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Women In Nazi Propaganda

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The Nazi Party of Germany created a nation that embraced the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*, which assigned specific roles and responsibilities based on gender. A country in which the Aryan nation was created based on the ideals set forth by Hitler that the German nation was descended from Norse “god-like” peoples, and become glorious leaders of the New World is what the Party ultimately worked for. In order to accomplish this task, the Nazis had to gain support of the people. The leaders of the Party, led by Adolf Hitler starting with his election in 1933 created policy which encompassed every aspect of daily life for the citizens of Germany. First drafted in his political outcries on the streets of Munich and later in his treatise on political might *Mein Kampf*, Hitler laid out a system of propaganda that had up to 1933 been unmatched at any point in the nation’s history. This system was particularly influential and ultimately damaging to the group of citizens to which it was centered, namely the women of Germany. The Nazi Party of Germany, specifically the Reich’s Ministry, enacted policies which dealt with the view that women should take a secondary role to that of the men of the country. The extensive system of propaganda the Nazis put into place garnered and kept the support of women across Germany. Their portrayal changed from 1933 as the “Mother of the Country” to “worker” for the Nazi cause in the context of the Second World War. An analysis of Nazi propaganda posters, cover art for women’s and girl’s magazines as well as speeches by Nazi leaders on the duties of women reveals that the demand for workers after 1939 led the Nazi Party to alter women’s roles to make up for the reduction in labor force based on their marriage status and racial categorization.

In order to understand the reason behind such a system of propaganda and the subjects portrayed within, the policy which governed the nation, namely the newly drafted constitution of Germany, as well as how other historians have viewed such a policy must first be looked at.

These historians have written extensively on the policy the Nazis enacted in order to govern the citizens of Germany in order to understand the mindset the leaders had and their attitudes towards those citizens, namely the roles of women in society.

The Nazi ideology that viewed women as subservient to men, meant that women as supporters to the cause had to be swayed into believing that the Reich was working for them as well. During the latter part of the 1920s leading up until 1940, Germany was a country, despite instances of economic stability, was wrought with turmoil and economic rebuilding as a result of the Depression in 1929, and everyday citizens having to make the decision of just with whom does the individual citizen ally themselves in the political arena. The Nazi view based on what Hitler laid out in *Mein Kampf* of men and women differed greatly in Nazi ideology and that depiction, through propaganda, party rallies, governmental practices and policy, and everyday life in Germany as a whole, depicted the sexes based on predefined roles, although differently

Now it is important to note that all of this fell into the reemphasis on the part of the Nazi Party of a concept known as *Volksgemeinschaft*. This is a term which Hitler reintroduced and represented a united Germany. Translated as “peoples’ community,” this concept originally was used during WWI in order to raise support for the war in Germany and unite the German people under a common goal, namely winning the war. Robert Cecil wrote in order to explain how the Nazis used this concept to unite the nation that;

Upon rising to power in 1933, the Nazis sought to gain support of various elements of society. Their concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* was racially unified and organized hierarchically. This involved a mystical unity, a form of racial soul uniting all Germans. This soul was regarded as related to the land, in the doctrine of "blood and soil. Indeed, one reason for "blood and soil" was the belief that landowner and peasant lived in an organic harmony.¹

¹ Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology*, (New York: Dodd & Mead, 1972), 166.

This concept also applied to the creation of specific roles of women in the “new” society in Germany. The fact that the Nazis created a system of social programs designed to gain the support of the people for the party itself, is overshadowed by its treatment of women across the country based on their racial heritage and social standing.

The views of historians, while offering insight from many views of explanation of the subject of the Nazi policy toward women, explain such a policy, the background behind justification for it as well as reactions from the public of Germany and the world at large as well as how it relates to the system of propaganda the Nazis used, keeping the support of women of the country. The time period between the World Wars can be seen as a precursor for the changes to social life in Germany from all avenues of daily life. The role of women in this time period is no exception. Renate Bridenthal shows this in her chapter in her book along with author Claudia Koonz, *Becoming Visible* that during the mid to late 20s, “the gap between men’s and women’s work in industry widened...small independent businesswomen lost out rapidly, while white-collar employees, usually younger women in non-managerial capacities, grew in numbers.”² This result of rifts growing between the sexes became the basis for Nazi policy on women in the years to come.

In order to explain how Hitler and the Nazis viewed women, what needs to be examined is the background of the this view in order to provide evidence for the reasons behind the depictions that were adopted by the Party in the early part of the war to get and maintain the support of those the Party deemed “fit” to represent the nation of Germany. Leila Rupp, in her article on women and the Nazi state, summarizes Hitler’s attitude towards women, which explains the policies which were enacted in order to lay out groundwork as to the role women

² Renate Bridenthal, “Something old something New: Women between the two World Wars,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Bridenthal et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 425.

would play in the Third Reich. Starting with his opposition to women participating in political roles, Rupp states; “Hitler based his well-known opposition to the political participation of women and his low estimation of women’s abilities on the concept of sexual polarity, the existence of separate spheres for the two sexes.”³

Rupp, again in her article goes on to write of Hitler’s explanation to the women of the country of his views; “Man’s world was the state, woman’s the home, and the two worlds complemented each other; women ought not to attempt to penetrate the world of men.”⁴ This argument provides the basis for the Nazi ideology laid out by Hitler himself, first in *Mein Kampf*, and later in his speeches on the subject of women and also what party leaders felt the subservient role of household wife/mother women should play in society.

