

# *Sexual Policy in the Third Reich*

## *Ambiguities and Inconsistencies*

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## Introduction

The National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP) was a reactionary political ideology that grew from being confined to a small group in Bavaria with no significant influence to one of the most pervasive and brutal regimes in recent history. As in Italy with Mussolini's fascist movement, National Socialism developed as a reaction against Marxist communism which was threatening Germany and the democratic parliamentary system which had brought the country to the brink of disaster, or so it was perceived by the nationalist Right. The NSDAP opposed communism, unregulated capitalism, consumerism, liberalism and the largely illusory power of the Jewish people, all seen as products of the Weimar Republic that emerged in 1919 following the First World War. One of the critical errors made by many students of this era is in supposing that National Socialism and Marxist Socialism were at opposite ends of the political spectrum, far Left and far Right, when in fact they were a hair's breadth apart in many respects. Both were totalitarian in their concept of state power, both were prepared to use extreme methods to realise their goals, and both regarded liberal democracy as a failed experiment which always led to weakness and moral decay.

The present paper is a study of some of the key aspects of sexual reproductive policy and sexual behaviour within the National Socialist regime. Central to the Nazi mission was the policy of national rebirth leading to the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the 'people's community', based entirely on the ties of ancestral heritage and informed by an unshakeable belief that the Germans were the supreme race. The ideology was an extreme form of conservative socialism that was backed by Hitler's radical views on sexuality and the separate spheres of men and women. This policy encouraged the idea of women as being Germanic through dress, such as the *dirndl*, and women's attitude towards sexuality. Another major party policy was that of sending homosexuals to prison and then onto concentration camps in order to re-educate them to adopt heterosexual behaviour. However, these policies were rife with ambiguity. Throughout the Nazi Party's twelve years of rule there were changes in the policies towards women. For example, they were first told to stay at home and raise a family; then, when war began, to go to

work and do their duty for Germany. How homosexuality was regarded also went through changes in policy. Prior to the Röhm purge in 1934 homosexuals were somewhat accepted within urban society and even the NSDAP itself, yet after the purge the policy towards these men changed radically, and would change yet again a few years later.

The purpose of this special study is to identify the reasons for the ambiguities and inconsistencies in Nazi sexual policy and to determine whether these were planned differences or *ad hoc* changes. There are limitations to this study however, for although much has survived from the Nazi regime, including eye-witness accounts, many public records were destroyed with the advance of the Allies into Berlin. There is also the fact that there is no reliable documentary evidence of public opinion; few dared to raise their voices against the Nazis, and those who did were either executed to prevent others from voicing the same opinion, or sent to concentration camps where many just disappeared. Terror on a grand scale was used to ensure that there would be little opposition to the Nazis' policies, and this meant that they could change without resistance whenever the original policy had become obsolete for whatever reason.

Reliable sources are therefore difficult to procure. Practically everything that has been written with regard to the Nazis comes with its own bias. Claudia Koonz in her book *Mothers in the Fatherland* is a populist read which targets a female audience. Koonz adopts a position which shows the reader a picture of how women were oppressed by the Nazis, and most of her analysis is heavily tainted with second-wave feminism. In effect, she asks how German women could allow this to happen to them. Koonz is not alone in this regard; many female writers researched for this study chose this revisionist model which is not only poor historiography but completely ignores the reality that many women readily and gladly gave up their political and economic rights in order to return to the home and the care of their children. This of course is in direct opposition to the feminist argument and possibly why women have difficulty empathising with their female counterparts with regard to Nazi party policy.

What the Nazi party attempted to do was to create conformity within its people, but many people conformed not through choice but rather the lack of

it. This was done through the use of mass propaganda techniques; radio was used for the first time to broadcast Nazi policy along with the press, all of which were under state control, as well as the total indoctrination of children. National Socialism was chaotic in nature and remained so throughout the twelve years of Hitler's reign which is why there were many policy changes during this time. The NSDAP's sexual policy was directed to the physical and social rebirth of Germany. The *Volksgemeinschaft* was the first stage of their plan, that of purifying the community of all of those deemed as being inferior, or *Untermenschen*. This would include Jews, Slavs, gypsies and black people. The second stage of the National Socialist's plan was that of the *Blütsngemeinschaft*, the community of pure blood. The *Schutzstaffel*, or SS, was the prototype of this second stage. Both Hitler and Heinrich Himmler foresaw a time, perhaps a century later, when not a single German citizen would have a drop of 'impure' blood in his or her veins across at least five generations. Hitler said in a speech in 1941: "I do not doubt for a moment, despite certain people's scepticism, that within a hundred years or so from now all the German élite will be a product of the SS – for only the SS practises racial selection."<sup>1</sup> The impact of the first stage was the murder of approximately eleven million people who had, through no fault of their own, become victims of Hitler's megalomania. The second stage was not implemented to any great degree although the SS were encouraged to make as many young girls pregnant as was possible, but this ended when the war was lost.

Within the *Volksgemeinschaft* there were politically and biologically defined roles for both men and women; men were expected to be masculine in the extreme and be the 'master' in their home life. Every woman was expected to conform to the idea of the Victorian woman where her only concern was to have as many children as possible and to dedicate her life to her husband and family. To achieve these aims, the National Socialists would offer incentives for men and women to marry in the shape of marriage loans, with a graduated reduction in the payment of these loans linked to production of children within these marriages. In return for these promises all the

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1 Burleigh, M (2001) *The Third Reich: A New History*. Pan Books, London. p274.

National Socialist party wanted was loyalty from them even if it meant giving up their children for the greater good, that of the continuation of the German race. This study will look at the treatment of women and how they integrated their own ideas into the state and why then the policy towards women changed, taking them out of the home and putting them back into the workplace. Men's role in society was based on male bonding – *Männerbund* theory - and provision for their family, as long as it was within a racially acceptable marriage. This male bonding stemmed from the First World War and seems to have been based on Hitler's experiences in the war, showing that men could and should rely on each other to the exclusion of women. Within the male society, where men ruled, the stress was on masculinity and the beauty of the male body. This was incorporated into all aspects of life under National Socialism, with health and fitness being of the utmost importance to all but especially men. Until the Röhm purge of 1934 it did not seem to matter if *Männerbunde* (the 'e' denotes the plural) included homosexuals; in fact it is undeniable that homosexuals were drawn to the Nazi movement precisely because of its overt glorification of male sexuality. Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, the tome that most Nazi policies were based upon, made no mention of homosexuals at all. He was completely uninterested in homosexuality; rather it was the prejudices of his closest associates such as Himmler who drove forward the homosexual purges when for so many years homosexuality had been tolerated within the Party. This study will look at the reasons for this change of policy.

The National Socialist government was an exercise in social engineering on a scale that rivalled the Marxist regime in the USSR, only instead of a nation of workers there would be a community of *Germans* based on racial purity through the eradication of undesirable people from society and the sterilisation of those deemed unfit to breed. Both totalitarian experiments failed, but whereas millions still visit the Tomb of Lenin in Moscow, no established memorial to Hitler exists. Even so, the grave of his mother in Leonding is still beautifully tended by persons unknown, as is the house which was his boyhood home. In other words, though both Marxist Socialism and National Socialism may have been unsuccessful in the creation of a perfect human society, there are still plenty of people alive today who regard both

ideologies as being worthy of respect and, perhaps, a second chance. Therein lies a warning to us all.

*Note by **The History Room** editors: The grave markers for Hitler's parents were removed in 2012 by an elderly descendant of Alois Hitler and the graves themselves made available for new burials. Similarly, since 2016, Hitler's boyhood home in Braunau am Inn has been scheduled for demolition.*

## **Part I: 'Der Reaktion': Weimar Germany and NSDAP policy**

The democratic experiment that became known as the Weimar Republic began its final collapse in January 1933 when Adolf Hitler assumed the chancellorship of Germany. Within eighteen months all traces of parliamentary democracy had been eradicated. It took three national catastrophes in less than fifteen years to bring the Nazis to power: the loss of the First World War, the currency crash of 1923, and the withering impact of the Great Depression, trials that even an older, more established democracy would be hard pressed to withstand, let alone one which had barely enough electoral support to make it function at all.

Weimar was not without its successes, but these were mostly at the cultural level. Advances in architecture, art, literature, science and music caught the attention of a global audience as the German *avant-garde* used the freedom of expression which came with universal suffrage to interpret the German past, present and future. Walter Lacquer described Weimar Germany as 'the first modern culture', but with political and social freedom came public promiscuity and widespread drug abuse. Critics on both Left and Right despised the 'moral decay' in the Republic, typified frequently by the Expressionist and Dada schools of art. Those on the Left attacked the 'base materialism' of the bourgeoisie; critics on the conservative Right were appalled by the mystifying sexual subcultures, especially in Berlin. Lacquer also observed that while many in the urban centres revelled in licentiousness and hedonism, the vast majority of small-town and rural Germans were repulsed by this so-called 'freedom'.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Lacquer (1974) *Weimar: 1918-1933*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London. p148.

