 3: The Party

The Nazi Party was inarguably established and led by men. At the very first meeting of the NSDAP in 1921, a unanimous decision was passed that 'a woman can never be accepted into the leadership of the party and into the leadership committee'.¹ The Nazi Party held a particularly rigid view of what a woman should be, and one of their aims was to return women to their traditional roles of 'biological and family functions',² which had dictated and limited the lives of women for centuries. To quote Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels, 'women [were] unfit by nature to be competitors of men in the same occupation, and instead must adorn their own particular sphere.'³ Naturally, this drew the ire of many women who were insulted by the marginalization and sexism implicit in this notion – but many women supported the Nazi Party, too. This chapter aims to explain the appeal of the Party as well as examining women's positive and negative viewpoints on the Nazi regime to shed some light on this.

The role of women in the Weimar Republic was remarkably progressive for the era in which the republic was established. In fact, Germany was one of the first nations in Europe to give women the vote. The Weimar constitution was written based on the American model, and article 109 in particular stipulated equal rights for women by stating that 'all Germans are equal before the law. Men and women have the same fundamental civil rights and duties.'⁴ This meant that for the first time in German history, women could not only vote, but serve as elected officials in the Reichstag.

While the number of elected women remained disproportionately low (at no point in

¹ Joachim C Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, Munich: R. Piper & Co, 1970. 263.

² Karl Dietrich-Braucher, *The German Dictatorship*, Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1970. 421.

³ *Women under Hitler Fascism: prepared by the Commission Investigating Fascist Activities for the National Committee to Aid Victims of German Fascism*, New York City: Workers Library, 1934. 4.

⁴ Weimar Constitution, Article 109

the Weimar Republic did the number of female legislators exceed 10% of the total government representation)⁵ this was likely due to difficulty adjusting to the new order - the presence of women in government at all was a remarkable step forward in the era.

But Weimar, for all its progress and development in many different areas, was a system unsuited to the tumultuous era in which it existed. The 1929 stock market crash hit Germany hard, and as a result unemployment rates soared. World trade was ruined and Germany, still recovering from the after-effects of the First World War, suffered many hardships for it. People lost everything, and tent cities sprung up around developed areas.⁶ Amidst this financial chaos, discontent bloomed, and many blamed the Weimar Republic as the source of all their ills. Herman Mau and Helmut Krausnick also point to the collapse of the German Monarchy as a factor in this dissatisfaction, calling it 'a shock that affected the deepest layers of consciousness' of the German people.⁷

The Monarchy had been the established leadership – first of Prussia and then, since 1871, of a united Germany. Upon its collapse, it became necessary to assemble some new method of leadership, but the new order soon began to fail as well. Consider the effect this would have on women; struggling alongside men to find work to feed their families, their children, elderly and infirm hungry and dirty without a stable roof over their heads or an assured source of income. For all Weimar's positive impact on the lives and liberation of women, the failure of its governments to maintain financial stability and acceptable living conditions for their people undoubtedly led to

⁵ Marc Debus and Martin Ejnar Hansen, "Representation of Women in the Parliament of the Weimar Republic: Evidence from Roll Call Votes," *Politics & Gender* 10:3, 2014. 341-364.

⁶ Otis C. Mitchell, *Hitler Over Germany: The Establishment of a Dictatorship (1918-1934)*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983. 176.

⁷Hermann Mau and Helmut Krausnick, *German History 1933-1945: An Assessment by German Historians*, Letchworth: The Garden City Press, 1983. 38.

resentment on the part of women trying to survive and provide in a difficult post-war age.

Why did Women vote for the Nazi Party?

Why women chose and voted for the Nazis to be their saviours from the cesspit of nationwide poverty is still being debated. Some early assessments, such as that by Joachim Fest in 1970, point to a kind of cult worship of Hitler as a reason why women may have voted for the Nazi Party. Fest states that 'quite simply, [women] discovered, chose and idolized him'.⁸ Evans identifies this as one of the most popular early explanations as to why women chose to vote for Hitler; the notion that German women were 'letting their hearts rule their heads in a characteristically female way'.⁹ Fest likens the 'pleasurable character' of Hitler's speeches to the 'public sexual acts of primitive tribes',¹⁰ in an attempt to explain the emotional fervour of Nazi rallies, but in doing so seems to suggest an illicit undertone to the female voter's attraction to the Party – suggesting women's sexuality had a role to play in their political leanings, a frankly bizarre point of view.

This opinion is indeed contradicted by an interview in Alison Owing's *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, in which Frau Regina Frenkenfeld, a former agricultural home economics teacher who had joined the Nazi Party because she was 'young and enthusiastic', responded to Owings' insinuation of Hitler's attractiveness with incredulity, replying that 'he had something fascinating in speech and appearance, in his

⁸ Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, 265.

⁹ Richard J. Evans, "German Women and the Triumph of Hitler," *The Journal of Modern History* 48: 1, 1976. 125.

¹⁰ Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, 266.

ability to convince . . . but sexy, I can only laugh. I don't know if he was sexy.'¹¹ When asked if any other women she knew found Hitler attractive, she replied 'Nein. We talked and palavered about everything possible in regard to Adolf Hitler, but whether he was sexy or not we did not talk about'.¹²

It seems Hitler himself also believed that the support of women came from a vested emotional interest in him. In 1933, he said that 'women have always been among my staunchest supporters. They feel my victory is their victory'.¹³ There can be little doubt that Hitler's legendary charisma played a part in drawing voters to him, or that at least some women idolised Hitler – though whether it was adoration in a purely political sense or a sexual obsession is debatable and likely varied from woman to woman.

Certainly Hitler claimed to be abstaining from marriage in order to keep up his appeal to female voters,¹⁴ but to what extent this was a personal preference instead of a political tactic is unknown. Eberhard Jäckel argues against the sexual aspect of Hitler's appeal, claiming that the dominant feeling for Hitler was not sexual in nature but more 'an almost childlike devotion to a beloved father'.¹⁵ Similarly, Charu Gupta argues against the notion that women voted for Hitler out of a purely emotional attachment, stating that 'this analysis fails to consider women's capacity for political thought and action. There is an alleged tendency for women to make political choices on the basis of candidates' personal qualities rather than by reference to issues.'¹⁶

Arguing that women only voted for Hitler on the basis of his fame and charisma seems

¹¹ Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, London: Penguin, 1995. 402.

¹² Owings, *Frauen*, 403.

¹³ Helen Boak, "Women in Weimar Germany: The 'Frauenfrage' and the Female Vote." in Richard Bessel and E J Feuchtwanger (eds), *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, London: Croon Helm, 1981. 155.

¹⁴ Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, 264.

¹⁵ Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler in History*, University Press of New England, 1984. 94.

