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Women's Advocate or Racist Hypocrite: Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and the Contradictions of Women in Nazi Ideology

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Women's Advocate or Racist Hypocrite: Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and the Contradictions of Women in Nazi Ideology

Abstract

The Reichsfrauenführerin, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, led the National Socialist Women's League from 1934 until she went into hiding in 1945. During her career in the Nazi Party, she created a female focused sector of the party that promoted pronatalist propaganda, discouraged women from engaging in politics, and urged women to only perform gender-suitable work. In contradiction to her message, Scholtz-Klink was the highest-ranking female political figure and a divorcee, who regularly chose her political career with the Nazi Party over her duties in the private sphere. Although she had little to no political power in the inner circle because of her sex, she did influence the actions and ideals of German women. She retrospectively claimed women, including herself, were not political. However, her speeches and other retrospective statements of hers demonstrated the racist ideology she promulgated for the party. This demonstrated Scholtz-Klink's complicity in the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews and non-Germans. Nazi ideology of women was contradictory and always evolving because the Nazis' main focus was the annihilation of the Jews, not control over women. Because of generations of systemic misogyny and racism, women posed no perceived threat to the Nazi men. Therefore, female focused policies lacked stability since "racial purification" was the first priority of the Nazi Regime.

Keywords

Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Nazism, women, race, gender

Disciplines

European History | History of Gender | Holocaust and Genocide Studies | Women's Studies

Comments

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Women's Advocate or Racist Hypocrite:
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Figure 1: Pictured from left to right is Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Heinrich Himmler, Rudolf Hess, Baldur von Schirach and Artur Axmann at a Hitler Youth rally on February 13, 1939. Source: Berlin, Rally of the HJ Land Service, ca. 1939, photograph, German Federal Archives, Koblenz, Germany, <https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de>.

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HIST 418 – Thesis
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I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code. *Mary Frasier*

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Once elected to power in 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party implemented several policies that looked directly to the female sex and their biological ability of reproduction. The Nazi Party instituted pronatalism propaganda and promoted the idea of “gender-suitable” work. With the termination of independent social organizations, the Nazi Party’s women’s section grew. The National Socialist Women’s League (*NS-Frauenschaft*) leader, Getrud Scholtz-Klink, proclaimed the importance of motherhood and women’s influence in the domestic sphere. She reiterated the Nazi belief that women did not belong in the public and political spheres. However, Scholtz-Klink promulgated this gender role while simultaneously contradicting it as a prominent female political figure looking to gain power in both the women’s section and the leadership of the Nazi Party. Since the Nazi priority was to eliminate Jews, Nazi ideology toward women was never the main focus, which resulted in many inconsistencies. This work argues that the contradictory nature of the Nazi woman exemplified by Scholtz-Klink was a result of the systemic sexism in both the Nazi Party and society as well as the tumultuous gender role upheaval of the interwar period.

Born on February 9, 1902, in Adelsheim, Baden, Getrud Emma Treusch grew up in a xenophobic, Christian family of five, learning the values of motherhood and antisemitism at a young age. At the age of eight years old, Scholtz-Klink witnessed her mother embrace her maternal duty as she raised three children alone after the passing of Scholtz-Klink’s father. In 1918, she dropped out of the high school she attended in Baden to work as a nurse in Berlin at the end of the war, as well as at train stations and in the households of officers’ families. She explained that she wanted to “devote herself completely to the war effort.”¹ During her short

¹ Anna Maria Sigmund, “Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: The Party Comrade,” *Women of the Third Reich* (Canada: NDE Publishing, 2000), 114; Paul R. Bartrop and Eve E. Grimm, “Scholtz-Klink, Gertrud (1902-1999),” *In Perpetrating the Holocaust: Leaders, Enablers, and Collaborators* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2019), 251; Danielle Drew,

time working to support the Germans during World War I, Scholtz-Klink experienced an immense sense of patriotism and devotion to the German cause. This, in combination with the traditionalist values she grew up with in Adelsheim, influenced Scholtz-Klink's disdain for the progressive culture and women's involvement in politics in the Weimar Republic. This period in her life would be a major influence on her eventual devotion to the National Socialist German Workers' Party.



Figure 2: Photograph of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink during her membership in the Nazi Party.²

In her scholarship, Jill Stephenson argued that women's intersecting identities greatly influenced the experience they had in Nazi Germany. Class, marital status, and especially race were important factors that determined how "valuable" a woman was to German society.

Although some scholars have tried to fit women's experiences in Nazi Germany into a neat box,

"Scholtz-Klink, Gertrud." *The Holocaust: An Encyclopedia and Document Collection: Entries L-Z 2* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 578.

² Sigmund, *Women in the Third Reich*, 113.

Stephenson explained that it is simply impossible to argue that all women went through the same set of circumstances because of a multitude of factors.³ She argued that although the identities of class and gender influenced the experience of individuals in Nazi Germany, race was still the main factor as to how the Nazi regime treated a person. Most gender discrimination perpetrated by the Nazis was not unique to them, but the mass sterilizations and acts of euthanasia on racial and eugenic grounds in the Third Reich was drastically different from the norm. Gender discrimination was intertwined with the Nazis' notions of racial purity, again emphasizing that the target was not necessarily women, but Jewish and non-German women.⁴ Stephenson's argument stood out against other scholarship because of her emphasis that race was the focus and driver of Nazi actions. While their family-planning policies reached extremes, most gender discrimination German women faced was discrimination women experienced around the world during this period.⁵

Claudia Koonz, a major scholar of women in Nazi Germany, argued that German women embraced the sex-separate spheres that Nazi men instituted in order to promote women's *Lebensraum*, or women's living space.⁶ Koonz contended, "By binding themselves to their own irrevocable second-rate status, they established their own satrapies on the margin of men's

³ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 4-5; Stephenson offers four "myths" that historians have used to attempt to explain Nazi women prior to 1970s scholarship, including Nazis provided more opportunities for women, the gender-segregated space Nazis gave them empowered women and liberated them from traditional restraints, women willingly returned to the domestic life they knew prior to World War I, or that they were victims of the Nazis themselves.

⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 5, 23, 33, 131, 136-138.

⁵ Jaclyn Foster agrees with this argument, saying that women of Nazi Germany cannot be placed in one category. She added that the lack of primary documentation is a major reason for the frustration and gaps in knowledge among historians of the subject. Whether deliberate or accidental destruction of documents, women's lack of importance and therefore no documentation, or many women, like Hitler's secretary, who did not speak to the public for years about what happened, many invaluable primary sources were lost or hidden. See Jaclyn Foster, "Gretchen and the German Garrison," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self - Knowledge* 6 4 (Fall 2008): 29-39.

⁶ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 14; Claudia Koonz, "The Competition for a Women's *Lebensraum*, 1928-1934," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 199.

realm.”⁷ Prior to 1933, some female Nazi leaders attempted to construct a hierarchy within women’s organizations that would eventually launch them into a position of real power in the Nazi Party. Hitler feared women gaining political power and purged the independent Nazi female leaders, reorganized the women’s section, and enlisted Scholtz-Klink to lead them in demonstrating the “everyday banality of evil.”⁸ According to Koonz, women recognized their importance by recruiting other women, providing names of the “unfit” to Nazi leaders, and leaving their jobs to have several children and participate in the state loan program. They also assured their husbands that the gruesome actions they performed during the day were morally sound and for the greater good of the nation.⁹ “Scholtz-Klink saw herself as...the leader of women missionaries who would bring Nazi doctrine ‘home’ to every family in the Reich. Far from remaining untouched by Nazi evil, women operated at its very center,” contended Koonz.¹⁰ Their perception that they contributed greatly to the Nazi Party demonstrated their guilt as perpetrators and bystanders of the atrocities committed by the Nazis.

