(Non-Academic) Project Title:
"After Fascism, Before Liberation: Queer Life in East and West Berlin, 1945-1969"

Suggested Article Title:
"Queer Spaces and Politics: Lotte Hahm, Community Organizer from Weimar Berlin to East Germany."

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Short Project Summary

My project will examine the reconstitution of queer networks and how the experience of queer community changed in Berlin between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the decriminalization of sex between men in 1968 (East Germany) and 1969 (West Germany). I will explore questions of memory, queer relationships with the state, Cold War geopolitics, and east-west permeability before and after 1961. This funding would permit me access to materials available in archives in Koblenz and Berlin, including the Koblenz Bundesarchiv, the Berlin Bundesarchiv, the Landesarchiv, the Stasi Records Archive, the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft, and the Schwules Museum archive.

Detailed Project Description

My project examines the reconstitution of queer communities, spaces, and networks in Berlin between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1968 in East Germany (GDR) and 1969 in West Germany (FRG). Between 1919 and 1932, Berlin thrived as an epicenter of queer culture and spaces. Historians Robert Beachy and Laurie Marhoefer have described Weimar-era Berlin as both the birthplace of modern queer identity and the first homosexual liberation movement, despite (and often in direct opposition to) the section of legal code which criminalized homosexuality at the time.[1] Germany's anti-sodomy law, Paragraph 175 (or §175), was active between 1871 and 1969.[2] The Nazi regime revised §175 in 1935 to ease the burden of proof for prosecutors and enact harsher punishments on those who violated it, necessitating that many queer individuals and groups move further into clandestine spaces or cease meeting altogether. After the Second World War, the FRG maintained the 1935 version of the law, and the GDR reinstated the previous version that was codified upon German unification in 1871. While §175 pertained specifically to relationships between men, other sections of the German legal code were used to target other queer individuals, as well. However, the criminal prosecution of non-male queer Germans was unstandardized, ambiguous, sporadically enforced, and often dependent on the interpretations and prejudices of state actors and enforcers.[3] Despite criminalization, queer literature, spaces, and activist groups resurfaced from their clandestine exile under the Nazi Regime after World War

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[1] Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 8, 19; Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2015), xiv.
[2] Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 89.
[3] Andrea Rottmann, *Queer Lives across the Wall: Desire and Danger in Divided Berlin, 1945–1970* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 18.

II.[4] Both the East and West German states continued to use their respective versions of §175 to prosecute queer men until the states enacted the legal reforms of 1968/1969.

My project explicitly asks why these reforms occurred and why East Germany was the first to decriminalize homosexuality. In doing so, it examines the re-establishment of queer communities and networks in East and West Berlin, the relationship between those communities and their respective states, the role of Cold War geopolitics, and how queer cultures in East and West Berlin developed similarly or differently before and after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Answering these questions will assist in the effort to bridge the gap between two seemingly disparate approaches to queer history: (1) the re-discovery of queer narratives otherwise omitted from history and (2) the creation of normative and marginalized genders and sexualities through legal and social regulations. My study will incorporate both approaches. In doing so, I will also emphasize that queer history is not only important to German history; postwar Berlin is significant to queer history, as well.[5] Revisiting Berlin in late 1945 will give us critical insights into key forms of queer resistance, the reconstruction of communities, and experiences under continued post-Nazi criminalization. In an era of rising global fascism, it is imperative to reconnect with our histories, the methods that queer individuals of the past used to protect themselves and their communities, and how clandestine or severed networks re-established themselves after the fall of fascism.

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[4] Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 50, 90, 134; Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 115, 121.
[5] Clayton Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany: Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945-69* (London, UK: Palgrave McMillan, 2012).

Proposed Article

As mentioned prior, Weimar-era Berlin fostered a thriving queer subculture and the first homosexual liberation movement. This period is succeeded by one of the darkest periods of German (and global) history. *The G&LR* has published insightful studies into the queer experience of Weimar and Nazi Germany through articles discussing prominent figures such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Claire Waldoff, Gertrude Sandmann, and Gad Beck. In addition to these significant queer Berliners, I will introduce Charlotte "Lotte" Hahm. In Weimar-era Berlin, Hahm was a local community leader who organized both queer social spaces and political groups with a focus on transgender and lesbian rights.[6] Hahm continued to arrange clandestine groups and spaces during the early years of the Nazi Regime, though she was eventually arrested and imprisoned in Moringen concentration camp until, at latest, 1937.[7] After the war, Hahm continued to coordinate queer spaces and advocate for queer liberation into the 1950s.[8] Through Lotte Hahm's narrative, readers will explore Berlin from the Weimar era, through Nazism, to the postwar world as experienced by a lesbian community leader. As readers face rising fascism in our contemporary world, Hahm's story is both prescient and may serve as a model for today's queer community leaders.

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[6] Jens Dobler, *Von anderen Ufern: Geschichte der Berliner Lesben und Schwulen in Kreuzberg und Friedrichshain* (Berlin, Germany: Gmünder Verlag, 2003), 104-115.
[7] Ingeborg Boxhammer, Christiane Leidinger, "Die Szenegröße und Aktivistin Lotte Hahm," in *Wir* hier! Lesbisch, schwul und trans* zwischen Hiddensee und Ludwigslust* (Berlin, Germany: Lola für Demokratie in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2019), 58; Claudia Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität* (Berlin, Germany: Centaurus Verlag & Media UG, 1997), 166.
[8] Claudia Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 166.

Biographical Sketch

My name is Keira Roberson and I am a PhD Candidate at Georgia State University studying history. My research focus is centered on queer communities in 20th-century Germany. My master's degree thesis examined the tactics and networks that queer Berliners formulated to protect themselves and their communities under the Nazi Regime. As one of two recipients of the Pharr-Buchenau Grant offered by my university, I was provided with the resources to travel to Germany and access materials at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde and the Militärarchiv in Freiburg. As a Doctoral Candidate, I am now building upon my previous study to follow these groups and narratives into postwar Berlin. The Free University of Berlin has generously agreed to become my host institution while I conduct my research. My previous experiences have prepared me with the familiarity of materials relevant to my current project and the skills necessary to efficiently navigate German archives.

As my doctoral dissertation, this project is a foundational element of my post-graduate career. I will use the research from this project to produce three studies: the first and most immediate will be my doctoral dissertation; second, I will use this project to develop my first monograph, which will be the book that initiates my career as a scholar of queer history; third, in the long-term, I will use this project in conjunction with my master's thesis and additional research to generate an examination of Paragraph 175 from its initial implementation in 1871 to its abolition in 1969.