To further the explanation on how the Nazi leaders viewed the issue of women in the state, Claudia Koonz, in her book *Mothers in the Fatherland*, includes an excerpt by Goebbels, the propaganda minister when he stated, “We have replaced individuality with collective racial consciousness, and the individual with the community.”⁵ This passage shows that the leaders of the Party were concerned not with the individual but the state and to break down the barriers of gender along with the concept of the individual in order to form a collective is something that was necessary in order to continue the efforts of the Reich.

Koonz’s overall thesis is that the fact that the Nazi party was about as male centered as any political party has ever been throughout history and its views on women and women’s proper roles in society were not thought of before by the party, and at the best extreme. Despite this, the Party was widely and actively supported by women at large in Germany at the time. Koonz also argues that it’s debatable that Hitler and his followers would not have achieved their

³ Leila Rupp, “Mother of the Volk: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology,” *Winter* (1977):363.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1987), 179.

aims without the acts of religious women who were committed to the cause. This was a cause which promised them a citizenship which was second-class at best and less than that of the men of the country based on their basic creed.

In evidence of this mindset on the part of Hitler and other leaders like Goebbels, Koonz writes;

Despite propaganda about “more feminine women,” the new priorities made it clear that docility was the only trait that counted in women. Concern for keeping mothers in their homes lasted only as long as the economic necessity made it advantageous. Ultimately, it became obvious that the ideal Nazi woman cultivated flexibility rather than any specific skills so that she could leave the workplace and return to homemaking as the economy demanded.⁶

This discussion on the beliefs of the Nazi leaders and how they felt toward women explains the fact that women were portrayed as a direct result of these beliefs, namely that women should be less than that of men of the country. In portraying women in this new role of wife/mother, the Nazi leaders believed that this depiction would aid the creation and achievement they subscribed to in *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Another example of this tendency on the part of Nazi leaders, namely Goebbels in the Ministry of Propaganda in order to create this new image of “woman” as the mother is how Koonz describes this tendency when she writes;

Despite the rhetoric about restoration of family life, Nazi policy was deeply revolutionary because it aimed at the creation of a family unit that was not a defense against public invasion as much as the gateway to intervention. The contradiction between promise and reality is nowhere more apparent than in the publicity for the weekly “stew day,” when mothers all over Germany prepared economical stews and contributed the money saved to the national charity, the winter relief (*winterhilfe*). In the posters advertising the drive, the happy family enjoys a tasty stew around the table but above them appears the stew pot (*eintopf*) to remind them that their supper serves a higher cause. Family happiness was not an end in itself but a means to a national purpose. Government sponsored family protection programs hastened the destruction of individualism and privacy. Hitler on

⁶ Ibid.

many occasions made the revolutionary implications of this system clear. “Anyone who interprets National Socialism as a merely political movement knows almost nothing about it. It is more than a religion. It is the determination to create the new man.”⁷ This concept of the creation of a new image of “woman” and “family” is what the Nazi leaders wanted to create in order to further their pursuit of the “perfect” society and achieve *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Through an analysis of historiographic sources that other historians have written in order to explain the policy the Nazis had in place, their ideology on the subject of women, and their general attitudes towards women in general, it can also be seen that the leaders of the Party, aside from Hitler, felt that women had a specific role to play in the new nation created by such efforts. The policies enacted in order to keep certain women as mothers of the country mirror the system of propaganda the Ministry of Propaganda put into place in order to recruit this group of the population and make their intentions known to the entire country as well as the world.

Charu Gupta explains the rise of the Nazi Party and their ideology towards women. After the end of the First World War, during the Weimar period, women were emancipated and rose up in the political ranks to positions of power. During the latter part of the 1920s when the Nazis were gaining influence and ultimately gained power with Hitler becoming Chancellor in 1933, the policies of the country drastically changed because, how Gupta puts it, “in their eyes, women were that part of the population on whom, if it was at all possible, novel, major and general hardships should not arbitrarily or continuously be inflicted.”⁸ She goes on to further give evidence for her thesis that specific women, namely Aryan women, were viewed by the Nazis as mothers to the nation when she states that they; “believed that the best situation for a woman was as full-time housewife and mother. She was the transmitter of German culture, guardian of racial

⁷ Ibid, 180.

⁸ Charu Gupta, “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany,” *Economic & Political Weekly* (1991): 46.

purity and supporter of national economic policy.”⁹ Both of these arguments posed by Gupta show that the Nazis viewed women not as equals to men but separate from them in their own right and that they had a certain place in society, unique to their place women as the housewife and mother.

There were those leaders of the country like Goebbels and Hitler who would want this change in Germany in how women were treated in the “new” society. Jost Hermand argues how the “old volkish campaigners who were supporters of the new Reich, fanatics of Aryanism, and also the matriarchalists and advocates of women's emancipation” had wished for the Party to come into power and become a Party of radical reformers. What resulted however was, as Hermand puts it, the opposite. Apart from the persecution of German Jews, the Nazi Party, “Rather than accentuating the mythical, archaic, and matriarchal, as many of the male and female volkish fanatics had hoped, what remained in most sectors were highly conventional, that is male-dominated concepts, which generally tended toward patriarchalism, the Fuhrer cult, all-male groups, or elitist grail-like concepts of an elect.”¹⁰ Once they were in power, the Nazis, did not stick to what was originally promised in creating the “model” community during their campaigns to gain power, on how they run government, thus lending an opposing viewpoint to Koonz’s on how the Nazi leaders were concerned with uniting all into one collective, which always has its limits in that there will always be conflicting views on how a country should be run and how the citizens should be treated in that society.

