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# Homosocial Desire, Comradeship and Social Order in Nazi Germany: A Gendered Analysis

*Umangdeep Kour*

## **Introduction**

To study political history, gender is one of the significant critical categories of analysis that enables us to open larger structures of political power and processes. An attention to the modalities of gender not only exhibits social roles of men and women but also reveals the embeddedness of gendered social roles in the construction of a society. The coherence of a social order and its legitimacy is critically premised on how well gender roles are internalised and performed. Compliance to the said normative gender order then serves in crucial ways, to solidify the claimed stability of the concerned political order. This leads to the production of a specific kind of social order that is laden with the tools of patriarchy and sexual division of labour. Thus, Natalie (1975) argues that it is illuminating to analyse the history of gendered men and women to determine the sex roles and their symbolic meanings in different societies to understand the social order and differences (Scott, 2007). Masculinities and femininities have different meanings and connotations in different cultures, and it varies in relation with different historical epochs.

As aptly theorised by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), it is more productive to explore masculinity and femininity as 'configurations of practice' rather than fixed roles and identity. Thus, masculinity and its claim of a desired and coherent hegemonic form is precisely that, a claim which must be iterated and performed every day for it to be given a form of normative social order. It is important therefore, to delineate relationships between different sets of masculinities to perceive the social order premised on constructions of gender in the society. Masculinity is established in contrast with femininity and therefore the social and symbolic meanings that are associated with masculinity and femininity give rise to the social order and encourage hierarchies (Connell, 2005). The meanings of masculinity and femininity were challenged and re-organized during the Great War (1914-1918) when women stepped out of their houses- the masculinisation of women and feminisation of men, the two highly charged social concepts helped the negotiations between the gender binaries (Kuhne, 2018).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2015) underlines the central role of 'male bonding' in 'Between Men' to explore the deployment of forms of masculinity that are at the heart of social meaning and transactions. The author explains about the 'homosocial desire' which is a social exchange of love and affection between same sex people, mainly men or masculine status of fraternity and it is independent of any romantic or sexual desire. The social transactions between men that this research focuses on are political whereby political leaders, parties and political discourse fosters and enacts forms of masculine transactions that become the primary basis of not only social meaning but of the constitution of the social order and of the nation.

In this paper, there will be an attempt to examine the idea of comradeship in Nazi Germany and the importance of male-bonding and competing masculinities in the construction of a nation-state. A nation-state is a sovereign territory that is ruled in the name of a community, who share a common history. The other structures of the society will also be examined through analysis of the social order during Hitler's era. By looking at these components, it will be possible to analyse the role of Nazi leader and the performance of his masculinity in relation to the desired hegemonic normative masculinity that Nazi Germany proclaimed as the basis of its racial superiority and influence of its masculinity in constructing an ideal nation. Although, it is necessary to pin that the subjectivity of an individual is ever changing and not fixed on a particular event and its construction is a perpetual process (Scott, 2018). Nevertheless, the aspect of Hitler's masculinity embodied in the ultimate leadership role allows us to see the gaps in the hegemonic masculine narratives and the necessity of compensating for those gaps by either using violent force or simply denying any vulnerability.

### **Nationalism and Masculinity**

Enloe (1990) argues "Nationalism has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinised hope" (Enloe, 1990).

Nationalism is an ideology that is constructed on the pillars of ethnicity, belongingness, utmost loyalty towards the nation state. Benedict Anderson (1983) in his work, defines the nation as "an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 9 1983). The idea of nation as a community constructs the nation as a 'fraternity' which is masculine in its nature. The use of the word fraternity by Anderson indicates the gendered notion of nationalism and points towards the role of masculinities in the construction of a nation. If a nation is seen as a community that is produced by putting up different pieces

by a club of men, then there is a fair possibility of seeing a nation as masculine entity, but this is not the actual case (Slootmaeckers, 2019). The construction of a nation also requires an important dichotomy of insider and outsider. Therefore, nation is not only what lies inside but it is an international concept that requires the presence of foreign land. Nation is an 'imagined community' because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet think of each other as part of their communion.