In the same school of thought as Koonz, Leila Rupp argued that many women embraced Nazi ideology because they felt they were given a bigger, more significant role in society. Although the Nazis eliminated many of the women’s emancipation policies, most individual women’s lives did not change, and they enjoyed the glorification of the duty most had already committed to: being a mother. When describing recruitment of women for the Nazi cause, Scholtz-Klink explained, “You have to reach them where their lives are – endorse their decisions, praise their accomplishments. Start with the cradle and the ladle.”¹¹ By making

⁷ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 15.

⁸ Claudia Koonz, “The Competition for a Women’s *Lebensraum*, 1928-1934,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 228.

⁹ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 9, 418.

¹⁰ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 6.

¹¹ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxv.

motherhood into more than just a mundane domestic duty, women felt empowered even though their circumstances remained virtually unchanged. Rupp contended that the image of a Nazi woman was not just a frail, docile mother, but an athletic, energetic, healthy woman who could perform “womanly work” with ease.¹² She stated, “Nazi ideology on women was, then, like Nazi ideology in general, a strange mixture of traditional conservative ideas, vague longings for a mythical past, and acceptance of the needs of a modern economy.”¹³ Many women embraced this ideology because it validated the traditional gender roles they held and provided them with a way to be active in society without stepping outside of their sphere.¹⁴

While discussing female labor, Annemarie Tröger’s scholarship focused on the use of biology to dictate if women could enter the workforce and what jobs suited them. Although the Nazi Party did not create the concept of sexual division of labor, the policies and propaganda implemented by them demonstrated a more powerful and aggressive push than in previous German governments.¹⁵ She offered two different models of female labor, the first being the “Blood and Soil Model.” Existing predominantly prior to 1933, the primary function of this model was psychological. As women were expelled from the industrial workforce after the first World War into domestic life or “derivatives of social motherhood” like social work, the deteriorating male identity crisis could be healed when men gained skilled employment.¹⁶ This model failed once the economy began righting itself after the Great Depression because the labor force required female labor again. The “Social-Engineering Model” created by Nazi technocrats, offered pseudo-science about the nature of women to explain that they could work in non-skilled,

¹² Leila J. Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology,” *Signs* 3, 2 (Winter 1977): 375-376.

¹³ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk,’” 379.

¹⁴ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk,’” 379.

¹⁵ Annemarie Tröger, “The Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 241.

¹⁶ Tröger, “The Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 239.

women-suitable jobs while young and unmarried, then disappear into the domestic sphere upon marriage.¹⁷ The unskilled labor provided by many women was rarely assured, paid less, and prevented them from accessing most social insurance. Scholtz-Klink fit neither of these models, however, because her work outside of the domestic sphere was political. Until it later became necessary during the second World War that women enter the workforce in droves, Scholtz-Klink continued to promote women remaining in the domestic sphere and only taking up gender-suitable work if need be.¹⁸

Shifting from labor to family policy, Michelle Mouton's scholarship focused on family policies in both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, offering a valuable comparison to explain typical family policy of the time versus uniquely extreme measures of the Nazi Party. More than 1.6 million men perished in the First World War and the birthrate fell to an all-time low of 14 per 1,000 during 1916-1917 and did not return to pre-war levels at any point in the 1920s.¹⁹ Weimar, as well as Nazi Germany, encouraged marriage and reproduction after the war. However, Nazi Germany's family planning policies became more invasive and focused primarily on "purifying the *Volk*," as Mouton's book title suggested. The Nazi state began requiring sterilization of people deemed racially and morally deviant and justified euthanasia practices for those who were "valueless" to the nation. Pro-family policies applied only to valuable, German women and brought with them a different type of oppression.²⁰ Mouton claimed that the extent to which Nazis prevented reproduction of some sections of society would

¹⁷ Tröger, "The Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat," in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 240.

¹⁸ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 120-121.

¹⁹ Michelle Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Nazi Family Policy, 1918-1945* (Washington D.C.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

²⁰ Gisela Bock, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State," in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 271. Gisela Bock's scholarship is around thirty years older than Mouton's, but it is still relevant and will be used alongside and in comparison, with Mouton's work. Mouton cited Bock often in her work.

qualify them as an anti-natalist state that only supported pronatalism for the “racially pure.”²¹ The family policy initiatives of the national government were not always implemented thoroughly and consistently on the local level, allowing many German women to avoid the push to have several children. Mouton argued, “individual German women, a primary focus of state family policy, demonstrated their ability to maintain their agency under both regimes as they held positions that ranged from collaborator to victim.”²² Scholtz-Klink easily embraced the Nazi pronatalist policy for German women in the 1930s, as she already had six children when she joined the Party. “During the 1920s,” she explained, “I had all I could do to keep house, raise the children, and provide a good home.”²³ By her third marriage, including her stepchildren, Scholtz-Klink was the mother of eleven children.²⁴ While she contradicted the Nazi woman ideal in other aspects, Scholtz-Klink welcomed her duty as a mother wholeheartedly.

The present study will use the general outline of Koonz’s scholarship, the comparisons of family policy of Mouton, and some methodology of Stephenson to look at the contradictions of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and other Nazi women caused by systemic sexism and racism and the gender role crisis during the interwar years. By looking at sex and race as two different but yet intertwining identities, it is evident that race was a more motivating factor for the Nazis than sex and the combination of both greatly influenced the experience of individual women. This work will focus on both Scholtz-Klink’s personal and public life as well as Nazi family policies to compare the similarities and differences of Nazi ideology toward women in contrast with the Weimar Republic. This research will add to the discussion of Nazi women and the Nazi

²¹ Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk, 1918-1945*, 17.

²² Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk, 1918-1945*, 33.

²³ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxvii.

²⁴ Bartrop and Grimm, "Scholtz-Klink, Gertrud (1902-1999)," in *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 253.

ideology toward women by emphasizing the influence of pre-existing oppression compounded by the extremity of Nazi policies.

The Weimar Republic Influence

The newly created Weimar Republic attempted to balance the major political, economic, and social upheaval in Germany in the aftermath of World War I. The democratic government sought to pull the country out of economic ruin while simultaneously dealing with the political and economic ramifications of the Treaty of Versailles that compounded the economic crisis. In addition, there was major social disruption in Germany after the war, as many mobilized women in the workforce had grown used to the economic and social independence they enjoyed during the war. This, along with the 600,000 widows and over two million “surplus” women, caused the government to reexamine the “woman question.”²⁵ The new democratic constitution called for equal rights and responsibilities for both men and women, including granting all women the right to vote. Although some women began to enjoy their emancipation by voting and entering public office, some restrictive imperial laws remained. For example, the Criminal Codes of 1871 and 1900 were still enforced, restricting women’s rights in marriage and divorce and outlawing abortion along with restricting birth control access. However, the enforcement of those codes did not hold back some women from embracing their new found economic, social, and political freedom.²⁶

The “New Woman” was a product of both the mobilization of women into the workforce during World War I and the progressive social culture during the Weimar Republic. She embraced her right to vote, used contraception, obtained illegal abortions, and earned her own

²⁵ Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 4-5.

²⁶ Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 5.

wages. If she married at all, the New Woman used birth control and only had an average of two children. Some women remained in manufacturing after the war, and by default, created a female-gendered division in the labor force. Others were now allowed to enroll in universities and became professionals and intellectuals as a result. Frau Regina Frankenfeld, a young girl coming of age in the Weimar republic, witnessed the age of the New Woman and went on to pursue professional studies and become an unmarried, child-free, agricultural home economics teacher. Frankenfeld demonstrated the complexity of the New Woman and politics, as she did become a Nazi Party member just a few years later, while still embracing the freedoms the Weimar culture had provided her.²⁷ Many feminist academics and intellectuals gave lectures to galvanize women to embrace their right to vote and understand the importance of democracy, but many audience members often got frustrated by the lecture. They felt they were not educated enough to understand the topic and how it pertained to them, and they had too many housekeeping responsibilities to worry about attending lectures.²⁸ Not all women who remained in a traditional domestic role fully rejected the New Woman, but it often was hard for them to connect with her due to class or educational differences.