The primary concern of the Nazi Party on the issue of women in serving in a subservient role in society is what scholars have also looked at in order to explain the actions and events of the parties involved such as the Nazi Party and its followers and their actions. It is in the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jost Hermand, “All Power to the Women: Nazi Concepts of Matriarchy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 19 No. 4 *Reassessments of Fascism* (1984): 660.

paradox of that policy with which most historians discuss when writing on the subject, one side or the other. On the one hand the Nazis wanted women of “pure” racial stock who were married in the home raising children for the continuance of the Reich. Evidence of this can be seen in Koonz’s book in the chapter on women in the Third Reich. In this chapter she states, “Hitler requires more “a relentless dedication to the improvement [of the race] with every means known to man, a drive to produce better, unburdened forms of existence, to achieve what our *Volk* has been destined to achieve”.”¹¹ On the other hand, they needed workers for the factories in order to keep the country running during times of war. These distinct parts of a greater policy on women is what explains the Nazi way of thinking on how to deal with the subject, and the results of such a policy on the dynamics of German life during this time period.

Thus the basis of the “two models” of female labor emerged in the Nazi ideology, despite being a product of the Weimar period; the Nazis adopted it and manipulated it to fit their aims of a “model” community. Annemarie Tröger writes that there were two patterns for female labor which emerged from the jumble of regulations that the Weimar government had in place and that the Nazis tried to alter. These two models are termed by Tröger as “Blood and Soil model and the Social-Engineering model.”¹² She goes on to describe the two models. The “Blood and Soil model is the conglomeration of misogynist beliefs and reactionary social concepts which generally regarded as the original or real fascist ideology about women.”¹³ This model was used early on in the Nazi Party during its inception as a power in Germany. This was the model of the labor force and that women were only an “economic” aspect of society.

¹¹ Koonz, *Ibid*, 191.

¹² Annemarie Tröger, “A Female Assembly-Line Proletariat,” in *When Biology became Destiny*,” ed. Bridenthal et.al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 239.

¹³ *Ibid*.

Tröger also states that, “the point of departure of the Blood and Soil Model was the concept of the “two separate worlds” the female one being the house and the yard, where the concept of “yard was expandable according to economic necessity. The only legitimate role was the mother or one of its derivatives in the “social motherhood” (social worker, teacher, nurse, etc.).”¹⁴ These two models were how the Nazis viewed women based on their racial background and social standing, whether married or unmarried, teenager or widow, according to Tröger. On the one hand they were a valuable labor force, on the other they were to remain in the home and “grow” the country from within.

Tim Mason in his study on Nazi policy toward women discusses of the policies the Nazis had in place during the time period of 1925-1940. He states, “That the Nazi leadership should have had any success in winning the loyalty and confidence of women”¹⁵ at all, is interesting in that the anti-feminism campaigns of the late 1920s and early 1930s were due to a rejection on the part of the Nazis to all liberalism. This gave rise to growing dissent and the causing of women to join left-wing political groups which spoke out against the Nazis throughout the regime so that something had to be done in order to garner their support once again.

In order to gain the support needed by women, Hitler spoke of the oppositions’, namely the communist stance, on the belief that the Nazis degraded women, despite the fact that the Nazis were already in power. To explain the stance that Hitler had toward women, Rupp recalls Hitler’s words in a 1935 *Frauenschaft* Party Day speech when he stated that, “When our opponents say: You degrade women by assigning them no other task than that of childbearing, then I answer that is not degrading to a woman to be a mother. On the contrary it is her greatest honor. There is nothing nobler for a woman than to be the mother of the sons and daughters of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Tim Mason, “Women in Germany, 1925-1940 Part I.” in *History Workshop No.1*, ed. Tim Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 87.

the people.”¹⁶ Again another example of how Hitler and Party leaders viewed women as central to the cause of the creation of *Volksgemeinschaft*, not including those of “non-desirable” racial stock or those who were deemed “unfit” for society like those who were diseased or of other nationalities, in providing offspring for the Aryan nation and furthering the Nazi ideals.

It is important to note that the view that women had towards their role in society was “furnished” by the Nazis in order to “educate” them on their proper place in the nation. Rupp further shows how the regime viewed women from the standpoint of the home. In the paragraph explaining this she writes, “A woman’s first and foremost duty was, not surprisingly, to be a mother. A large number of books and pamphlets glorified with excessive sentimentality the German mother, the mother of the *Volk*, in an apparent attempt to create a Nazi mother cult or to appeal to traditional feelings on motherhood.”¹⁷ These traditional feelings are the “ideal” motherhood model of the mother at home birthing and raising the child. Here again more examples of how Party leaders viewed women as subservient to men and that they must hold their rightful place in the Reich as mothers of the country. Further on in the paragraph, Rupp offers an explanation why this was so. She writes, “Woman’s biological role took on heightened importance for the Nazis because of the declining German birthrate...attributed to the poisonous atmosphere of the liberal era.”¹⁸ This is a direct result of the lack of need or wants on the part of women during the 1920s to have children due to the liberal mindset of the era, women were more independent and wanted to go out and have fun, just as in the United States with the “flapper” image of women.

Ute Frevert, in her book on women in Germany, offers further explanation of just how the Nazi’s viewed women. Frevert writes, “Hitler himself considered women to be among his

¹⁶ Rupp, *Mother*, 364.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 370.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

most faithful followers, explaining that his success by claiming that the new Germany had much to offer women: “In my state, the mother is the most important citizen.”¹⁹ This is a fair explanation on how Hitler and his *male* followers viewed women in Germany, as less than that of the men of the country.