¹⁶ Charu Gupta, "Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany," *Economic and Political Weekly* 26:17, 1991. 44.

to deny women their own political agency. It cannot be denied that women were facing most if not all of the same problems and hardships as men in the difficult times in which they found themselves; they had lost a war, lost their money and lost their national identity. Gupta also points out that at times some women would have been hesitant to vote for themselves and thus would cast votes to whichever party the male members of their family preferred.¹⁷ After all, voting was still a relatively new concept to some women, as it had been less than fifteen years (at the time of the key elections of 1930 and 1932) since they had achieved the right to vote in 1918.

To argue that the Nazi Party appealed to *all* who voted for them is a vast oversimplification – for many it may have been an ambivalent choice instead of a dedicated decision. In addition, women had other allegiances to consider; region, religion, class and family preferences would all have factored into a woman's political decision. Detlev Peukert points to the old elites left over from the Monarchy, whom he claims 'repudiated democracy and then, when the authoritarian road proved to be a dead end, threw their lot in with Hitler'.¹⁸ This is an example of a class group dedicating themselves to the Nazi cause (in this case, out of an intense dislike of the Weimar Republic) – and thus any women within this group would have been expected to vote for the Nazi Party, personal preferences or reservations aside, for the perceived good of their fellows.

However, this does not mean that the appeal of the Nazi Party should be dismissed or underestimated. After all, at least one in every three Germans who voted at all voted for Hitler at least once.¹⁹ The Nazi Party went out of their way to be noticed, with 'noisy

¹⁷ Gupta, "Politics of Gender," 45.

¹⁸ Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 272.

¹⁹ Jäckel, *Hitler in History*, 91.

and violent SA demonstrations, tireless propaganda forces, turbulent mass meetings and interminable speeches'.²⁰ They held voter recruitment drives and sent national speakers to rural areas.²¹ In short, they drew attention to themselves. For a nation whose government was flagging and for whom day-to-day life was becoming an increasing struggle, the Nazi Party were undoubtedly attractive with their promises of a newer, greater Germany. And within that new Germany, they promised women that they would 'secure their status better than democracy had ever done'.²² They argued that the civil, economic and political equalities laid out in the Weimar Constitution were not so much a boon as a problem, because they had 'exposed women to the same hardships as men'.²³ By their reasoning, women were suffering needlessly. Should they retreat back into the domestic sphere, the economy would heal for it, and they in themselves need not worry about work or financial matters because that was the responsibility of their husband.

The promise of a secure status at home, the veneration of the housewife and mother, and the promise of greater autonomy within their specific sphere were not, especially during the financial hardships of the Great Depression, offers to be sniffed at. The Nazis argued that the emancipation of women meant the return to their natural sphere of femininity, not the further blurring of the lines between genders. They held firm to the belief that the sexes were 'equal but not the same'²⁴ - that men were the natural breadwinners, workers, soldiers and politicians, while a woman's role was as the wife and mother, ensuring the health and happiness of her family. By establishing

²⁰ Dietrich-Braucher, *The German Dictatorship*, 232.

²¹ Dietrich-Braucher, *The German Dictatorship*, 228.

²² Elizabeth Harvey, "Visions of the Volk: German Women and the Far Right from Kaiserreich to Third Reich," *Journal of Women's History* 16:3, 2004. 161.

²³ Julia Sneeringer, *Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. 231.

²⁴ Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, 266.

housework and motherhood as essential to the country, the Nazis were essentially validating 'women's work', arguing that their contribution to the National Community was just as important as men's.

There was a sense of urgency (perhaps deliberately) placed around the need for women to live according to Nazi views in order for society to rebuild. In 1933, author Carola Struve asserted that 'woman, by dint of her intuitive capacity for empathy is the mediator between nature (God) and man', that 'nature has placed the task of solving all ethical quandaries in the hands of woman and that nature will not allow for any disobedience in the form of distancing oneself from her laws.'²⁵ What this implies was that the modern woman was an aberration against nature, and that only through a return to the old order could the crumbling Germany be restored. Struve seemingly confirmed this in stating that 'contemporary forms of state are wholly unnatural in terms of their most fundamental economic, cultural, and intellectual-spiritual structures and that they therefore reflect distorted growth.'²⁶ While admittedly sounding far-fetched, one must once again consider the context of the time: the desperation, the suffering and the lack of hope. Any explanation for their hardships, especially those which seemingly had a solution, would have been appealing.

Even some members of the Feminist movement began to gravitate towards this ideal. Matthew Stibbe states that they 'sought to distinguish themselves from their religious, bourgeois and socialist counterparts in their outright rejection of emancipation as a hoax: equal rights for women, they argued, had merely meant 'equal rights to be exploited'.²⁷ What Stibbe means by this is that these 'Nazi Feminists' saw emancipation

²⁵ Carola Struve, *Woman's Freedom and Freedom of the Volk on Foundations of Camaraderie*, 1933. Published in Rabinbach and Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*.

²⁶ Struve, *Woman's Freedom*, 1933.

²⁷ Matthew Stibbe, "Women and the Nazi State," *History Today* 11:35, 1993. 3.

as a fraud, allowing themselves to be exploited by the Capitalist system, and that therefore retreating into the home as the Nazis suggested would be true liberation because they could live on their own terms.

Solving the Big Problems

The Nazi plan for relieving the congestion of the labour market (an effect of the Great Depression drastically decreasing employment) was to dismiss women in order to free jobs up for the men. Jarman, writing in 1956, states that this actually won them political support from women.²⁸ Jarman perhaps believed that women were eager to leave work, a belief possibly brought about by the social and gender norms of his own era. The Nazi policy of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* could have an appeal upon examination; it freed women from the stress of having to find work, as it was expected that they would depend on their husbands, for whom more work would be made available. In the shambles that was the job market during the Great Depression, this could have seemed an agreeable way out of struggling to find work for themselves. After all, even before the Depression, women were paid less than men and had less opportunity for promotion.²⁹ While explaining the position that a woman of the Weimar republic may have found herself in, Evans quotes Renate Bridenthal, who argued that

Condemned for her abandonment of her family, suffering consequently from a sense of failure not only at home but at work where her socially induced feeling of inferiority was reinforced by low pay and advancement, it would not be surprising if the woman of the Weimar Republic failed to embrace her supposed emancipation and even rejected it in politics.³⁰

Here again the appeal is clear; an exit from the crumbling, frightening world of the

²⁸ T.L. Jarman, *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany*, New York University Press, 1956. 189.

²⁹ Dietrich-Braucher, *The German Dictatorship*, 421.

³⁰ Evans, "German Women and the Triumph of Hitler," 133.

labour force into the relative stability and comfort of the domestic sphere, supported in doing so by her husband, her community and the Nazi Party.