Many women incorporated aspects of the New Woman into their domestic centered lives, such as voting and using contraception, but still remained a housewife and mother. Katherine Thomas recalled, "I remember well the startled look on the official, an elderly corporal, when I entered my name upon the rolls of the law-courts, giving the double profession of editor and housewife. 'But you cannot have two professions!' he expostulated...it was too much for

²⁷ Allison Owings, *Frauen: Germany Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 388-389.

²⁸ Katherine Thomas, *Women in Nazi Germany* (New York: AMS Press, 1981), 20-21. Katherine Thomas is an unidentified contemporary of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and provided a wealth of information on the status of women in Nazi Germany when she originally published her book in 1943.

him.”²⁹ The battle between traditional gender roles and the New Woman was one created more so as a socio-political issue for conservatives and the Nazis to campaign on than an actual problem in society. They claimed the New Woman caused a “moral crisis,” as women were supposed to be the moral guardians of the family and selflessly care for them above herself, but the New Woman supposedly shunned motherhood.³⁰ Arguments like this caused incredulous outbursts from conservatives, like that of the older gentleman Thomas recalled. Although conservatives argued the New Woman was destroying German society, many women, including Scholtz-Klink, rejected most New Woman notions, and returned or remained willingly in the domestic sphere after World War I.

Many women found themselves embracing the ability to return to the home after mobilization during the war. They preferred to take care of their husbands, children, and home and socialize through women’s organizations. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink herself welcomed this gender role and married her first husband, Eugene Klink, in 1920. Scholtz-Klink and her first husband had six children, with one dying in infancy.³¹ Scholtz-Klink did not plan to enter the political world or public sphere in general. She only changed her mind after her first husband’s sudden death at a Nazi Party rally.³² Nevertheless, both the government and society feared the inability to control the New Woman and conservatives often blamed her in the abstract for societal issues as well as stealing jobs from unemployed men.³³ This, along with a continuously declining birthrate, forced the Weimar Republic to emphasize the restoration of German family life and the importance of German motherhood. Weimar Germany created Mother’s Day as a

²⁹ Thomas, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 20.

³⁰ Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 9; Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 13.

³¹ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 114; Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 251; Drew, *The Holocaust*, 578.

³² Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxvii.

³³ Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 13.

national holiday to celebrate women's "selflessness and caring" and to indirectly suggest that women's ability to reproduce was their most important contribution to society.³⁴ The social growing pains in Germany had yet to be resolved when economic crisis hit the country once more.

When the stock market crashed in late 1929 and the Great Depression rocked the world economy, Germany experienced the economic side effects tenfold because of its already precarious economic situation. The Great Depression compounded the societal changes and pressures women were feeling and added new difficulties. Conservatives accused women of being "double earners," assuming they were married and bringing home a paycheck in addition to their husband's. Official unemployment statistics showed that female unemployment was not increasing nearly as rapidly as male unemployment. This misleading statistic did not consider that many women worked in consumer industries, not the labor industry; they did not always have insured jobs that contributed to the official unemployment tallies. Women lost their jobs at roughly the same rate as men, but their jobs were not always counted in the national unemployment numbers.³⁵ Middle-class women began working alongside working-class women when their husbands or fathers could not find work, a necessary action that perpetuated society's attacks that women were stealing men's jobs. Other changes, like loosened rent controls and cuts in health insurance, were felt by both men and women, but were especially stressful on women, who were raising families and were essentially in charge of everyone's well-being.³⁶

The economic fallout of the Great Depression gave the National Socialist German Workers' Party the ammunition it needed to attack the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic and

³⁴ Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 13-14.

³⁵ Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 14.

³⁶ Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 16.

blame the progressive social culture in Germany. “Hitler located the crisis not only in the German economy but also in German society, and he insisted that only a racially based *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) could restore Germany to its former greatness.”³⁷ The Nazi Party claimed the New Woman was un-German and it promised to “emancipate women from emancipation.” The Nazis vowed to restore orderly families and healthy children in Germany.³⁸ When Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and her husband became members of the Nazi Party in the 1920s, this was the ideology they embraced and promoted. At the beginning, she only saw herself as helping her husband with his duty to the party and fulfilling women’s work in the name of party. “I never cared much for politics,” claimed Scholtz-Klink, “although I supported my husband’s views.”³⁹ However, Scholtz-Klink soon grew out of those “auxiliary” tasks. When her husband, an “ardent SA man,” unexpectedly died of a heart attack during a Nazi Party rally, she was so angry she immediately went to the local Nazi district leader and volunteered.⁴⁰ Scholtz-Klink believed her husband was a martyr of the Nazi Party and that in his absence, she now needed to take his place. The district leader suggested she begin by organizing women in Baden and because of her great success there, Scholtz-Klink was soon promoted to be an advisor on women’s associations. Her political career took off from there.⁴¹

Women’s Lebensraum:

The Nazis ensured the German public that they would answer the “woman question” once and for all when they took office in 1933. In a speech to the Meeting of the National Socialist Women Organization in Nuremburg on September 9, 1934, Hitler claimed that

³⁷ Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 13.

³⁸ Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 13; Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 18.

³⁹ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxvii.

⁴⁰ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxvii.

⁴¹ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxvii; Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 114.

women's emancipation was the fault of the Jews because they had created and implemented the concept. After sufficiently placing the blame on "Jewish intellect," Hitler then launched into a proclamation of the importance of women's place in their "smaller world" so that men could flourish and thrive in their "bigger world." By keeping a neat, orderly, and loving home full of children, women would be helping their husbands succeed in life, which was the task "Providence had assigned women," according to Hitler.⁴²

Because she springs from the root of life, woman is also the most stable element in the preservation of a people. When all is said and done, it is she who has an infallible sense of what is necessary if a race is not to perish, because of course her children will be the first ones afflicted by all this suffering...Accordingly, for many years we National Socialists have protested against bringing woman into political life, a life that, in our eyes, is unworthy of her.⁴³

Hitler justified denying women entry into politics because they were too moral for such tasks and instead told them that their contribution to the nation and the "battle" was to create the next generation of the German *Volk*. In his speech, Hitler not only expressed his desire that women remain in the domestic sphere and procreate, but he also specified that German woman would keep the "race" from perishing, not the population. Even at an event that was supposed to be women focused, Hitler demonstrated that extermination of the Jews and creating a "pure" *Volk* was his first priority for Germany. Throughout the entirety of the speech, he repeatedly blamed the movement for women's rights on the Jews and reiterated the importance of women throwing themselves into motherhood. He concluded his impassioned speech with a battle cry for all women to not just be mothers, but to look at it as their national, patriotic duty to the fatherland.

You women, party comrades, you are the women who shall lead, organize, and help us in this struggle. You have taken an honorable task. That which we seek to build in the Volk as

⁴² Adolf Hitler, "Speech to the Meeting of the National Socialist Women's Organization" (speech, Nuremberg, Germany, 9 September 1934), as cited and quoted in Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 311-314.

⁴³ Hitler, "Speech to the Meeting of the National Socialist Women's Organization," as cited and quoted in Rabinbach and Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 312-313.

a whole is what you must anchor firmly within yourselves... You must be man's counterpart in these, our struggles on behalf of the Volk for freedom, equality, and honor, and peace, so that, with this eye for the future, we may be seen as true warriors by and for our Volk.⁴⁴

Hitler knew exactly how he planned to answer the women question when he came into power in 1933. He not only immediately rolled back many advancements in laws that gave women more personal freedom, but he began campaigning and producing propaganda with similar messaging to this speech. He wanted women to remain in the domestic sphere and not interfere in politics and their husband's world, while having as many German children as possible.

