

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SEXES IN POST-WAR GERMANY

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Abstract. Macroscopically, in the broader context, the emergence of women's dominant role in society is attributed to the social reformations in the Sixties, not the reforms of the immediate post-war years. The normalisation of gender definitions foreshadowing people's affairs was based on the principle of male power, whose agency was declared dogmatic and authoritarian within traditional societal norms (family, workplace, sexuality, the army, religion, or other personal beliefs). Gender inequalities in post-war society were evident, even though the ambivalence on gender hierarchies during the war did not persist. Women performed certain societal roles, mainly as canonised collaborative nuclear family figures. The impact of the war has proven robust not only on the art sector but also on everyday life and social activities that shape gender relations. At the end of the 1930s, the archetype of male soldiers, acting as the safeguard of the family and the homeland, was still lingering to create social figures.

Keywords: Weimar Berlin, Nazi cinema, Third Reich, Cold War, social construction, nuclear family, sex reform, other

INTRODUCTION

The latter years of the war and the lawless period ahead of the liberation were characterised by the disruption of gender relations in terms of an overly distressing command on behalf of male authority. The *renegotiation* of gender relations became evident even through suppression to reinstate men as the dominant figure in

domestic life. Prostitution and other forms of exploitation of women experienced an upsurge in the war years. Still, females became a hallmark of hedonism even in the immediate post-war years in the face of the veterans or the Allied soldiers. They abused sexuality that men were legitimate to go after as a ‘reward’ for their military virtue or any other war-related male competency.

The gender hierarchies that were gradually replaced by the collaborative nuclear family, bonded by ties of love between parents and children. The Sixties personalisation instigated a surge of capitalist-oriented market policies that came about as services, mainly in the vexed terms of fashion and lifestyle, were deployed in mass industry. Enepekides, through case studies, worked towards a model of gender relations that retained gender differentiation and, at the same time, gave way to raising new forms of unleashed female personalities and trending opportunities.

A new, ordered, gendered, and more mobile post-war society elevated women in the higher social scales of education and new forms of employment. The widespread assumption of a stalling process of assimilation of female citizens in modern democratic life was reversed through ever-increasing participation in electoral politics, which emerged after female suffrage in post-war Europe. The gender designation of women also came out as a result of their rise in population during the immediate postwar years. [For more information, *see* Jaskot 2012, 39].

Misogynism as a sign of the decaying correlation between women and democracy demonstrated Second World War remnants of abnormal societal operations: deviant social behaviour (protests, affairs with war criminals or dissidents), benign or innocent sexualism as an exchange for monetary or material paid prostitution, undefined political choices, or accession to feminist revolutionaries, blurred sexual and professional attitude. Social mobilisation provoked an overwhelming need for enrolment in social norms, expressed unconditionally (marginalisation, sexual affairs with wealthy men in terms of prostitution), that could promote procedures to accelerate their elevation in the societal hierarchy.

MAIN SUBJECT

The history of Weimar Germany and the Third Reich through the post-war decades, chromatised by the more significant part of the Cold War through the dawn of the 1970s, designates a fifty-year-long period of debated sexuality entangled with politics. As indicated, a history of the relationship between *female sexuality* and the *camera eye*, the *evolution of a camp vision* that brought the seed for the ambivalent interrelation between *Nazism* and *eroticism* (Mizejewski 1992, 6). German fascism triggered the rise of exuberant female sexuality, musical applications, the comic and the camp parody, *the so-called harassed bachelor* (Mizejewski 1992, 6), termed “Weimar Decadence”. The persistent element of imminent female allure was performed through psychoanalytic perceptions of Nazism, lying against a phallic norm upon which the latter established its aesthetic politics.

The materialisation of Weimar Berlin, the iconography through pornography and sadomasochism, crafted a history of Gender that defended itself through the blurred nexus of ‘visibility’ and ‘spectatorship’. The aestheticisation of the gender difference, expressed also in stereotypes, is depicted as a cultural construction via geopolitics and sexual attitude. The pleasurable spectacle is identified as *decadence*. Decadence is defined through the Jewishness, the effeminate beauty, the aberrant and the unknowable *Other* acting through their compelled invisibility and misappropriation. As Mizejewski puts it through a visible paradigm:

The Fosse film conflates female sexuality and Jewish identity as similar terms of genital anxiety, reworking a historical anxiety seamlessly into one of the strategies of mainstream film” (Mizejewski 1992, 18).