Whatever the reasons of each individual woman who voted for the Nazi Party, each was part of a larger group that was instrumental, as Hitler himself acknowledged, in allowing the Nazis to take power and establish the Third Reich atop the ashes of the Weimar Republic. From a modern perspective, women willingly voting for a party which sought to reverse the strides taken in women's liberation and freedom of choice seems paradoxical – as though they were seeking to undo all of the things that they had achieved since the rise of first-wave feminism in the late 19th century. But one must consider the historical context before making judgement. While it may well be true that a proportion of women were staunch Nazis and thus voted for the party out of loyalty and dedication to the cause, many other women voted for the party for reasons of family or out of hope that the Nazis could indeed bring about the much-needed 'return to order' which they promised. The most important factor to consider is that the Nazi Party were capitalizing on a financial crisis in which thousands were struggling – both men and women were searching for a way to rebuild the collapsing nation, and the Nazis knew that if they presented themselves as the only ones capable of doing so, the people would flock to them. Thus the Third Reich emerged, much like Weimar before it, because of the desperation of a suffering country.

Supporting the Nazis

In this instance, understanding the position of women requires understanding the attitude of the populace as a whole. Hitler had promised stability and societal reform,

as discussed previously, to the crumbling Germany. In fact, the list of promises Hitler made to a run-down, starving population who were still in mourning not only for those lost in the First World War but for their national identity, pride and economy read like a veritable Christmas list for the nation: A modern highway system, progressive environmental legislation, spectacular foreign-policy triumphs, an overall economic miracle.³¹ Therefore, at least on paper, supporting the regime when coming from this position was understandable. Perhaps not fanaticism, but general acceptance or even tentative hope would have won out.

For the Nazi Party, the seizure of power in 1933 by no means meant that the regime was secure. As with any ruling system, it could only last if the public was placated (through contentment or through fear). Above all, what was needed to retain the necessary respect of the people was an idol - an embodiment of the ideals, attributes and passion of the Party. The Führer was famously charismatic, and it was from this attribute that his authority was derived, and which had won him the leadership of Germany in the first place. Hitler claimed to embody the nation, having been called forth to lead it; he alone would possess authority over political and social change, evolution and life.³² His authority was absolute and indisputable: 'the will of the Führer, in whatever form it is expressed, creates law and alters existing law.'³³ Yet despite these claims, he never formally established his authority in the sense of a constitution or legal documentation; instead, his authority derived from his relationship with the German people – the respect, admiration and submission of both men and women. Frau Charlotte Müller, in an interview with Owings, attributes some of Hitler's support to

³¹ Catherine A. Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2014. 97.

³² Jeremy Noakes, "Hitler and the Nazi State," in Jane Caplan (ed.) *Nazi Germany*, Oxford University Press, 2008. 74.

³³ Ernst R. Huber, *Verfassungsrecht des Grossdeutschen Reiches*, Hamburg, 1939. Quoted in Noakes, "Hitler and the Nazi State," 74.

desperation – ‘They did it because they were afraid and they wanted work, because there was a lot of unemployment. Many of us workers gave in. It happened.’³⁴

To understand why the Third Reich’s essential dictatorship structure would have been accepted, one must once again consider the recent historical events, still fresh in the memory of the people; the collapse of the German Monarchy, the loss of the First World War, and then the failure of the Weimar system. The Monarchy, which had lasted a good deal longer than Weimar, must have seemed more stable in hindsight, and thus firm autocratic leadership would have appeared to be the solution. As Mildred S. Wertheimer put it in 1935:

[The German People had] been educated to follow, not to lead, and resented the responsibility which a democratic government places on the individual. They felt comforted by Hitler in their distress, deriving a sense of comradeship from the Nazi movement, the marching shoulder to shoulder, the flags and the pomp and circumstance.³⁵

In addition, it is worth noting that the largest group drawn to the Nazi Party had another good reason for it – National Socialism was a movement composed predominantly of youth, as Wertheimer explains, because

The German birth rate during the years just before the war was particularly high and the children born during that period, now adults between twenty and thirty, have undergone the severest hardships. They have never known the security which seemed largely a matter of course to their parents; they have experienced only war, revolution and the difficulties of the post-war era.³⁶

The largest draw to the Nazi party was inarguably Hitler himself. Undoubtedly eloquent and passionate, seemingly personable, Hitler had painted himself as a leader that Germany needed. He bolstered pride in their country, affirmed their opinion that they had not been militarily defeated in the decade prior (‘We didn’t win and we didn’t lose’

³⁴ Owings, *Frauen*, 159.

³⁵ Mildred S. Wertheimer, *Germany Under Hitler*, New York: Foreign policy association, 1935. 13.

³⁶ Wertheimer, *Germany Under Hitler*, 14.

was the opinion of most of Germany regarding the First World War³⁷) and played off of their anger at the perceived betrayal that their nation had suffered when the Versailles treaty was signed. In stoking tempers, promising restorations and stroking the national ego, Hitler caught and kept many people's attentions. Catherine A. Epstein states that 'at a time when the popularity of Nazism suffered due to rising prices, flat wages, and ongoing unemployment, Hitler generated renewed regime support each time he circumvented another Versailles restriction'.³⁸ Hitler used the demolishing of this much-hated treaty to bolster support when his regime hit hard times, renewing faith and confidence in himself and his party by undoing the offences of the past.

It should be noted, however, that there were so few in Germany who did *not* condemn the treaty of Versailles that, as Fritzsche points out, it could not have been the major factor in realigning German voting behaviour prior to the Nazi seizure of power – Social Democrats and German Nationalists alike protested against it, and the public's overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards it pushed moderate politicians to extreme nationalist positions – though of course they disagreed on the best way to deal with the *Schmachfrieden* (the Shameful Peace) of Versailles.³⁹ Fritzsche concludes that while the treaty of Versailles weakened Weimar by giving legitimacy to the right-wing nationalists who opposed democracy, it was likely the effects of the Great Depression which led to the Nazi seizure of power.⁴⁰ Therefore it seems that the treaty of Versailles was simply used as a tool by which Hitler could demonstrate that he was acting in the best interests of the German people.

³⁷ L. Ames Knowlton Jr., *Berlin after the Armistice*, Tucker-Kenworthy Co, 1919. Quoted in Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. 152.

³⁸ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 113.

³⁹ Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, 153.

⁴⁰ Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, 154.

In addition, for women in particular, it seems there was a degree of underestimation in regards to how extreme the Nazi policies towards them actually were. Stephenson references a questionnaire sent to all political parties by the BDF (Federation of German Women's Associations) in March 1933 which asked how many female candidates were being presented by each. She states that this was clearly based on two assumptions; 'that elections still meant something in Germany, and that political parties still wielded influence and would continue to do so.'⁴¹ What this implies is that the extent to which the Nazis would wield control was unforeseen, and the destruction of the women's movement under the Nazis was unanticipated. Women who voted for the Nazi party likely saw the positives that the party could bring to their country without realizing what it meant for their gender's social position.

A Truly Popular Regime?