The men on the gender role spectrum take up the role of protectionism and authority and see women conforming to the traditional biological role of a mother and wife. Women are perceived as symbolic of nationhood that have to be protected by virile, strong men. Dibyesh Anand (2008) explains about Hindu Nationalism and confirms through his ethnographic research that nationalism is produced through performative bodies. There is a sexualised conception of the body of virile man and the body of the 'other'. There is a masculinised anxiety around the conception of nationalism that keeps the discourse of masculinity and nationalism interlinked. Through these theorisations, the construct of discourse of nationalism is gendered.

One of the most important elements of a gendered notion of a nation is the construction of family. The family we are discussing here is formed on the ideals of gender roles and hierarchies in what it calls God-given or nature-given natural social order. It is naturalised and is a microcosm of the nation precisely because this idea of the normative nation, with everyone in their ordained place, is also naturalised. Family is the core component which safeguards and uplifts the cultural and hegemonic structures of a nation-state because a heterosexual family embodies a nation. It also qualifies the heritage and natural tropes of societal structures. But it is very important to investigate whether family is a natural institution, or it has been socially constructed with the biases towards the gender identities and other hierarchies that are hereditary in its composition. Family is an organisation where the positions and roles of all its members are fixed. The absence of one person does not leave the family structure defunct. The certainty of a family gives a strong base to the nation and its ideals (Davis, 2016). Therefore, the family acts as a strong, undisputed organisation in the social order. It is significant to note that the reason that feminist scholars see nation and its variants as masculine is because of the emphasis on the masculine cultural themes. The nation is built on the ideals of bravery, honour, patriotism which are aligned with the definitions of strong masculine forces. Women in this vision become repositories of a naturalised and eternal nation and bear the burden of keeping

intact the hegemony of masculine transactions. Thus, the investment in the maintenance and reproduction of heteronormativity whether through the family or all other social institutions also embody nation and therefore become a prime responsibility of a hegemonic masculinity that is a persona of a national identity to safeguard women and the honour of the nation (Nagel, 2019).

Even though the idea of nationalism seems inclusive, it has systematically left women and minorities outside the arena of its glory. Women are seen as symbols of a nation that needs protection, and the burden of nationalism is often carried by the masculine forces. Nationalism highlights a very important question of 'us' and 'them'. It creates a division which is sometimes unhealthy and results in violent consequences as well. The right-wing ideology, towards which Nazi ideology tilts, also addresses an important question of how nationalism leads to the birth of competing masculinities (Slootmaeckers, 2019 ). Both phenomena are co-constructed. It will be interesting to note that the ideas of nationalism totally ignore and sideline the marginal masculinities and emphasise that only specific heteronormative men and a defined sexuality can protect the nation and ignite the fire of nationalism.

### **Nazism and Organising Male Power**

The term 'Fascism' was first used in Italy, 1915 by members of Mussolini's movement. Fascism may be defined as a "form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion" (Paxton, 2005). Nazism is a political movement that has been led by Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany. Politically, Nazism is a form of fascism that is broadly based on two elements: nation and race (Davies and Lynch, 2002). The rise of Mussolini in 1922 and Hitler in 1933 embarks the rise of fascism in Europe. The theorisation and execution of fascism and Nazism may seem similar but at the same time, when looked carefully it differs. The obsession of Nazism with race and the scale of terror incorporated by it is far more aggressive than Italian fascism. The race played an important role in distinguishing Nazism and classical fascism. But it should be carefully noted that both Nazism and fascism are called 'core fascisms' because they were systematic and different from other authoritarian regimes (Davies and Lynch, 2002). The rise of Mussolini in 1922 and Hitler in 1933 embarks the rise of fascism in Europe. The

theorisation and execution of fascism and Nazism may seem similar but at the same time, when looked carefully it differs. The obsession of Nazism with race and the scale of terror incorporated by it is far more aggressive than Italian fascism. The race played an important role in distinguishing nazism and classical fascism. But it should be carefully noted that both nazism and fascism are called 'core fascisms' because they were systematic and different from other authoritarian regimes (Davies and Lynch, 2002).