Along with this modernist rejection of Wilhelmine culture came new ideas on sexuality from the German 'New Left'. While the working class parties such as the Communists and the Social Democrats stayed resolutely uninterested in the matters of sexuality, the champagne socialists of their day advocated the complete liberalisation of sexual practices and the abolition of censorship. Conservative groups deplored all such talk. Major women's organisations campaigned vigorously for a widespread purge of homosexual groups, and the official condemnation of premarital sex, masturbation, contraception and public nudity.<sup>3</sup> Against them was a platform of sexual equality for women, legalised abortion and homosexuality, and approved birth control. Of these, the last three became illegal under the Nazis and female promiscuity was frowned upon. The calls of the New Left were not that the state should ignore the private lives of individuals, but that government should give legal support to liberal sexuality and promote it in the interests of social freedom. As Willem Melching put it, 'This would make a positive contribution to the position of women as independent individuals in society.'<sup>4</sup> However, such a radical programme brought with it the implied separation of sexuality and procreation, something the conservatives and later the Nazis wished to prevent. Left-wing newspapers argued that the traditionalists were only interested in raising the birth rate to provide the army with more 'cannon fodder', and the punishment of a year in prison or a fine of a thousand marks for selling contraceptives was regarded as practically medieval.<sup>5</sup>

An influential group of writers known as the *Weltbühne* ('World Stage') regarded male and female homosexuality as proof that there was no natural link between sexuality and procreation, and that the traditional role of the woman as wife, mother and educator was woefully outdated. One of the *Weltbühne*, the Dutchman Theodor Henrik van der Velde, published a book in 1928 entitled *Die Vollkommene Ehe* (The Ideal Marriage) in which he advocated restricting the number of children and sexual experimentation, including bisexual encounters and additional lovers if both partners

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3 Melching, Willem (1990) 'A new Morality': Left-Wing Intellectuals on Sexuality in Weimar Germany. *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol.25, No.1, January 1990. p72.

4 Melching, W. 'A New Morality' p75

5 This was under Paragraph 184 of the penal code. Homosexuality was already illegal under Paragraph 175. (See Part III of the present study.)



consented. This early swingers' handbook was immensely popular, prompting the social commentator Rudolf Arnheim to declare that 'the separation of love and sexuality has finally appeared.'<sup>6</sup> Writing in the *Berliner Zeitung*, he argued that the 1920s were now an age where one's own morality was a personal affair, and where sexual freedom was a sign of a truly liberated society. Kurt Hiller wrote that the new Germany had 'bestowed the freedom of the individual to do what gives him pleasure.'<sup>7</sup>

The sexual excesses of Weimar Germany were deplored by the majority of the middle classes and the conservative south. Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

Today the whole of our public life may be compared to a hot-house for the forced growth of sexual notions and incitements. And is it not a frightful shame to see the number of physically weak and intellectually spoiled young men who have been introduced to the mysteries of marriage by the whores of the big cities?<sup>8</sup>

Leaving aside his interminable rants against prostitution and syphilis, such general views as this found a ready audience in the Germany of the 1920s. The wanton promiscuity was associated in many people's minds with the emancipation of women, both in politics and the workplace. The divorce rate climbed alarmingly, so too did the number of abortions and illegitimate births. Government ministers gloomily predicted 'the death of the nation' unless the balance could be restored between the male and female spheres, something which the Nazis would devote a large part of their policy-making to after 1933.<sup>9</sup>

One other aspect of sexual freedom in Weimar Germany merits attention, and that is the peculiar passion for public nakedness.<sup>10</sup> Nudity equalled freedom, and freedom from clothing brought one closer to nature.

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6 Melching, W. 'A New Morality' p82.

7 [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/hiller](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/hiller). (Biography, 2008) Hiller (1885-1972) had been interned by the Nazis in 1933 in Dachau. He fled Germany in 1934, first to Prague, then to London.

8 Hitler, Adolf. (2001) *Mein Kampf*. Pimlico, London. p221

9 Pine, Lisa (2000) Nazi Policy Towards 'a Strong and Pure German Nation'. *Modern History Review* April 2000. p23.

10 Jonathan Meades, the architectural critic and maker of *Jerry Building: Unholy Relics of the Third Reich* (1994, BBC) said of the Germans, 'they love anything compulsory and anything communal, and if can be done naked, so much the better.'

Public nudity, according to many travellers in Germany during the 1920s, 'was becoming a feature of everyday life.'<sup>11</sup> Stephen Spender wrote:

Roofless houses, expressionist paintings, atonal music, bars for homosexuals, nudism, sunbathing, camping, all were accepted. Surrounded by this superficiality were the indignant Protestants, vengeful nationalists and doleful communists, but such intent expressions of will and feeling were obscured by the predominant fashionableness. It was easy to become advanced. You only had to take off your clothes.<sup>12</sup>

But for once this was not an issue which exercised the Nazis as much as sexual liberation. They introduced a ban on mixed nudity in 1935, but not all of the Party membership was prepared to observe or accept this. Nudism was an integral part of the *Männerbunde* (see Part III), and there were three major naturist organisations which flourished in the Republic and continued to attract new members well into the Nazi years.<sup>13</sup> The *Berliner Zeitung* claimed in August 1930 that up to three million Germans regularly practised public nudity, and the numbers were growing despite the introduction of a 150Rm fine in 1932. This was the so-called 'gusset decree' which insisted that women sunbathed in a full costume which covered their breasts, upper body and the upper part of their thighs.<sup>14</sup>

Hermann Goering said in 1931: 'The naked culture movement deadens the woman's natural sense of shame, removes men's respect for women, and thereby destroys the conditions for any genuine culture.'<sup>15</sup> Although Goering did not ban naturism when the Nazis held power, he continued to disapprove of the practice, calling it 'one of the greatest dangers to German morality.' In a desperate attempt to appear politically correct, some naturist organisations banned Jews and socialists from their memberships.

In summary, the sexual politics and practices of Weimar Germany provided reactionary conservatives of all political shades with much to be

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11 Jefferies, Mathew (2006) 'For a Genuine and Noble Nakedness'? German Naturism in the Third Reich. *German History*. Vol.24 No.1 (2006) p61.

12 Spender, Stephen. (2001) *World Within World*. pp108-09.

13 These were the Imperial League for Free Physical Culture (RFK), the Imperial Association for Free Physical Culture (AFK), and the League for a Free Way of Life (LffL). Together, they claimed around 85,000 members.

14 Jefferies, Mathew 'For a Genuine and Noble Nakedness.' (2006), p66. Men also had to wear costumes with legs and a gusset.

15 *Ibid* p67.

angry about. The National Socialists condemned and deplored practically everything associated with sexual liberalism and experimentation. To them, the emancipation of women was not progress but a Jew-inspired calamity to befall Germany and her people. More traditional minds were dismayed by the apparent collapse in female morality and public behaviour, thus when the Nazis had the opportunity to put the clocks back, they found millions of supporters for what they termed *der Reaktion*. Under the Nazis, nudity and sexuality would be rebranded as 'grace and beauty', neither tempting nor sinful. Any variation or deviance which did not serve the needs of the race would be purged.<sup>16</sup>

## **Part II: Heterosexuality in the Third Reich**

The ultimate political goal for the NSDAP was the creation of the *Blütsgemeinschaft*, the racially pure community. It follows by simple logic that the social role and status of women would be critically important if this aim was to be realised, since they would be the bearers of the new race. Hitler's personal appeal was greatest among women and boys. This latter group was almost totally seduced by the magnetic charisma of their *Führer*, largely through indoctrination within the Hitler Youth. But a great many women too were enthralled by the man, not because of his looks (which in the most charitable sense could only be described as average) but because he possessed two of the most powerful aphrodisiacal qualities known to humankind: immense power and a lot of money. Also, because he cultivated the image of the reclusive guru, pondering the great questions of humanity high up on his Alpine mountain; and because Goebbels created the public portrait of the bachelor whose only love was Germany, he represented an unattainable figure. Women in their millions dreamt only of saving him from loneliness; in their tens of thousands they wrote letters offering to bear his child, often with their husband's consent. Explaining this curious attraction is a difficult matter, but most arguments fall within two categories. First, some claim that German women suffered from what might be called mass sexual

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16 Marschik, Mathias. (2003) A Fascinating Spectacle of Inconsistencies: Eroticism in the Nazi Era. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol.6 No.1 (2003) p97.

hysteria; second, they gave their support rationally and with much aforethought because he offered them a much better life.