The speed with which a Nazified nation sprung up after the seizure of power in January 1933 meant that there was little to protect those who had previously openly opposed the Nazi Party. According to Jill Stephenson, it was those on the political left, such as the Social Democratic and Communist parties, who were the first to be affected by this, as 'Nazi stormtroopers ran amok unchecked in spring 1933, abusing and virtually kidnapping known or suspected opponents. Many socialists and Communists were rounded up by officers of party or state and detained without trial for months.'⁴² Open opposition to the Nazi government was dangerous right from the start. While they had been known to be violent as a mere fringe party, they were now violent and in total control, with nobody to hold them accountable. Hitler's police state, with its brutal

⁴¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 27.

⁴² Jill Stephenson, "Inclusion: Building the National Community in Propaganda and Practice," in Jane Caplan (ed.) *Nazi Germany*, Oxford University Press, 2008. 116.

sanctions and encouragement of suspicion, ensured that everybody, even those who opposed the regime in secret, were careful (at least when in the open) to conform.

Nonetheless, the popularity of the Führer and the popularity of the regime itself appear to have been two separate opinions. On 29 November 1943, an SD Report on the 'Basic Questions Regarding the Mood and Attitude of the German People' turned up some interesting results:

While the Führer is the only person who is considered capable of mastering the present situation and future problems, the remaining leadership of the Reich is no longer trusted unconditionally. In particular, the failure of promises and prophecies to be fulfilled has seriously undermined trust in individual leaders as far as many compatriots are concerned.⁴³

What this meant, in short, was while the people remained loyal to Hitler, their faith in the Nazi government was waning. The report explains that this was the result of a number of factors; firstly, a loss of faith in the media, owing to the biased reports portraying negatives as positives (for example, a military withdrawal as a success) and constant negative portrayals of enemies such as England and America.⁴⁴ Such blatant bias often decreases faith in the sources of the materials. The second problem affecting faith in the government was the behaviour of Nazi leaders at local, lower or middle levels. Issues such as illicit trading, inter-governmental favours and factors such as the flaunting of wealth and power alerted individuals to the fact that Nazi officials were not nearly as affected by the wartime restrictions imposed on everybody else.⁴⁵

At what point the separation between the Führer and the Nazi Party came about is unclear. While a Nationalistic figure such as Hitler may have been popular, this does not

⁴³ SD Report to the Party Chancellery on 'Basic Questions Regarding the Mood and Attitude of the German People' 29 November 1943. Translated in Noakes, *Nazism*, 550.

⁴⁴ SD Report, Noakes, *Nazism*, 550.

⁴⁵ SD Report, Noakes, *Nazism*, 550.

mean his regime was embraced as much as he was. In regards to the more rural areas of Germany, Walter Rinderle and Bernard Norling point out that

Although the 'Nazi Revolution' began in Berlin it had to be carried out by the rank and file members of local NSDAP organizations. These varied widely in size, unity, fervor, and quality of leadership. Local party organizations also chose diverse methods and timing in pursuit of their objectives. Some communities were farther removed geographically from central authorities than others. Insularity and suspicion of outsiders was by no means uniform. Some localities prized their churches and local institutions more than others. Many workers, farmers, and other special interest groups accepted the new regime externally but never became enthusiastic, unreserved Nazis.⁴⁶

This in itself is perhaps the point: acceptance of the regime did not equal fervent belief or even support. While outward resistance was dangerous at best and a death sentence at worst, small acts of rebellion were not unheard of. Women refusing to give the 'Heil Hitler' greeting,⁴⁷ worker's strikes, listening to foreign broadcasts or even jokes about the Führer were not unheard of.⁴⁸ It seems acceptance, rather than embracement, was a common reaction to the establishment of the Third Reich. Even though they largely agreed with the basic principles of national regeneration, anti-Marxism and anti-Semitism, Nazism never achieved all of the overwhelming social changes that it intended – it never penetrated all aspects of German life, try though it might, as evidenced in previous chapters.

This fact is evidenced on the female side through the way that many women maintained their autonomy throughout the years of Nazi rule – despite encouragement to the contrary, they continued to dress, act and live on their own terms, not necessarily completely rejecting Nazi ideals, but not fully embracing them either. It was

⁴⁶ Walter Rinderle and Bernard Norling, *The Nazi Impact on a German Village*, University Press of Kentucky, 1993. 107.

⁴⁷ "Nazi Women Lax in Heiling Hitler," *Daily Mercury* [Mackay, Qld.: 1906 – 1954] 11 October 1941.

⁴⁸ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 112.

acceptance of the new order, nothing more. While many women supported Hitler, this did not necessarily mean support for the regime – an act of faith that the Nazis could restore the country, perhaps, or a simple case of mass hero worship, as suggested by Frau Frenkenfeld’s words. Whatever the case, the fact remains that the Nazis could never have gained power without support from the very women whom they sought to marginalize and segregate. This does not detract from women’s agency, however – it is entirely possible that these women knew that the regime would require compromise in order to maintain their desired lifestyles, or else simply adapted once the Nazi policies took hold.

Chapter 4: Women at Work

From their earliest days, the Nazis were hostile to those who did not fit their rigid view of the ideal community. What this meant for German women in the era of the Nazi ascension and the Third Reich was that those who had chosen to study and/or undertake certain professions found themselves demonized, because they had, in the Nazi view, disobeyed the natural order and denied the God-given role assigned to their gender. The Great Depression saw a rise in the popularity of this stance, not least because the ejection of women from high-paying roles saw more career opportunities for men. Had the economy been stable, this discriminatory stance would likely have decreased the Nazis' popularity, but times being what they were, it became a point of agreement.¹

As discussed in previous chapters, marriage, housework and child-rearing was the ideal situation for a Nazi woman. Employment and financial responsibility fell to the men. Women were not intended to be financially independent. From father to husband, they were to depend on the men in their lives for financial support. What this meant was that finding a husband was, in the Nazi worldview, of chief importance, and taking care of her husband and family in the domestic sphere was a woman's chief purpose. Joseph Goebbels famously summed this up in a metaphor:

The mission of woman is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world. This is not at all as rude and unmodern as it sounds. The female bird pretties herself for her mate and hatches the eggs for him. In exchange, the mate takes care of gathering the food, stands guard and wards off the enemy.²

¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 11.

² Joseph Goebbels, *Michael: Ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern*, Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Frz. Eher Nachf, 1929. Translated in George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966. 43.

The stigma around working women naturally extended to highly-educated women, which was attacked as a 'Jewish-intellectual' concept. The 'liberal-democratic-Marxist' practice of encouraging women to achieve the same career goals as men was also frowned upon, because women and men were fundamentally different, albeit complementary.³ Even before 1933, there had been discussion of limiting entry to senior schools of those whom they felt 'unsuited to academic education'. Sure enough, the Nazis succeeded in reducing the numbers of students in both senior schools and universities (further than they had wished, in the latter case, as Stephenson observes).⁴ Childhood and adolescent education also provided an opportunity to further instil Nazi values in the German youth – both in regards to the Party and their own destined roles within it. Thus, the education system was utilized to educate both genders on the individuality of their role within this new society, and the expectations therefore placed upon them.

