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| ADDITIONAL NOTES |  |

# Book Review:

*Hitler at Home*. By Despina Stratigakos. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015. 384 pp. \$40.00 (cloth).

*Stormtrooper Families: Homosexuality and Community in the Early Nazi Movement*. By Andrew Wackerfuss. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2015. 352 pp. \$90.00 (cloth); \$35.00 (paper); \$22.99 (ebook).

By Alan Rosenfeld

The Nazi Party was, in many respects, the crystallization of a series of paradoxes, one of which is poignantly captured in the two texts under review—namely, that a political movement that purported to shield the traditional, heterosexual nuclear family was energized by men who eschewed such living arrangements. Andrew Wackerfuss’s *Stormtrooper Families* and Despina Stratigakos’s *Hitler at Home* clinically probe the homosocial networks of the Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment, or

SA) and the carefully constructed domestic spaces of Hitler’s home life, deconstructing the ostensible boundaries between the public and private in the Nazi universe. At the same time, these books grapple with self-conceptions and outward portrayals of masculinity within the movement, drawing sharp distinctions between “reality” and narrative constructions, the latter of which seem to have wielded far greater societal influence, both within Germany and abroad.

*Stormtrooper Families* offers a captivating microhistory of the rise and demise of the Nazi SA in the metropolis of Hamburg. Andrew Wackerfuss, a historian working for the United States Air Force, has mined city archives to uncover memoirs, letters, and local newspapers that allow him to weave a storyline that addresses the issues of masculinity, intergenerational conflict, and the interplay between the local and the national within the National Socialist movement. Particularly riveting are the vivid accounts and interpretations of the violence of the Weimar-era *Kampfzeit* (time of struggle), when the SA developed into “an all-consuming political fraternity” that functioned as a substitute family for multitudes of frustrated young men who constructed themselves simultaneously as marginalized victims and “heroic male warriors” (pp. x, 63).

*Hitler at Home* offers an intriguing expose of the Nazi regime’s conscious construction of a public obsession with the private life of the Führer. Author Despina Stratigakos, a faculty member in the Department of Architecture at the University at Buffalo,

focuses extensively on the painstaking renovations of Adolph Hitler's three residences—his Munich apartment, the Old Chancellery in Berlin, and the mountain retreat that would be rebranded as the Berghof. Sparing no expense, the Führer and his advisors set out to dramatically transform Hitler's image into that of a man who led a cultured, peaceful, and even “boring” private life (p. 59). The author astutely situates the skillful transformation, dissemination, and consumption of the new domestic Hitler myth within a broader “growth of celebrity culture in the 1920s and 1930s” made possible by technological advancements in the world of media (p. 207).

Both titles under consideration successfully draw their readers' attention to the complexities of Nazi views and portrayals of masculinity. Seeing themselves as the “postwar heirs of powerful male bonds formed during wartime,” stormtroopers glorified in their own martial masculinity while vilifying the “feminized and weak” Weimar Republic (p. 50). Although outbursts of “homophobic activism” certainly occurred, Wackerfuss argues that stormtroopers welcomed homosociality and homoeroticism, precisely because they perceived such behavior as constituting the “peak of masculinity” (pp. 97, 93). The Führer himself, much like his stormtroopers, shunned life as the head of a nuclear family in favor of that of the perpetual bachelor. Furthermore, the fact that Adolf Hitler subsisted as a vegetarian and avoided the consumption of alcohol and tobacco products made him an incongruous candidate to lead a hyper-masculine political order. Rumors of a love affair between Hitler and his niece, Geli Raubel, and the young woman's untimely death inside her uncle's Munich apartment in 1931 in an ostensible suicide sparked further accusations of sexual deviancy within Nazi leadership, alongside critiques and parodies of SA leader Ernst Röhm's open homosexuality (p. 21).

It should therefore come as no surprise that the Nazi Party's concerted campaign to refashion the image of the Führer featured attempts to make him “seem both warmer and less queer” (p. 4). Stratigakos effectively pinpoints the German presidential campaign of 1932 as the moment when the Nazi Party apparatus “discovered the publicity value of Hitler's private life” (p. 149). Specifically, the party sought to transform a man perceived in key circles as an unschooled rabble-rouser into an “educated and cultured man” and a “trustworthy statesman,” who possessed a remarkable capacity for self-discipline and industriousness (pp. 153, 85, 152). This was accomplished largely through the publication and dissemination of postcards and picture books, but also, as Stratigakos expertly demonstrates, through the architectural

and interior designs of his residences. In Hitler's Alpine retreat known as the Berghof, for instance, the masculine spaces of the Great Hall, dining room, and study figured prominently, while sensual portraits of women created by prominent artists "reinforced Hitler's heterosexual bachelor domesticity as well as his cultural sophistication" (p. 94).

The point here is not to conflate masculinity with sexuality, but rather to call attention to the ways in which the policing of male sexuality—or sometimes the lack thereof—figured prominently in constructions of Nazi masculinity, both by the movement and its opponents. Central to Wackerfuss's study is the enigmatic notion that the all-male SA at its very core transgressed the heteronormative, family-centered gender order that the Nazi movement claimed to defend (p. 93). In fact, the SA demanded "allegiance to an all-male lifestyle" that provided its members with an escape from the traditional family and "social settings that supervised and regulated young male sexuality" (pp. xiv, 164). The author reveals the blurring of boundaries between homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual behavior inside a political fraternity in which "open homosexuals existed comfortably" (p. xii). At the same time, Wackerfuss chronicles in considerable detail how the stigmatization of the SA as an organization that tolerated homoeroticism undermined

Nazi attempts to present stormtroopers as the embodiment of German masculinity. It is clear that many heterosexual SA men profoundly resented satirical press coverage and "the socialist mocking of stormtrooper sexuality" and that they tragically channeled these frustrations into public attacks against homosexual men as a form of immunization against attacks on their manhood (pp. 183, 97).