In order to explain the difference between men and women, Frevert writes, “But his words were directed to German, Aryan, healthy and politically loyal mothers, for women who failed to meet these requirements, Hitler’s *Frauenparadis* meant public humiliation, enforced sterilization, torture, removal to concentration camps and murder.”²⁰ Frevert here is explaining that the basic ideology of Hitler’s that the Aryan would rule the world and that the women who were only of that descent of “Norse” racial stock were the only ones that were worth the trouble of keeping around in order to support a breeding program to raise a nation of Aryans, was adopted in all aspects of life and that any woman who was not of this Aryan descent was sent off to be ridiculed and even killed, later on in concentration camps such as Ravensbrück created for the purpose of isolating and exterminating undesirable females, for the continuation of the Reich and the German race.

Koonz also explains this tendency on the part of Hitler and Nazi leaders to treat women how they viewed them, as something which was specific to their gender and that of less than the men of the country. She writes;

In 1933 the first signs of a new Nazi attitude toward motherhood had appeared, but the change, like so many policies had passed unnoticed because it seemed to be an extension of older traditions. If women’s obligation to the Volk centered on childbearing, then public agencies ought to assume the obligation to care for those women and their children. Nazi policy rested on the right of the nation to force women to bear children. Shortly thereafter, propaganda began praising the heroic “racially pre” unmarried mothers loyalty to the Führer. In the mid-thirties, as Hitler’s obsession with Aryan

¹⁹ Ute Frevert, *Women in German History* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997), 207.

²⁰ Ibid.

breeding revolutionized conventional views of marriage, his dreams of conquest and war compelled women to leave their womanly Lebensraum and return to the factories.²¹ Koonz is expressing that Hitler and others like Goebbels had a clearly defined policy on women as well as a propaganda system in order to promote those policies and beliefs. Where Koonz says as stated above that the Nazi leaders wanted to “force” women to bear children further lends evidence that the leaders viewed certain women, namely married Aryan women as vessels in which to continue the German race, and this was depicted in the propaganda of the pre-war years starting in 1933.

Frevert goes on to discuss how during the war years starting in 1939, the Nazi Party needed the mass support of women to go to work for the war effort, because of the labor shortage after the first World War and the need for every man to take up arms for the cause against the enemy. This changed drastically however when the sudden influx of male laborers after Hitler’s ascension to the Chancellery in 1933 so that the policy had to be changed in order to accommodate for the male labor force as well as the forced labor force that was beginning to take shape from all of the prisoners of war as well as the newly segregated Jewish population. An example of this is where Frevert states, “Though at the level of political organization the Nazis were consistent both ideologically and in practice, policy was constantly shifting where the female labor force was concerned.”²²

The general consensus of Nazi dogma by leaders viewed women as something other than *human*, but as Charu Gupta put it in her article on the subject, “as German woman she is a mechanical womb; enthroned as heroic patriarch, the man towers over the family.”²³ This statement in her introduction on the subject of women in Nazi Germany describes the attitude of Hitler and other party leaders in that the woman was seen not only as a work force for the cause,

²¹ Koonz, *Mothers*, 197.

²² Frevert, *Ibid*, 217.

²³ Gupta, *Ibid*, 40.

they were primarily viewed as the mothers of the Aryan race, or those deemed fit were, and that they were to be treated as such, and that the man was dominant over the woman in all things domestic.

Going on in her analysis of the subject, Gupta explains the Nazi policy toward women and thus giving credence to the fact that the Nazis needed women in order to keep providing either strong suitable men for the Nazi cause, or more suitable women in order to replenish the supply of breeding stock for the Aryan nation. She also discusses that, women who were viewed as mothers were;

either as Aryan mothers, to be encouraged to have more children and to be made fit to do so by the new emphasis on physical training which the Nazis introduced in schools, workplaces and organizations such as the League of German Girls, or as “inferior” mothers, as Jewish, gypsy, handicapped or other “degenerate” mothers and potential mothers, to be discouraged or prevented from having children and to be rigidly separated from the favored majority of the population.²⁴

This statement shows that the Nazis truly viewed the female as subservient to men and that the suitable ones should be used in order to continue the race but that those who they saw as unfit should be dealt with, as discussed before in the creation of special concentration camps for women, in order to cull out the bad “seeds” of the population and prevent them from creating what they felt was less than standard offspring.

Another argument to this fact that the Nazis wanted only those women of the preferred background of Aryan bloodlines to be those who would mother the country, Jill Stephenson in her book on women in Nazi Germany writes, “But the encouragement they gave applied strictly to those whom they regarded as valuable citizens, from the points of view of race, heredity, health and politics.”²⁵ This justification was used in order to enact policies towards marriage, thus further controlling the issue of the role of women in society.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 40.

Nazi Party leaders stressed that the education of women and their role in society was also important in order to have women realize at a young age that they were to be the mothers of the country. As Stephenson writes, “service, in the family, in the community, at work, even in public life was to be the motive of education.”²⁶ This meant that the Nazi leaders wanted the women of the nation to be educated not in the sciences or other subjects the men were educated in, but in the subservient domestic life that they were to be asked to embark upon once they became of marrying and child bearing age so that they were not allowed to be able to think freely and openly about such things as becoming leaders in the community rather just to become mothers and homemakers, perpetually subservient to men.

