
Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939–1943

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IN THE TIERGARTEN IN BERLIN, there is a memorial to the homosexual victims of Nazism. An ominous gray rectangular structure, it has a single small window set into its side, through which a viewer can watch a looped video. Initially the video showed two men kissing, to represent the thousands of gay men who were persecuted during the Third Reich. Because no women appeared in the footage, however, critics charged that the Nazis' lesbian victims had been forgotten. Since even before its dedication in 2008, this memorial has thus been at the center of a heated public debate: Should it include lesbians?

Those who criticized the video's omission of women acknowledged that, unlike gay men, lesbians had not been the targets of an orchestrated campaign of police persecution under the Nazi state. Nevertheless, they argued, lesbians were denounced and sent to concentration camps. Moreover, the memorial is not just about the past—it is also a reminder of intolerance and violence against both gay men and lesbians in the present.¹ Prior to the dedication of the site, a compromise was reached. It stipulated that the video would eventually be replaced by one that included women. But the plan stalled when a group of historians, activists, and directors of other Holocaust memorial sites protested. In an open letter, they argued that it would be a “falsification” of history for the video to portray women.² The Nazi

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¹ “Homo-Mahnmal: Mal wieder die Frauen vergessen!,” *Emma*, September/October 2006; Sirko Salka, “Denkwürdiges Duell,” *Siegessäule*, May 2010, 8. See also Stefanie Endlich, “Das Berliner Homosexuellen-Denkmal: Kontext, Erwartungen und die Debatte um den Videofilm,” in Insa Eschebach, ed., *Homophobie und Devianz: Weibliche und männliche Homosexualität im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2012), 167–186; Corinna Tomberger, “Das Berliner Homosexuellen-Denkmal: Ein Denkmal für Schwule und Lesben?,” *ibid.*, 187–207; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, ed., *Der homosexuellen NS-Opfer gedenken* (Berlin, 1999). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Rainer Hoffschmidt, Alexander Zinn, Joachim Müller, and Eberhard Zastrau, “Offener Brief: Denkmal für die im Nationalsozialismus verfolgten Homosexuellen,” <http://www.homo-denkmal.de/files/Offener%20Brief%20-%20Staatsminister%20Neumann%20100318.pdf>. See also Alexander Zinn, “Homophobie und männliche Homosexualität in Konzentrationslagern: Zur Situation der Männer mit dem rosa Winkel,” in Eschebach, *Homophobie und Devianz*, 79–96, here 79.

state, they wrote, did not “subject” lesbians “to individual persecution . . . on the grounds of their sexual orientation.” Whereas thousands of gay men were sent to concentration camps, “there is not a single historically substantiated case of a lesbian woman who was persecuted by National Socialism because of her homosexuality.”³ The debate attracted international attention, with many press reports unquestioningly duplicating the open letter’s claim that because the Nazis did not persecute lesbians, it was nonsensical for the memorial to include them.⁴ In 2012, the foundation that oversees the memorial finally installed a new video. It shows both female-female and male-male couples kissing.⁵

The fact that prominent historians still disagree, quite vehemently, about what seems a simple point—whether the Nazis persecuted lesbians—raises some interesting questions not just about how the Nazi state responded to lesbianism, but about the Nazi state itself.⁶ The situation of lesbians in Nazi Germany has received too little attention.⁷ But the very ambivalence of the state’s reaction to lesbianism opens up a productive analytical angle on important questions about how Nazi rule functioned at the local level. It is in fact rather difficult to give a simple answer to the question of whether the Nazi state persecuted lesbians because of their sexuality. Elaborating the necessarily

³ Hoffschildt, Zinn, Müller, and Zastra, “Offener Brief.”

⁴ Stephan Speicher, “Entwertung der Geschichte,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 19, 2010; “Küssende Frauen statt küssender Männer,” *Tagesspiegel*, June 4, 2010; Allan Hall, “Row over Berlin Holocaust Film Memorial Showing Lesbian Kiss over Claim It ‘Distorts History as Nazis Didn’t Target Women,’” *Mail Online*, March 27, 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1260917/Row-German-holocaust-film-memorial-showing-lesbian-kiss-claim-distorts-history-Nazis-didnt-target-women.html>; “Lesbian Kiss at Gay Holocaust Memorial Draws Protest,” *Advocate Online*, March 25, 2010, <http://www.advocate.com/news/daily-news/2010/03/25/lesbian-kiss-berlin-gay-holocaust-memorial-draws-protest>.

⁵ Both films are online at <http://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/denkmaeler/denkmal-fuer-die-verfolgten-homosexuellen/film-im-inneren-des-denkmals.html#c955>.

⁶ On the state of the debate, see Eschebach, *Homophobie und Devianz*.

⁷ On why it has received so little attention, see Claudia Schoppmann, “Zum aktuellen Forschungsstand über lesbische Frauen im Nationalsozialismus,” in Stefan Micheler, *Denunziert, verfolgt, ermordet: Homosexuelle Männer und Frauen in der NS-Zeit*, vol. 4 of *Invertito: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* (Hamburg, 2002), 111–116.