This does not mean, however, that all women did during the Nazi era was domestic or menial work. The Nazi party fully intended for their beliefs and influence to penetrate every aspect of life, inside and outside the home, so leaving women largely to their own devices would have been counter-productive. It was likely to this end that the *NS-Frauenschaft* (National Socialist Women's League) and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) were so prevalent – indoctrination of youths, ensuring the reliability and the belief of women, as well as a simple way to gauge an individual's reaction to the Party by creating opportunities for involvement.

Ultimately, it was the Second World War which forced the Nazis to about-face on their

³ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 116.

⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 120.

policies regarding working women – the labour shortage led to a call for an ‘all hands on deck’ policy, which encouraged women to come and work in factories and on farms. Evidence suggests that this move was unpopular, as I will discuss, perhaps because it exposed the hypocrisy and the disorganisation of the regime, revealing the not unsubstantial gap between Nazi ideology and Nazi reality.

Women’s Employment

The Weimar Republic had seen no small amount of advancement in regards to women’s roles in the professional world. While the proportion of women in employment (the ratio of employed women to the total female population of Germany) remained largely steady during the establishment of the Republic (31.2 per cent in 1907 to 35.6 per cent in 1925), there were significant changes in regards to the internal positions of this group. Over the aforementioned period, the proportion of domestic employees and farm workers fell by as much as 5.5 per cent, while white collar and industrial workers increased.⁵ As Peukert points out, this is hardly a sufficient enough change to justify the passion with which the issue of women’s employment was debated in Weimar – the answer, he states, was the ‘emergence of certain clear shifts within the gender-based division of labour, which in turn affected the perceived image and social role of women.’⁶ This was certainly a subject which had captured the attention of the Nazi Party. Hitler stated in a speech in September 1934 that ‘it is not true, as Jewish intellectuals assert, that respect depends on the overlapping of the spheres of activity

⁵ Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 96.

⁶ Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 96.

of the sexes; this respect demands that neither sex should try to do that which belongs to the sphere of the other.’⁷

The *ABC of National Socialism* (1933) stated that

[a German woman] had no desire to work in the factory and no desire to enter parliament. A comfortable home, a loving husband and a multitude of happy children are much more to her taste. National Socialism will ensure that the men get jobs again so that they can establish and feed a family and so that they can rescue women from the current need to work.⁸

Here we see one of the justifications – this was not taking opportunities from women so much as rescuing them from the terrible position which the crumbling economy had put them in. The marriage loan scheme, discussed previously, was supposed to be a further lure away from employment and into domesticity. Nonetheless, this scheme was not ultimately successful – millions of German women, both lower and middle-class, continued to work in the mid-1930s, a number which only increased when the rearmament programme took off in 1936.⁹

This did not mean that all doors remained open during the years of the Third Reich, however. Certain professional careers which were deemed unfeminine became out-of-bounds for women to practice or attempt to enter into. Examples of such careers include politics, the practice of law and journalism – especially if the woman’s racial or political background was also questionable by Nazi standards.¹⁰ Of course, the severity of the issue was understated or smoothed over on the public front – Frau Magda

⁷ Speech given to the NS- Frauenschaft on 8 September 1934. Translated in Pine, *Hitler’s ‘National Community’*.

⁸ *Das ABC des Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin, 1933. Quoted in Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 84.

⁹ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 85.

¹⁰ Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 242.

Goebbels stated to a female reporter of the London *Daily Mail* that the expulsion of women from jobs was 'highly exaggerated', going on to confirm that there were only three professions from which women had been excluded - the military (as, then, was the case globally), government and law. If a German girl was faced with a choice between marriage and career, she was naturally encouraged towards marriage as this was 'undoubtedly what is best for a woman'.¹¹

From an outside perspective, the restrictions to the freedoms of women in Nazi Germany certainly seemed a tragic step back, especially when compared to the advances made in other nations. For example, one newspaper compared the university figures of Nazi Germany – in which only ten per cent of registered students were women – to those of Russia, where they argued women were encouraged to undertake intellectual work, with nearly half the students of technical colleges and three-quarters of the total number of medical students being female.¹² These two dictatorships had such a stark difference regarding the role of women that one almost wonders if it was less to do with the welfare of the nation and more to do with the preference of the leadership.

Outside of Germany, the reaction to the Nazi treatment of women in regards to the professions was very negative – particularly from countries in which women's emancipation had gained a foothold, and feminist thinking was becoming more prevalent. On 31 May 1933, representatives of numerous women's organisations met at the House of Commons in London, under the chairmanship of Miss Rathbone, M.P., to discuss the issues of the position of women under the Nazi regime. The conference

¹¹ *Vossische Zeitung*, 6 July 1933. Translated in Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, 43.

¹² "Nazi Women to Stay At Home," *Gnowangerup Star and Tambellup-Ongerup Gazette* [WA : 1915 – 1944] 30 April 1938. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article158204605>

reportedly felt 'deep dismay' felt at learning of the dismissal of many women from their positions in public services and the restriction of their opportunities in the area. Their consensus was that 'while recognising that the internal affairs of every nation must be mainly its own responsibility. . . any injury done to the women of one nation must be deeply felt by the women of all nations, and must prove an obstacle to the increase of good will and to the maintenance of peace amongst nations'.¹³ Women outside of Germany, at least those in Great Britain, clearly saw the Nazi policies as a reversal of the emancipation movement and a terrible blow to their gender's struggle for autonomy and future equality.

There are arguments from all sides as to what the case actually was for these women; that the Nazis deliberately limited opportunities for women negatively affected a generation of potential professionals, that the gender-segregated lifestyle afforded women space to empower themselves and break free from traditional restraints, or that women retreated willingly to the domestic sphere as the Nazis wanted.¹⁴ Overall, it seems that the way of life that women experienced under the Nazis was simply what they themselves chose to make of it with what opportunities were available to them.

Education

Stevenson states that 'the Nazis' attitudes were a conglomeration and extension of conservative ideas prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century when women were trying to gain admission to the universities, still apparent after the Great War, and increasingly popular by 1930'.¹⁵ What this essentially boiled down to was the widely-held belief that men and women were fundamentally different, and thus women were

¹³ "Nazi Treatment Of Women," *The Times*, 2 June 1933.

¹⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 4.

¹⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 116.

not suited to the rigours of academia. It seems academia was one of the 'male spheres' on which women should not encroach – convenient, as it was difficult for a non-university educated individual to enter a profession.

It was only in 1901 that the Universities of Baden (Freiburg and Heidelberg) were the first to fully admit women. While the resulting changes were gradual (and reluctant), eventually the other German states followed this example, and by the outbreak of the First World War, all German universities now accepted women, while all states provided courses to educate women up to university standards.¹⁶ The reception at the time was mixed – one professor admitted that few of his female students would get use out of their education as 'they would marry before ever starting a career', while other, less moderate male students claimed that academic standards were falling *because* of the presence of women in university, and that the long-standing tradition of 'student comradeship' was being destroyed.¹⁷

Therefore by the time of the establishment of the Third Reich in 1933, the presence of women in academia was still a fairly new – and clearly unwelcome, by Nazi standards – phenomenon. The Nazis were known to be anti-intellectualist and exclusionary, so a female intellectual would indeed have been wholly unwelcome in their ideal society. The Nazis' answer to this problem was not to simply ban women's admittance to university, as that would likely have raised eyebrows, and the Nazis were still very much reliant on public support to maintain their carefully-cultivated order. Instead, they simply took to the root of the problem – the youth.

