

The Development of Nationalism in Germany during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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Abstract. The historical period of Germany in between 1871 to 1945 has dramatic ups and downs such as the rapid recovery in the Nazi Germany. This is a hot and famous topic for many historians that studies the history of Europe. Researchers found out the movements of leaders of Germany with public's support was the important reason behind the fast changes, but the backbone of all movements were lacked of unified explanation. Therefore, the topic of this paper is the nationalism development and influences in Germany from 1871 to 1945. The method is to review key historical events in and period in Germany and Germany has participated into, then illustrates the effect of nationalism within them. The reviews find out that each significant event with Germany as well as decisions made by leaders of Germany has been affected by the idea of nationalism, which means the concept and ideology of nationalism was the main fundamental factor that led to the theatrical history of Germany.

Keywords: Germany, Nationalism, World War I, Nazis, Adolf Hitler.

1. Introduction

Germany, the sponsor of both two world wars, faced severe economic and military damage after its defeat in the First World War, particularly during the 1920s. In this weakened state, Germany was perceived by the entire Europe as incapable of quick recovery. "The defeat of World War I as well as the peace settlement bewildered all the Germans and caused extremists rising up after it in the 1920s" [1]. This statement illustrates the condition of Germany and the instability that arose during this period, making it understandable for European countries to perceive Germany as fragile.

In fact, with the rise of Adolf Hitler and his ideology, he brought Germany back into power successfully within twenty years and started the Second World War. As Simms states, "The World War I developed Hitler's ideology" [2], and Hobsbawm notes that "the apogee of nationalism was in between 1918-1950, and the removal of minority nationalities was one of its consequences" [3]. These statements suggest that Hitler's actions had a strong connection with the ideology of nationalism. The connection is evident in the case of the Holocaust, which represents the expulsion of minority nationalities.

During the 1930s, when Hitler rose to power, nationalism was indeed at its peak [3]. However, it is important to note that nationalism had been present in Germany since the late nineteenth century. It is difficult to determine objectively whether nationalism was the single most important factor in the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the development of nationalism and the situation of Germany, considering key historical events such as the First World War, the transition period of the 1920s, and the extreme period of the 1930s. This study aims to find out the influence of nationalism on people's ideologies and how it played a fundamental role in the dramatic history of Nazi Germany.

2. Before WWI: Nationalism in Germany

Before the 1870s, Germany was not even an authoritarian state, it was just a combination of several states with German speakers lay on the border of Europe with countries such as France. The way that Germany became a nation was since the early 19th century and linked strongly with nationalism. With the rose of nationalism during the period of early 1800s, those German nationalists who initiated

the idea of nationalism came to several key concepts that should be focused on to be unified as a complete nation. The language, ethnic, culture, as well as race were included in the nationalism idea. Germany nationalists decided to use the keywords to influence people's ideology and let them be filled with the idea of nationalism. As a result, all German-speaker states merged and people would love their countries.

When Germany had been unified as a single state, which was after the period of 1870s, the seed of World War I already germinated and the long-term cause of the First World War started from here, including the idea of nationalism. Since 1871, after the first round of rising nationalism, the new country Germany had not been as powerful as all the other European countries, such as Britain and France. Therefore, under the pressure of having strong nations around, the ideology nationalism was pinpointed by the Germans. The ideas of Germans demanded to get stronger and to make Germany a superior state gradually led to World War I forty years later. Behind this, the fundamental concept of having the sense of superiorly country was taken from nationalism, which proved that nationalism grew significantly during the period between 1871 the unification of Germany and 1914 the First World War.

Similarly, nationalism also influenced Germany to pay much attention on nations in Africa and Asia. As the more powerful states Britain and France already carved up all the main areas and increased their colonies, the Germans felt that they should compete with other countries to occupy more colonies to gain more raw materials and territories. This idea was a faint nationalism concept behind it as the more they received, the more they could prove their country was superior. However, in this forty-year period, nationalism was not the main reason that influenced the outbreak of the war, but the idea already developed and shaped German power.