The existing literature on lesbians and the Nazi state includes Ilse Kokula, *Jahre des Glücks, Jahre des Leids: Gespräche mit älteren lesbischen Frauen* (Kiel, 1986); Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich*, trans. Allison Brown (New York, 1996); Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität* (Pfaffenweiler, 1997); Schoppmann, “Zwischen strafrechtlicher Verfolgung und gesellschaftlicher Ächtung: Lesbische Frauen im ‘Dritten Reich,’” in Eschebach, *Homophobie und Devianz*, 35–51; Schoppmann, “Elsa Conrad—Margarete Rosenberg—Mary Pünjer—Henny Schermann: Vier Porträts,” *ibid.*, 97–111; Kirsten Plötz, “. . . ihre perversen Neigungen restlos bloß zu stellen”: Die politische und sexuelle Denunziation einer Nationalsozialistin 1933,” in Micheler, *Denunziert, verfolgt, ermordet*, 92–110; Schoppmann, “Zum aktuellen Forschungsstand über lesbische Frauen im Nationalsozialismus”; Jens Dobler, “Unzucht und Kuppelei: Lesbenverfolgung im Nationalsozialismus,” in Eschebach, *Homophobie und Devianz*, 53–62; Insa Eschenbach, “Einleitung,” in Eschenbach, *Homophobie und Devianz*, 11–20; Michael Schwartz, ed., *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus: Neue Forschungsperspektiven zu Lebenssituationen von lesbischen, schwulen, bi-, trans- und intersexuellen Menschen 1933 bis 1945* (Oldenbourg, 2014). Dobler writes that as of 2011, aside from Schoppmann, for the most part no one had done substantial research on the subject; “Unzucht und Kuppelei,” 53. Schoppmann recently penned a useful state-of-the-field essay that demonstrates how much archival research on the topic has yet to be done: Claudia Schoppmann, “Lesbische Frauen und weibliche Homosexualität im Dritten Reich: Forschungsperspektiven,” in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus*, 85–91, here 89–91. My perspective differs from that of other scholars on lesbianism and the Nazi state in that I offer a theoretical framework that foregrounds the notion of risk and relates it to lesbianism and to gender nonconformity, thereby offering a means to make sense of the seemingly patchwork response of the state to women who had affairs with women, the unsystematic nature of which is apparent in Schoppmann’s copious research.

complex answer involves reconsidering both the risks facing women who had affairs with women and female-to-male “transvestites” in Nazi Germany and, at the same time, the methods of the Secret State Police (Geheime Staatspolizei, the Gestapo), a national force that by 1936 was centralized under Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS.⁸

To ask whether lesbians were persecuted for lesbianism per se obscures what happened, because neither “lesbian” nor “persecution” is a term that serves well in an analysis of this particular historical issue. Perceived gender nonconformity put some women and some transvestites at risk, but not all women who had affairs with women transgressed gender norms. Moreover, in the history of Nazism, the word “persecution” evokes an explicit state program; the effort to eradicate male homosexuality, for example, followed from a harsh law against male-male sex and was directed by a special national police division.⁹ There was no similar campaign against lesbians or female-to-male transvestites. But female gender nonconformity, transvestitism, or apparent lesbianism could lead to serious trouble with the Gestapo, though not in simple, direct ways, and not necessarily in isolation from other aspects of a person’s life—thus not in a manner that some of the opponents of including women in the memorial would term “persecution.” Perceived gender nonconformity might, for example, bolster an accusation of sabotage. Even absent an explicit campaign against lesbianism, some lesbians and female-to-male transvestites were harassed, terrorized, and subjected to violence by state and party officials and hostile neighbors at least in part on account of their gender or sexuality. This maltreatment can be accurately termed “persecution,” though it was nothing like what men caught up in the effort to eradicate male homosexuality suffered. Yet rather than ask whether persecution happened, we can more productively address this history by considering risk: what risks were incurred, and why, and what the nature of those risks was. The risks that lesbians and transvestites faced did not stem from a single law or from a dedicated police division. They were nevertheless quite real.

In addition, there is something important about the way the Gestapo worked that the situation of lesbians throws into stark relief. Existing studies of the Gestapo have focused on the role of denouncers, private citizens who took the opportunity to report anything they thought the police ought to know. Yet despite the wide latitude to denounce, the large majority of “Aryans” had nothing to fear from the Gestapo. Eric Johnson found that less than 2 percent “had a run-in of any kind with the Gestapo,”

⁸ Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1913–1945* (Oxford, 1990), 21–22, 29–43. Because of the Gestapo’s broad mandate to police political opposition and threats to the state, it was involved in a wide range of initiatives, from the fight against communism, to the enforcement of anti-Jewish policy, to the pursuit of regime critics of various kinds. “Transvestite” (*Transvestit*), a term in use in German-speaking Europe from the first decade of the twentieth century, shared some common ground with “transgender,” a term that came into widespread use at the beginning of the twenty-first century, but the two identity categories are by no means synonymous. This article uses the historical term. In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, “transvestite” had a flexible meaning. It was used as a term of self-identification by people whose authentic gender did not match the gender they were assigned at birth, as well as by people who understood themselves to be cross-dressers or gender nonconformists. On the historical definition of “transvestite,” see Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto, 2015), 59–61. On the rise of the term “transgender,” see Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2008), 19.