When Hitler demanded women remain in their sphere, he had not necessarily intended for the concept of women's *Lebensraum* within the Nazi Party to grow and expand in the manner that it did. The Nazi Party only looked at women as a means of reproducing the German *Volk*, not as group of people that could aid in the Nazi cause. Nazi women were more than willing to accept their second-sex status in Nazi Germany and procreate in exchange for the establishment of their women-only realm in the public sphere, better known as women's *Lebensraum*, or women's living space. Using the language Hitler used to explain why Germany needed to go to war and expand German territory, Claudia Koonz explained the idea that women wanted to build a hierarchy, enjoy freedoms, and have responsibilities in the public sphere, but remain in an insulated, gender-role appropriate public sphere. However, even women at the apex of the hierarchy, like Scholtz-Klink, never attained nearly the same authority of political power as that of the Nazi men.⁴⁵ Women believed that they had joined a movement more-so than a political party and thought they played a vital role in revolutionizing German culture. In describing women's *Lebensraum*, Scholtz-Klink said, "My own women's division concerned itself with

⁴⁴ Hitler, "Speech to the Meeting of the National Socialist Women's Organization," as cited and quoted in Rabinbach and Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 314.

⁴⁵ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 55-59.

women's responsibilities. We formed almost a state within a state.”⁴⁶ Because Nazi men often did not bother much with the *NS-Frauenschaft*, Nazi women had the false impression that they had autonomy in their decision making, but unfortunately the systemic sexism of the Nazis was so deeply entrenched, the women and their agenda were not considered a threat to the men.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, women continued to join the Women’s League and the responsibilities that put upon themselves began to multiple, so they needed a sturdy, dependable leader.

The national *NS-Frauenschaft* was falling apart when Scholtz-Klink took over its leadership in 1933. Guida Diehl and Elisabeth Zanders, along with other prominent conservative female leaders in the 1920s, seemed to be heirs-apparent to lead the Women’s League, but for a multitude of reasons, including Hitler’s fear that some women, like Zanders, were attaining too much political clout, none of these women became the next *Reichsfrauenführerin*. After her devotion and success in Baden, Scholtz-Klink eventually emerged victorious among the other leading contenders for the position in February of 1934. Her obedient disposition and apparent conformity to the gender roles set forth by Hitler made her ideal for the position. Her appointment was a great tactical move on the part of the Nazi men, as she was an ideal public face for what it meant to be a Nazi woman. Scholtz-Klink had married her second husband, Günther Scholtz, two years prior, had a large family, and was immensely devoted to her party.⁴⁸ Doris Kirkpatrick of the *New York Times* described her physical attributes as those of a perfectly sculpted Aryan woman.

Her gentle femininity is a startling contrast to the military atmosphere. She is a friendly woman in her middle 30s, blonde, blue eyed, regular featured, slender...Her complexion is

⁴⁶ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxiii.

⁴⁷ Koonz, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 214-19.

⁴⁸ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 84-85; Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 252.

so fresh and clear that she dares to do without powder or rouge...her firm capable hands have known hard work.⁴⁹

A picture-perfect Aryan woman and devoted party member, Scholtz-Klink accepted her role with gratitude and began to lead the *NS Frauenschaft* with gusto. Her two main tasks would be to dismantle all women's organizations and subsume them into the Women's League and to promulgate pronatalist propaganda to all German women of child-bearing age.



Figure 3: Gertrud Scholtz-Klink on the cover of a magazine for Nazi women, featuring her as a Nazi leader.⁵⁰

Scholtz-Klink aided the Nazis in disbanding all organizations they found objectionable and banned political organizations, like the socialists and communists. From radical feminist

⁴⁹ Doris Kirkpatrick, "Role of Women," *New York Times* (September 26, 1937), as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxi.

⁵⁰ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 221.

leaders to a women's group who demonstrated mild tendencies of feminist ideology, Scholtz-Klink helped dissolve the group and then incorporate those women into the National Socialist Women's League. Even non-objectionable organizations eventually disappeared, as Nazis wanted one central organization that had state-controlled activities and content. Select religious organizations were the only groups that survived the merging of all social organizations into one Nazi organization, with whom Scholtz-Klink had a good working relationship. Scholtz-Klink had dissolved local organizations while leading the regional Women's League in Baden and corralled many women into joining the Nazi Party. Her experience at the regional level helped her excel at dissolving organizations at the national level.⁵¹ When addressing the party and "her women" for the first time in her new role, Scholtz-Klink emphasized that women performed countless little sacrifices that enabled the nation to thrive, just like a mother caring for her child. She concluded, "Being a mother unites women from all classes and all walks of life," and she then emphasized the new mother's service and mother training program being instituted by her sector of the Nazi Party.⁵² Scholtz-Klink's greatest accomplishment in her work for the Nazis was her implementation and success in her mother-education courses, as she had very little power or influence in any other realm of the Nazi Party's activities.

The *Reichsfrauenführerin* perceived herself as having great power and influence over the female members of the Nazi Party as well as its leadership. When asked years later if she felt she had influence, Scholtz Klink responded with a resounding yes.

Of course, I did. We enjoyed continual informal contacts with the highest officials. Göring, Rosenberg, Hitler, Himmler... I knew them all. Just before his death Goebbels admitted that he wished he had paid more attention to the women's division period now that's the marker

⁵¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 85-86; Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 114-115.

⁵² Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, "Rede an die deutsche Frau" (Reichsparteitag, Nuremberg, Germany, 8 September 1934), as cited in Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 166-167.

real person, a mensch. He admitted his oversight and, in the end, repented. You can't imagine what gentlemen they all were.⁵³

Even when admitting that the Nazi leaders did not care about women, she could not bring herself to fully believe that they had never cared, and that the women's section was not a priority.

Although she did have a few private meetings with Hitler and the others, they rarely listened to her ideas on how to improve and utilize the national Women's League. Scholtz-Klink was perhaps the only person who believed that she wielded political power in the inner circle. "She is only a tool of the male Nazi leaders; yet she is the willing tool," argued Katherine Thomas.⁵⁴

According to Hitler's orders, she had the rank of an office manager and whenever jurisdictional conflicts arose, she never won the battle. Although she was treated as part of the cadre with a handful of other famous Nazi women, she was never invited to the elaborate parties and events the other women were because most of Nazi leadership did not enjoy her presence.⁵⁵ In spite of the obvious signs that Scholtz-Klink wielded little to no political influence within the inner circle, she remained steadfast in her role because she felt empowered by the work. Likewise, when Frau Frankenfeld received a promotion in the Reich Food Production Department in 1934, she similarly felt important, empowered, and recognized for her hard work. Frankenfeld, even though she felt the same perceived notions of growing authority, recognized that Scholtz-Klink was an idealist whose tasks and goals had nothing to do with the annihilation of the Jews.⁵⁶

Without saying as much directly, Frankenfeld pointed out that not only was Scholtz-Klink a woman, but she oversaw women's issues, not any part of the Final Solution plan. Because of this, she would never attain the same level of importance as the male leadership of the Nazi

⁵³ Scholtz-Klink in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxiii-xxiv.

⁵⁴ Thomas, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 30.

⁵⁵ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 115, 119.

⁵⁶ Owings, *Frauen*, 396, 401.

Party. That said, Scholtz-Klink held political power within the hierarchy of women's *Lebensraum*, was a national female role model, and greatly influenced the daily lives of German women.

Scholtz-Klink held an inherently political position, as the leader of the national Women's League. She gave a multitude of speeches on Nazi ideology, specifically focusing on pronatalism and motherhood. She was a true believer and promoted Nazi ideology everywhere she went. However, her leadership position was directly contradictory to what she proclaimed as the appropriate behavior for women in Nazi Germany. "Those who have once heard the screaming of Communist and Social Democratic women in the streets, in parliament...know that a truly German woman will not lend herself to that," proclaimed Scholtz-Klink, reiterating that a woman's place was as a mother in the home, not in the political arena.⁵⁷ Scholtz-Klink spoke these words as the highest-ranking female official of a political party, whose ideology she promulgated regularly. It was obvious she saw herself as having power within the political party, but yet she admonished women who wanted to enter politics. The contradictions of Scholtz-Klink did not end there.