¹⁶ Jill Stephenson, "Girls' Higher Education in Germany in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10:1, 1975. 42.

¹⁷ Stephenson, "Girls' Higher Education in Germany in the 1930s," 43-44.

Education under the Third Reich was (in policy but not always in practice) streamed – while boys studied science, Latin and other academic pursuits, girls’ schooling placed overwhelming emphasis on the domestic crafts such as cooking and sewing, all the while being bombarded with propaganda emphasising the importance of motherhood and ‘womanly virtue’.¹⁸ It seems that at least some parents recognized this as a problem, especially for their academically gifted girls, as they flouted policy loopholes to gain their daughters admission to boy’s schools. Changes were made to try and block these loopholes, such as the August 1938 policy that girls in the lower grades of boy’s schools were not to receive Latin lessons, to match the absence of Latin at girl’s schools.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the war inevitably got in the way, and so no progress was made towards either a complete separation or a desegregation of boys and girls in regards to education.

Overall, the Nazis’ aim of reducing female university students was largely successful – according to Stibbe, the number of women in university fell from an all-time high of 18,375 in 1932 to 6,080 in 1939, and in 1933 the Nazis decreed an annual intake of only 15,000 students a year, of which only 10 per cent (a measly 1500) could be women.²⁰

Nazi Organisations for Women

As previously explained, women were not allowed to serve in the official leadership of the Nazi Party at any point of the organization’s 24-year history. Therefore a woman who wanted to serve the Nazi party had to do so in other ways. In the beginning, the work was primarily *ad hoc* – female lead soup kitchens or medical clinics for the SS, for example, which were often started by female sympathizers or the wives of party

¹⁸ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 127.

¹⁹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 126.

²⁰ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 110-111.

members.²¹ But as the party's membership and ambitions grew, it became clear that a more solid organization was necessary. It was only with the appointment of Gertrud Sholtz-Klink in February 1934 as the National Women's Leader that consolidation began (resistance was naturally present, as many women wished to maintain their own organizations, but was quashed) and the NSF was officially formed.²²

The Nazis sought a monopoly on public groups and events – this was logical, considering their suspicious nature and determination to prevent resistance, as a public group was exactly the source from which they themselves had sprung, and from which resistance, too, could be organized. All opposing political parties had been banned in 1933, with many of the more outspoken opponents fleeing Germany forthwith, but even the Nazis could not ensure that some enemies of their regime lurked in the shadows. Thus it made sense that the Nazis would hold dominion over public gatherings, groups and activities – not only to protect themselves, but to further their goals of integrating the regime into every aspect of German life.

Just because the Nazis wished women to be housewives and mothers did not mean that they wanted them to remain primarily isolated at home – domestic and cultural activities under the leadership of the NSF were considered the key areas in which women could 'contribute to the rebirth of the nation'.²³ What this meant, according to Stibbe, was that women were to 'learn proficiency in cooking and cleaning, develop an understanding of the regime's demographic and racial policies, and, as educators of the young, pass on healthy German views and standards to their children'.²⁴ They also contributed to and worked for charities to ease the burden of the poorer households

²¹ Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, London: Croom Helm, 1981. 26.

²² Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, 15.

²³ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 36.

²⁴ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 36.

(provided, of course, that those households were Aryan). Overall it seems that the central purpose of the NSF was the indoctrination of women – though, according to Stephenson, the terms ‘spiritual leadership’, ‘ideological training’ and ‘political education’ were more likely to be used outright.²⁵ The fact that in the latter 1930s the NSF’s membership remained steady at around two million²⁶ seems to suggest that the bulk of German women had no interest in being spiritually guided or politically educated, instead preferring not to engage with the regime to such a close degree.

It certainly seemed that in some respects, the Nazi Party was utterly tone deaf to the needs and sensitivities of many women. For example, Frau Anna Zeigler, a Nazi Women’s leader, reportedly gave an inflammatory speech on 8 October 1939 which accused women of neglecting their duty of keeping up the morale of the men at the front, reportedly saying that ‘The Fuhrer will not be knifed in the back again . . . He applies the laws of war to women as well as to men to stamp out slackness.’²⁷ This speech reportedly caused such a furore amongst women listeners that they began angrily shouting that their husbands were at the front, before storming the stage and attacking Frau Zeigler outright, leaving her beaten and scratched. Nineteen women were arrested following the attack, while Zeigler was taken to hospital.²⁸ What this tells us is that while some women may well have supported the regime enough to attend speeches and rallies, this did not mean that they were happy to see their husbands go off to war, nor to be blamed for their suffering.

²⁵ Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, 145.

²⁶ Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, 155.

²⁷ "Nazi Women Attack Their Leader," *Barrier Miner* [Broken Hill, NSW: 1888 – 1954] 9 October 1939. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48329732>.

²⁸ "Nazi Women Attack Their Leader," *Barrier Miner*.

Wartime Mobilization

The Second World War provoked an 'all hands on deck' response from most, if not all, of the countries who participated, as labour shortages resulted from the conscription of able-bodied men and industry flagged as workers were shipped off to war. Famously, Allied countries such as Great Britain and America introduced women into their workforce – to work in factories, in rural areas, even for the secret services. The ability and enthusiasm of these women ensured that the country did not feel too strongly the effects of having a large proportion of men leave the country to fight the war – and for many women it may have benefited on an emotional level to feel that they were doing their part for their country. German mobilisation of civilians to supplement the workforce tried to use a similar method of persuasion – the desperation of the war and the need to ensure the country's industries continued to run smoothly meant that every available hand was needed.

Women were called to all areas of work to compensate for the lack of male labour available. In 1939, it was reported that the German railway company had decided to employ women in ticket offices and 'in other capacities' in order to keep the system running effectively.²⁹ In addition, it was announced that the German mercantile Marine Corps had its first female certified captain – a Fraulein Anneliese Staribeir of Hamburg, a former school-mistress.³⁰ Certainly, this showed a shift in the attitude of the Nazis to women at work – particularly allowing a woman to hold a marine command position – but whether this was genuine progress or a 'needs must' stance which would have reverted after the war back to their original 'male breadwinner' doctrine remains unclear.

²⁹ "Nazi Women to Work," *The Evening News* [Rockhampton, Qld: 1924 – 1941] 4 July 1939. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article198733741>.

³⁰ "Nazi Women to Work," *The Evening News*.