⁹ This division, the Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und Abtreibung, coordinated the efforts of the Gestapo and the criminal police (Kripo). Burkhard Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz: Die Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn, 1990), 122–124.

and only 17 percent were concerned that they might have such an encounter.¹⁰ Historians have struggled to understand why most of the “Aryan” population apparently did not fear the Gestapo despite the fact that the organization’s own files show that it ruthlessly policed the intimate lives of “Aryans,” especially through denunciation. Part of the explanation is that the Gestapo’s attention was neither evenly nor randomly distributed. It was directed at some “Aryans” and not at others. One reason for this was the influence of “witnesses,” people whom the Gestapo called in for questioning. In the rich transnational literature on denunciation and policing in modern states, denouncers—people who contacted the police on their own to volunteer information—have received a lot of attention.¹¹ But witnesses—people who were specifically summoned by the Gestapo—have not, even though they could have a tremendous influence on an investigation. This did not mean that “social outsiders” were simply slandered by their upstanding neighbors and then shipped to concentration camps by obliging Gestapo officers.¹² Suspicions about some people flourished, while suspicions about others withered away. The police often ignored denunciations they deemed frivolous.¹³ Some “Aryans,” however, raised suspicions among witnesses and denouncers that the Gestapo found credible and worth investigating.

What witnesses said about a person to Gestapo officers depended on that person’s “social capital.” There is a rich literature on the concept of social capital, especially in sociology, and different scholars use the term to mean different things.¹⁴ It is used here, as in the work of many sociologists, to mean an intangible advantage that one gains by being integrated into a particular social network.¹⁵ It also includes the

¹⁰ Eric A. Johnson, *The Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York, 1999), 174.

¹¹ The literature on denunciation in Nazi Germany includes Martin Broszat, “Politische Denunziation in der NS-Zeit: Aus Forschungserfahrungen im Staatsarchiv München,” *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 73 (1977): 221–238; Reinhard Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle im Dritten Reich: Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft im Alltag einer rheinischen Großstadt* (Frankfurt, 1987); Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*; Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, *Herrschaft und Alltag: Ein Industrieviertel im Dritten Reich* (Bonn, 1991) and subsequent publications; Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation im NS-Regime oder die kleine Macht der “Volksgenossen”* (Bonn, 1995); Bernward Dörner, “Heimtücke”: *Das Gesetz als Waffe. Kontrolle, Abschreckung und Verfolgung in Deutschland 1933–1945* (Paderborn, 1998); Johnson, *The Nazi Terror*; Vandana Joshi, *Gender and Power in the Third Reich: Female Denouncers and the Gestapo, 1933–45* (New York, 2003); Stephanie Abke, *Sichtbare Zeichen unsichtbarer Kräfte: Denunziationsmuster und Denunziationsverhalten 1933–1949* (Tübingen, 2003); Carsten Dams and Michael Stolle, *Die Gestapo: Herrschaft und Terror im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 2008); Claire M. Hall, “An Army of Spies? The Gestapo Spy Network, 1933–45,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 2 (2009): 247–265. For reviews of this literature, see Abke, *Sichtbare Zeichen unsichtbarer Kräfte*, 21–27; and Dams and Stolle, *Die Gestapo*, 231–243. Select works on other national contexts and in the transnational study of denunciation include Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, eds., *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789–1989* (Chicago, 1997); Robert Gellately, “Denunciation as a Subject of Historical Research,” *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 26, no. 2/3 (2001): 16–29; Wendy Z. Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin’s Russia* (New York, 2011); Michael R. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (New York, 2011); Jonathan Dunnage, “Surveillance and Denunciation in Fascist Siena, 1927–1943,” *European History Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2008): 244–265; Colin Lucas, “The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution,” *Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4 (1996): 768–785.

¹² The phrase “social outsiders” is from Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus, eds., *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, N.J., 2001).

¹³ Johnson, *The Nazi Terror*, 21, 286.

¹⁴ For an authoritative review of this large literature, see Alejandro Portes, “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 1–24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

benefits one enjoys from one's reputation with certain people, in this case people who were members of a regime-friendly network—people whose word the Gestapo trusted.

Examining lesbianism is a good way to get at how suspicion congealed around some "Aryans" and not others, because while lesbianism was not a crime in Nazi Germany, it did inspire anxiety. Even if that anxiety had little to do with the Gestapo's priorities, it could nevertheless serve the organization's agenda. Because there was no law prohibiting sex between women, as there was for sex between men, lesbianism was officially of little interest to the police.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it was not in keeping with Nazi gender ideals. In addition, many people had frowned on it prior to the Nazi takeover in 1933, independently of the Nazi Party's views on it. It could draw negative attention from neighbors and drive them to voice suspicions to the Gestapo. In an investigation of a woman thought to be a lesbian, therefore, the priorities of denouncers and witnesses could diverge from those of the Gestapo. And yet the two sets of priorities could interact in an intricate way, pushing an investigation forward.