Richard Evans considered this debate by presenting a simple question: why would women willingly vote for a Party that was so avowedly antifeminist and convinced that male political and social power was superior in all respects? As he says, 'thus the women of Weimar Germany, it seems, voted quite happily in 1932-33 for their own enslavement.'<sup>17</sup> Previous attempts to explain female support have concentrated almost entirely on the psychological aspects, including contemporary opinions such as those by Hermann Rauschning who declared in 1939 that it was the women's vote which had enabled Hitler to seize power. He advanced the argument that women were fascinated by Hitler who engendered in them a kind of sexual rapture, especially amongst older women, during the many rallies and other media appearances. Other authors extended this theme, notably William Shirer, Joachim Fest, and Richard Grunberger whose *Social History of the Third Reich* (1976) is still a standard text. Taken together, these arguments create the image of a 'collective debauch' in which women gladly sacrificed their political and social status in order to worship at the feet of the Fuhrer whose 'monkish persona' awoke in them sexual desires which had lain dormant or repressed for decades, if not centuries.<sup>18</sup> Fest suggested that Hitler had the capacity to exploit and manipulate two powerful female qualities simultaneously: their willingness to submit to male dominance and an insatiable demand for authority and order.<sup>19</sup>

Such a view might be considered controversial today were it not for the fact that feminist writers still struggle with the same puzzle. As Francine du Plessix Gray wrote: 'Women, to a much greater degree than men, have a powerful and very contradictory need for liberation and for shelter, for freedom and for oppression.'<sup>20</sup> Evans rejects these arguments but he does not do so

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17 Evans, Richard J. German Women and the Triumph of Hitler. *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol.48 No.1 (1976), p123.

18 Fest (1972), p401 and Grunberger (1976), p117.

19 Fest (1972), p402.

20 Faust (1982), p83. Radical feminists have been attempting for many years without much success to drive out the first characteristic, which they see as negative, from women's self-identity, claiming that the will and desire to submit is culturally learned from a patriarchal society.

very convincingly. He accepts that the emotional interpretation of Hitler's appeal to women was based largely on the contemporary opinion that women were too politically immature to have been persuaded by political arguments. After all, they had only been enfranchised in 1918 and had not yet built up the intellectual or experiential core of political activism which would have enabled them to make sound objective choices. Evans interprets the female shift to the conservative right as a total rejection of the considerable advances in women's emancipation which had taken place under the Weimar regime, and yet strangely he enlists the support of a writer who argues *against* that very premise, Renate Bridenthal.

Bridenthal's position is that women were *not* emancipated at all in the Weimar Republic, but changes in their lives gave the impression that they were. She argues that the movement of women into the workplace and into politics created a powerful cocktail of real guilt and illusory fulfilment in millions of women:

Condemned for her abandonment of the family, suffering consequently from a sense of failure at home as well as at work where her socially induced feeling of inferiority was reinforced by low pay and lack of advancement, it would not be surprising if the women of the Republic failed to embrace her supposed emancipation and even actively rejected it in politics.<sup>21</sup>

Such an opinion might appear in any western newspaper in 2009 and still carry much weight, but in Bridenthal's view this is why women turned to the NSDAP in 1932-33. Thus, far from being 'liberated', they had only been further exploited by being yoked to the economic machine. At least the Nazis, who promised to lead them back to the nursery and the kitchen sink, promised stability, status and fulfilment.

Evans weakly challenges Bridenthal's position by dismissing her statistical model of female political choices, suggesting that her conclusions are too narrow, but he then relies upon the same evidence to advance his own theory. He points to the fact that because women were more represented in the workplace after 1918, this became the fuel for a wider feminist movement which embraced the spread of contraceptive use, the declining dependence on men for economic well-being, the demand for

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21 Cited in Evans (1976), p133.

greater state support in women's health and education, and the rejection of the noble *Hausfrau* image portrayed in the media. But his conclusion does not suffice, for he confuses job *opportunities* with job *satisfaction*. As in many countries even today, the majority of lower-class German women in the interwar period were practically shackled to that section of the economy which enabled them to balance work with family duties. It is true that the numbers of working women increased quite considerably, but the overwhelming majority of those jobs were menial, unfulfilling and low paid. Thus Evans, in attempting to disprove Bridenthal's argument, only succeeds in reinforcing her point. When Hitler offered women the 'separate spheres' model of National Socialism, he was promising to liberate the German woman from wage slavery and return her to being queen of the home, the 'angel of the house', and to give concrete form to those promises with state financial support.

Evans is on stronger ground when he suggests that German traditional society was adversely affected by the new rights of women to work for wages. He makes the distinction between work outside of the home and work within it, for many Germans of both genders regarded paid work for women as being detrimental to the good management of the family. Trade unions objected because female employment was depressing wages and stifling job prospects for boys, and women's groups objected because they made a connection between greater female spending power and a decline of moral values in the young such as female drunkenness, increased promiscuity and rebelliousness in the home. Older women who worked were frequently accused of domestic neglect, of being too tired to grant their husbands their nuptial rights, and of undermining the education of their children by having too little time to give them.

The Nazis approached this problem in their characteristically confused manner. On the Left of the party, men such as Gregor Strasser loudly and frequently declared that the German woman would have equality of status in the National Socialist state regardless of whether she worked or not, and whether she was single or not, and whether she had children or not. Even Magda Goebbels said in 1933 that German women had full access to the world of employment, claiming that only three professions were denied to them: the military, government and the practice of law, skilfully ignoring the

fact that all three were pillars of the state, and together they created, controlled and determined the lives of everyone.<sup>22</sup>

Evans has no time for these platitudes, rightly supposing them to be propagandist and for consumption at home and abroad. Instead, he focuses on the political views of the largest German women's organisation, the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF) which had nearly a million members on the eve of Hitler's rise to power. He combines the platform of the BDF with that of the NSDAP which insisted that the regeneration of German power and honour could only be achieved through the 'separate spheres' model. Both groups interpreted the word *Feminismus* to mean not female emancipation and political equality, but to represent so-called feminine qualities of appeasement, compromise and submission. Thus, antifeminism in Germany was not restricted to the political sphere of women's emancipation, but used equally to attack qualities deemed to be incompatible with Germany's national rebirth. For this to occur, 'masculine' qualities of 'hardness', leadership and comradeship were essential qualities which most men (and a great many women) believed that women did not and could not possess. These 'masculine' qualities could only be found in all-male societies such as the *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) and the *Männerbund*.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, feminism in all its forms was strongly linked to Judaism and by extension, Marxism. The German League for the Prevention of Emancipation of Women (DBBF) believed that the women's movement was part of the internal Jewish conspiracy to subvert the German family and destroy the purity of the race. Founded in 1912, the DBBF had widespread support amongst the middle classes and had no difficulty in grabbing yet more when it proclaimed that the granting of female suffrage and economic independence would only lead to the neglect of the family and the production of more children for the Reich. As Evans says, 'these ideas were repeated almost without amendment by the Nazis', and he cites Hitler in *Mein Kampf* who made a direct link between emancipation and the global Jewish conspiracy to destroy the German family and pollute the Aryan race.<sup>24</sup> Thus it

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22 Evans (2004), pp138-140.

23 See Part III for a fuller discussion of *Männerbund* theory.

24 Evans (1972), p135

was that women, simply by virtue of their gender and their cultural values, found themselves inextricably attached to the two great horrors of the German Right, communism and the Jew. It is no wonder therefore that the NSDAP wished to dismantle such rights as women possessed which lent credence to the interpretation that the emancipated woman might well be 'the enemy within', thus she was to be subjugated, re-educated and confined to positions of obedience and submission to the male will.

The great paradox in this is that the BDF were wholly on the NSDAP's side, as were many working-class women by 1932. Overwhelmingly middle class, the BDF had long campaigned against contraception, abortion, the removal of female antisocial elements, political careers for women, and the complete separation of a woman's employment from her domestic duties: she could have one, but not the other. As for working-class women, as Bridenthal showed (despite Evans' later objections) they regarded the drudgery of menial labour to be demeaning to them as women because it forced them to neglect their families, and they demanded greater state assistance with child care and health maintenance. Either way, the Nazis could gather female votes in abundance, on the one hand by promising a return to 'traditional' female values, and on the other by offering financial support for wives and mothers of all classes.<sup>25</sup>

The BDF was dissolved in 1933 and replaced by the *Nationalsozialistischen Frauenschaft* (NS-Frauenschaft, or NSF), and it was an amalgamation which received considerable support from the former membership of the BDF. In fact, the only differences between the policies of both groups were that the NSF was more radical in its solutions to the problems facing German women. For example, the BDF's campaign against contraception was replaced by the eugenics policies of the Nazis, including forced sterilisation and state permits for marriages. The BDF's insistence on state medical help for the infertile was replaced by the easy dissolution of barren marriages under the NSDAP, and promiscuity amongst younger women – for a long time the bane of the German middle class – was now officially recognised if it led to the birth of a racially acceptable child. So, far

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25 Bridenthal (1972), p155.



from being the Judao-Bolshevik devil in disguise, the BDF and its million members (and millions more supporters) were actually the willing accomplices in the wholesale destruction of feminist rights won under the Weimar Republic.