Furthering the argument that the woman was also valuable to the country in the workplace, Tim Mason states that the Nazis, from their inception of the party were concerned with the total use of everyone in the country, whether woman or man as parts to the machine. This resulted in a growing number to women going to the workplace because, as Mason puts it,

The drive for domesticity in the years 1933-1936 had fed on the inadequacies and superficialities of the liberal theory and practice of emancipation. The socio-economic structure had remained largely impervious to liberal reforms in the 1920s,²⁷ The Nazis however also valued the usefulness of those women fit to work for the cause as servants to the nation. Gupta goes on to write that the Nazis recognized women for their efforts as workers by stating that, “the employed woman was by no means forgotten or totally rejected. Thus it was stated that “no woman who out of personal preference, wants to take up a profession, will be prevented from doing so”.²⁸ It is with this distinction which makes the Nazi policy towards women unique in that it valued women for all their usefulness, whatever role they may

²⁶ Jill Stephenson, “Women's Labor Service in Nazi Germany,” in *Central European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 118.

²⁷ Tim Mason, “Women in Germany, 1925-1940 Part II,” in *History Workshop No.2*, ed. Tim Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 7.

²⁸ Gupta, *Ibid*, 40.

serve so that they could utilize women in every aspect of daily life of the nation. This policy of including women in the workforce, only applied primarily to unmarried women however.

With the inception of the Women's Labor Service, which was created in 1934 in order to manage which jobs women were hired to and oversaw women workers, now headed by the Nazis, encouraged compulsory service starting in 1935 so that a steady labor force would be present. This started a rift between those in power in the Party as to how this branch of the government should be run. On the one side there were those like Goebbels who believed that the compulsory service of women was good in order to keep the labor force strong. On the other side there were those who like Hierl, who was the head of the newly renamed *Nationalsozialistischer Arbeitsdienst*, or NSAD as of 1933 and would remain in that post until the end of the war, "who were determined to maintain the primacy of the "educational" function."²⁹ Stephenson also describes that,

There was, though, some common ground between those who saw practical value in the Women's Labor Service and those who stressed the "educational" motive. Both agreed that the actual work performed should be in agriculture or domestic service, two areas deemed especially suitable for women's employment, in Nazi theory, and, as it happened, two areas which were to grow very short of labor from the mid-1930s.³⁰

She describes here the differences on how different leaders viewed the issue of how to deal with women in Nazi society and how best to use the growing numbers as a suitable workforce for the Reich.

Stephenson writes in her essay *Women in Nazi society* that, "The Nazis intention was not, as was often claimed to remove women completely from the labor market. They did aim to persuade married women to leave work, to devote their full attention to their family, or to start a

²⁹ Stephenson, *Women's*, 245

³⁰ Ibid, 246.

family if they were childless.”³¹ Mason also writes on this subject as providing support for the need of support in the early days of the Party to gain support of all. He writes,

This was probably the ground on which the regime gradually began to win general recognition and support among German women. Whether they had no children or two or six, whether they subscribed to any part of Nazi ideology at all or not, their own experience (reinforced no doubt by the wishes of their husbands) told them that regular work under the prevailing conditions was little more than an unpleasant necessity and that their 'pre-ordained' place in the home was altogether more comfortable.³²

Mason here presents an argument which echoes the statement made by Gupta that women were a valued part of the workforce, but at the same time married women would better serve the country if they were in the home raising children for the cause instead of at work keeping jobs from those who needed them more, such as the men or other single women. Later on in the duration of the war however, that policy would change because a greater work force of women was needed to allow the men to go to battle.

Despite all the efforts on the part of the Nazis to get women to be valiant mothers in the home as well as be a driving force in the workplace in order to support the cause in times of war, their efforts were mildly successful. According to Gupta, “Germany failed in mobilizing its women labor force during the war.”³³ She writes to explain this argument;

Though the Nazis declared that a woman's place was in the war, their mobilization propaganda was not as forceful as that of America. This was due to a number of reasons. Hitler was opposed to conscription of women. Also Nazi propaganda expressed great concern for protecting women from physical or mental strain that might endanger them as mothers.³⁴

The result of such an attitude towards women on the part of the Nazis was such that it meant that women did not have the incentive to go to work. There was no equal pay policy that had been enacted by the party so women had no real reason to go to work. This confused policy towards women and the absence of what Gupta calls, “concerted propaganda campaigns,” meant that

³¹ Stephenson, *Women*, 85.

³² Mason, *Ibid*, 8.

³³ Gupta, *Ibid*, 44.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

women truly did feel unequal to their male counterparts, something that the Nazis set out to accomplish in the first place but was an unintended consequence when it came time to mobilize the women into the workplace so that they had a mass labor force in times of war.

To sum up what Gupta argues about the portrayal of women on the part of the Nazis one must look at where she writes that; “Nazi ideology on women was, like Nazi ideology in general, a strange mixture of traditional conservative ideas, vague longings for a mythical past and acceptance of the needs of a modern economy.”³⁵ This meant that the members of the Nazi regime had to work harder in order to keep the support of the women workers and mothers despite their beliefs in them as mothers to the nation and a driving potential work force.

Throughout all of the analysis of these historians’ critical views about the subject there are several things that come to mind as to the policies and attitudes towards women that Hitler and the Nazi party had during their regime of the Third Reich. The primary goal of portraying women as the mother figure and their role in giving birth to the Aryan nation is something that Hitler wanted from his early days in the Party in 1919 as well as when he was building support for his ascension to the Chancellery in 1933. The fact that he reiterated this concept of the necessity of the *Volksmutter* role in his speeches to women’s leagues just further emphasizes this point. Despite all of these attempts the general population of women supported the cause of the party because they felt that they had a responsibility to really be the mothers of the country, even though there were those feminists in opposition who were shot down by the party, nevertheless support for the cause was clearly evident in the everyday lives of German women under Nazi rule and these historians discuss these and other facts throughout their arguments.