3. The 1920s: The Development of Nationalism in the Transitional Period

After World War I, Germany was defeated and it went into a Weimar Revolution where all the political ideas changed from before. Nationalism, in the Weimar period had been weakened, as Germany stepped into a situation that it was punished harshly by the Treaty of Versailles and the War Guilt Clause. Within the Treaty of Versailles, Germany had to give out their lands and pay a massive reparation to the winning countries, resulting in Germany's economy has decreased suddenly. The punishments made it challenging for Germany to recover and stay weak for a long period of time. The number of nationalist movements also decreased as the German public felt surprised by the defeat in World War I, which in turn reduced the confidence of nationalists. Moreover, other parties started to rise, creating more instabilities in Weimar Germany.

However, even though there were fewer nationalist movements compared to the period before World War I, the remaining ones had a significant influence on the German public and resulted in the rise of extreme nationalism later in the 1930s. One illustrative case is about the perception of the loss in World War I. Many German citizens did not believe that the defeat of World War I was because of military weakness and were eager to find an alternative explanation. This led to the emergence of the Stab-in-the-Back Myth, which blamed the Jewish people for Germany's defeat instead of attributing it to the performance of the German armies on the front line. Nationalism had a strong connection with the Step-in-the-Back Myth as it resulted in a majority nationality (Germans) blaming a minority nationality (Jews) for their failure.

Meanwhile, the myth promoted more nationalism extremist in the future years. The nationalist movement known as "Black Horror on the Rhine" (schwarze Schmach am Rhein) patched the political divergences in Germany and enhanced the image of Germany as a state [4]. This movement used propaganda to show the image of African French soldiers committing acts of violence against Rhine women, symbolizing the idea that Germany was being punished by the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Therefore, even during the Weimar Republic, when nationalism was not as popular as before, the few remaining nationalist movements played a crucial role in the recovery of Germany.

4. The 1930s: The Peak of Nationalism in Germany

Moving onto the period after the Weimar Republic ended and the rise of fascism in Germany in the early 1930s leading up to the beginning of World War II, known as Nazi Germany, the country during this period was led by Adolf Hitler. While the Nazi main ideology was rooted in fascism, it also incorporated a strong sense of nationalism. Starting from 1933 when Hitler came to power, his aim was to become the dictator of Germany and bring Germany back to its former strength with the powerful idea of nationalism [5]. Hitler wanted to prove that with his leadership and the ideology of fascism that included past nationalist ideas, Germany could regain its status as a strong nation. In this whole process, Hitler's political actions were heavily influenced by nationalism, which played a significant role in the recovery of Germany [6]. Thus, during Hitler's rule, nationalism reached new heights, even stronger than in the period before World War I.

Nationalism significantly influenced Hitler and the whole German public's action [6]. This can be shown by the way that Hitler governed the country and formulated his policies. One prominent example is his defiance of the rules established by the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Treaty, which was clearly dangerous and this was the secret rearmament. According to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany's army and weapons were strictly limited to a certain amount such as only 100,000 soldiers were allowed in the army, no airplanes or submarines can be used. Additionally, the Locarno Treaty prohibited any German soldiers in the Rhineland area. Under these rules, Germany was portrayed as weak. However, nationalism encouraged Hitler to act against the Peace Treaties, which he marched soldiers into the Rhineland area. The reason that nationalism was important in this case lies in the fact that Germany risked facing severe consequences for violating the Peace Treaties, and it was the idea of nationalism that influenced Hitler to take this action [7]. The Rhineland was one of the borders of Germany, and its demilitarization was to prevent Germany from attacking other countries. However, this also meant that the Rhineland area was vulnerable to invasion by other nations. Therefore, if Germany got attacked by others from the Rhineland, it would make the situation even more challenging for Germany to recover. Nationalism, with its emphasis on maintaining the strength of a nation and asserting superiority, influenced Hitler to take this action. The sense of nationalism demanded the preservation of national strength, and this motivated Hitler to march soldiers into Rhineland to ensure its safety. Unfortunately, the League of Nations acquiesced this action, further encouraging Hitler in his further steps and fostering more extreme nationalist movements.