From this broad scope we can see that while Nazi Germany and classical fascism may be different there are also many critical similarities. Both of these ideologies thrive on the concept of extreme nationalism, dictatorial leadership, anti-Marxist stance, ruthless repression of oppositional groups, the neglect of democracy, glorification of war and strong support for armament, economic self-sufficiency and use of propaganda to rise in power (McDonough, 2014). The notable feature of fascism from which ideals of Nazism have emerged is its stress on the production of a utopian future where a 'new man' and new state would prosper. There was also a lot of focus on daring and courage which attracted youth. The ideology also encouraged male chauvinism and domination of men in the social order. Nazi fascist political articulation specificity lay in its emphasis on 'race' and its deployment to declare a masculine superiority of the Aryan race. Hitler was very much driven to the idea of 'survival of the fittest' and he believed in the centrality of supremacy of pure race (Aryans) over mixed and weak races. War was one of the main aspects which could purify society because only the strong and superior would survive i.e; a racially pure 'Aryan' folk community (Volksgemeinschaft).

The racialisation of 'manliness' is one of the focal points to deconstruct the discourse of masculinity in Nazi Germany. Hard masculinity in its hegemonic manifestations demands aggressiveness, discipline, control over self and others. It consists of three dimensions: men's physical performance, their emotional conditions, and their moral constitution. It also emphasised on strong moral wellbeing and emotional strength. The demand of a strong body and physical performance was seen as a trademark of superiority of race and masculine ideals. The emotional strength of Nazi soldiers was seen in decision making processes and self-control. The valour and responsibility as a strong masculine soldier were highlighted when the fear of death is overpowered by the love and sacrifice for the Vaterland (Fatherland).

### **Male Bonding and Comradeship**

Friendships are more flexible forms of social exchange in the normative order of cultures. To analyse bonding in its relationship burdened with political discourse. The discourse around solidarity and comradeship in the context of male bonding involves debate around the appropriation of a hegemonic masculinity. The ideology of nationalism has changed the course of history throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The rise of national ideology influenced the male solidarities and civil moralities and therein gave new identity to the masculine order (Kaplan, 2022). The glorification of sacrifice in wars cherished the masculine stereotypes of virility. Comradeship was also one of the important aspects in the German social and military order and was evoked during warfare. Comradeship can be defined as bond and brotherhood between soldiers during the war or at the times of adversity. The emotion of comradeship which became an applauded phenomenon in German World War 2 (1939-1941) has its roots coiled in the histories of the Great War (1914-1918). The Nazi conception of comradeship was seen as a cultural move to cope up with the brutalities of The Great War which helped German men to stay intact and prepare for the upcoming wars and render their services in the building of nation. The ideal of comradeship was seen as a healing mechanism for the sufferings of a military defeat. The convenient instalment of comradeship by the Nazi Germany is different from the original stance of comradeship that has been used and appropriated by the political Left. The use of the word 'comrade' was politically made popular during the French Revolution and later adopted by socialists and became a significant term in the communist history. People who fought for the ideals of communism addressed each other as comrades. Dean Jodi (2017) in her articulation of 'comrade' inspired by the works of Alexandra Kollontai emphasises that in left politics comradeship was built on the value of equality and it opposes isolation and hierarchies. The left sees comradeship as an egalitarian system of solidarity where all the men and women worked together for the common good. Identity has no role to play-it's all about the work for socialist social order. The most notable point of comradeship is that it is a political statement and it differs from the other relations that are kin-based (Dean, 2017).