Support came readily from other groups, including the Social Democrats and the Catholic Centre Party, who were quite happy to row in behind this redefinition of a woman's role even if they despised most of the NSDAP's other policies. The trade unions and the churches had no reason to stand in the way of programmes that would reduce the numbers of women in work and return them to the pew and the parlour. And yet, as always with the NSDAP, there were contradictions in both policy and application. For example, the more avidly they pursued a programme of sterilisation and regulated fertility, the more they undermined the family. The state became the determining agency in the production of children, not society. With easier divorce and abortion on demand for reasons of racial purity or infertility, the divorce rate began to climb still higher. Also, by pouring money into marriages through state loans, and at the same time investing funds in Himmler's *Lebensborn* project, the Nazis simultaneously applauded marriage *and* childbirth for the single woman. Further still, the state financial support for the non-working wives of men at the front line simply encouraged more women to withdraw from the labour market precisely at the moment when Germany's war effort was struggling because of a labour shortage.

Evans believes that the Nazi policy of granting economic appeasement of women in the home, and the granting of middle-class demands for more 'traditional' female values, both served to avoid another *Dolchstoß* similar to 1918, a 'stab in the back' this time not delivered by Jews and Socialists but by their shadow cousins, the women of Germany. Thus he concludes that women of all classes were prepared to sacrifice their so-called 'freedoms' in order to secure a productive, worthwhile life at home, and it is wrong to presume that some powerful emotional bond existed between the women of Germany and Adolf Hitler; rather, those who voted for him were part of 'the political mentality of the politically illiterate.'<sup>26</sup> Evans is wrong, for to presume

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<sup>26</sup> Evans (1972), p168.

that women flocked to the polls because they knew no better is patently ludicrous. Except for a small group of mainly younger women who shrugged off politics as tedious and dull, and apart from those brave young women who actively resisted the Nazis (and often paid with their lives) the adoration of Hitler by the *Hausfrauen* in the home and the *Mädschen* in the *Bund Deutsche Mädel* (BDM, the Hitler Youth wing for girls) was visceral and absolute. The catchphrase of the hour was *Emanzipation der Frau von der Emanzipation* (women's emancipation from emancipation). By giving their support to Hitler, they were voting not for their enslavement or oppression, but for liberation from having to be liberated, and for the shelter of the state as they lived their lives as women.

Having secured the support of the vast majority of German women, Hitler offered them a seductive package that contained both glory and cruelty. The Party's cold gaze fell upon key aspects of femininity that would be harnessed or controlled to build the master race. These aspects were sexual behaviour, fertility, racial purity and care of the family.

In 1932 Goebbels claimed that 'the mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring many children into the world. The female prettifies herself for her male and hatches the eggs for him.'<sup>27</sup> In other words, a woman's primary function was that of a breeding machine. National Socialism required women to be the initiators of seduction; it was not for men to pursue women, but for women to appear obviously available. To achieve that goal, men needed to make themselves as desirable as possible, mainly through uniforms, body fitness, medals and other symbols of Aryan manhood:

The 'erect self' of the German man did not have to bother with female seduction. Countless images and texts show how women looked up to 'their' men in uniform, be it their husband or an unknown soldier.<sup>28</sup>

In the Third Reich men were expected to present themselves as progenitors of the perfect race. In this way, the separate spheres model enabled men to be exalted and uplifted in direct contrast to the rigidly defined roles prescribed for women. Instead of the situation in most modern western cultures where

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<sup>27</sup> Koonz (1986), p364.

<sup>28</sup> Marschik (2003), p99.

women compete to be as noticeable as possible to potential partners, in Nazi Germany it was the men who had to preen and strut – bright peacocks parading before the drab peahens.

Women were expected to be attractive, but not in a directly sexual way. To display herself as a sexual object was to reduce herself to the level of street whore or 'showgirl'. Men who pursued such women were letting down themselves and the race. Hitler's preference for the *dirndl*<sup>29</sup> for women permeated through south German society and sparked a fashion wave, but even northern women were expected to tone down their dress to avoid adverse comments from both genders. Instead of competing with each other sexually, women would be given the opportunity to impress others through their homes and children. Even so, women used make-up, hair styles, glances, gestures and so on to re-arm themselves with seductive techniques in the absence of changing clothes fashions. Nevertheless, the official – and therefore most respected – dress code for women was *Trachten* (traditional) clothing and *Gretchen* braids, or at least hairstyles that were uniforms in themselves.



From a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective this seems remarkably oppressive, but there were major psychological and social advantages from this regularisation of female public appearance. In effect, the regime socialised female sexuality too. By levelling the playing field by easing out the visual competition between women, they made it easier for less attractive females, or those who were not beautiful but had strong 'inner values', to find suitable mates. Nudity and sexuality therefore took on different meanings: Real women – and especially uniformed men – were desexualised.<sup>30</sup> Sports and health maintenance became crucial to maintaining one's mating value. Grace,

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29 Image: Traditional *dirndl* outfit c1949. Bundesarchiv, Bild183-09958-0575/CC-BY-SA 3.0.

30 Marschik (2003), p104

demure beauty and feminine dignity were prized; sluttish behaviour, excessive display and aggressive seduction were considered un-German. Such women would be cast out of communities by other women; it was the perfect era for women to police other women. In so doing, the Nazis enabled women to revalue the 'sexual currency' and to derive more benefits, security and concessions from men for the exchange of sex, safe in the knowledge that prostitutes and promiscuous rivals were under attack by the state and society at large.<sup>31</sup>

And yet there was much ambiguity and inconsistency. Films often depicted women 'draped for men's eyes' and musicals featured women who were very lightly dressed indeed.<sup>32</sup> Women in the cinema of the Third Reich were generally presented in one of two ways: racially and socially acceptable, or the polar opposite of such virtues. Manuela Von Papen studied the propaganda effect of this dual approach and concluded that the Nazis had not turned the clock back, but had moved dramatically forwards to elevate women to the status of 'guardians of the culture'.<sup>33</sup> Housekeeping and child bearing were raised to the plane of a state function:

Although the Nazis were opposed to women's social, sexual and political equality, in racial terms Aryan women were equal to Aryan men and racially suitable women were promised respect. Therefore the vast majority of German women supported the clearly anti-emancipatory stance of the leadership because they believed they were participating in a great national revolution and the creation of a new order.<sup>34</sup>

This was a political conjuring trick of some magnitude. At one stroke the Nazis had cleansed the so-called 'decadent' elements from visible German society, and this appeased both younger and older women as it removed many aspects of female competition for men, and at the same time they promised women absolute security in the home, the family and on the streets.

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31 See Baumeister & Vohs (2008) for a full discussion of this phenomenon. Though not applied to any historical period, their work examines the exchange of female sexual favours in return for a wide variety of resources and concessions.

32 Marschik (2003), p104. The careers of some globally known stars were affected as a result. Marlene Dietrich suffered a massive backlash from 1935 onwards as the state turned against her vampish persona and her films were banned. She had left Germany in 1930 and became an American citizen in 1937.

33 Von Papen (1999), p694.

34 Von Papen (1999), pp693-694.

However, despite the regime's attempts to tone down women's dress, there was more resistance as the economy faltered and the war began. Women were even enticed to attend NSF meetings with the promise of a fashion and lingerie show afterwards, and even the demure BDM promoted fashion and cosmetics courses to younger women. The conformity was eroded by fear of war and the decreasing numbers of available men as the army expanded. By 1939, any seductive techniques could be permissible providing they did not transgress acceptable community codes, involve race defilement, or threaten other women. The pulling up of the stocking, the fastening of the garter belt ('the most coquettish pose of the era') became highly eroticised. As the war progressed, it fell more to the German woman to make herself a 'worthy prize' for the hero on the front line. The restrictions against overt physical sexuality quickly eroded, and German women could again flock back to the shops to buy (limited) ranges of cosmetics, clothes and lingerie. In the end, the eroticism of Weimar, so often denigrated by the party, had returned to war-torn Germany: 'Even in the last days of the regime, surviving bombardment was followed by bacchanalian excesses in the streets.'<sup>35</sup> The search for immediate gratification had returned.