As woman who supported her *Führer* in his belief that women belonged in a subordinate sphere that aided men in their success, she did not demonstrate this in her personal and public actions. Although Scholtz-Klink continuously argued that women should be sub-servient to their husbands and the nation, she had higher aspirations for herself and other women than she admitted. In an October 1936 speech about the duties and tasks of Nazi women, Scholtz-Klink proclaimed, "The German housewife is really the best minister of economics, since if we women would only work together systematically toward this goal, the *Führer* and his whole economic

⁵⁷ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 117.

staff would not have to work nearly as hard.”⁵⁸ In this speech, Scholtz-Klink insinuated women not only could manage the financial situation of their homes better than their husbands, but that if women worked together, they could manage Germany’s financial situation without the help of Hitler or the other male Nazi leaders. Nearly lost among the many pages of her speech about the virtues of motherhood, Scholtz-Klink demonstrated her, perhaps subconscious, conviction that women were intelligent beings who could hold high-ranking, intellectually based jobs and still be mothers. Because of her internalized misogyny, sexism, racism, and indoctrination of Nazi ideology, Scholtz-Klink did not act on these inklings, but instead threw herself into work for the Nazi Party and found purpose in work for the nation.

Her dedication to promoting motherhood and service to the nation was undeniable, but her husband began questioning Scholtz-Klink’s own dedication to motherhood in the late 1930s. She regularly went into the office to work and teach her training course. Promoting Nazi ideology necessitated travel around Europe from time to time to give speeches, taking her away from the home for several days at a time occasionally. Her second husband complained about her numerous party duties, most likely because he was not nearly as dedicated to the party as she was. Instead of scaling back her party duties or completely retreating into the domestic sphere, Scholtz-Klink divorced him in 1938.⁵⁹ Completely contrary to what she promoted in her daily work and speeches to the German women, Scholtz-Klink left her husband when he was unhappy and wanted his wife to take her domestic duties more seriously. Her divorce seemed to have little to no effect on her party performance or on the Nazi leadership’s opinion of Scholtz-Klink, as her marriage and divorce were the only two times he was mentioned in her history.

⁵⁸ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, “Duties and Tasks of the Woman in the National Socialist State,” in Randall L. Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism* (College Station, T.X.: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 58-59.

⁵⁹ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 117; Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 252.

Additionally, Scholtz-Klink promoted women's *Lebensraum*. Even though women's *Lebensraum* restrained women in their designated sex-segregated sphere, they developed a hierarchy and authority roles within the system, demonstrating that Scholtz-Klink, along with other Nazi women, craved to be more than just a housewife and mother with a membership in a social organization. Both Scholtz-Klink and Frau Frankenfeld felt empowered and important in their positions of authority. Nazi women were ambitious in the Third Reich and wanted to attain positions of power and influence. However, brainwashed by Nazi ideology and entrenched in generations of sexism, misogyny, and racism, they accepted positions of limited political power instead.

Family Policy:

After World War I, there was a dramatic decrease in the birthrate and an increase in “surplus woman” across Europe, including in Germany.⁶⁰ This, along with the increased women's social and economic mobility and changing gender role expectations, led to a strain on relations within marriages and between couples. When they came to power, the Nazis attacked the “New Woman” and single women for being sexually promiscuous with non-Germans and disrupting the social order. The Nazis almost immediately legally defined a proper German marriage as a long-term, loving relationship between “two genetically healthy and racially identical people of opposite gender...with the aim of conceiving like-raced and genetically healthy children and raising them to be able-bodied national comrades.”⁶¹ They launched a “major and systematic campaign” to remedy the low marriage and birthrates problem in

⁶⁰ Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 5, 48. “Surplus women” was a disparaging term for women of marrying and child-bearing age after World War I, but there were no men for them to marry. Many women were more or less forced to embrace the stereotype of the “New Woman” because they needed to support themselves, whether or not they decided to have children out of wedlock.

⁶¹ Ludwig Nockher, “Vorschläge zur Gestaltung des deutschen Ehescheidungsrechts,” as quoted in Klinsky, *Die Frau in NS-Staat*, 60, as quoted in Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 48.

Germany.⁶² The Nazis began by vigorously enforcing the prohibition of abortion, closing birth control centers, and severely restricting access to contraception. They also instituted marriage loans, which a married couple received after the woman pledged to leave the workforce and not return unless her husband no longer received an income.⁶³ The Nazis instituted the Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German People and the Nuremberg Law of 1935, both guarding against marriage between Aryans and non-Aryans. The former required a couple to obtain a Certificate of Suitability for Marriage signed by a doctor, assuring the state that they both had no diseases or hereditary illnesses they would pass on to the next generation of the *Volk*.⁶⁴ Thomas recalled a German woman she knew who was marrying an S.S. officer and had to first determine her family lineage and receive a physical, then she and her fiancé could apply for the loan.⁶⁵ “Between August 1933 and January 1937, some 700,000 couples, nearly a third of those who married during the period, received a loan.”⁶⁶

The Nazi regime added procreation incentives to the marriage loan, giving a twenty-five-cent reduction for each child born as well as suspension of interest payments for an entire year.⁶⁷ Frau Wilhelmine Haferkamp explained how the child incentives aided in balancing the financials in her steadily growing family in 1933.

When one had ten children, well, not ten, but a pile of them, one should join the Party; '33 it was, nicht? I already had three children and the fourth on the way...I got thirty marks per children from the Hitler government, came every month, and twenty marks' child aid from the city of Oberhausen. Was fifty marks per child. That was a lot of money. I sometimes got more “child money” than my husband earned.⁶⁸

⁶² J. Noakes and G. Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945: State, Economy, and Society 1933-1939, A Documentary Reader* vol. 2 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 256.

⁶³ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 257.

⁶⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 28.

⁶⁵ Thomas, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 50-52.

⁶⁶ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 257.

⁶⁷ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 257-258.

⁶⁸ Frau Wilhelmine Haferkamp, as quoted in Owings, *Frauen*, 19.

Contrary to seemingly positive results represented in Frau Haferkamp's story, this initiative worked in increasing the number of marriages in Germany, but the birthrate stayed relatively stagnant, even with the additional incentives on the marriage loans. Having only one or two children became the new normal in many families and the Nazis needed to do more than take away a year of interest on a loan to change that. Realizing this, the Nazis began spreading propaganda emphasizing the importance and patriotic duty of motherhood. Images of smiling mothers surrounded by many happy, healthy Aryan children shown on every Nazi women's magazine cover (see Appendix, Images 1-4). The Nazi Party also created organizations, events, and classes that focused on motherhood training.⁶⁹

Scholtz-Klink was particularly talented at instituting and promoting Nazi ideology focused on marriage and pronatalism. She introduced a mandatory "household" year simultaneously with the party's implementation of the marriage loans policies. The household year was a prerequisite for all young women intending on attending college after they completed secondary school. During this year, Scholtz-Klink and other women teaching the program brainwashed young women into believing continuing their educational career was absurd and that "brainwork" was a masculine pursuit unbecoming on them.⁷⁰ Instead, Scholtz-Klink argued, they should be focusing on becoming wives and mothers and if they must work prior to marriage, pursue work that allowed them to reflect on their futures in the domestic sphere.⁷¹ In her leadership of the *NS-Frauenschaft*, Scholtz-Klink had the ability to not only indoctrinate young women about becoming wives and mothers, but women who were already housewives

⁶⁹ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 257-258.

⁷⁰ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 116.

⁷¹ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 114; These training courses were sometimes deemed "Nazi bride schools." Although Scholtz-Klink created the program and implemented, she and the program were under close supervision by Heinrich Himmler. Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 252.

and mothers. She began implementing training courses that taught ideology and housewife tips, but the most popular and successful were the motherhood training courses. The motherhood classes she created were the biggest and most influential accomplishment of her Nazi career.⁷²

Scholtz-Klink demonstrated her deep-rooted belief in the importance of motherhood by not only being a mother herself and teaching training courses about motherhood to women, but by willingly promulgating the cult of motherhood ideology in speeches and in print propaganda. In her article “To Be German Is to Be Strong,” in the *NS Frauen Warte* Nazi women’s magazine in 1936, she did not hold back her disdain for the “New Woman,” and she preached about the sanctity and patriotism of motherhood.