A curious alienation from the mainstream state order demands was calling for an imminent crisis of the reliability of the spectacle (Mizejewski 1992, 18). A crisis of societal irrelevancy, that of ‘knowability’ relating to certain social norms. It is evident that:

Obsessed with categorisation and ‘types’ of women and sexual response, the Sex Reformers

ultimately posited a 'normal' sexuality, so that 'the boundaries defining deviant groups and behaviour sharpened (Mizejewski 1992, 27).

Through this, it becomes clear that specific Nazi aesthetics imposed via categorisations in terms of Gender and society did not emerge as newly born abnormal anxieties but were based on previous customs, traditions, and ideas born in Weimar Germany to expand retrospectively even through the 19th century's anthropological preoccupations. Within this assumption, society is defined through *Sex, Race, and Eugenics*.

By showcasing Nazi cinema, the aesthetics of fascism promoted mass expression in art through censored production, aiming to build a mass culture appealing to the people's mentality and national consciousness. But a certain question is what triggered gender relations and sexual differences' crafting of social stereotypes? The dynamics of visibility, German fascism, along with mainstream cinema, and the biological order as a creed of the Third Reich promoted "visible differences of gender and race" and discrimination in which the authoritative male commanded over the female *Other* to the accreditation of an ever-dominant male governance of the world order, which is conquered by "strong, white males" (Mizejewski 1992, 14).

Popular understandings of 'Nazi eroticism', here stylised to the point of the surreal, focus on sexual performances and spectatorship in relation to Nazism. (For more, see Mizejewski 1992, 22).

The Sexual '*Other*', the '*Odd*', or irrelevant to modern-day coded as "fascinating fascism", highlighted 'cultural similarities', engulfed in gender and race properties that encouraged human capabilities through stereotypes. I should mention that the Nazi was perceived internationally as aberrant, not as a trauma, since the term applies to official contemporary state demands. On the other hand, Nazi repression appeared to trigger degenerate or even abnormal sexual functions of love and affection. The sexual and the political merged to produce theatre works as cultural products that assimilated

society's sexual anxieties, oscillating between sadomasochism and fascism.

Nazis used everything at their disposal – including culture – before the war's end (Jaskot 2012, 13).

Through a protracted period of Nazi propaganda, the Nazis asserted through culture their pervasive influence in *Western* society, even during the post-war decades, expanding through the 1970s. Even in the sexual attitude promoted within the patriarchal society, the dualism of dominance and submission was leveraged by the Nazis to legitimise their state politics.

In Weimar Berlin, “while the liberal inquiries... were tolerated... hostile theories of homoeroticism were far more popular, as evidenced in Hirschfeld’s repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to repeal Germany’s Paragraph 175, the nineteenth-century national law that made homosexual activity a crime” (Mizejewski 1992, 26).

Homosexuality in the Nazis was initially considered ‘aberrant’, but later incorporated their principles to heighten white male autonomy from females, accrediting their sexual performance in terms of same-sex desire, which, as a mass, reinforced their authoritative superiority in ‘nature’. The National Socialist theories of homosexuality as rival but slightly contradictory at their subsequent reconsideration were foregrounded by Weimar Sex Reform movement theories that, though, went hand in hand with the quote: “Third Reich’s later goals of eugenics and control of deviance” (Mizejewski 1992, 26). Nazi propaganda targeted certain elements of Weimar tolerance on Cabarets’ sexual liberation and the emerging roles in the frame of deliberate uniform re-appropriation of the society’s norm.

The ‘normalisation’ of the liberated New Woman was ventured through their domestication within the later Nazi assumptions that stemmed from obsolete anthropological traditions, celebrating male authoritarian superiority.

CONCLUSION

The Third Reich demonstrates how gender relations interconnect with racist politics, German fascism, which, in the jargon of gender studies, is seen as sexism and, in terms of an ever-dominant manliness, as misogyny. Class struggle contributed to the configuration of the folklore community. Fascism relied more on sexual interpersonal anxieties, stemming from war psychopathologies, rather than ‘class struggle’, a fact that was considered irrelevant and incompatible with their aims and purposes. As it is argued: “The sexual anxiety concerning women is not accidental but a central fascist issue concerning boundary and self-versus-other” (Mizejewski 1992, 34). Nazi cinema bolstered sexual polarisation similar to the forms employed in Classic Hollywood Cinema. (Mizejewski 1992, 35).

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