An examination of primary sources in the system of propaganda the Ministry of Propaganda created shows this view of women on the part of leaders such as Goebbels. This

³⁵ Ibid.

system, through visual as well as textual material, and also transcripts of speeches made by Nazi leaders, all lead to the conclusion that the Nazi leaders wanted women to have a certain role to play in society based on their heritage as well as marital status and also wanted to groom females from a young age and appeal to children of all ages in order to keep their ideals alive in the newer generations so that they carried that throughout their lives.

Starting with the speeches made by Nazi leaders themselves in order to show this emphasis on being the mother of the country as well as marking a change in ideals about women's roles throughout the war years, one can see just in the rhetoric of these speeches that a definite change was not only eminent, but necessary. These forms of propaganda were used initially in order to orally account the wishes of Hitler and other Nazi leaders so that the women would have another way of hearing of these policies and wishes, and decide for themselves what role they would play in society.

In a speech given in 1933, just six weeks after Hitler took power as Chancellor, Josef Goebbels, and the newly elected Minister of Propaganda, spoke on womanhood, and what it meant to be a woman in the New Germany. In this speech to German women, he states;

It is a happy accident that my first speech since taking charge of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda is to German women. Although I agree with Treitschke that men make history, I do not forget that women raise boys to manhood. You know that the National Socialist movement is the only party that keeps women out of daily politics. This arouses bitter criticism and hostility, all of it very unjustified. We have kept women out of the parliamentary-democratic intrigues of the past fourteen years in Germany not because we do not respect them, but because we respect them too much. We do not see the woman as inferior, but rather as having a different mission, a different value, than that of the man. Therefore we believed that the German woman, who more than any other in the world is a woman in the best sense of the word, should use her strength and abilities in other areas than the man.³⁶

³⁶ Zentralverlag der NSDAP. "Deutsches Frauentum," *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1934), pp. 118-126. In *Nazi Propaganda by Josef Goebbels 1933-1945*, "German Propaganda Archive", Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb55.htm> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

Goebbels is emphasizing early on in Hitler's leadership that the Nazi party had a particular view of women, and that view was that the right woman should stand by her man and become the mother and leader of the household, raise the children to become the future of the country and that they have no place in politics and should use their abilities in other avenues of daily life separate from but supporting the men of the country.

Goebbels goes on in the same speech to say that;

A fundamental change is necessary. At the risk of sounding reactionary and outdated, let me say this clearly: The first, best, and most suitable place for the women is in the family, and her most glorious duty is to give children to her people and nation, children who can continue the line of generations and who guarantee the immortality of the nation. The woman is the teacher of the youth, and therefore the builder of the foundation of the future. If the family is the nation's source of strength, the woman is its core and center. The best place for the woman to serve her people is in her marriage, in the family, in motherhood. This is her highest mission.³⁷

What Goebbels meant here just re-emphasizes the Nazi leadership's point that women had a certain place in society and they should practice it as such to the best of their abilities. There was no place in public life for a woman and especially not in the military is what the Nazi leaders believed early on in their race for total domination of Europe.

From the visual material the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda sanctioned in order to emphasize their point of women's role in the "New Order", it is evident through this portrayal that the Nazi leaders wanted certain women for certain roles. Beginning with the role of that of "mother of the country," it can be seen that this was the primary goal in spreading the influence of Nazi ideals to the women across the country.

The *Frauen Warte* was the Nazi Party's biweekly illustrated magazine for women. The issues which are discussed here are a sample of those which were distributed to women of the country between 1935 and 1945. This was the primary state-sponsored periodical which spread the propaganda of the Ministry of Propaganda so that a vast number of German women received

³⁷ Zentralverlag der NSDAP. *Frauentum*, Ibid.

the messages the Nazis wanted to convey, whether it be at first with promoting the image of “mother of the country,” or later after 1939 shifting the focus to “worker” in the context of the increased fighting in the war.

Figures one and two are cover art for the primary women’s magazine in Nazi Germany. It is seen in these two images from 1937 that the primary focus is that of “mother of the country.” As it is seen in Figure 1, the mother takes center stage, as the support system to the child she is holding,



Figure 1³⁸



Figure 2³⁹

as well as the warrior husband who stands behind her. She is also the support system to the entire country, represented in the background in the farmer. This striking image is what the Nazi

³⁸ NS Frauen Warte. “Cover Art for NS Frauen Warte”, Vol 6 Issue #20 1937/38. *The Frauen Warte*. “German Propaganda Archive,” Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw6-20.jpg> (accessed April 20, 2011).

³⁹ NS Frauen Warte, “Cover art for NS Frauen Warte”, Aug 1938. *The Frauen Warte*, “German Propaganda Archive,” Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw7-04.jpg>. (Accessed April 20, 2011).

leadership meant by the “mother” being the driving force to carry the country into the future by breeding the new generation.

In Figure 2, the figure of the mother is presented as the cover for this issue as well. These depictions, with a small family and the father being portrayed as a worker for the country show that this is how one should behave in society and that the woman is the foundation of the family. This is something that The Nazi leadership emphasized throughout their Propaganda campaign, that the woman is central to the family.

Other covers from the same magazine depicted mothers as the support system of the family as well as the family being the foundation of the country. As can be seen below in figure 3, the ideal Aryan family is depicted in order to get across the message further that the Aryan race will lead the country and those women who are married and from this heritage should have only this role, to be the mother figure.