But behind the applause for the reformed 'New Woman' of Nazi Germany, praised for her public modesty and devotion to her family, lay a more sinister intrusion into the lives of those who did not fit into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Although the regime insisted that it was a woman's duty to bear children for the state, those children had to be racially pure and physically healthy. The National Socialists simply modified and radicalised existing eugenics practices. The Weimar Republic already had marriage clinics that would check the racial suitability of couples before they married, but their popularity with the public was never as great as those clinics which dispensed contraceptive advice. The Nazis closed the latter in 1933 and massively expanded the provision of the former. The drive to 'cleanse' the national body (which was notionally feminine) and bring about the rebirth of German society, all 'impure' elements had to be purged and prevented.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Marschik (2003), p107.

<sup>36</sup> Czarnowski (1997), pp116-118. Gisela Bock (1983) traced the principles of German racial hygiene back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Several 'eugenics' publications emerged across

The Nazi system of marriage loans is well documented elsewhere, but the initial rush for these was soon tempered by the strict health screening which was a prerequisite. These checks were to be completed *before* the couple married, so without a clean bill of racial health the marriage itself could not take place, legally at least. After 1937, marriage licences were only offered after the health screen *and* a letter of 'political suitability' issued by their local government or Nazi organisation. The screen was a dangerous moment, especially for the woman. If she was determined to be unfit for motherhood, the most likely consequence was forced sterilisation. This was backed by a platform of laws which appeared between 1933 and as late as 1944. The criteria for compulsory sterilisation gradually increased moving from hereditary deformity to feeble-mindedness, finally culminating with persistent absenteeism from work, failure at school and chronic antisocial behaviour, such as alcoholism. Men, too, were frequently the victims of this policy, but it was always primarily directed at and applied to women. The total number of issued marriage loans probably did not exceed 800,000 but the known number of sterilisations is around 200,000 and probably there were a great many more.<sup>37</sup> Alongside these draconian practices was the complete illegality of abortion from 1933, carrying with it a mandatory death sentence from 1943. It is impossible to know how many abortions were carried out in the Third Reich, but there were 7000 convictions for illegal practice between 1932 and 1938.<sup>38</sup>

Women in Nazi Germany were politically seduced by promises. If they conformed to the Party line and accepted the role of 'mothers of the nation', their lives were relatively secure only if they were lucky enough not to fall foul of the racial policy. The penalties for *Rassenschande* (race crime) were severe, and sometimes fatal. Women depicted in feature films, as Von Papen showed, were simply either 'good' or 'bad'. Of the more than 700 films made during the entire twelve years of the Third Reich, over half were *Heimat* movies (Homeland). The *Heimatfilme* typically represented a wayward woman

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Europe, and yet this was at a time of steady decline in the birth rate which was attributed to mainly middle- and upper-class women who were limiting the size of their families. Bock (1983), pp404-407.

37 Bock (1983), p409. Many medical records, especially concerning the *Aktion T4* euthanasia programme, were destroyed in 1945 before the final collapse.

38 Bock (1983), p410.

who would be re-educated by her peers and disciplined by a male, either a father, brother or someone in an official capacity. Normally she would be depicted infiltrating or returning to a thoroughly orthodox *Volkisch* community, and she would in some way be considered dangerous to that community either as a sexual predator, a gossip, a meddler or a non-conformist. In the course of the film she would come to accept the error of her ways and be once more accepted into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or she would be cast out, perhaps even killed. As Von Papen said,

The message to the women of the Third Reich was to stick with what they know and not threaten the solidarity of the community. People who cannot or will not adapt will always remain outsiders.<sup>39</sup>

Given that more than 70% of the entire female population went to at least two films a week before the war, the *Heimatfilme* became a powerful mechanism for the transmission of Nazi ideology to women, and as the war got fully under way, two further genres, the 'Home Front' films and the 'Professional Heroine' appeared and achieved great popularity. The first genre depicted the woman who held down two jobs, one in the home and one for the war effort. She worked hard, lived frugally, and set a shining example to other women. The second genre was the most radical, for in these films a woman would suddenly, but temporarily, take over a man's role because of some emergency, but always with the implied aftermath that she would return to her female sphere when the crisis was over.<sup>40</sup>

The movie industry in the Third Reich was directed by Goebbels as head of all German media. Aside from occasionally grazing on the young starlets who passed through his office, he made sure that the entire ideology of the Third Reich as it applied to women was projected to them on the silver screen. During the course of the 1930s the initial requirement that women stayed at home and tended their husbands and children was reversed. After 1936, due to the demands of the second Four Year Plan ('Guns and Butter'), women were urged to return to work, and by 1943 all unmarried women were

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39 Von Papen (1999), p706.

40 Von Papen (1999), pp707-709. The most popular of the 'Professional Heroine' films was *Unser Fraulein Doktor* (Our Young Lady Doctor, 1940) in which a young medical student fills a doctor's post left vacant by a man gone to the front. She does a marvellous job and, of course, and marries him when he returns a hero. The film ran for 18 weeks to packed houses in Berlin alone.

conscripted into the Reich Labour Service. These U-turns in Nazi policy were depicted and explained at the cinemas. As Matthias Marschik put it, 'and so they achieved a surrogate emancipation of sorts, the freedom to conform or not.'<sup>41</sup>

### **Part III: Homosexuality in the Third Reich**

The National Socialist regime's attitude to homosexuality was based on existing legislation. In April 1871, shortly after the unification of the German Reich, Prussian restrictions on sexual contact between members of the same sex were adapted and expanded to become Paragraph 175 of the penal code (§175). When the National Socialists rose to power in 1933, this law was used to provide for not only the prosecution of homosexuals, but for their persecution too. A common slang term for a male homosexual was a '175-er', or with a wink and a nudge, someone might suggest that a man was 'born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May' (17/5).

The curious paradox within the Nazi attitude is that before the Röhm purge of 1934, homosexuality was generally tolerated within the Party. Indeed, the nature of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) was temptation itself to homosexuals. The strong emphasis on male camaraderie in the Brownshirts led Christopher Isherwood in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) to comment favourably on the magnetic effect that so much *lederhosen* exerted on those inclined to respond. Scott Lively also asserted that some aspects of promotion largely depended on favourable sexual orientation, provoking Himmler to complain wearily that a man's advancement in the SA rested less upon merit than his availability to the openly gay leader, Ernst Röhm.<sup>42</sup> Hitler, who had written not a word against homosexuality in *Mein Kampf*, publicly defended Röhm in 1931, but the opposition press, and a lot of graffiti artists, happily pilloried the

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41 Marschik (2003), p106.

42 Lively (1995), p92. *The Pink Swastika* has attracted much negative criticism since its publication, and it is true that some of Lively's conclusions seem forced, especially his reliance on some extremely doubtful evidence that Hitler was essentially homosexual. While not categorically stating so himself, Lively should know better than to use Walter Langer's second-hand anecdotes as hard fact.



SA and its leader in cartoons and vulgar slogans.<sup>43</sup> The German Communist Party gleefully proclaimed homosexuality to be a 'fascistic perversion'.<sup>44</sup>

And yet immediately after the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, Hitler and Goebbels took the NSDAP through an abrupt about turn. No longer was homosexuality merely a matter of private interest, for in claiming that he had purged the Party of 'degenerates' and traitors, Hitler opened the floodgates to the homophobic lobby and §175 was restored as a weapon in Himmler's hands.<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey Giles suggests that it was the legal profession, not the leader of the SS, who drove forward the persecution of homosexuals, but it is certain that after Röhm's death the situation became much more perilous.<sup>46</sup> Early in 1935, fifteen men in the city of Weimar were tried and convicted of 'lustful intent' even though penetrative intercourse had not been proven as was required by §175. This was quite typical of Nazi policy in general – vagueness from the top of the hierarchy led to the policy being implemented in different ways all over Germany, much of it subject to local custom and morals.<sup>47</sup> In Berlin, for example, homosexual contact between males had long been part of the subculture, even accepted, but in Bavaria such activity would be met with instant imprisonment and social ridicule. At least one of the fifteen men in Weimar was released on appeal with the judge expressing the hope that it was still possible to make 'a proper and worthy human being out of him', but it is more likely that he would be used as bait to entrap other gay men. The Nazis were adept at getting the society to police itself, and this would be another example of the practice.<sup>48</sup>

The subsequent reform of §175 after 1934 was essentially a measure to appease the right-wing of the Party upon whose support Hitler had relied

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43 In August Kubizek's highly questionable memoirs, he and Hitler were once the subjects of an attempted seduction by a homosexual in Vienna. When Hitler gave his friend the standard lecture on the topic, Kubizek recalled: 'As an abnormal practice, he wished to see it fought against relentlessly, and he himself scrupulously avoided all contact with such men.' If true, it is one of the rare statements Hitler ever made on the subject. (Kubizek, 2006, p220)

44 Tamagne (2004), p115.

45 According to Giles (1992), Hitler referred to the victims of the purge as 'disgusting apes', or so it was reported in the *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1934.