A useful way to approach the history of women who had affairs with women, people who did not conform to gender norms, and the Gestapo is through a microhistory of the Würzburg Gestapo's investigation of one such woman, Ilse Totzke.¹⁷ Totzke has already come to the attention of historians and the public because she was an "Aryan" who risked her life trying to help a German Jew. Little attention, however, has been paid to the fact that she was a self-consciously masculine woman and may have considered herself a lesbian and/or a transvestite.¹⁸ A microhistory of Totzke's

¹⁶ The extensive scholarship on the persecution of gay men includes Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz*; Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann, eds., *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle: Verdrängt und ungesühnt* (Paderborn, 2002); Stefan Micheler, *Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder der "Anderen": Männer begehrende Männer in der Weimarer Republik und der NS-Zeit* (Konstanz, 2005); Micheler, *Denunziert, verfolgt, ermordet*; Günter Grau, ed., *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933–45*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London, 1993); Geoffrey J. Giles, "The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler's SS and Police," in Dagmar Herzog, ed., *Sexuality and German Fascism* (New York, 2005), 256–290; Giles, "The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich," in Gellately and Stoltzfus, *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, 233–255; Giles, "A Gray Zone among the Field Gray Men: Confusion in the Discrimination against Homosexuals in the Wehrmacht," in Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth, eds., *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New York, 2005), 127–146; Giles, "'The Most Unkindest Cut of All': Castration, Homosexuality and Nazi Justice," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 1 (1992): 41–61; Giles, "Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich: The Radicalization of Prosecution against Homosexuality by the Legal Profession," *German History* 23, no. 3 (2005): 339–354; Andreas Pretzel and Gabriele Roßbach, eds., "Wegen der zu erwartenden hohen Strafe . . .": *Homosexuellenverfolgung in Berlin 1933–1945* (Berlin, 2000); Susanne zur Nieden, *Erbbiologische Forschung zur Homosexualität an der Deutschen Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie während der Jahre des Nationalsozialismus: Zur Geschichte von Theo Lang* (Berlin, 2005); Schwartz, *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus*.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Robert Gellately for bringing Totzke's case to my attention. For his analysis of it, see Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 180–183, 258. Gellately does not examine how Totzke's perceived gender nonconformity and sexuality played a role in the investigation.

¹⁸ I surmise this from photographs of her; see Figures 1 and 2. For other literature that does not mention Totzke's sexuality or gender expression, see Mordecai Paldiel, *Saving the Jews: Amazing Stories of Men and Women Who Defied the "Final Solution"* (Rockville, Md., 2000), 150–154; Israel Gutman, Sara Bender, Daniel Fraenkel, and Jakob Borut, eds., *Lexikon der Gerechten unter den Völkern: Deutsche und Österreicher* (Göttingen, 2005), 273–276. For two accounts that mention neighbors' allegations of lesbianism but do not analyze how gender and sexuality influenced Totzke's case, see "Chaos and Consent," episode 2 of the documentary series *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (BBC, September 17, 1997); and Herbert A. Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm: Growing Up Jewish in Germany, 1918–1943* (New York, 1999), 202. Yad Vashem added Totzke to its list of Righteous among the Nations in 1995.

case reveals factors that other studies have not brought to light, factors that were not unique to her situation but rather were endemic to the functioning of the Gestapo system and to the circumstances faced by some lesbians and transvestites in Nazi Germany. Thus far, historians of the Gestapo have tended to examine large bundles of cases together, seeking trends. In contrast, a microhistorical view of an individual case “will reveal factors previously unobserved.”¹⁹ The complex process by which suspicion was produced and sustained, and the related role of witnesses and their sensitivity to social capital, left traces that close attention to the composition of the documents in a Gestapo file reveals. These traces, however, fade into the background when one surveys many cases. Like studies of the Gestapo, most work on lesbians has collected as many individual stories as possible, seeking broad trends.²⁰ In contrast, intense attention to this single case shows that “lesbian” is too broad a category for examining the situation of women who had affairs with women in Nazi Germany: Gender nonconformity mattered. The category “transvestite” mattered. In addition, this case demonstrates the Gestapo’s disinterest in lesbianism, on the one hand, and how witnesses who did care about lesbianism could drive the Gestapo to act, on the other. In other words, “state persecution” is the wrong thing to be looking for here. What we find, rather, is a complicated interaction between the prejudice of neighbors and acquaintances and the Gestapo’s methods that put some lesbians and transvestites at dire risk.