But for the German right, the meaning of comradeship differed significantly and signalled more clearly towards the strictly hierarchical basis of male bonding. It is hierarchical in nature so that there is one ideal comrade who is in the position of military leadership. The advantage of comradeship is rendered to those who sacrifice their self, agency and identity for the group of comrades. During Holocaust and the Great War, ideals of comradeship were evoked to justify the horrors of killings. For soldiers, it was not the lust for violence but solidarity amongst

themselves and the responsibility towards Volk and Fatherland that bound them together as comrades (Kuhne, 2018). The soldiers could never grasp the meanings of comradeship but express it as an experiential feeling towards a set of nationalistic values. It is claimed by the war veterans that the source of strength in the moments of weakness during war came from the comrades who would fight along.

It is interesting to note how the premises and effect of male bonding are regarded differently from the female friendships/bonding. The intimacy of a homosocial setup in a war clouds the notions of manliness and the definition of hegemonic masculinity in a definitive sense. The emotions of care, affection, bond, tenderness and love that emanates in comradeship are valuable but as these are stitched with the identity of a woman they are displaced and refashioned from the perceived 'female world' to that of the male homosocial setup which is masculine in its construction. The concept of protean masculinity gives us a glimpse of how a broad range of masculinities affirm to be together in the comradeship. The Mannerbund, the community of men united in emotional attachment, was a core element in the Nazi Germany social structure. It was the model for the National Socialist ideal of male solidarity and superiority to women and other outsiders, and of a strict hierarchy among men themselves. Next to the family, the Mannerbund was the cornerstone of the Nazi society (Oosterhuis, 2017). Under the Wandervogel, the popular German youth movement (1896- 21 19330), Hans Blüher suggested that a homoerotic sentiment between men is very important to uphold the nationalist agendas and it strengthens the military ethos. The idealisation of male bonding, sensual love for women is seen opposite to spiritual love for the male youth and the former was considered as superior (Oosterhuis, 2017). It was not explicitly mentioned, but it was clear that homoerotic tendencies were seen in the misogynistic ideology of the Mannerbund.

### **Social Order in Nazi Germany**

The idea of the nation in the Nazi political order was built on the values of division of labour based on gender. The women in Nazi society were kept at a subservient position reiterating the patriarchal values in the society. Women were included in all important narratives of Nazi Germany but as a symbolic figure. The concept of childbirth is core to the Nazi ideology and is seen as a significant contributor in the war and in the reproduction of the perfect and superior Aryan race. The image of woman as a mother was kept in high regard in German society and often invoked in establishing nationalist ideals as they were seen as protector and transmitter of German culture and racial purity. Aryan mothers were seen as the figures of national identity



and honour and were encouraged to birth more children for supremacy of the Aryan Race. The German Nazi ideology reversed the female emancipation by representing women as just reproductive agents and reignited the essentialist idea of motherhood as the core identity of women. Women were desexualised, encouraged to appear as simple and hostile, to be seen as mothers and wives to restore respect in larger domains and categorising children as desirable and undesirable through the lens of race. Women stepped out of homes to embark the emotion of emancipation, but gender roles were always employed which turned feminist movements of the era as conservative (Gupta, 1991). The obsession with motherhood comes out clearly in German social order as Women's associations, like the NS Frauenschaft, urged women to stay within their family and household duties. Just as men served the state by fighting, so women served by bearing and rearing cultured children. The theme of childbirth in Nazi ideology is popular as an analogue to battle. Rupp (1977) states "Every child that a woman brings into the world is a battle, a battle waged for the existence of her people" (Rupp,1997). Breeding Camps, Anti-abortion legislations and ban on contraceptives are seen as examples of control and extreme sexism in the Nazi Germany. Therefore, we can conclude that social order in Nazi Germany was bound together by adhering to the requirements of maintaining hegemonic masculinity and militarised male bonding. The rules of patriarchal subordination of women and criminalisation of deviance located in any other form of sexual identity became the bedrocks of Nazi articulation of and derives mostly from cultural and racial superiority sentiments.