46 Giles (2005) p340.

47 Oosterhuis (1997), p189.

48 Crew (ed) (1994) Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul's examination of the Gestapo demonstrated that fully 85% of all cases brought to the service's attention were generated by the public at large. In this sense, the Gestapo were a reactive force, not a proactive one.

during his rise to power. Hitler had paid only lip service to the gay question before becoming chancellor, occasionally advocating the closure of gay clubs in Berlin and speaking with apparent disapproval about public naturism. What the new purge really reflected was a desire to impress the public that the regime was actually getting things done, especially as most Germans believed that those incarcerated in the prisons and the camps were criminals who fully deserved to be there. With the imprisonment of many male homosexuals after 1934, the Party could claim that the 'cleansing' of asocial elements within the *Volksgemeinschaft* was well under way even though the exact definition of the law remained unclear and there was distinct reluctance on behalf of the Party leadership to discuss this publicly. The lack of clear guidance simply made it easier for conservative judges and members of the security forces to impose ever harsher punishments on 'sexual deviants' to the point where two out of every three homosexuals died in custody.<sup>49</sup>

Homosexuals also fell foul of both the eugenics and racial policies in Nazi Germany, both of which were intimately connected. National Socialism bracketed homosexuals in the same group as the Jews, the Roma, psychiatric cases and the hereditarily ill, all of whom seen as a threat to the purity of the race, and within their concept of 'biopolitics' had to be eliminated.<sup>50</sup> Even though §175 technically applied to lesbians too, it was rarely enforced and female homosexuality was by and large ignored by the government.<sup>51</sup> Lesbians were regarded with ambivalence by the Nazis because they were still potentially fertile, and as such could still produce children for the Reich even if they were impregnated by force. Male homosexuals, however, were regarded as a dead weight on society; they most certainly could not further the cause of a racially and morally pure *Volksgemeinschaft*, so in that sense they were defenceless. Sterilisation was widespread in the Third Reich as a means of controlling undesirable fertility. A 1935 amendment to the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Progeny (1933) included a clause by which those in violation of §175 might be castrated. It also extended the

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49 Giles (2005) p342.

50 Oosterhuis (1997), p187.

51 The public's view of lesbianism was not so liberal, however. Edward Crankshaw noted in his history of the Gestapo that many women in suburban and rural communities frequently identified lesbians to the security services as a means of purging 'unfeminine elements'.

definition of a homosexual act to include kissing, hugging and touching. Yet again, this was a law with no clear interpretation handed down to the courts, and many doctors used unscrupulous methods to obtain the victims' written consent to the procedure. In addition to homosexuals, all vagrants, prostitutes and irredeemable alcoholics were also condemned by this law, prompting some international observers to comment that here was an effective method of clearing the streets of embarrassing eyesores in advance of the 1936 Berlin Olympics.<sup>52</sup> In point of fact, *all* male sex offenders in Nazi Germany were liable to be castrated, some for remarkably trivial reasons such as the university lecturer who was convicted of tickling a hotel page boy on a park bench in 1936. Under pressure from the Gestapo he confessed to his 'crime' and agreed to castration in return for a job in a library once he had served a short prison sentence. In reality, he was stripped of his doctorate, served three years in Dachau, and on his release the job never materialised.

The Nazis justified this extreme brutality by pointing to the practice in other states such as Denmark and California even though the evidence then, as now, does not support the claim that castration eradicates sexual urges. Indeed, in a commentary on the original 1933 legislation the Reich Minister for Justice, Dr Franz Gürtner, specifically advocated that homosexuals *not* be castrated under §175 for this very reason, even though he was one of the three signatories to the 1935 Amendment, leading us to the conclusion that the Röhm purge had indeed launched open season on the gay community. The Lutheran Church in Germany also supported the law from the position that it was better for the deviant in the long run because it would protect him from further corruption in the sight of God.

Within the first nine months of the Amendment the prison doctor at Moabit had completed 111 castrations, boasting that he had reduced the operation time to eight minutes under local anaesthetic. By 1941 there had been 2,156 recorded castrations, with some high profile cases being used in propaganda campaigns to emphasise the Party's claim that 'deviants' were steadily being removed from society, although officially the practice was never

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52 Giles (1992), p42.

declared to be a punishment and was instead hailed as a control method for sexually aberrant behaviour.

The law was extended still further in 1943 to include college failures, persistent absentees from work, antisocial troublemakers, compulsive criminals of all categories, defeatists and political dissenters. All of these fell under the umbrella term *Gemeinschaftsfremde*, or 'aliens to the community', and their removal from society and their potential sterilisation was seen as necessary to prevent further pollution of the racial stock. Although the new amendment was suspended for the duration of the war, there were Nazis who wanted to implement it at once, primarily in their drive to rid Germany of male homosexuals. They were opposed by those who believed that the emasculated male could be reintroduced to society and might even serve the armed forces in some capacity. This latter view was actually supported by the Gestapo who remained convinced that there was a distinction between the congenital homosexual and the unfortunate victim of a predatory seducer. This group, they believed, could eventually be reintegrated into society after a suitable period of re-education, but this type of ambiguity was rife within the NSDAP where different departments all had different ideas about the implementation of already confusing policy directives. Although the aim of the NSDAP had been to breed homosexuality out of the German population, this seemed to change as the war effort took a turn for the worst after Stalingrad. In other words, the reintegration of homosexuals was a cynical move designed to make up for the massive losses on the Eastern Front and the steadily depleting labour force.

The Party also tried to enlist the scientific community into its war against homosexuality. Attempts to prove that homosexuality was congenital were ridiculed in the outside world, yet this did not stop Himmler from pestering Hitler into drafting an order in 1943 prescribing the death penalty for any member of the SS indulging in same-sex acts of carnality. Hitler, never much interested in the subject anyway, acquiesced to Himmler's wishes but then ordered him to keep the edict secret, fearing that Germany's enemies would use the information to scoff at the supposed supermen of the Nazi racial elite. But Himmler was convinced that one active homosexual could 'infect' five others if left to his base desires, and a senior biologist in the

ancestral heritage society, the *Ahnenerbe*, produced a diagram which indicated that the whole of the SS would be gay by 1945 unless drastic action was taken. This led to many acts of injustice as ambitious SS commanders used the edict to remove rivals or humiliate junior officers and men.<sup>53</sup> One case involved a suspected gay soldier on leave from the Russian front who was given a one-year jail sentence for merely brushing against an SS sergeant who claimed indecent assault, a clear case of entrapment.

For Himmler, the greatest threat was a demographic calamity. He estimated that there were two million active homosexuals in Germany, and the theory of the 'gay contagion' meant eventually there would be no heterosexual reproduction at all. Perhaps a more realistic fear existed in the belief that a secret homosexual organisation might one day be present in the heart of the state. He believed that homosexuals looked after their own, so one gay minister might employ five gay assistants, and so on. Said Himmler:

You cannot trust a homosexual. He is sick, loose, dishonest, irresponsible and disloyal. He is an ideal target of pressure and has an insatiable need for confidence.

As Florence Tamagne commented, 'this is a compendium of all the most banal prejudices with regard to homosexuals.'<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately for the gay community of Germany, the man who held them also controlled the Nazi terror machine.