TOTZKE COMMITTED THE “CRIME” for which she was sent to a concentration camp in the middle of the night of February 28, 1943, when she climbed over a wire fence on the German-Swiss border with Ruth Basinski, a twenty-seven-year-old Jewish kindergarten teacher whom she had met through a mutual friend the previous fall.²¹ Totzke, who was then thirty years old, had helped Basinski slip away from the detention facility at 17 Auguststrasse in Berlin where she was being confined in preparation for her impending deportation.²² That night at the border, Totzke and Basinski had bad luck. Swiss border guards caught them and turned them over to the Gestapo. They never saw each other again. Basinski was sent to Auschwitz.²³ Totzke was transferred to the custody of the Gestapo in Würzburg, the medium-sized, somewhat conservative, predominantly Catholic city in Bavaria where she had lived most of her adult life.²⁴

¹⁹ Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pa., 2001), 97–119, here 101. Jill Lepore writes that in contrast to biography, microhistory assumes that “however singular a person’s life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness”; Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2001): 129–144, here 133. On this, see also Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Sziórtó, “Introduction: Against Simple Truths,” in Magnússon and Sziórtó, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (New York, 2013), 1–11, here 5.

²⁰ An exception to this is Plötz, “... ihre perversen Neigungen restlos bloß zu stellen.”

²¹ St. Ludwig Gestapo report, March 1, 1943, Staatsarchiv Würzburg: Gestapo 16015 [hereafter Gestapo 16015].

²² On 17 Auguststrasse, see Beate Meyer, “The Fine Line between Responsible Action and Collaboration: The Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland and the Jewish Community in Berlin, 1938–45,” in Beate Meyer, Hermann Simon, and Chana Schütz, eds., *Jews in Nazi Berlin: From Kristallnacht to Liberation* (Chicago, 2009), 310–363, here 328.

²³ She survived; *In the Eye of the Storm*, 203. She, however, seems not to have learned that Totzke also survived; Strauss, who had contact with Basinski after the war, believed that Totzke was murdered.

²⁴ On Würzburg, see Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, chap. 3.

The Würzburg Gestapo already knew a great deal about Totzke when she arrived in their offices following her capture at the border.²⁵ They had been investigating her on and off for four years. Despite the years of scrutiny, her attempt to cross into Switzerland with Basinski marked the first instance of actual illegal behavior that they had managed to verify. Totzke had been the target of a motley collection of seemingly unrelated accusations between 1939 and 1942. These accusations appear unconnected at first, but they have a unifying theme: suspicions fueled in part by what denouncers and witnesses took to be her lesbianism or gender nonconformity.

The only surviving evidence attesting to Totzke's own views on her gender and sexuality is her appearance in photographs preserved in the Gestapo's file on her.²⁶ (See Figures 1 and 2.) In these two sets of pictures, apparently taken years apart, she wears a suit jacket. In the later photos taken by the Gestapo in 1943, she wears a tie, and her hair is cut in the style known as the Eton: short, slicked back, and neatly parted.²⁷ She may have been wearing trousers. Totzke's attire owes something to the New Woman fashion of the 1920s. The New Woman cut her hair short in a pageboy (*Bubikopf*)—of which the Eton is a close-cropped version—and sported fashions that borrowed from men's tailoring, such as tuxedos. But Totzke's style, especially in the later photographs, is an unusually masculine version of New Woman fashion, one that was popular in lesbian subcultures in Germany prior to the Nazis' seizure of power and controversial in the mainstream press.²⁸ In contrast to the jackets commonly featured in New Woman fashion spreads, the shoulders of Totzke's suit are not cut to a feminine line but are boxy, like those of a man's suit. Moreover, the Eton served as a visual code of identification in lesbian subcultures.²⁹ At least from the chest up, Totzke's style is quite similar to that of Lotte Hahm, a prominent lesbian and transvestite activist during Germany's lesbian, gay male, and transvestite political and social renaissance of the 1920s.³⁰ Hahm often appeared in the lesbian magazine *Girlfriend* (*Die Freundin*) in a suit, pants, and a tie, with her hair styled just like Totzke's. (See Figure 3.) The Gestapo file contains no information about whether Totzke had connections to lesbian

²⁵ On the Würzburg Gestapo officers, most of whom suffered no consequences following 1945, see *ibid.*, 262–265.

²⁶ As Susan Crane argues, we ought to take care with how we use images the Nazis made of their victims, who did not consent to be photographed and for whom photography was part of the process of being murdered or subjected to extreme violence. This is true of Totzke in Figure 2, which was taken by the Gestapo. Crane argues that we should pause before attributing agency to the subjects of such photographs. Susan A. Crane, "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography," *History and Theory* 47 (October 2008): 309–330, here 309, 315. On photography and the Holocaust, see also Sybil Milton, "Images of the Holocaust—Part I," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 1 (1986): 27–61. Nevertheless, I use these two sets of images to say something about Totzke's sartorial choices. In so doing, I throw my lot in with a long tradition of commentators on photography who have asserted that the photograph exceeds the photographer's admittedly considerable power to manipulate. Though influenced by the photographer, the subject, and other humans, the photograph is also an image created by the reflection of light off of the material world, and thus it tells us something about a moment in time that can be in excess of the photographer's intentions. On this interpretation, see Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy: or, The History of Photography, Part 1* (Stanford, Calif., 2015), 1. The photographs of Totzke, including the ones taken by the Gestapo, show something about how she chose to present herself.