### **Nazi Homosociality and Threat of Homosexuality**

Distance from and persecution of homosexuals was another crucial mode of sustaining norms of hegemonic masculinity. Medical historians have used the word Biocracy to explain the structure of governance in German society. Biocracy, a term invented by physiologist Walter Bradford Cannon, referred to the influence of biological science on society and its public policies. The impurity of race, the question of race, gender sexual deviance, crime, immorality all was categorised as biological and medical problems. Therefore, it has been argued that social structures in Nazi Germany were seen as a collaboration of professional medical sciences and authoritarian politics. The rhetoric of medical emergency had been employed in the Nazi Germany by suggesting that Germans are suffering from deadly diseases and the cure for all of it is through racial purification. To achieve racial hygiene and save the German race, the use of biomedical advances is necessary, which means, to cure homosexuality using biomedicine and clubbing all populations that are perceived as threat -Jews, Roma, Sinti, inherently ill population and psychiatric patients. In Nazi Germany, male-homosexuals were seen as bigger

threats as compared to women homosexuals as men were primary in the social structure and women were seen in the passive role according to notions of sexuality and division of labour. Although the biomedical explanation of homosexuality failed to convince everyone about the cure, there were different stances by people at different hierarchical units (Oosterhuis, 2017).

The presence of Ernst Röhm as a high -ranking official in Nazi Germany gave a conflicted view of how the Nazis saw homosexuality. Ernst Rohm was chief of the staff of the Nationalist Socialist Sturmabteilung who embraced masculinity as a political component even though it was challenged because of his sexuality. Röhm treated militarised masculinity as a prominent feature of political movement. He emphasised on the inseparable ideals of discipline and comradeship as the core of the political and military qualities (Hancock, 1998). Röhm's scarred face was seen as a statement of masculinity and negated the stereotypical association of femininity attached with homosexuality. Even though homosocial bonds in the military were celebrated, Rohm emphasised on the fluidity between homosocial and homosexual relations. This was perceived as a threat to culture and the Nazi army. Rohm challenged the privileges of a heterosexual homosocial bonds and highlighted the homosexual masculinities. Rohm was killed during 'Night of the Long Knives' in 1934 and then after this purge, Hitler became the absolute administrator.

Hitler was well aware of the homosexuality of Ernst Röhm, a high-ranking officer of Sturmabteilung (SA). He was also a close subordinate, but Hitler seemed unconcerned and often evoked the personal and public life dichotomy. As long as the 'brownshirts' managed to be a useful paramilitary force, Hitler was of the view that Rohm's private life was his own personal affair till the time he could use some discretion. Hitler's views eventually flipped after the purge of the SA in 1934 and the onset of war six years later. In 1941, Hitler targeted all the homosexual elements in the SS, and that "police officers who committed lewdness with another man or permitted themselves to be misused were to be given the death sentence " (Boden, 2011). Thus, although Hitler was seen as tolerant of homosexuality initially but later, he demanded the most severe punishment for offenders (Boden, 2011).

Homosexuality then became illegal under the Hitler's rule in Nazi Germany. Homosexuals were considered a threat to the 'Aryan' race. Their attraction to other men meant they would not contribute to the welfare and upliftment of the Aryan race by not producing children for the Volksgemeinschaft. The gay men were persecuted and were sent for medical experiments

and brutal treatments in Nazi Germany. The Nazis did not have a definitive policy to punish lesbians. Despite this, there were some lesbians who were either denounced by neighbours or friends or caught by the Nazis in other ways. These women were arrested and often sent to concentration camps, labelled as political prisoners. The Nazis believed that they needed racial purification, and homosexuals were filthy and unhygienic and spread diseases and are not true nationalists because they didn't contribute to procreation (Oosterhuis, 2017).

### **The Führer**

The German word Führer can be translated to English as 'leader' or 'guide'. It's a political title that is closely associated with the figure of Hitler. There was something peculiar about Nazism and one of the reasons for the same was the conduct of the Hitler as a leader. He is considered a charismatic leader who had exceptional oratory skills and was the main hand behind the ideological conception of a superior Aryan race and inferior Jewish race. Max Weber (1922) described charismatic authority by explaining the social relationship between charismatic leaders and the followers. The social order that is produced is the result of conditioning by the authority and the nature of obedience. The charismatic leader gives rise to new social structures and shares a personal bond with the masses (Wendt, 2016).