But at the same time as this war was being waged upon the gay community in Germany, an entirely separate subculture of 'acceptable' homosexuality was thriving in the community, the party and the armed forces. Central to this was the German concept of the *Männerbund*. The best description of the *Männerbund* was provided by Nicholas Sombart:

The *Männerbund* was a cult of virility, friendship and fidelity, a community bound by a pact and whose secret was male eroticism between the

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53 Himmler's homophobia was erratically expressed. As part of a purge between 1937 and 1940, he first targeted 'careless automobile drivers' as the primary asocial target, followed by homosexuals and abortionists, and then murderers. This purge led to the arrests and incarceration of more than 95,000 suspected homosexuals, though very few of these were actually gay. (Giles, 2005)

54 Tamagne (2004), pp120-121 (including Himmler quote.)

membership, and at the centre of which was the *Männerheld*, the hero of the men.<sup>55</sup>

There were innumerable *Männerbunde*, but a common denominator for all of them was the unshakeable belief that all-male groups and societies were extraordinarily powerful in their abilities to channel masculine energy into the society, nation or the state. As Peter Davies wrote:

*Männerbund* theory, which became the theory of choice for intellectuals who gravitated to National Socialism, posited the absolute and biologically necessary separation of collectives of men from collectives of women, and granted men exclusive history-making power.<sup>56</sup>

Davies also considered the intellectual battle that consumed some anthropologists in the first thirty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including those inclined towards the NSDAP, that focused upon the supposed matriarchal origins of European culture in which all religious and political power was in the hands of the *Volksmütter*, the 'mothers of the people.' Such theories appalled conservatives and male chauvinists, and the resultant backlash saw the development of *Männerbunde* as an antibourgeois, antifeminist method of liberating men from the oppression of female tyranny. Through the pens of such writers as Heinrich Schurtz and Hans Blüher, the 'eroticized camaraderie' of the all-male society was credited with the most notable achievements of culture and state-building. Combined with *volkisch* ideas, *Männerbund* theory produced what Davies called 'ecstatic, cultic visions of Germanic warrior bands.' He added:

*Männerbund* theory can thus be read as an attempt to deal finally and unambiguously with a crisis in the language of masculinity that had arisen at the turn of the century.<sup>57</sup>

Hans Blüher wrote that the goal of the *Männerbund* was not equality, 'the prayer of the weak', but freedom and the sublime love of masculine power.<sup>58</sup> It follows that a plethora of clubs, societies and organisations in which male power and the male physique was worshipped was bound to be a magnet for homosexuals.

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55 Tamagne (2004), p118.

56 Davies (2007), p103.

57 Davies (2007) p103.

58 Tamagne (2004), p116.

This concept was explored through a controversial novel published in 1928, *Fundvögel*<sup>59</sup> by Hanns Heinz Ewers, whose real specialism was the horror genre. Ewers constructed a rather fantastic plot involving transexualism, rape, sadomasochism, lesbianism, male homosexuality and incest which all served to address the question, can a person's sexuality be truly changed? This of course was central in much of Nazi ideology dealing with sexuality of all forms; we have seen how many National Socialists believed that homosexuality could be 'cured' by one means or another. Ewers himself had been an activist in the gay emancipation movement during the Weimar years, but had joined the NSDAP in 1927. Although he strongly disagreed with the Party's anti-Semitism, he was attracted by the Nietzschean philosophy and the occultic beliefs of the *Thule* Society.

The nature of male homosexuality had been one of the most intense debates in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Magnus Hirschfeld, a famous European gay rights campaigner and contemporary of Ewers, claimed that homosexuality was the 'Third Sex' and that 'male homosexuals possessed a female soul within a male body'.<sup>60</sup> Hirschfeld's tireless campaigning in part led to a Reichstag committee voting to scrap §175 in 1929, but the recommendation never came before the full parliament due to the political crises at the time. But according to many German conservatives, Hirschfeld's interpretation was dangerously effeminate; the slang term for Hirschfeld's type of gay was a 'bearded lady'. Adolf Brand, leader of *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* (GdE), (or the Community of the Self-Owned) preferred the image of the all-male bonding culture idealised by the ancient Greeks. He understood this to mean homoerotic (but not necessarily homosexual) relationships between adult males and adolescent boys. The membership of the GdE believed that such an approach would not compromise the heterosexual relationships between men and women, but the all-male relationship would be primary and 'pure', and that women or any idea of the feminine would be repressed. This was a lock-and-key fit with the Nazi beliefs of male

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59 The full title is *Fundvögel, die Geschichte einer Wandlung* ('Foundling-bird, story of a metamorphosis').

60 Jones (2001), p320. Hirschfeld founded the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Research) in Berlin in 1919. The magnificent library on sexual sciences housed there soon found itself on the fire in the Nazi book-burning orgies of 1933.

supremacy and female subordination. The membership of the GdE was unlikely to have exceeded 2000 in the thirty years of its existence, but those ranks included at one time Röhm and his close associate in the SA, Karl Ernst.

In *Fundvogel*, Hanns Ewers took these ideas to the literary level. The women in the novel are presented as mere sexual objects; the men as sexual *beings*, capable of multiple copulations with either gender. To the Nazis, women were little more than receptacles, but men were agentic, dynamic and pro-active. This recalled the sexual philosophy of ancient Rome in which the passive receiver of the male phallus was termed the *pathicus*, and the male agent of copulation was the *vir*. It mattered not whether the *pathicus* was male or female; he or she was always deemed the subordinate or submissive partner. Nevertheless, the book was considered a little too risqué for the National Socialist morality and it was banned in 1934.

But much of what Ewers wrote and Hirschfeld espoused lay at the heart of Nazi sexual policy. Even though the legal changes after 1935 made homosexuality a much more dangerous practice, the Nazis never addressed the homoerotic attraction inherent within the *Männerbund*. The Nazi obsession with uniforms, patriarchal control, the exclusion of women from politics, the law and medicine, all acted to draw homosexuals to the movement. For them to openly condemn homosexuality and legislate against it was akin to a brewery campaigning for temperance. National Socialism gleefully promoted male bonding in the largest proto-*Männerbund* of all, the Hitler Youth. Similar conditions existed in Mussolini's Italy, and as a movement fascism threatened to bring to the surface that homoeroticism which had been part of modern nationalism from the beginning.<sup>61</sup>

*Männerbund* philosophy went extraordinarily deep into German male culture. Since the first publication of the GdE's magazine *Der Eigene* ('The Specials') in 1896, an abundance of like-minded societies had emerged, tapping into German traditions of the noble warrior in the mould of Arminius, conqueror of the Roman legions in AD 9.<sup>62</sup> The Nazis believed that the

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61 Jones (2001), p330.

62 Arminius, hero of the Teutoburg Forest, is commemorated by the *Hermannsdenkmal* statue which Boris Johnson described as 'one hundred and eighty feet of mini-skirted, copper-



*Männerbunde* would be 'the most tangible expression of patriotism and superior to family relationships'.<sup>63</sup> Hans Blüher declared that the state itself must become a global *Männerbund*, in effect leading to an openly homoerotic society. In his view, such a society 'is the means by which inverts protect themselves from social death.'<sup>64</sup> By 'inverts' Blüher meant self-confessed practising homosexuals, but for him 'sublimated' homosexuals – those who loved with their hearts and souls but not their bodies – were the highest form of life. Enthusiasts considered sublimated homosexual feelings to be the most important element which bound such groups together. Male love, but not male *homosexual* love, was the crucial distinction. *Männerbunde* ranged in scope from religious orders to the more popular *Wandervogel* (Wandering Birds) which originated, perhaps not coincidentally, at the time of the GdE in the late 1890s. These back-to-nature groups despised modern decadence and promoted *Männerbund* ideology. Heavily infiltrated by the early Nazi movement, they were all disbanded in 1933 and submerged into the wider political movement of the Hitler Youth, yet their basic philosophy survived. Part of this philosophy was anti-feminism, for increasing signs of the feminisation of society was perceived to be left-wing, bourgeois, and therefore a sign of weakness. Thus within the *Männerbund*, and their more openly homosexual counterparts in the GdE, the Nazis found the ideal combination of all their key principles: patriotism, military virtue, anti-modernism, and above all the creation of separate male and female spheres with the latter being regarded and treated as the inferior group.

*Männerbund* philosophy received a major boost with the advent of the First World War. Trench warfare idealised masculine comradeship and the principles of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the people's community. Ferociously strong male bonds built on self-sacrifice, devotion to one's leaders, and unthinking loyalty to the common cause were manipulated by the NSDAP and other nationalist groups to recover some positive value from the humiliation of defeat. Rohm exalted the virtues of the common soldier and declared that 'male comradeship, cemented with blood, was much deeper than the

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bottomed hero.' Still visited by 130,000 visitors a year, the *Hermannsdenkmal* is one of the most durable, and popular, nationalist emblems.

63 Oosterhuis (1997), p197.

64 Tamagne (2004), p117.

marriage bond.’<sup>65</sup> By encouraging and developing this perception, the Nazis automatically relegated women to the margins of German life except for the home. It was a model of male superiority which could only be found in war. Thus, while the Nazis extolled the family and the raising of ‘good’ German children, they simultaneously undermined the bonds of marriage between man and woman by promoting *Männerbund* philosophy, and they made matters worse in 1936 by making membership to the BDM and the Hitler Youth compulsory, taking away parental authority in the process.