²⁷ On the Eton, see Katie Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (New York, 2011), 27, 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7, 32–33. On masculinity without the male body, see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C., 1998).

²⁹ Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*, 32–34.

³⁰ On Hahm, see Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 57, 62.



FIGURE 1: Undated photograph of Totzke that Gestapo officers kept in their file on her. Staatsarchiv Würzburg: Gestapo 16015.

or transvestite subcultures. In the spring of 1932, she left the boarding school where her father had sent her and moved to Würzburg. Thanks to money from an inheritance, she was able to live independently in the city during the Weimar Republic's final year and to attend a music conservatory. She could have accessed lesbian and



FIGURE 2: Photographs of Totzke taken by the Gestapo after her 1943 attempt to flee Germany. Staatsarchiv Würzburg: Gestapo 16015.

transvestite subcultures even in conservative Würzburg, for example by subscribing to *Girlfriend*.³¹ The Gestapo did not record any statement from Totzke about her gender or sexuality, but it is apparent from the photographs that she transgressed gender norms. Furthermore, people around her thought that she did so. In a report on Totzke sent to the Gestapo in 1942, a city official noted, “She often goes out in men’s clothing.”³²

It is also possible that Totzke considered herself a “transvestite,” which the sexologist and activist Magnus Hirschfeld defined as a person who had the “strong drive to live in the clothing of that sex that does not belong to the relative build of the body.”³³ In the 1920s, transvestitism (*Transvestitismus*) had a broad meaning, describing people who merely wished to cross-dress as well as people whose true sex was not their birth sex.³⁴ Transvestites had a relatively high profile in Germany in the 1920s. Hahm, who identified at various times as both a lesbian and a transvestite, was among those who built a distinct social movement for transvestites under the Weimar Republic. Weimar-era police in some cities even issued permits allowing transvestites to dress in public as the sex they felt themselves to be.³⁵ Nevertheless, transvestites still encountered social stigma and police harassment.³⁶ A woman’s choice of decidedly masculine attire did not necessarily mean that she was a transvestite: some masculine lesbian women of the 1920s considered themselves homosexual but not transvestite.³⁷

A climate of more pronounced hostility to lesbianism and female gender noncon-

³¹ On the relative availability of magazines such as *Girlfriend*, see *ibid.*, 69.

³² Report, October 13, 1942, Gestapo 16015, 53.

³³ Magnus Hirschfeld, *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Amherst, N.Y., 1991; original German ed. 1910), 124. On the development of the category, see also Rainer Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts: Transvestitismus und Transsexualität in der frühen Sexualwissenschaft* (Giessen, 2005), 35–37.

³⁴ Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 59–61.

³⁵ Katie Sutton, “‘We Too Deserve a Place in the Sun’: The Politics of Transvestite Identity in Weimar Germany,” *German Studies Review* 35, no. 2 (2012): 335–354.

³⁶ “Streif auf Männer in Frauenkleidern,” *Münchener Neuste Nachrichten*, December 12, 1923; “Burschen in Mädchenkleidern,” *Vorwärts*, December 10, 1923.

³⁷ “Die Welt der Transvestiten,” *Die Freundin*, June 8, 1932.



Lotte Hahm

„VIOLETTA“,
Kommandantenstraße 72, hat

Mittwoch Damenball mit Saalpost
Eintritt frei f. M.

Sonabend Türkisches Fest
mit Bauchtanz Mützen gratis
Zum Tanz spielt eine
türkische Saxophonkapelle

Sonntag Preistanzen
mit Geschenken

Anfang 8 Uhr Tanzleitung Kati Eintritt 50 Pf. f. M.
Nur Damen haben Zutritt

Hierzu ladet alle lieben Freundinnen herzlichst ein
Die Klubleiterin Lotte Hahm

FIGURE 3: Lotte Hahm pictured in the magazine *Girlfriend (Die Freundin)*, October 8, 1930.

formity set in after 1933. Believing that a race risked degeneration and sterility when its women displayed androgyny or masculinity, Nazi ideologues railed against the “masculinization” of “Aryan” women.³⁸ Their worldview held that women such as Totzke were violating not just gender norms, but racial and political norms as well. Of course, reality did not conform completely to ideology. Many “Aryan” women never met the ideal of the eugenically superior mother who forwent work outside the home to care for her many children.³⁹ Propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels even complained that Nazi women’s organizations were masculinizing women.⁴⁰ However, female masculinity came in varieties that were less or more threatening to Nazism. The masculinity of someone like Totzke was far more transgressive—and recognized as such—than the masculinity that Goebbels perceived among members of women’s organizations. By the early 1930s, women’s fashions had swung back toward the feminine, and the New Woman vogue no longer provided cover for a decidedly masculine style like Totzke’s.⁴¹ Nazi hardliners countenanced female trousers only for sport and leisure, although during the war the demands of labor and bicycling (given fuel rationing) made them common work clothing for women.⁴² A woman who kept her short haircut remembered being derided as “un-German.”⁴³

Nazi jurists considered criminalizing lesbian sex but did not do so, even though a

³⁸ “Dr. Eberhard: Feminismus und Kulturuntergang,” *Der Angriff*, June 4, 1928; Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 24–25.