When one looks at the history of Nazi Germany from a distance, war and genocide are seen as major elements but when we look carefully, race atrocities, politics of world war are also part of bigger picture in the social fabric of then Germany. This indicates that Nazism was a multi-faceted political force. Theorists with similar views as Karl-Dietrich Bracher argued that if we look at the nature of Nazism, everything boils down to Hitler's Weltanschauung i.e; the world view of Hitler. The uniqueness of Nazism was the Führer. Hitler was Nazism (Kershaw, 2004). Hitler's legitimacy was one of the strongest attributes that was the result of his charismatic authority. His structural power was constituted around the collectivisation of emotional admiration by the followers and the dependency of all the socio-legal frameworks on Hitler, paralysing the actions of the citizens who did not follow what Hitler commands (Wendt, 2016).

Hannah Arendt's (1958) conceptualisation of modern dictatorship indicates that the tyrant is successful in its idea when he can use the instrument of terror to rule masses who are extremely obedient and make them victims despite their acknowledged innocence. Hitler won the hearts of the masses and popularised to the people the ideology of anti-Semitism which led to his success and stabilisation of terror (Arendt, 1958). Hitler had himself admitted in *Mein Kampf*

that he was a passionate patriot, and his idea of nationalism was driven during his school. He asserts that his inspirations were soldier-king Frederick and Otto Von Bismarck (McDonough, 2014). The inclination towards strong leadership can also be one of the reasons that Hitler became a tough leader in his regime.

The hatred towards Jews laid in much more historical context. Hitler was in Vienna (1908-1913) when he first experienced animosity towards the Jews. These feelings of anti-Semitism led to a mass genocide of Jews. The resentment towards Jews emerged because Hitler did not like the visual of Jews on the streets of Vienna as they were completely different from the Germans. The Jews as alien race was the common conception for German nationalism, and it was fueled by the anti-Semitic literature that would emphasise that every sin and vice that would happen in multicultural Vienna was perpetrated by Jews. The anti-Semitic literature would also reinstate stories of morally corrupt Jews that would seduce innocent Germans (McDonough, 2014). This whole narrative created a series of sexual panic among the supporters of anti-Semitism and forced them to participate in the grotesque killings of Jews in Germany.

The strong political force of German nationalism was somehow made more fervent by producing an enemy i.e; Jews and by propagating anti-capitalist policies for the welfare of Germany. Hitler used the rhetoric of anti-Semitism, anti-capitalism and nationalism combined with right wing traditionalism to bring workers, middle and upper class together under one single umbrella which is Nazi Party. The core idea was to exclude Jews and make one big German nation under the leadership of a great leader who was identified as Hitler, all powerful and value laden (McDonough, 2014).

## Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to see the performance of masculinity with the ideas of nationalism in the military structures and the leadership roles in dictatorial states. The state of enquiry is Nazi Germany where I explored its military dimensions by interrogating bodies of soldiers who are devoted towards the idea of comradeship. The relationship that I have explored is of a homosocial desire between men in these military spaces which demands tough and fierce nature but the belonging towards each other leads to a non-erotic sense of male bonding that is to care and love fellow comrades. The fervent nationalism and social order produced in Germany also hint towards its patriarchal setups and traditional gender roles. The

other aspect was to look at the homosexuals in Nazi Germany both as soldiers and citizens. The figure of Ernst Röhm is very crucial to analyse homophobia and nationalism embedded in Nazi Germany. All of this social and political order was carried out under the leadership of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler who has been known for his dictatorial tendencies and genocide of Jews by portraying them as a threat to the Aryan race. The race is an important element of distinction between Nazism and Fascism and both of the ideologies led to the emergence of extremist nationalism and dictators like Mussolini and Hitler.

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