This created a schism in the Party’s ideology that was never resolved. *Männerbunde* shared a place with the importance of the family as a cornerstone of Nazi values, but within the leadership of the Party there was widespread disagreement which should come first. National Socialist ideology presented German women with the seductive idea that motherhood would bring a form of social deification but there were serious inconsistencies with this. Increasingly after 1936 the role of the mother was undermined by the state as it took her children away into the youth groups at an ever younger age.<sup>66</sup> The Nazis believed that all children belonged first to the state and then to the parents, and boys in particular were encouraged to seek the company of other boys and men rather than the ‘feminised’ environment of the home. Close emotional ties to the family were disparaged, and various organisations bombarded German boys with the importance of male solidarity and comradeship.

The promotion of the idea that the proper political and social education of German boys could only be done by another male displaced the mother and replaced her with an older mentor that would guide the boy into adulthood with the required character. The *Männerbunde* of the Army, the SS, the SA, the RAD and the Hitler Youth were all crucial to the development of character and the total rejection of feminism in all its forms. Formal education of the intellectual kind was of minor importance. Education provided by the state concentrated on the separation of gender spheres – girls were trained to be wives and mothers, boys were schooled to be soldiers and workers. The

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65 Oosterhuis (1997), p198.

66 This has disturbing parallels with British society today where the government constantly harangues parents on child-raising techniques.

emphasis on politically correct youth development was typical of all totalitarian states, for those people born before the accession to power could never fully understand the new order, therefore only children could be fully indoctrinated.

This inevitably raised some objections, particularly from the National Socialist women's organisations, but also from intellectuals. In 1933 Sophie Rogge-Börner, an adherent of the matriarchal theory mentioned above, bitterly criticised the exclusion of women from public life and the Nazi cult of motherhood, seeing in it nothing more than another conservative, bourgeois interpretation of femininity which she identified as 'Judao-Bolshevism' in different clothes. The true German woman, she argued, is not a simpering, half-educated *Hausfrau* but a warrior in her own right. She and a number of other writers addressed an open letter to Hitler in April 1933 demanding the equal participation of women in the political, social and military life of the state.<sup>67</sup>

At a less intellectual level of society, many ordinary women saw the idealisation of male bonding as detrimental to the sensual love of a man for a woman, replacing this with a 'spiritual' love between men. Some were concerned that *Männerbund* philosophy would eventually lead to a decline in marriages, and the combination of misogynistic ideology with homoerotic attraction would weaken the race far more than the feminisation of society. Social Democrats and Communists seized upon this idea in the years immediately prior to the Nazi era, deploring the flaunted homosexuality of Rohm and other leaders to encourage the fear that mothers would lose their male children to gangs of uniformed pederasts. More objections came from a significantly powerful office, that of Heinrich Himmler. Profoundly homophobic, Himmler complained to Hitler that the male bonding in the SS and the Hitler Youth could reduce the experience young men might gain with women and they might possibly turn away from them altogether. Of course, this was ideologically opposed to the Party's aim of breeding a pure Aryan race. Himmler claimed that the movements facilitated homosexuality and led to

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67 Davies (2007), p110. Rogge-Börner (1858-1955) was author of *Die Deutsche Kämpferin* (The German Warrior Woman, 1933) and can best be described as a 'radical Nazi feminist'. Hitler did not reply to the open letter, although he met with her on number of occasions before the war.

'masturbation circles and sexually tinged friendships'.<sup>68</sup> These rants were comparable to Hitler's on the subject of prostitution and syphilis, but Himmler did not regard prostitution as such an abhorrent practice; in fact he even advocated it as a remedy to homosexuality. Hitler regarded women's control of men as enfeebling, thus there should be no equality between the sexes as women would only subvert this to their own ends. His firm belief was in the principles of the *Männerbund*, and Himmler, ever loyal, eventually concurred.

And yet all the senior Nazis held private doubts about the glorification of the naked male body that was inherent to all *Männerbunde*. Communal showers, communal wrestling and communal sports all frequently involved total or near-nudity. Youth leaders and army instructors were told to be on constant alert for signs of illicit sexual contact, but it was rather the fact that the Nazi leadership feared homosexuality as a threat to their own power that was the real problem. For a Party which based much of its credibility on a return to 'traditional values', rampant homosexuality would be catastrophic. Furthermore, if women believed in large numbers that they were turning over their children to perverts and molesters, then female support for the regime would wither rapidly.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

At the simplest level, all sexual policy in the Third Reich was directed towards one aim, the successful creation of the *Blutgemeinschaft*, the community of pure Aryan blood. The racial core of this entity was to be the SS, hence Himmler's *Lebensborn* project, but that was a merely an experiment that might have borne fruit in the distant future. At the time of their accession to power, the Nazis implemented policies designed to have a rapid cleansing effect on a society which they perceived to be morally corrupt and racially impure. This accounts for the swift action taken to regulate marriage and childbirth in 1933; the slower, more pervasive creation of the German 'New Woman' was still not complete by 1939, as the main film genres were still depicting 'good' and 'bad' women well into the war years. Forced sterilisation and eugenically motivated abortions began early and gathered pace as the

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68 Oosterhuis (1997), p200.

69 Giles (1992), p51

regime bedded in, and the equalisation of competition between women through dress codes, lustreless hair styles and methods of seduction were all accepted if not always welcomed. After all, the vast majority of women in *any* society could be deemed 'average looking', so when some of the sexual advantages held by the rare beauties were undermined, very few women objected. Such policies also enabled the small-town woman and her rural peers to feel triumphant in the battle against the urban decadence of the Weimar years.

However, the real inconsistencies in Nazi policy towards women lay in their shifting attitudes towards women outside the home. The initial injunction to women was to quit work, make babies and keep a happy household, but by early 1937 the propaganda was urging them to return to work as part of the 'Guns and Butter' economic programme; by 1939 there were 14 million women in the workforce. And yet Hitler stopped short of full conscription of women into the labour market because he doubted their economic value and worried about losing the goodwill built up through the policies of the early years. This retreat from the earlier policies was most definitely unplanned, and its consequences meant the increasing numbers of forced labourers transported to Germany from the occupied territories. The cinemas attempted to sanitise women's labour as a heroic battle for the state, and to some extent this was successful with the 'Home Front' genre, but there can be no doubt that the 'separate spheres' model would have to be substantially rebuilt had the war outcome been favourable. Furthermore, the regime had no qualms about using female nudity for the titillation of both genders with displays such as *Die Nacht der Amazonen* (The Night of the Amazons), annually staged in Munich with imitations in other cities. Their museums and galleries were full of naked female imagery, but it was never pornographic or even overtly sexual, just statuesque, physical, perfectly Aryan. This was an ambiguity in the policies towards women but it is easily explained within the deeper concept of the racial ideology. The perfect male *or* female body was a sign of social success and racial power, but it is still difficult to accept that such veiled erotica served only noble aims. It almost certainly provided an outlet for otherwise suppressed sexual feelings.

It was in the field of homosexual policy that the greatest inconsistencies and ambiguities emerged. As Florence Tamagne concluded, 'Nazism never displayed a unified vision of homosexuality.'<sup>70</sup> Right at the heart of the state there was an unresolved tension between acceptable and unacceptable homosexuality and homoerotica. The *Männerbunde* promoted and glorified virile masculine comradeship, and lenient attitudes were applied to homosexuality in these groups and the army. And yet Nazism was never a pro-homosexual movement despite early tolerance of the activities of a few. There were more Himmlers than Röhm's in the NSDAP, and though it was undeniable that some sections of the Party attracted homosexuals, especially the Hitler Youth and the SA, it is unlikely that they were disproportionately represented when compared to other social groups or classes. Despite the *Männerbunde* and the exaltation of the Aryan male, the NSDAP remained profoundly homophobic. How, then, to explain this contradiction?

As with the policies concerning women, the easy answer is to revert to the racial goals of the state. Even if lesbians could be 'used' for the advancement of the race, homosexual males could not. Leaving aside the probably irrational fears of homosexual conspiracies at the heart of government, and the ludicrous beliefs that homosexuality was a contagion that had to be contained like typhoid outbreak, what irked the Nazis most was the vision of the homosexual as an intruder. The racial, sexual and family policies were all based on the existence of the separate spheres for male and female, and by his actions the homosexual straddled the line, sometimes described as the 'third sex', upsetting the delicate balance. Those intellectual gays who had worked from the Left to achieve real rights under Weimar saw themselves just as vilified by their former comrades who seized on the homoerotic aspects of the Nazis and denounced them all as bourgeois pederasts and sadists. Thus the homosexual man was adrift without any hope or sight of a friendly shore to swim for, and this was not a society to be unwanted by.

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70 Tamagne, Florence: *A History of Homosexuality in Europe, Vol 2, 1918-1939*, Algora Publishing (New York) 2004, p130.

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