³⁹ Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003), 7–8.

⁴⁰ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 25.

⁴¹ Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (New York, 2004), 85–86; Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*, 183.

⁴² Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 250, 266.

⁴³ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 25.

vocal minority agitated for criminalization.⁴⁴ Lesbianism supposedly had no significance for population politics. While homosexuality wasted a man's potency, one jurist claimed, "the woman who is inclined to lesbianism" was "nevertheless capable of reproducing."⁴⁵ According to another, "unlike the man, the woman is always ready for sex."⁴⁶ In addition, jurists feared that cliques of homosexual men were corrupting public life, but they had no such apprehensions about women, whose political role under Nazism was limited.⁴⁷ Lesbianism was also supposedly less common and also less conspicuous, and therefore less likely than male homosexuality to spread by example. Finally, because women were normally physically affectionate with their friends, to make lesbianism a crime would, it was feared, prompt a flood of unfounded denunciations.⁴⁸

Thus far, historians of lesbians in Nazi Germany have found a checkered record. Some women ran into serious trouble with the state on account of their sexuality. Others did not. Austria had an anti-homosexuality law that did apply to women, and women were convicted under it.⁴⁹ Although Germany's sodomy law did not apply to women, there were legal grounds for prosecuting women for same-sex sexuality.⁵⁰ With the exception of the sodomy law, sex laws in Germany, including the age of consent law, were gender-neutral and therefore could be used against lesbians.⁵¹ They were applied in cases where the fact of the matter was simple lesbianism, not the crime with which the women in question were charged.⁵²

In addition, in Nazi Germany a person could be incarcerated without being formally accused of a concrete legal infraction. The Gestapo had the power to implement protective custody, indefinite confinement without recourse to the justice system, a construct that was used to send people to concentration camps.⁵³ For example, when officials discovered that two women in the League of German Girls in occupied Poland were having an affair, one was sent to a camp.⁵⁴ A 1934 decree allowed the Gestapo to take men or women into protective custody if they were "morally endangering" a person who was sixteen or younger.⁵⁵ This appears to have

⁴⁴ It had been decriminalized in Prussia in 1851, while sex between men remained a crime; after German unification in 1871, Prussia's law applied to the whole Reich. *Ibid.*, 80–83.

⁴⁵ Landesgerichtspräsident Strauß quoted *ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁶ Otto Thierack, later Reich minister of justice, quoted *ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁷ Male homosexuality also had a special salience for the Nazis because prior to 1933, their enemies had accused them of embracing male homosexuality (but not lesbianism), and once in power, the party took pains to ingratiate itself with conservatives by denouncing male homosexuality, for example immediately after the murder of Ernst Röhm. Giles, "The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich," 236–237; Stefan Micheler, "Homophobic Propaganda and the Denunciation of Same-Sex-Desiring Men under National Socialism," trans. Patricia Szobar, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 95–130, here 105–107; Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, chap. 5.

⁴⁸ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 94.

⁴⁹ Claudia Schoppmann, *Verbotene Verhältnisse: Frauenliebe 1938–1945* (Berlin, 1999).

⁵⁰ Schoppmann has recently suggested the need to reexamine the assumption that the sodomy law, Paragraph 175, was not used to prosecute women for same-sex sexuality. See Schoppmann, "Zwischen strafrechtlicher Verfolgung und gesellschaftlicher Ächtung," 41; Schoppmann, "Lesbische Frauen und weibliche Homosexualität im Dritten Reich," 89.

⁵¹ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 202, 209–210; Dobler, "Unzucht und Kuppelei," 59–60.

⁵² Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 209–210; Dobler, "Unzucht und Kuppelei," 59–60.

⁵³ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 28.

⁵⁴ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 47 (case of Anneliese S. and Hildegard Sch.).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

happened to Hahm, who was accused of seducing a minor and spent several years in a camp.⁵⁶ Police could also deem a person “asocial,” an amorphous designation that could be applied to anyone who was viewed as violating National Socialist norms.⁵⁷ A Hamburg woman who was arrested in a raid on a lesbian bar was designated asocial and sent to a camp.⁵⁸ People could denounce for any reason, and proved willing to denounce things that were not illegal.⁵⁹ That included lesbianism. In one such case, a woman and her girlfriend were denounced by some neighbors. They underwent grueling interrogations by the Gestapo about their sex life but ultimately were not charged with anything.⁶⁰

At the same time, many “Aryan” women who had affairs with women were able to conceal their sexuality sufficiently to pass through the Nazi years without much trouble, provided that they were not perceived as state enemies for other reasons, such as communism or Jewishness. Some cases demonstrate a marked lack of anxiety about lesbianism on the part of authorities. Two other women caught in a lesbian relationship in the League of German Girls were let off with a warning.⁶¹ In another case, two cohabitating people whom neighbors took to be two women (one in fact seems to have self-identified as a man) were denounced for lesbianism, were investigated, and confessed to a relationship, but were not punished. They were even allowed to continue living together when they promised to end the relationship.⁶² Other “Aryan” women who quietly had affairs with women were enthusiastic Nazis.⁶³ Lesbians who were Jewish, or were designated as regime enemies for other reasons, faced very different circumstances.