Between 1918 and 1933, motherhood was often robbed of its deepest meaning and reduced to something superficial, something that was even held in contempt. Instead of a child being seen as the deepest affirmation of the woman and of life, it was seen as a burden, as a sacrifice on the part of the woman... It is therefore our task to awaken once again the sense of the divine, to make the calling to motherhood the way through which the German woman will see her calling to be mother of the nation. She will then not live her life selfishly, but rather in service to her people.⁷³

Scholtz-Klink repeatedly emphasized the greatest service women could give to the nation was giving birth to racially pure and genetically healthy German babies. She then proclaimed that German women knew hardship, they understood pain, and that to be a German woman meant being a strong individual. According to Scholtz-Klink, young and middle-aged women joined the Women’s League and looked forward to volunteering to help with mother’s aid and welfare.⁷⁴ Assistance programs for mothers and children were essential to the pronatalist movement, especially after the commencement of World War II. Many women either did not have a husband to financially support them, or their husband’s income did not cover the cost of

⁷² Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 93; Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 120.

⁷³ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, “To Be German Is to Be Strong,” *N.S. Frauen-Warte* 4 (1936), 501-502.

⁷⁴ Scholtz-Klink, “To Be German Is to Be Strong,” 501-502

raising a family. The Women's League and other Nazi sponsored organizations ran these welfare programs. Propaganda advertising the assistance programs illustrated breastfeeding Aryan women, glowing as they looked lovingly at their child, further indoctrinating women with the cult of motherhood (see Appendix, Image 5). Scholtz-Klink celebrated women coming together to help other women in her speech, because only women understood the gravity of the responsibility of repopulating the nation.⁷⁵ Similar to Scholtz-Klink's sentiment, Paula Siber wrote, "The woman question...is a question that has the profoundest influence on the life of the Volk because the future of the Volk rests in the woman's womb."⁷⁶ Using just a few words, Siber summarized the immensity of the duty of German women to procreate to ensure the nation's continuance. Scholtz-Klink took her responsibility as a mother to the nation very seriously and implored other German women to do the same.

The Nazis' promotion of Mother's Day in May and the creation of the Mother's Honour Cross were other forms of propaganda used to emphasize the procreation of Aryan women. During the festival that celebrated "the German family," women with at least three children under the age of ten received Honour Cards reading, "the most beautiful name in all the world is Mother."⁷⁷ Even more prestigious was the Honour Cross of the German Mother, which was presented by Nazi Party dignitaries to mothers, dependent on their number of children. Women with four to five children received the bronze cross, women with six to seven children received the silver cross, and women with eight or more children received the gold cross (see Appendix, Image 6). The cross's similarity to the German Iron Cross, the highest military honor, underscored that women's patriotic duty to the nation was to reproduce as many racially pure

⁷⁵ Scholtz-Klink, "To Be German Is to Be Strong," 501-502.

⁷⁶ Paula Siber, *Die Frauenfrage und ihre Lösung durch den Nationalsozialismus* (Wolfenbüttel-Berlin: George Kallmeyer Verlag, 1933), 9-14, as cited and quoted in Rabinbach and Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 309.

⁷⁷ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 31.

German babies as possible.⁷⁸ Although the mother training programs succeeded and the Nazis amplified the pomp and circumstance of Mother's Day, neither these nor the child incentives on marriage loans made a large difference in the birthrate deficit in Germany.

Racism and sexism were inextricably linked in Nazi ideology, with the cult of motherhood and pronatalism only being propagated to German women. In stark contrast to the celebrations of Mother's Day, non-German, Jewish, "hereditarily unhealthy," and "asocial" women experienced a radically different version of Nazi family policy. Eugenic sterilization was instituted with the 'Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring,' which argued that if there was a threat of serious defect of physical or mental nature because of an individual's medical history, they were to be sterilized. Frau Frankenfeld explained she supported the sterilization policy of individuals with hereditary illnesses because she met children with serious physical and mental health effects because of those illnesses and she thought it was horrible. Having no compassion for the children, Frau Frankenfeld held the sentiment of Nazi ideology that they were a menace to society, and they would never be productive citizens. While she did not condone it, Frau Frankenfeld was not particularly disturbed by the fact that Nazis killed many people deemed "congenitally ill" under this policy.⁷⁹

Women experienced discrimination at higher rates than men when undergoing the physicals required by law before marriage. Doctors did not always test men for fertility and sexually promiscuous men were not considered asocial. However, doctors always tested women's fertility and would promptly deem them unfruitful if something were awry. "Asocial" women, or those who did not adhere to the societal standards of sexually permissible behavior,

⁷⁸ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 31.

⁷⁹ Owings, *Frauen*, 397-398.

often were sent to concentration camps, and forced into prostitution.⁸⁰ Although single German mothers faced discrimination for pregnancy outside of wedlock, if the mother could prove the pure racial heritage of the unborn child, the state offered her assistance, and she was not sterilized. Non-Germans not deemed “hereditarily ill” or “asocial” could still be sterilized or at least encouraged to utilize contraception. Scholtz-Klink demanded that Germans adhere to the “natural order,” and advocated for sterilization of those who were not “racially pure” in many of her speeches and articles for the party.⁸¹ The sterilization policies of the Nazi regime not only demonstrated their racism but their invasiveness into the private lives of women. The Nazis had a “totalitarian tendency to wipe out boundaries between public and private life,” demonstrated in their ideology toward women.⁸² This notion of the private being political was especially exemplified by the family policies of the Nazi regime. Sexuality, sex life, marriage, and children were topics handled privately between two partners prior to the Third Reich. However, under Nazi reign, women’s private lives were politicized because of their ability to procreate.⁸³

Women in the Workforce:

A common misconception is Nazis expelled masses of women from their industrial jobs when they came to power. Many women had lost their jobs in the late 1920s and early 1930s due to the Great Depression. The unemployment crisis in Germany created an illusion that women’s existence in the workplace threatened men and their ability to attain what little employment was available. The concept of women working was not new, but it provided a scapegoat for the Nazi Party to blame.⁸⁴ The social upheaval in the Weimar Republic and years

⁸⁰ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 34-35.

⁸¹ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 118.

⁸² Charu Gupta, “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, 17 (27 April 1991): WS48; The concept of the private being political is touched on in this paragraph but is an area of research that can be delved further into pertaining to women in Nazi ideology.

⁸³ Gupta, “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany.” WS40-WS42.

⁸⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 50-51.

spent at war caused a gender role identity crisis for men across Europe, and the unemployment of the Great Depression compounded the anxiety they already felt. The Nazi Party took advantage of this and blamed working women. Conservatives and Nazis particularly attacked married working women, or “double earners,” because they supposedly stole jobs away from unemployed men when women’s husbands was already working and financially supporting the family, presumably.⁸⁵

With the abundance of unwed women in the aftermath of World War I and a mobilized female workforce, it was estimated that eleven and a half million women were “economically active” in 1935.⁸⁶ About a third of these women worked in family-owned businesses or on the family farm, but others remained in industry and civil service occupations outside of the private sphere. The Nazis’ labor policy depended on the labor market and public morale, as well as their racist and sexist ideology.⁸⁷ Nazi ideology remained steadfast in the belief that women should be mothers first and foremost, but if they must enter the workforce, that they perform gender-suitable labor. Prior to coming to power in 1933, they promoted a female worker model that scholar Annemarie Tröger deemed the “Blood and Soil” model. This model argued that women and men had two separate spheres and women who desired to work must find work within her sphere, such as social work, teacher, nurse, or work within the family business. The Blood and Soil Model was in response to the crumbling male identity during the gender role crisis in the Weimar Republic. The fascist and misogynistic concept additionally argued that women were brainwashed with “Jewish decadence,” feminism, and bolshevism, into wanting to be intellectuals or attain high-level positions in the workforce.⁸⁸ Frau Anne Hepp exemplified

⁸⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 51.

⁸⁶ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 268.

⁸⁷ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 268-269.

⁸⁸ Tröger, “The Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 239-240.