Figure 3⁴⁰



Figure 4⁴¹

⁴⁰ NS FrauenWarte, “Mother’s Day Issue”, 1939, *FrauenWarte*, “German Propaganda Archive”. Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw7-23.jpg>. (Accessed April 19, 2011).

⁴¹ NS FrauenWarte, “Mother’s Day Issue”, 1940, *The FrauenWarte*, “German Propaganda Archive”. Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw8-22.jpg> (Accessed April 18, 2011).

Figure 4 also emphasizes this point that the woman who is married and of this Aryan heritage should be the mothers and not working in the factories or in other avenues of life, for they are the ones who are the most desirable for the breeding program the Nazis had in place in order to breed a purer more Aryan stock for the future of the country and German race.

As the war years waned on through 1939 however there was a shift that took place in order to get women into the factories and increase the labor force of the country. The reasons behind this were because the men of the country were off fighting the two front wars after 1941 in Russia and France and were dying at an alarming rate, for the Nazis were being defeated by the allies. Below are examples of how the Nazis attempted to get the support of women and get them into the factories and working on the farms in order to keep the war machine alive.



Figure 5⁴²



Figure 6⁴³

⁴² NS Frauen-Warte. "Cover Art for NS Frauen-Warte", April 1940. *The Frauen-Warte*, "German Propaganda Archive". Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw8-19.jpg> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

⁴³ NS Frauen-Warte. "Cover Art for NS Frauen-Warte", June 1941. *The Frauen-Warte*, "German Propaganda Archive". Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw9-24.jpg> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

As seen above in Figure 5, the depiction of the woman working in the field with the image of the factory as well as the soldier behind her shows that the Nazi leaders were working hard to get women out of the house and into the factory in order to keep the labor force strong. This was common throughout the war years as the Nazis were continually being defeated in places like France and Russia by the allies and losing more and more soldiers to these battles. All of this resulted in the male workers of the country being recruited into soldier positions to fight to keep the war going and hopeful defeat on the part of Germany. In doing so the workforce suffered tremendously and the need was there in order to keep things running, thus the cover art and posters seen below to get women to work.

Figure 6 also depicts a woman in a working role as nurses in order to support the nation. This particular issue of the magazine deals with women working for the war effort and the cover portrays the woman as such. Again this marks a shift in the depiction of women primarily as mother to worker for the cause in Nazi Germany during the war years.

Adult women magazines were not the only print material available in order to get the support of females across the country. It can be clearly seen that the Nazi leaders wanted to imprint this image at an early age discussed earlier of “mother” and then “worker” as time went on. The images below will first be seen to deal with this depiction of “mother”, and then “worker” for the cause. The way to do this was to initially compare the lives’ of German children to that of the soviets and have the girls of Germany realize that they are better off serving the Fuhrer than living under a soviet rule. This would enable the Nazi leaders to mould the girls into the women they felt they should become by portraying a better life full of happiness and health in Germany.

In figure 7, the point is clearly illustrated that the Nazi leaders wanted to emphasize the point that Germany was a better place than Russia for little girls to grow up. The ragged disheveled clothing of the soviet girls in contrast to the clean almost “Aryan” looking girls, primarily those of Norse heritage with blonde hair and blue eyes is something the leaders wanted to impart upon the children of the country and that it was their duty to live as the “perfect” German woman and become mothers to the country. This is evident in the articles contained within the magazines which discuss these themes.

Figure 8 also emphasizes this point of how one should live in the new Germany. Clean healthy mountainous living in the Aryan way should be practiced so that all can be healthy and



Figure 7⁴⁴

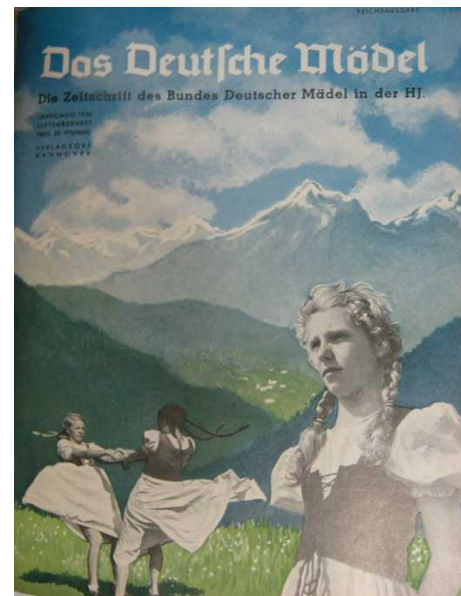


Figure 8⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Das Deutsche Mädel. “Cover Art for Das Deutsche Mädel”, Jan 1938. *Das Deutsche Mädel*, “German Propaganda Archive”. Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/maedel/dm1-38.jpg> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

⁴⁵ Das Deutsche Mädel. “Cover Art for Das Deutsche Mädel”, September 1938, *Das Deutsche Mädel*, “German Propaganda Archive”. Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/maedel/dm9-38.jpg> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

grow-up to become good healthy mothers to raise the new race of Aryan children. This is a common theme throughout these magazines.

On the other side of how German girls should conduct themselves, there are illustrations which depict younger women in nurturing roles for the war effort, as well as those depicting girls working in the fields in order to lend support for the war cause during the time when fighting was ramping up after 1939. This was in effort to get girls to get it in their minds at an early age to be willing to work for the cause, whenever that time arose. The images below illustrate this shift in thinking on the part of Nazi leaders.