Comparisons to the British attitude were made, as *The Times* reported that one German newspaper wrote –

To-day British women do not don uniforms for mere vanity, but to work for dear life at shipyards, factories, and elsewhere because Churchill wants ships. German women are mobilized, too, but they still have much to learn about the heroes at Stalingrad and on other fronts. Failure to recognise the dire need of the hour is suicide.³¹

Clearly German women weren't as mobilised or as effective as their British counterparts. But the blame here should not be laid at the feet of the women, but at the Nazi policies and doctrines which had heretofore affected their ways of life. One must remember that the Nazis had made their position clear before the war that they *did not want* women to work, so this abrupt about-face, even brought on as it was by the desperation of war, was undoubtedly a confusing and contradictory move. The *Times* article itself makes reference to this fact, pointing out that 'Only a year ago Hitler himself declared his opposition to the employment of women on a larger scale because the future stamina of the German race depended on the girls and young women being shielded from the rigours of war for the function of marriage and motherhood.'³²

In addition, the difference in regards to the willingness of the female war-time workers of different nations may have been largely contributed to by one rather important factor: whether or not they had actually volunteered. While the female work efforts in countries such as Britain and France were composed of women who had willingly volunteered to take up a place in the war effort, German women were *conscripted* to do so. In 1940, the New South Wales edition of the Daily Telegraph reported about 'married women being conscripted for labour, while their children are looked after in

³¹ "Through German Eyes," *The Times*, 5 February 1943.

³² "Through German Eyes," *The Times*.

State Kindergartens'.³³ A far cry from the Nazi ideal of the beautiful, domesticated housewife, they reported that 'overworked women in ugly frocks and low-heeled shoes march through the streets, and we are told that these are the typical representatives of German womanhood'.³⁴

Jill Stephenson notes the reluctance of women to engage, calling the Labour Front propaganda about the willingness of women to serve 'downright dishonest' and noting that even Sholtz-Klink herself had admitted in retrospect that she could only rely on her organized members to contribute, with the others having to be mobilized by the state.³⁵ This reluctance to serve is a trend to be noted when considering the larger picture of women's engagement in the Nazi regime, especially when compared with the enthusiasm of British women's contribution to the war effort, as the Nazis themselves noted.³⁶ Low involvement in the NSF, too, seems to indicate, if not outward rejection, a generally cautious attitude towards the regime. Of course, every woman living in Nazi Germany was different, and their individual lives, pasts and attitudes would have contributed to just how much they engaged with the Nazis.

Overall, the Nazis appeared to have shot themselves in the foot, so to speak. By discouraging women from holding any more than menial jobs, greatly reducing their access to higher education and promoting their views that women should leave the breadwinning to men, they successfully turned many women off of the idea of a career. But when the war started and labour was short, this meant that the mobilization of women back into the workforce in the absence of men was difficult, as not only did the abrupt about-face of this policy expose the Nazis hypocrisy, but women had become

³³ "Women Conscripts in Nazi Germany," *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954) 12 January 1940. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248230535>

³⁴ "Women Conscripts in Nazi Germany," *The Daily Telegraph*.

³⁵ Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, 181.

³⁶ "Through German Eyes," *The Times*.

comfortable with their lifestyles and saw no reason to change that, even in war time. In addition, this seeming lack of enthusiasm from women combined with the low membership of the NSF speaks of, if not a rejection of the regime, then a carefully maintained distance from it.

Conclusion

There are undeniably discrepancies when looking at the subject of women in Nazi Germany. When examining their lives and experiences under the regime, much is known about Nazi policies and practices, from the pro-natal propaganda and gender-separatist ideals to the attempted influence of the party in everything from fashion to organized meetings. Surviving Nazi archives tell a very clear story of *their* point of view on the so-called 'woman question'. But comparatively little is known about the other side of this narrative – the women themselves. While journalists such as Owings and historians such as Mouton and Koonz have sought to give voices to these women and their experiences, there is still an imbalance of understanding. This begs the question of how we can truly know what life was like for a woman under the Nazi Regime without understanding both the side of the would-be oppressors and the side of those they sought to control.

But asserting that this new approach is necessary raises another question; what would it *mean* to write a history of Nazi Germany in which women are genuinely centred as their own actors and agents? Women undoubtedly shaped at least part of the history of the Third Reich – they were, after all, over half the population of Germany at that point in time. But to portray them as being genuinely or even partially active in the regime of their own volition requires the uncomfortable acknowledgement that they should bear part of the blame for the atrocities committed. Recalling Joshi's assertion that early feminist historians found the issue of women in Nazi Germany problematic because it

would 'soil the young discipline'¹ of women's history and thus maintained their silence only further raises the question of when would be the appropriate time to discuss the truth of the matter.

If we are to attempt to deepen our understanding of the lives of women under the regime by looking at it from the women's perspective, one could say that time is running out. The generation that lived through the tumultuous era of the Third Reich is dying out, and with the passage of time more and more potential sources, not only oral histories but diaries, letters and personal accounts are being lost to the ages. If this perspective is to be examined in more depth, it must be soon, and thus any lingering unease about portraying women in a negative light through their actions in times of historical significance must be put aside in favour of greater historical understanding. The point of this thesis is to examine aspects of women's lives under the regime, the Nazi policies and practices surrounding them, and discuss the ways in which women adapted in order to carve out an acceptable lifestyle for themselves and their families. This resistance, when it appeared, was not resistance in the brave, for-the-greater-good sense – it was purely self-serving and self-preserving. Expansion upon this idea of framing this part of history from the women's side is possible, by looking at the wider range of various women's experiences, in order to seek understanding of how women affected the regime instead of vice-versa.

As discussed previously, the Nazi regime could never have functioned without some level of obedience and on the part of the women. It must be said that women *were* a part of the Nazi regime, with all of the stigma and shame that comes with that fact in retrospect. Some level of complacency was always present, and complacency with the

¹ Joshi, "Changing Perspectives," 209.

Nazi regime was problematic, especially when the true crimes of the regime came to light after the war. To quote the British philosopher John Stuart Mill, 'a person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury.'² It could be said that the women of Nazi Germany should be judged just as much as men for the atrocities committed under the regime, whether or not they actively participated – therefore a history in which women are portrayed as active players is necessary to our understanding of the factors which shaped the era and led the German people to the point in which mass slaughter and other crimes against humanity were a reality in their nation.

But this in itself raises the counter-argument that anything other than acceptance was a danger to survival – the Nazi regime is known to have been violent and intolerant of dissent of any kind. The majority of women's complacency and willingness to bury their heads in the sand in regards to the crimes of their government could be explained as a survival instinct on the part of those who saw little option other than to comply. In addition, self-interest – as evidenced by much of what has been discussed in this thesis – seemed a prevalent attitude in Nazi Germany, which is ironic when one considers the community-oriented principles of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Maintaining ignorance about the crimes of the Nazi regime was in the self-interest of many who wished only to continue to live in peace, having adapted themselves to this new order. According to Frau Margarete Fischer, 'We knew there were concentration camps, but you must picture they were so camouflaged, people who lived in nearby villages hardly knew anything of them.'³ We must consider just how much of this camouflage was on the part of the Nazis (certainly they must have gone to some lengths to conceal the truth of

² John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, London: Longman, Roberts, & Green Co., 1869.
<https://www.econlib.org/library/Mill/mlLbty.html>

³ Owings, *Frauen*, 5.

their crimes) and how much was willing ignorance on the part of the population. Only by further discussing this with those who were present and looking into personal accounts of the Third Reich can this question have any sort of definitive answer.