Tröger's Blood and Soil Model as a wife and mother while simultaneously working with her husband at the family's photography business. Perfectly content with working within her sphere, she eventually joined the Nazi Party so the family business could reap the pro-Nazi benefits, even though her husband would not join. Frau Hepp explained away the antisemitic tendencies and eventual mass murders that her party perpetrated against the Jews and argued she joined to benefit her business, not because she believed in their ideology per se.⁸⁹ The initial push of the Nazis to expel women from the industrial workforce worked in increasing male employment numbers and supported their pronatalist propaganda. However, this method only sustained Germany for about three years.

Around 1936-1937, the boom in rearmament production and the compulsory labor service and conscription caused a shortage in labor and the Nazi regime had to rethink its ideology toward women in labor. Desperate to utilize women's labor, the Nazis needed to create a way to justify women entering the labor industry while still assuring society they were second-class citizens.⁹⁰ Tröger described this as the Social-Engineering Model, explaining the change in women's status in the labor force. Developed by the technocratic elite of the regime, the model used pseudo-science and social Darwinism to establish what areas of industry women could work in and for how long. The Social-Engineering Model established that after women trained for their "real" jobs as housewives and mothers, they would enter the labor industry for a few years. The women worked on conveyor belt assembly lines and did not have the option of promotion because of the requirement to leave the labor industry as soon as they got married.⁹¹ Propaganda pictured smiling, young Aryan women with the caption, "A wonderful task: Reich

⁸⁹ Owings, *Frauen*, 360-364.

⁹⁰ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, 269.

⁹¹ Tröger, "The Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat," in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 240.

Labor Service Women's Leader: A job for today!" in attempt to normalize the shift in women's labor policy (see Appendix, Image 7).⁹² In this manner, Nazi Germany used female labor that they desperately needed, but they managed to contain women in their own sphere.

In 1936, around the same time the Social-Engineering Model of female labor was being implemented, Scholtz-Klink took on the leadership of the Women's Bureau in the German Labor Front in addition to her duties as the *Reichsfrauenführerin*. Similar to her duties leading the Women's League, she was responsible for persuading women to enter the workforce as a service to their nation.⁹³ In a speech from October of 1936, Scholtz-Klink called on women to take on this patriotic duty to support the economic well-being of the nation.

We have the task of showing other women...how to be part of the process of moving selfish 'I' to the 'you' of the people's community, to join our work and to win them over to National Socialism. That is why we have established the German's Women's Work...to deal with the particular socio-political problems of women – gaining respect for working women, protecting working mothers.⁹⁴

Scholtz-Klink asked for unified support from all German women for all German women in their entrance into the industrial workforce. She ensured that working mothers would also be protected under her leadership. In addition to the household year and motherhood training courses that Scholtz-Klink created, the Nazi regime now asked young women to devote the years between school and marriage to the assembly line. Although the Nazi regime and Scholtz-Klink attempted to cover up their contradictory change in women's labor policy, the ease in restrictions due to a labor shortage demonstrated the arbitrariness and falsity of their biological claims that women in the Third Reich should only be mothers. The commencement of World War II

⁹² *A wonderful task: Reich Labor Service Women's Leader: A job for today!* Poster. (1930s) Calvin University Propaganda Archives. <https://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters2.htm>.

⁹³ Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 252.

⁹⁴ Scholtz-Klink, "Duties and Tasks of the Woman in the National Socialist State," in Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, 56-57.

exponentially increased the need for female labor force and further debunked the Nazis' biological and pseudo-scientific claims as to why women should not be in the industrial workforce.

Race versus Gender:

Some emancipatory qualities existed within the Nazi regime for Aryan, middle-class women, but no true emancipation took place. Some women, like Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, felt empowered by the Nazi regime and her ability to rise in Nazi ranks and lead the National Socialist Women's League. She attained the title *Reichsfrauenführerin* and influenced women's policy implementation, but Scholtz-Klink had no true influence in the inner circle. Her political emancipation was limited within the restraints of women's *Lebensraum*. Young women who had access to the same gym classes as their male counterparts may have felt liberated in the moment, but they then attended mandatory classes, indoctrinating them in Nazi ideology and the cult of motherhood.⁹⁵ The gender wage gap, lack of female representation in the government, and anti-abortion propaganda in Nazi Germany was not unheard of in other countries in the 1930s and 1940s. Several countries recently passed female enfranchisement legislature, but in many other countries, women were still fighting for their right to vote. Gender discrimination and systemic misogyny in policies and social expectations was normal throughout the European continent, but the mass sterilizations and acts of euthanasia on racial and eugenic grounds in the Third Reich was drastically different. The gender discrimination that was unique to Nazi Germany was intertwined with their evil notions of racial purity.⁹⁶

Although the identities of class and gender influenced the experience of individuals in Nazi Germany, race was still the main factor as to how the Nazi regime treated an individual.

⁹⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 75-76.

⁹⁶ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 23-27, 33-46.

The female experience varied immensely, depending on race, class, and determined social status, such as asocial and sexual deviant, among others. Race was always the key factor in whether women could access organizations, education, or proper healthcare. Determining a woman's role and treatment in Nazi Germany firstly depended on her racial purity, with submission to the Nazi ideal of motherhood and service to the state as a second consideration.⁹⁷ When the Jewish butcher that Frau Haferkamp's mother always frequented and liked very much disappeared, she bawled and yelled at the Nazis standing outside, guarding the empty store. However, her mother knew not to fight with them any further. Frau Haferkamp concluded, "They would have beat us dead."⁹⁸ This narrative demonstrated how Frau Haferkamp and her mother's Aryan, middle-class privilege affected the experience they had in the Third Reich versus what the butcher's female relatives experienced. They got away with yelling at Nazis about their unfair practices since the mother and daughter were deemed "valuable" in society. However, as women, they could only protest so much before they too would experience abuse. Frau Frankenfeld demonstrated her Aryan, middle-class privilege when she described her colleagues at work learning about Jewish relatives and having to emigrate to save themselves and their families as "light office gossip."⁹⁹ As a member of the Nazi Party and having no Jewish ancestors, Frau Frankenfeld did not feel the need to educate herself on the abuses taking place in her country or what their progression meant for her colleagues and neighbors. Both women did not use their privilege to fight the injustices committed by the Nazis, and therefore were guilty bystanders.

When she spoke to Claudia Koonz in the 1980s, Scholtz-Klink claimed she had no idea about the atrocities perpetrated against the Jews until after World War II. She argued that up

⁹⁷ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 33-46.

⁹⁸ Frau Wilhelmine Haferkamp, as quoted in Owings, *Frauen*, 22-23.

⁹⁹ Owings, *Frauen*, 396-397.

until the implementation of the Final Solution and the mass murder of millions of innocent Jews, that everything taking place in Germany was legal and particularly as a woman, it was not her place to comment on or care about what was happening in respect to the Jews. Scholtz-Klink deflected and responded, “We women stayed remote from the Jewish community. Our job was to direct welfare programs to help German people. As a leader I welcomed women from all political backgrounds.”¹⁰⁰ She excused the lack of Jewish women participating in her organization because “none volunteered.”¹⁰¹ Raised in a xenophobic family, Scholtz-Klink contended the antisemitic policies of the Third Reich did not bother her, but she was not involved with that mission of the party much either. Contrary to her claims, she used inflammatory language and made racist remarks about Jews in numerous speeches and posters on Nazi ideology and did have some knowledge of the atrocities committed by the Nazis.

For 14 years, you, party comrades, have fought side by side with the Brown front against the Jews, the mortal enemy of the German nation, have unmasked Jewish lies and avoided Jewish businesses. Not a penny more to a Jewish store, no Jewish doctor, no Jewish lawyer for the German woman or German family! Women, do not underestimate the terrible gravity of the struggle. The Jew wants to lead it until the germination has been destroyed. We will lead it until Judaism has been destroyed.¹⁰²

In her remarks displayed on a propaganda poster, she argued that Jews tried to take over Germany, but the Germans fought back. However, they needed to fight until the “germination,” or the further growth of the Jewish population was destroyed. Scholtz-Klink directed women to do their part by boycotting Jewish businesses in their daily lives. Her complicity in the annihilation of Jews did not end with her racist language at party rallies. When fellow female colleagues in the Women’s League returned from concentration camps and told Scholtz-Klink

¹⁰⁰ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxviii.

