

The role of women in nazi germany essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Abstract

Germany came under the influence of the Nazis for a short period of twenty years, from the mid twenties until the end of the Second World War. This period was the most traumatic the world has witnessed in recent times and was marked by global warfare, racial atrocities and savage massacres of unarmed and helpless people as the Nazis, led by Adolph Hitler unleashed their bigoted savagery on the peoples of Europe.

The women of Germany, after centuries of male domination were just about beginning to get a taste of equality with the introduction of the right to vote by the Weimar Republic in 1918 when the Nazis took over power and changed the rules of the game drastically, with their medieval approach towards the role of women in society. Hitler and his Nazi followers firmly believed that the main role of women should be restricted to procreation and the rearing of children, thereby increasing the numbers of pure and racially superior Germans. This mindset led to their banishing women from politics, public life, education and gainful professional employment and brought in two decades of gender suppression and inequality comparable to what existed in medieval Europe.

This research paper attempts to chronicle and analyse the role of women in Nazi Germany, with particular reference to the persecution of women down the ages and their current efforts to achieve emancipation and gender equality. Even today millions of women all over the world are treated as inferior and kept in subjugation, similar to that experienced by women in Germany under Nazi rule and it is the duty of citizens of the free world to

work towards achieving their freedom from gender inequality and male subjugation.

1. Introduction

The Nazi era in Germany lasted for barely twenty years. The movement started making its presence felt in the mid-twenties, reached its' peak in another ten years and had been shut out of the world by 1945, following the defeat in the Second World War and the collapse of The Third Reich. Hitler shot himself in his bunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945. The next half century saw the Nazis being hunted down from every corner of the world, tried and sentenced. The brief years of Nazi dominance came to be known as the holocaust, one of the worst periods to hit mankind, and the leader of the Nazis, Adolph Hitler epitomised as the incarnation of evil

Germany, till the beginning of the twentieth century, had been very much a male dominated society.

For centuries, a woman's role in German society was summed up and circumscribed by the three " K" words: Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen). Sometimes the fourth " K" is mentioned: Kleider (clothes). (Women in German Society)

The end of the First World War in 1918 and the installation of the Weimar Republic in Berlin saw a brief period of equality and enfranchisement before the Nazis came to power with their warped views on sex, race and religion and proceeded to enforce them upon the German citizenry.

The period of Nazi rule saw women being treated much as they were in the three thousand years preceding the current era as objects for facilitating procreation and the furthering of the pure German race. Mercifully, the Nazi empire did not last long and while they caused immense harm to the human race and towards womankind while they ruled Germany and much of Europe, deliverance from their clutches also made the free world realise the consequences of remaining oblivious to evil, just because of its distance from the doorstep.

It is the objective of this research paper to undertake an analysis of the role of women in Nazi Germany, with particular reference to the gender inequality and the suppression of women down the ages.

2. The Persecution and Degradation of Women

Prejudice against women has been pervasive. It existed in all patriarchal societies and it is difficult to find a religion that treated men and women equally. Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism find common ground in the degradation as well as active persecution of women. " Even the Greco-Roman influence on the status of women draws mainly on the writings of Aristotle, who predated Christianity by about 350 years. In the Aristotelian position, women are viewed as morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to men. They are incomplete human beings, without a fully developed soul. They are irrational, and even with extensive schooling could not attain the intellectual status of men." (Fishbein, H. D., P27)

The history of this slow and steady process of subjugation and subsequent persecution of women down the ages is a classic case of the build up of

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prejudice and has very strong parallels with the stories of the blacks and the Jews. The major difference is in periods and geographical distribution. The build up of prejudice against women took place over thousands of years and across the globe whereas the build up of anti-Semitism and the black problem was much faster and in localized areas.

While control was being enforced on women, their role as species propagators was always kept at the forefront. Their role was thus clearly delineated as procreators of children and their main activity confined to giving birth and bringing up children. This reasoning was used by a male dominated society for thousands of years to take away all their political and social rights and relegate them to the inner recesses of households. The process for emancipation of women started in the west in the nineteenth century and continues till today. The espousers of women's emancipation have worked in areas of income, enfranchisement, political and social rights for many years and the battle for achieving full equality between the sexes continues even today.

In Germany, a law passed in 1918 decreed that all women above twenty would be allowed to vote. This development was not really the effect of a strong suffragette movement, which in Germany was essentially weak but more a result of socialist legislation.

The move came as something of a shock since most states had legalized women's participation in political organizations only in 1908. Germany's prewar suffragist movement had also been weak, in part because the women's movement was dominated by moderates for whom suffrage was a

relatively low priority, viewed not as the gateway to equality but as the crowning recognition of women's indispensability to public life.[12]

Ultimately, woman suffrage in Germany was the fruit not of a suffragist campaign but of the revolution, which spoiled it in the eyes of many who opposed the new regime, both male and female.(Sneeringer)

While, the movement for equality in all spheres of life was gaining momentum all over the world the sudden reversal of modern day thought with regard to women in Nazi Germany came as a rude awakening and should be taken in the nature of a clarion call to the supporters of freedom and women's rights. The opposers of freedom continue to exist and vigilance needs to be maintained at all times to protect the freedom that has been won after centuries of oppression.

3. The Position of Women in Nazi Germany

Adolph Hitler replaced all perspectives of judging a person with only one. He believed in the superiority of the German race and in their destiny to rule the earth as superior beings. He however, made a small differentiation. He put German men at the top of the pack followed by German women. He also believed that it was the sacred duty of German women to further the German race by continuously giving birth to more pure Germans and thereby increase their numbers. The Nazis needed their population to increase and the decline in birth rates from 1900 to 1933 had disturbed them. In his speech to the NSDAP Women's Organization in September, 1933 Hitler emphasized his perception of the role of women as paraphrased below.