Both texts call attention to the critical role of propaganda, demonstrating how the party meticulously crafted myths and narratives that bolstered Nazi political objectives. In the case of Hamburg's stormtroopers, the city's Nazi newspaper, the *Hamburger Tageblatt*, and other party organs consistently "reversed the position of victim and perpetrator," portraying rival Communist and Socialist groups as aggressors and fueling a "persecution mentality" that allowed SA men to conceive of their own use of violence as righteous and protective (pp. 222, 203). In the case of the Führer, Stratigakos argues that the 1932 publication of Heinrich Hoffman's *The Hitler Nobody Knows* "marked the beginning of a profound transformation" in the way the party presented its leader and the way the larger public perceived him (p. 23). Indeed, this was but the first in a series of propagandistic photo books that, in chronicling the

Führer's domestic life, gradually solidified a new "formulaic narrative" of Hitler as a cultured and disciplined gentleman who loved children, animals, and mountain quietude (169).

Stratigakos deftly contrasts the power of the ecstatic masses on display in Riefenstahl's seminal film *Triumph of the Will* (1935) with the sense of intimacy that these picture books created between individual readers and their *Führer*. For example, in its depictions of Hitler's bedroom, dining nook, and views from the windows, *Adolf Hitler's Adopted Homeland* (1933) invited Germans to project "the self onto the private Hitler," observing the world through the gaze of the Führer (p. 170). *Youth around Hitler* (1934) accomplished these objectives even more explicitly, offering the story of an intricately staged event in which Hitler selected a lucky birthday girl from among the throngs of visitors outside his Obersalzberg home so that the girl could have a private celebration with the symbolic father of the German nation (p. 176). In this sense, the target audience of young readers was "encouraged to imagine the thrill of the singular" as they followed the chosen girl into the Führer's private world (p. 174). Unlike the heavy-handed propaganda churned out by Joseph Goebbels's office, these narratives emphasized values over ideology (p. 152).

Although National Socialism was a male-dominated movement, which relegated women mainly to the private sphere of motherhood and family life, the party required the rhetorical and symbolic presence of women in the political sphere. Nazi men could fulfill their roles as heroic male guardians only through the existence of women and children requiring protection. However, Wackerfuss also contends that women "played a large but overlooked role" in the daily operations of the all-male SA (p. 166). Although actual membership and the "defining experience" of "male bonding and physical combat" were closed off to them, female allies were able to support the cause within traditionally defined gender roles (p. 167). He argues that "behind every stormtrooper unit stood several women who helped keep the men dressed and fed, and who comforted them when sick" (167).

While *Stormtrooper Families* recognizes the discrete efforts of ordinary Nazi women, *Hitler at Home* convincingly presents architect and interior designer Gerdy Troost as a prominent and influential member of Adolph Hitler's inner circle, on par with director Leni Riefenstahl. Whereas Hitler went to great lengths to keep his romantic relationship with Eva Braun secret, his professional relationship with Gerdy Troost was well-known and received considerable attention in the German press (p. 128).

Hitler commissioned Troost to redesign his three residences and assigned her a “particularly significant” role on the juries for the House of German Art and the 1937 Great German Art Exhibition (p. 137). In fact, Stratigakos reveals that Troost developed into such a “power in her own right” that the highest-ranking Nazi officials “did their best to remain on good terms” with her (pp. 121, 114). Despite the fact that Troost did not hold an official office, her “access to and influence over” Hitler also made her the recipient of “countless letters” from perfect strangers seeking to enlist her help from the Führer (p. 130). Troost’s career thus provides a fascinating exception to the strict gendered separation of spheres that the Nazi regime otherwise sought to establish.

If *Stormtrooper Families* demonstrates the crucial function of overt violence in the ascendancy of the Nazi movement, *Hitler at Home* illustrates the ways in which myths and images of wholesome rural values effectively masked the subtler forms of Nazi violence. The visible ferocity of the SA’s paramilitary activities served the dual purpose of attracting new recruits and making the Nazi Party’s political wing appear as a more palatable alternative. Stratigakos demonstrates that countless Germans “enjoyed and cherished” the carefully constructed myth of a peaceful Führer at home in the serenity of the Berghof, the man who loved children and dogs and maintained harmonious relationships with his kindhearted neighbors (p. 178). In reality, the Nazis had decimated Hitler’s Alpine community by forcibly removing its inhabitants in order to construct a “heavily guarded enclave of the Nazi elite,” but Stratigakos argues that the popularity and durability of the Berghof myth—both in Germany and abroad—reveal the existence of an “eager audience” for a “sanitized version” of Nazi practices and policies (p. 317).

“Image is everything,” as the saying goes. The two texts under consideration in this review display the Nazi regime’s obsession with managing the public image of their movement and its leader as a means of shaping and oftentimes completely concealing the reality of the brutal world they were creating. At times, however, the Nazis’ violent machinations could no longer be plausibly hidden. The lethal purge of SA leadership in the Night of Long Knives in 1934 signaled the end of the stormtrooper era and the destruction of the “homoerotic family in favor of the heteronormative one” (p. 323). In the case of the Führer, the Nazis’ invasion of Poland and instigation of a second world war muted production of a tranquil and domestic Hitler in favor of a uniformed war leader hard at work. Although neither of these titles aspires to present a world

history narrative, the success of these two works in exploring the themes of identity construction and the blurring of private and public boundaries opens up avenues of inquiry and comparison in a variety of regions and time periods.