¹⁰¹ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxviii.

¹⁰² Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, *NS-Frauen Warte* vol 1 issue 20 (1933), as quoted in Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 118.

that the depressing conditions upset them, she made sure to extract her women from working there in the future, but she never felt concerned about the conditions of the prisoners in the camps.¹⁰³ Scholtz-Klink and her third husband, August Heissmeyer, made frequent trips to visit prisoners in women's concentration camps, such as at Moringen, Lichtenburg, and Ravensbrück, in line with Heissmeyer's role as inspector of concentration camps.¹⁰⁴ The *Reichsfrauenführerin* may not have witnessed firsthand the mass killing camps, but she had at least an inkling of what the Nazi regime was doing to the Jews of Germany and the surrounding territories. Scholtz-Klink was both a perpetrator and bystander, as she had knowledge of the abhorrent actions of the Nazis and did nothing to stop them. Her sway within the Nazi Party leadership was little, since she was a woman, but she did not even attempt to help the Jews and other prisoners in Nazi concentration camps.

Scholtz-Klink was so incredibly dedicated to the Nazi Party because of her privilege as an Aryan, middle-class woman. She had the privilege to pursue a political career and travel around Europe promoting the Nazi Party. Her privilege allowed her to be indifferent toward the abuse and mass murder the Nazis committed against the Jews but be annoyed with how the mandatory yellow Stars of David displayed on Jews' chests were aesthetically displeasing to her.¹⁰⁵ She very obviously discriminated against the Jews and promoted the racist ideology of the Nazi Party at rallies and in circulated Nazi propaganda, as her article in *NS Frauen Warte* demonstrated. She claimed innocence because "women were not political," but as the leading female political figure in the Nazi Party, she could not use that excuse to explain away her

¹⁰³ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxxii.

¹⁰⁴ Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 252.

¹⁰⁵ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxxi.

complicity. Women were political and Scholtz-Klink was not innocent in the perpetration of mass murder against Jews during the Third Reich.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion:

Scholtz-Klink married SS-Obergruppenführer August Heissmeyer in 1940. Combined with the five children her third husband brought with him from a previous marriage and a child they had together, Scholtz-Klink became a mother to eleven children. Some critics felt she was neglecting party duties and others felt she was neglecting her family. The irony of the working-class mother conundrum and double standard Scholtz-Klink faced is hard not to appreciate. Feminists and women's rights activists who would have fought against this through policy and societal changes had gone into hiding, fled Germany, or been victims on the Final Solution, partially thanks to her. By 1945, Scholtz-Klink and her husband needed to go into hiding. She and her husband were first captured and imprisoned in a Soviet prisoner of war camp but escaped. Director of the German Red Cross, Princess Pauline of Württemberg, knew Scholtz-Klink from the work she had done with the Red Cross in the Women's League and hid her and her husband in Bebenhausen. Under the alias Maria Stuckebrock, Scholtz-Klink successfully hid for three years before she was identified and arrested on February 28, 1948. She was first sentenced to eighteen months in prison for forging documents, but after massive protests, her sentence was re-evaluated. She was found guilty of being a "main culprit" and "major offender" in May of 1950 and was sentenced to an additional thirty months in prison.¹⁰⁷

Once released from prison, the Political Purging Commission of the Federal Republic of Germany forbid Scholtz-Klink from holding political office or a profession for the remainder of

¹⁰⁶ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 116-117.

¹⁰⁷ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 114; Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 251; Drew, *The Holocaust*, 578.

her life. She returned to Bebenhausen and held on to her emphatic Nazi beliefs for the rest of her life. In 1978, she published her book *Die Frau im Dritten Reich (The Woman of the Third Reich)*, which confirmed her continued dedication to Nazism and relived some of her speeches from her “glory days.” She died on March 24, 1999 at the age of ninety-seven, an “arrogant and bigoted and unreconstructed” Nazi.¹⁰⁸

Backlash against the Weimar Republic and the drastic drop in birthrates beginning during World War I caused many reactionary policies to be put in place by the Nazi regime. German women experienced systemic sexism in the workplace, in the political and public spheres, and in the control over their reproductive systems. This was not new in Nazi Germany but took on new extremes compared to past German governments. Scholtz-Klink and other Nazi women were products of World War I, the interwar years, and the social upheaval of the Weimar Republic. Many women clung to traditional roles in a time of immense change. In addition to this, the Nazi Party offered women’s *Lebensraum* for them to feel pseudo-empowerment in the public sphere. Because of their privilege and perceived political power, Nazi women were guilty bystanders and perpetrators of the atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jews as well.

Nazi ideology toward women and a Nazi woman’s role was so contradictory and constantly changing because women and their role was an afterthought for the Nazi Party. Other than their ability to procreate a pure German *Volk*, the Nazis thought women were useless for political purposes and did not utilize Scholtz-Klink and her organization members as effectively as they could have. The number one priority of the Nazis was to abuse and annihilate the Jewish population in and surrounding Germany. Because of this, policy focusing on women was not created with as much attention to detail and execution. The systemic sexism in Germany and the

¹⁰⁸ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 114; Bartrop and Grimm, *Perpetrating the Holocaust*, 251; Drew, *The Holocaust*, 578; Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxvi.

Nazi Party, in tandem with racism perpetrated by the Nazis, caused policy and gender role expectations toward German women to be contradictory and change over time.

Gertrud Scholtz-Klink wielded political power in her role as *Reichsfrauenführerin* by influencing family policy and promoting female labor policy. Although Scholtz-Klink did not gain influential political power with the inner circle of the Nazi Party, her influence on the women's section of the Nazi Party was undeniable. She flourished in the women's *Lebensraum* because she worked her way to the top of the hierarchy and felt empowered in her position of authority. Her foreign and domestic speeches promulgated Nazi ideology and emphasized that a woman's patriotic duty was to remain in their "natural" place within the home and give birth to a multitude of Aryan babies. Scholtz-Klink was the mother of eleven racially pure children but did not fulfill any of the other gender role expectations she laid out for German women. She was a major female political figure who led the national Women's League even though she told women that if they worked, they should only obtain women's work, like teaching, nursing, or social work. She created and oversaw implementation of family policy for German women, while telling them they must remain in the domestic sphere and steer clear of politics. Scholtz-Klink chose to divorce her second husband over leaving her political career with the Nazi Party, while she implored women to remain home and care for their husbands who had long days at work.¹⁰⁹ Her ability to embody these contradictions publicly in addition to her lack of self-doubt in her authority role demonstrated the power she held in the *N.S. Frauenschaft* and over German women.

¹⁰⁹ Scholtz-Klink, as quoted in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxiv-xxv.

Appendix



Image 1

Source: *NS Frauen Warte*, (1937-1938), *Calvin University Propaganda Archives*, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/fw.htm>.



Image 2

Source: *NS Frauen Warte*, (May 1939), *Calvin University Propaganda Archives*, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/fw.htm>.



Image 3

Source: *NS Frauen Warte*, (May 1940), *Calvin University Propaganda Archives*,
<https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/fw.htm>.



Image 4

Source: *NS Frauen Warte*, (August 1938), *Calvin University Propaganda Archives*,
<https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/fw.htm>.



Image 5

Source: *Support the assistance program for mothers and children*, Poster, Calvin University Propaganda Archives, <https://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters2.htm>.



Image 6

Source: *Gold Mother's Cross*, Photograph, *The National Holocaust Centre and Museum Archives*, <https://www.holocaust.org.uk/gold-mothers-cross>.



Image 7

Source: *A wonderful task: Reich Labor Service Women's Leader: A job for today!* Poster. (1930s) *Calvin University Propaganda Archives*. <https://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters2.htm>.

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