While this thesis looks primarily at women's lives on a group level, looking at those issues which affected the lives of *typical* women living in the Nazi state, future works on the subject may look at the polarities which existed on the spectrum of women's loyalty to the regime, the varied experiences of women therein and the implications of this on the female position at this point in history. For example, in my research into newspaper archives I turned up a surprising amount of articles which seemed to indicate a militarization of women, particularly during the war. In December 1944, Melbourne's *Weekly Times* reported that the Germans had begun training women to send to the front lines – stating that 'training has already removed traces of sex differences between male and female soldiers', and that these women were 'trained in ordinary barracks by male N.C.O.s'.⁴ What makes this significant is the clear dismissal of the established Nazi opinion that the genders should remain in separate spheres and adhere to their roles in society as dictated by the expectations of their sex. As discussed in Chapter 1, a 'mannish' woman was deeply undesired by Nazi society, yet this report claims that they are deliberately training women to be thus in order to bolster their forces. If true, this hypocrisy shines a light on the way that the Nazis seemed willing to adapt their beliefs to ensure their continued survival, but it also speaks of the lengths that some women were willing to go to for the Regime.

Along a similar vein, evidence also suggests that German women stepped up to fight when the need arose whether or not they were trained for it. An example of one such

⁴ "Nazi Women as Soldiers," *Weekly Times* [Melbourne, Victoria: 1869 – 1954] 13 December 1944. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article224841032>.

occurrence was reported in *The Herald* in June of 1944, during a battle in Normandy, as the allied forces pressed forwards, they faced the threat of snipers – a number of whom were female. [British] General Montgomery stated that ‘They [were] stout – hearted German women who were killed while doing their stuff. They were probably married to the German officers.’⁵ In this case, it seems, the loyalty of these women may not have been to the regime necessarily but to their husbands. But the point still remains that both of these cases show women acting as their own agents, fighting alongside men, and thus acting as perpetrators rather than as victims.

In addition, my research turned up many cases of open defiance on the part of ordinary German women, such as a case in May 1942 in which a group of German women were shot by SS soldiers for standing on the tracks to prevent the departure of a troop train,⁶ and the case of Sophia Scholl, who was executed alongside her brother Hans Scholl and friend Cristoph Probat for producing anti-Hitler leaflets and painting anti-Hitler slogans on Nazi buildings. She, along with others, was arrested and charged with treason, and subsequently shot.⁷

I bring up these cases now to bring to light the vast spectrum and the polarity of women’s decisions and actions during the regime. The purpose of my thesis is to explore how women survived and adapted to the regime in their own self-interest, but if further understanding of how the regime affected women (and how women affected the regime) is to be gained, further research must be done into the actions, beliefs and lives of a broad range of German women in the Nazi era.

⁵ "Nazi Women Snipers Shot," *The Herald* [Melbourne, Victoria: 1861 – 1954] 13 June 1944.
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article241309212>

⁶ "Nazi Women Hold Troop Train, Shot," *The Daily News* [Perth, WA : 1882 – 1950] 30 May 1942.
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78283487>

⁷ "Nazi Executions," *Daily Advertiser* [Wagga Wagga, NSW: 1911 – 1954] 13 April 1943.
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article144108849>

The idea of women being passive victims of the regime purely because it denied them rights and decisions previously open to them is problematic. Stephenson quotes Andrea Böltken, who explains that

The premise of women's history is primarily patriarchy and its subordination of the female half of humanity . . . If every woman is by definition a victim, then 'female perpetrators' are also fundamentally victims who were exploited and functionalized simply in the interests of the patriarchal system.⁸

To draw this conclusion that even the worst of perpetrators was a victim of male influence is to deny that women have their own independent motives and reasoning. Even in a male-led and male-dominated regime like that of the Nazis, complicity and/or perpetration on the part of any women was done of their own accord, and thus any blame should be laid at their feet. While women in groups which were targeted by the Nazis for racial or eugenic reasons were undoubtedly victims given the nightmarish hardships that they had to endure, to argue that those who participated in the regime, be it voluntarily or, as discussed in this thesis, from a carefully orchestrated distance, likely do not warrant the label of victim nearly as much, if at all.

Even with the amount of work now done on the subject, the position of women in Nazi Germany remains unclear. Certainly a shift in the historiography shows an evolution from the immediate assumption that women were victimized to acknowledging their compliance and even their crimes, but still there is a lingering sense that the patriarchal oppression rendered women unable to resist.

I would argue that this is because of the way the subject has been framed – discussion centres around what the Nazis did to women, but little in return is discussed about

⁸ Andrea Böltken, *Führerinnen im 'Führerstaat': Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Trude Mohr, Jutta Rudiger und Inge Viermetz*, Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995. Quoted in Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 126.

what women did in response to this. Employment figures, birth rates and other statistics are telling, but little other discourse exists on the ways in which women acted independently of the regime's cajoling in order to establish themselves. According to Stibbe, the intention of the Nazi Party was to reconstruct society along racial lines, and oppression faced by women under the regime held little difference to that which was being faced elsewhere.⁹ What made the position of women in the Third Reich unique was the emphasis on pro-natalism and racial importance – something which had little bearing on women's lives if they were racially pure and had or could have children. What this *meant* for these women was that they had enough independence to write their own rules, create their own interpretations of the Nazi ideals, and establish their own lives.¹⁰ Koonz acknowledges this in *Mothers in the Fatherland*, stating that 'the separation between masculine and feminine spheres, which followed logically and psychologically from Nazi leader's misogyny, relegated women to their own space – both beneath and beyond the dominant world of men.'¹¹

It was this independence from the regime, this establishment of their own communities and cultures within that of Nazi Germany, which necessitates further work be done in regards to women in Nazi Germany. The story of Nazi Germany remains incomplete so long as the role of women is looked at in regards to what was done to them instead of what *they* did. The evidence of support for the regime (when one recalls the voting patterns), adaptation to it and distance from it discussed in this thesis barely scratches the surface of what was likely a deep and well-defended subculture, born out of pragmatism and necessity. The Nazi regime in and of itself was built, led and enforced by men. This meant that women were beneath men in that regard, but what it also

⁹ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 3.

¹⁰ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 4.

¹¹ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 6.

meant was that women lay outside of the regime's reach. Given independence through being largely ignored by the leadership, women in Nazi Germany were the architects of their own lives in one of the most infamously domineering regimes in history.

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