



Fatherhood and family from a German perspective

Men in German culture are always at the focal point in public concern and cultural resolution. This public concern rose to a high level significance after the Nazi war which grievously impacted families and societies.

Fatherhood and family in German culture would remain an incomplete narrative without the Nazi experience.

The influence of the Nazi war, the will to power of Fredrick Nietchez, and the dominance of supremacy by Adult Hitler, made German family and culture a dominant masculine society. There is no doubt that men who experienced Nazi war and the Second World War were profoundly altered by it, and the families to which they returned was changed forever (Kitchen, 2008). Kitchen and other historians note that Nazi experience was an extreme situation with which each man had to cope in his own way. The Nazi experience and its impacts on families prove the importance of men to their children and family. Experiences and consequences on families transformed German men to develop traditional and historic responsibility for raising their sons and daughters. At all times, German men are viewed as good husband whether at home or in Diaspora. In contrast, lots of married or unmarried women from other countries who receive unpleasant treatment from men in their families often times look up to German men as alternative. They report that their decisions were based on the fact that they are not treated well by men from their own cultures. As a result, these women see German men as those who treat their wives better. And by so doing, they date and marry German men primarily to compensate for the yelling love, care and tenderness in return. Most German fathers have been raised all their lives by well educated mothers who are very much confused on what a good Dad ought to be doing in German family and society. The above experiences and circumstances according to Hobson (2006) are the reasons why "German manhood" has always received widespread ambiguity. Ambiguity of this nature has continued to hurt German men till today. The principal ambiguity of German manhood is the question of German fatherhood.

Since the beginning of this century, Germany has witnessed great success in the number of fathers who take time off to stay with children (Abranisohn, 2008). However, comparative studies from both sides of the Atlantic show that fewer men enter fatherhood as many more leave. The difference here is that the distinctive mark of fatherhood traits is imprinted in the German landscape; in the collective memory of the Nazi past (Ostner, 2005). The Nazi crises and its impact on of the economy transformed German fathers into becoming family providers. This privilege became a norm in the wake of the industrial revolution as fathers were far removed



from the practical work of the household. Studies revealed that the influence of the Nazi war also caused most men to lack adequate resources to be bread winners in their own families. Lack of resources cut them off from fatherhood roles. Men's role in the family was grievously impacted during the industrial revolution. After the revolution, many Germans were engaged in an unskilled employment that would not allow them time for nurturing children and caring for families. Lack of adequate time with family after revolution hindered men from having time for emotional and social interaction with kids. Bob Connell adapted this coinage "trans-national business masculinity" for German men whose job impacts their presence at home. In similar circumstances, Netherlands and Sweden were placed at opposite ends of weak male breadwinner stereotypes. Fathers in these two countries abandoned their breadwinner responsibilities to their wives just as single custodian fathers in the South African heritage. Sometimes abandonment or an absence is as a result of military recruitment to the Nazi war or death in combat which dramatically impacted lives of children and their mothers. Experiences of the war also impacted them emotionally and mentally. Most German fathers who returned from Nazi war experienced disconnection of affect and emotion as a result of combat. After they came back, their impulses and feelings were expressed in a chaotic ways. After their return, most of them function under unusual circumstances thus showing severe impairments (regression) in their ability to engage in an activity when they remember the war. After they came back, most families reported that they are hunted by intolerable traumatic memories through imaginal or in vivo experience. After they return, many of them develop personality disorder, mental retardation and depressive disorders. Most family members describe their symptoms as being anxious, irritable and on the edge most of the time. They narrate auditory experiences and irritability, sleeping difficulty interrupted by vivid nightmares. Also, relationship with parents that used to be warm turned into discord, affecting wives, children and family. The absence of men due to war has impacts German veterans and their families. Veterans would develop surges of fear, panic, guilt, memory loss, constricted affect and avoidance of activities. They will experience difficulty getting close to others and members of their extended families or kinship. The absent of men in Swedish families placed them at opposite end of gender regime typology. The concern here is that understanding of the duties and responsibilities of fathers often times are expressed in cash and pragmatic terms. Again, men in Swedish families rely on public services for childcare, old age care, pensions, health



insurance, unemployment insurance, student loans etc. All these government assisted programs have helped relieved major burden of support to Swedish and German fathers (Gaunt et al, 2003).