The slogan “ emancipation of women” was invented by Jewish intellectuals. If the man’s world is said to be the State, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community, then it may perhaps be said that the woman’s in a smaller world. For her world is her husband, her family, her children, and her home. But what would become of the greater world if there were no one to tend and care for the smaller one? The great world cannot survive if the smaller world is not stable. We do not consider it correct for the women to interfere in the world of the man. We consider it natural if these two worlds remain distinct. (Women in Germany)

Hitler knew the importance of healthy women and they were encouraged to stop smoking, to stop slimming and to do more sport to increase their fertility. In 1933, the Nazis passed a law allowing for loans for German couples to marry and start families, the money for which would come from taxing singles and childless couples. This clear demarcation of roles between men and women was however somewhat false and actually cloaked his contempt for women and his feeling on their ability for useful contribution. In fact, he felt that women should stay away from politics and should not participate at all in the running of the country. Speaking on January 26, 1942, he said that,

I detest women who dabble in politics. And if their dabbling extends to military matters it becomes utterly unendurable. In no section of the Party has a woman ever had the right to hold even the smallest post. In 1924, we had a sudden upsurge of women who were interested in politics. They wanted to join the Reichstag, in order to raise the moral level of that body,

so they said. I told them that 90 per cent of the matters dealt with by parliament were masculine affairs, on which they could not have opinions of any value. (Women in Germany)

His apprehensions of the damage women could do was aggravated by the 1918 law enacted by the socialists, which enabled women to vote, as well as by the years of the great depression that saw men losing their jobs by the thousands. In an election speech in 1932 Hitler committed that, if brought to power, he would remove 800, 000 women from jobs and give them to men.

The reaction of the German people to these utterances by Hitler does not cease to startle thinking people even today. Despite his blatant intolerance, virulently racist and clearly anti-feminist stand he was voted into power by the German electorate, that too an electorate that had more women than men; and where women were being wooed by all parties including the Nazis. Throughout the period from 1918 to the ascension of power by the Nazis, the womenfolk voted conservatively, and ironically, against the socialists who gave them their vote.

Their pattern of voting during Weimar would become one of consistent support for parties of a conservative, confessional bent. Those that openly pledged support for female emancipation—the socialist parties and the liberal Democrats—did not generally fare as well with female voters.

(Sneeringer)

This fact, for the researcher becomes one of the biggest paradoxes of the issue of women in Nazi Germany. The German women were fully aware of

Hitler's agenda, the nature of the Nazi party, their political manifesto and their anti-feminist attitude towards women. However, it can be safely surmised that Hitler and the Nazis would not have come to power without a decisive woman vote in their favor. As such, do we take it that Hitler had the backing of a majority of German women in his plans for racial and gender domination?

Ultimately, ... Nazism succeeded because it felt democratic to most Germans; it was identified " with a new national mood that emphasized national integration, social reform, and economic prosperity." The Nazis rose to power because of " the unprecedented activism of so many ordinary Germans," and this activism continued to support the regime in the disastrous years that followed. (Barnett 745)

During the Nazi regime the women of Germany were totally marginalized from political positions and were not involved in any of the political decisions, nor did they figure in any of the trials of Nazi officials after the war. Their actual support for Hitler and the Nazis thus remains a matter of conjecture but it would not be wrong to infer that in spite of their avowed political and social agenda, the Nazis did enjoy the support of the German women.

The Nazis, after they came to power, did not really have to take women out of labor jobs because of the extra need for workers following the tremendous increase in production witnessed by the German factories. In other areas however, action was swift and surgical. The services of married female doctors and government officials were terminated and women barred from

acting as judges or public prosecutors, as Hitler thought that they would not be able to “ think logically or reason objectively, since they are ruled only by emotion” (*)

This mind set is very similar to the one that existed in sixteenth century Europe where women were basically thought to be ruled by emotion and thus unable to think properly. In a startling but related development, the number of female students at German universities went down from more than 18000 before the Nazis came to power to less than 6000 in 1939. This trend would have continued if the war had not swallowed the vast majority of German men, allowing women to return to university and fill up vacant seats.

It does however appear not all women were satisfied with this state of events and protested in significant numbers against this Nazi high-handedness. A number of them joined leftist parties and were detained in Nazi concentration camps. In 1939, there was only one concentration camp exclusively for women at Moringen in Germany. By 1939, two more needed to be opened because of lack of space to accommodate the ever-increasing number of dissidents

4. Conclusion

The collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945 put an end to Hitler’s large-scale experiments with human guinea pigs and brought back a modicum of sanity to a world that had been held hostage by the whims of a crazed and messianic sadist. German women continued their broken tryst with emancipation and Germany today has a female chancellor in Angela Merkel. While female representation in the corporate sector, in the government and

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as a percentage of total persons employed is far lesser than other countries like Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands to name a few, women's involvement is slowly improving in all areas of endeavor.

It remains a matter of great concern that the condition of women in many countries, particularly those of the Islamic nations, still resembles what it was like in Nazi Germany. It is a major tragedy that even today millions of women live lives of subjugation in countries run by modern day Hitlers, leaders who think that women should restrict their role in life to giving birth to children and are forbidden from looking beyond this not look beyond this responsibility. It becomes the job of women in the free world to take up the cause of their less fortunate sisters and build up global movements to ensure first, their freedom from male domination, and second, that neo fascists are not allowed to get away with the subjugation of women any more.

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