The influence of nationalism in Germany was also evident in Hitler's propaganda efforts. Within Nazi propaganda, nationalism was shown clearly by the way he propagated to the German public. To illustrate, in Hitler's propaganda, it always included the advantages and achievements that the Nazis had brought to Germany. For instance, it emphasized the significant economic and military recovery that had taken place with Nazi rule. This kind of speech was to gain public support and trust, which enabled Hitler to dictate Germany more easily [8].

Moreover, in the Nazi propaganda, the Nazis had the control over mass media, ensuring that the public only had access to information that the Nazis wanted them to see. All the bad and negative things of the Nazis were suppressed, therefore German people were always seeing positive things about the Nazis and Hitler, which led to Hitler would receive more support from the public and people believed in the Nazis strengthened the nationalism ideology. In Hitler's propaganda, the concept of nation was also emphasized. This was the part that Hitler put limitation of the cultures. In this case, Hitler banned all the western culture in Germany such as jazz music, dance and western arts. He encouraged German publics to pay more attention on traditional German culture such as classical music. This part of propaganda was to increase the cultural confidence and prevent German people following the west instead of the Nazis.

On the opposite of positive propaganda, secret police forces, led by the Gestapo, were used by Hitler to achieve a similar aim, particularly monitoring and removing opposition [9]. With Hitler's extreme fascism and nationalist ideology, some people were not willing to support him. The consequences of them were sending to concentration camps or giving punishments. The aim of

removing opposition was to maintain stability in Germany as oppositions might arise and affect the way people think.

A wide range movement that showed a strong nationalism in Hitler's Germany was the Youth movement and education. Hitler indoctrinated the children by changing the textbooks in school. Moreover, in the Hitler Youth, boys were trained to be good soldiers with physical activities and using weapons. Girls were taught to excel in motherhood. The aim of this movement was to continue nationalism and convey the thinking of a powerful state to the next generations in the future as children are more easily to be brainwashed [10]. Meanwhile, the courses in the Hitler Youth movement and Germany's education in primary level were also influenced by nationalism. To illustrate, training boys with military and physical activities was aiming to increase the size of army in the future, which would make Germany stronger as the army population increases and all the soldiers were trained since they were young. For education, the hatred towards Jewish people and the glorification of the Nazis were included in subjects such as history, German and biology. This type of education would cultivate more nationalist in the future, as children tend to believe and retain what they learn.

Finally, toward the start of the World War II, the most extreme nationalist actions happened in Germany: The Holocaust. This marked the progression of the persecution of Jewish people and stands as one of the largest instances of removing minority nationality within a major nation. The purpose of Holocaust was fundamentally nationalistic: the extermination of a minority nationality, Jews, was seen as a means to strengthen the power of the dominant nationality, the Germans. The Holocaust was undeniably caused by nationalist thinking [3, 6].

5. Conclusion

This review underscores that nationalism was one of the main factors that made the tumultuous history of Germany, spanning from its unification in 1871 to the Second World War 1945. During this period, the causes of the two World Wars also had a strong connection with the development of nationalism in Germany as this ideology influenced the leaders of Germany to start the World Wars. This means that the nationalism thinking of "your country is the best" had an extreme effect of people's actions and it definitely caused conflicts and wars because its aim was to fight for the most powerful and superior place.

However, in the Weimar Germany, it was clear that after the defeat of World War I, nationalism became weaker. This shows that even though nationalism could help a country to fight for its power but meanwhile create unstable consequences, which made the power of Germany fluctuated between extremely strong and absolutely weak. As a result, using such extreme ideology to rule a country must be thought carefully about the process and consequences in the future, whether its disadvantages outweigh advantages. The history of Germany also showed that blindly pursuing for the best may not receive a positive result at the end.

The paper has examined both positive and negative effects and developments of nationalism in history of Germany, shedding light on how this ideology influenced figures like Hitler and the broader consequences of nationalistic actions. However, it is worth noting that the study primarily focuses on significant events and periods within Germany from 1871 to 1945, and there may be more nuanced effects of nationalism that warrant further exploration.

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