While the above limitations exist, German men love punctuality, and appointments. For them late to family occasion is a no no. Late at meetings and conferences is a misnomer. When a German tells his family that he will be picking them up at 9.am, he meant 8:59 am and he expects them to be ready on his arrival. When he said he will be picking them up to go to the beach at 4pm, he meant 3.59pm. Time therefore is very sacrosanct to German men. One thing German men hate is “African time” where people show up for a 7am appointment at 12 noon. Time affects German world view, their everyday practical lives and their situation in life. Similarly, when German men say they know you, they meant they know your place of residence, your place of employment, your resident phone number, the best time to get hold of you, your marital status and the number of children you have etc. Germans are always active and ready to raise children in the same way other nations do. On one hand, German men don't do curtsey or men's tricks. Majority of them are right wing conservatives who hold family values to a tenacious degree. They will honestly tell family what they expected them to do. They prefer their wives to be honest, orderly and precise. On one hand, they prefer children to be hardworking and obedient, honest, orderly and respectful. Exploratory survey on transitory families, reveal that German men are the worst lovers compared to other men across the Planet. The reason is because they are stingy and selfish but free and generous to their own immediate families. In comparison to German men, Dutch men (Holland) appears rough, Americans dominant, Welsh too soppy, Scots too loud, Turk too sweaty, English too chubby and African too abusive to their wives.

The Swedish/German language preserves today specific kinship terms that have disappeared in many other European languages. The kinship awareness in these two cultures gives specific names for various relationships existing in the family. Among Swedish national, there are four designations for grand-parent: mormor (mother's mother), farmor (father's mother), morfar (mother's father), farfar (father's father). Studies reveal there are designations for aunt: moster (mother's sister) and faster (father's sister) and uncles are called distinguished as farbor (father's brother) and morbror (mother's brother) Grandchildren are divided into dotter dotter (daughter's daughter), sondotter (son's daughter) dotterson (daughter's son) and sonson (son's son).



In pre-industrial Germany, family formation (through marriage) happened late in the lives of men, in line with the European marriage pattern (Hajnal, 1983). But the emergence of bourgeois family saw German men as sole breadwinner who worked outside the family, while wives were responsible for rearing children for domestic work, and for the recreation of family members. Moreover, there are some aspects of German family development that are similar to those found in other Western European countries (Hajnal, 1983). One of such developmental family history otherwise generational memory is evident. German developmental and generational history is strong. This generational history is the memories that German men have of their own family histories, as well as more general collective memories of the Nazi past. Tamara and other family scholars (1992) admitted that a sense of history does not depend on the depth of generational memory, but identity and consciousness do, because they rest on the linkage of the individual's life history or family history with specific historical moments. In Germany and other parts of European countries, the structure of family life and the development overtime are profoundly different. For example in Denmark, the "land of the vanishing housewives," the traditional family has practically ceased to exist; whereas in West Germany or Switzerland where the majority of mothers of two children are housewives, it is still the dominant family type (Knudsen, 1997). East Germany precisely is facing demographic crises as huge numbers of women abandon the former communist region leaving behind an underclass of poorly educated, jobless and disillusioned husbands (Connolly, 2007). In Denmark and East Germany, too many women paint a bleak picture of men. Those who are unable to stomach such condition left Germany in search of livelihood outside. The rationale behind such criticism has continued to defile rational explanation. The exodus of men and women affected family growth and moral development. It accelerated the decline of family unity and kinship formation. It is essential to indicate here that secular decline of family size began in the nineteenth century. In the mid nineteenth century, the former East Germany experienced an unprecedented drop in births, marriages, and divorce indicating a fundamental shift in the patterns of family formation, with a slow and hesitant adaptation of the Eastern to Western pattern. Germany in 1930s and 1940s experienced an unprecedented period of fascism, racism, and pronatalistic population policy under the Nazi regime (German press, 1970). Some transformed into Ernest Junger's "man of steel", achieving a serene indifference towards the horrors of Nazism around them and families. Others found



solace in deep religious faith a redefined life in absurdity. Many turned their back on violence and became pacifists; others espoused militant socialism and longed to turn the war between nations into a war between families and classes. Most German husbands are domineering because they are ex-war veterans. Most of them are authoritative who provides discipline and family meta rules. Kitchen remarked that those who turned their back on their own families because of the war failed to cope at all and suffered from what was known as 'Cowardice' for which the penalty was death, then diagnosed as 'hysteria' or 'neurasthenia' soon become "shell shock" and now usually labeled post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When a family member of a German household (especially the father) is suffering from this type of disorder (PTSD), it is like a titanic ship wrecked by a mighty iceberg. Most German families began to notice PTSD when men came back from Nazi war. On their return to families, they become obsessed with vivid nightmare and constricted affect. And when they stayed home with family they claim they experience guilt, memory loss and avoidance of family members. All these make German fathers to recall the war. Infect the haunting war experiences leave them unable to adjust to realities of family life on their return. Many have great deal of trouble interacting with the outside world. The man who cannot interact with the outside world can hardly interact with the inside world-the family.

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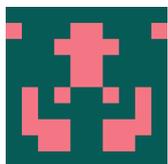
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