Figure 9⁴⁶



Figure 10⁴⁷

⁴⁶Das Deutsche Mädel. "Cover Art for Das Deutsche Mädel", November 1942. *Das Deutsche Mädel*, "German Propaganda Archive". Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/maedel/dm11-42.jpg> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

⁴⁷Das Deutsche Mädel. "Cover Art for Das Deutsche Mädel", July-August 1943. *Das Deutsche Mädel*, "German Propaganda Archive". Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/maedel/dm7-43.jpg> (Accessed April 20, 2011).

As can be seen in figure 9, the portrayal of the young woman as nurse to the wounded soldier shows that the Nazi leaders wanted to get young women and girls to have the mindset to go into service for the country. This is echoed by figure 10 in that it portrays a young woman serving soldiers possibly on the front lines in order to give them a greater feeling of home life rather than the dredges of war. Again this shift was due in part that the Nazis needed women to get out of the house and go to work for the cause, and even at an early age of being a young girl, this idea was taught so that when they became of age they would go to work right away and keep the war machine running.

Written materials were also used in order to lay out roles for young girls as they grew into adulthood. Aside from the magazines which were produced by the Ministry of Propaganda to this aim, textbooks were also written to discuss biology and how women should be subservient to men. Other materials such as an education plan for young girls and the books they were to read during what years in school point to this idea that the Nazi leaders wanted a specific plan in place to “educate” the girls of the country and have them conform to their overall plan.

In a biology textbook for middle school aged girls written in 1942, the laws of nature and humanity echo that of the Nazi leadership so that the “proper” information was conveyed at a young age. In the first chapter of the book it states;

All living creatures that succeed in the struggle for survival are not satisfied merely with existence, but seek to preserve their species as well. Here too is a drive that corresponds to natural law. Without this drive, species would long since have vanished. The fox builds a den for its helpless young and cares for them. The deer cares for its fawns, and the bat even carries its young with it through the air. Each spring we watch with fascination as the birds cleverly build their nests, hatch their eggs, and untiringly feed their young. Insects place their larvae in certain areas where food is available. Mosquitoes and dragon flies, for example, put them in water, the cabbage moth in cabbages, stag beetles at the base of old oaks. We find the care of the young characteristic of all branches of the animal kingdom.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Marie Harm and Hermann Wiehle, *Lebenskunde für Mittelschulen. Fünfter Teil. Klasse 5 für*

Here is where it is evident that the concept of caring for one's young should be the primary goal of the women of the country. Using examples from nature in order to illustrate the notion that women must stay at home and care for the home and family is something that is the primary lesson that it is seen in nature that the male is the dominant force in a society throughout this textbook written in 1942. The continuation of the species is also discussed in order to emphasize the concept of procreation on the part of women and to have children in order to keep the species (nation) alive and growing.

Within the framework of the Hitler youth, there existed a system of education intended to reach everyone in the country. In the winter of 1938-39, the NSDAP drafted this system for girls aged 10-21 so that they would have a framework for learning based on what the Nazi leadership wanted them to learn. This system was patterned after the ideals of the party and included reading books during certain times which preached the Nazi doctrine and further illustrated the point of the roles of women in society.

Also, by organizing this education into certain age groups, education of the masses across the Reich could be done more efficiently and effectively. As seen in the documentation and instructions for the system, "With the beginning of the new year, worldview education for units of the HJ, the BDM, the DJ, and the JM will be organized by age group in the entire Reich."⁴⁹ The document goes on to lay out the system of education educators must follow in order to educate the girls of the country in the way the Nazi leaders saw fit.

Mädchen (Halle: Hermann Schroedel Verlag, 1942), pp. 168-173. "German Propaganda Archive", Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/textbk01.htm>, (Accessed April 20, 2011).

⁴⁹ Reichsjugendführung. "Worldview Education for Winter 1938/39 ." German Propaganda Archive", Calvin University. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/hjworldview.htm> (accessed April 13, 2011).

The importance of this issue of the portrayal of women in society is that there are stark differences in the policy and efforts the Nazi party put into practice that contrast with those of other countries of the same time period, which what makes it so important to discuss. The general Nazi view that women were subservient to men and that they should play a key role in the creation of a new race of citizens, is something that, while present in other countries of the day like Italy, is something entirely unique in its practice in Germany. In the United States, there was an effort on the part of the government to rally women to the factories with images like *Rosie the Riveter*, but all in all there was no effort on the part of the U.S. government to sponsor a breeding program and to tell the women of the country they were less than the men. This is important to state because this theory that the Nazi elite were out to unite through division of the sexes and give each their own role in society is something that the Nazis had at their core belief system. Hitler and other leaders like Goebbels surely did believe that the man was greater than the woman and that the woman should do everything in her power to serve the man. This is evident through the extensive policy discussed throughout what other historians have studied as well as the primary sources such as the cover art and speeches given in order to depict the Nazi leadership as something entirely unique in the world and during the time period in which they ruled. The change in attitudes towards women did not change in its basic creed over time, but the change in the way women were depicted in order to gain support for women to become workers was necessary in order to keep efforts for war running smoothly throughout the war years. This was all done in an attempt to create the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a community of citizens where everyone has a specific role to play in the continuation not only of a specific race of people, but the success of the nation as a whole. What this reveals about policy making is that basic creed, such as the Nazi views of how men and women should play specific roles in society

and how men were the dominant force in society, can be the driving force in how a country is run in the context of nation building and during times of crisis such as the Second World War. This view can be jaded at its inception or morphed overtime into something that becomes obsession so that the policies enacted by the ruling party change the country into something that spirals into chaos and disarray, resulting in its failure. The failure on the part of Nazi leaders to recognize that their views on women as well as policies enacted were actually causing their downfall is something that needs to be considered when contemplating the errors of the past, and forming a new future for any nation across the world.

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