Transvestitism also took on new meaning after 1933.⁶⁴ A 1938 study most likely reflected the views of many police officers and officials when it defined transvestitism as “asocial.”⁶⁵ Male-to-female individuals were in dire danger, as police often assumed that they were male homosexuals.⁶⁶ Female-to-male individuals ran into trouble with the police on occasion.⁶⁷ Yet at the same time, in some cases officials adhered to the Weimar-era procedure of issuing transvestites official permission to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 212–218. See also Wolfgang Ayass, “Asoziale” im Nationalsozialismus (Stuttgart, 1995).

⁵⁸ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 240.

⁵⁹ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 140.

⁶⁰ Dobler, “Unzucht und Kuppelei,” 59. For other cases of women denounced for lesbianism, see Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 42, 169, 209, 237; Rainer Herr, “Transvestitismus in der NS-Zeit—Ein Forschungsdesiderat,” *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 26, no. 4 (2013): 330–371, here 355; Plötz, “. . . ihre perversen Neigungen restlos bloß zu stellen.”

⁶¹ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 47 (case reported by Klara P.). For other cases of women known to be lesbians who had little trouble with the Nazi regime, see *ibid.*, 170–175.

⁶² Herr, “Transvestitismus in der NS-Zeit,” 355–356.

⁶³ Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 46–47; Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 175–178.

⁶⁴ Historians have only recently begun to examine transvestitism under the Nazi state. Jane Caplan, “The Administration of Gender Identity in Nazi Germany,” *History Workshop Journal* 72, no. 1 (2011): 171–180; Herr, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts*, 157–165; Herr, “Transvestitismus in der NS-Zeit”; Rainer Herr, “In der heutigen Staatsführung kann es nicht angehen, daß sich Männer in Frauenkleidung frei auf der Straße bewegen: Über den Forschungsstand zum Transvestitismus in der NS-Zeit,” in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus*, 101–106.

⁶⁵ Hermann Ferdinand Voss, *Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Transvestitismus* (Marburg, 1938), 41.

⁶⁶ Herr, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts*, 158–159.

⁶⁷ Caplan, “The Administration of Gender Identity in Nazi Germany,” 2–3; Herr, “Transvestitismus in der NS-Zeit,” 356–357.

cross-dress. Nazi-era officials did this only when a transvestite disavowed homosexuality, and often begrudgingly: one female-to-male person spent almost a year in a concentration camp for “endangering public safety and order” by wearing men’s clothing before officials renewed his permit to dress as a man.⁶⁸

To date, histories of lesbians and female-to-male transvestites in Nazi Germany have generally revealed an ambivalence: a few arrests and investigations, accounts of hiding and fear, but nothing like the campaign against gay men. A chronological reading of the Gestapo’s file on Totzke reveals that this apparent ambivalence is a result of the ways in which historians have asked questions. Gender nonconformity and ideas about cross-dressing, together with responses to lesbianism more broadly, resulted in an intricate spiral of suspicion around Totzke, rather than a campaign of persecution.

IN 1939, THE WÜRZBURG GESTAPO began its investigation of Totzke in earnest by collecting two very different stories about her from two men. The first, Ludwig Gründel, an instructor of physical education at the University of Würzburg and an officer in the army reserves, came to Gestapo headquarters of his own volition to report that Totzke was a saboteur. Specifically, he thought she might be an agent with French sympathies who was planning to covertly damage Luftwaffe buildings or anti-aircraft batteries.⁶⁹ Gründel stated several reasons for why he found Totzke suspicious. One was that she did not receive her mail at her home. Totzke did not get her mail at her own address because a few years prior, the Gestapo had briefly put her mail under surveillance without finding anything suspicious. (Their file on her does not record what prompted that first round of postal surveillance.⁷⁰) When she noticed that her mail was being opened, she began having it sent to other people’s addresses. Gründel had other reasons for suspecting Totzke: she had a friend who was a French translator, she knew some other suspicious people, and a half-Jewish man had visited her apartment. She also seemed to prefer to live near military installations. Her former residence was close to an anti-aircraft battery, and she had recently moved close to a Luftwaffe building.

Reviewing what Gründel had said, Gestapo officers took note of two potential “crimes” worth investigating: sabotage and having social relations with Jews. Both were serious. Both fell within their mandate. The Gestapo, as well as many ordinary “Aryan” Würzburgers, had been policing and disrupting social relationships between “Aryans” and Jews since well before any national regulation prohibited them.⁷¹ A 1941 law that police eventually used against Totzke banned “Aryans” and Jews from appearing in public together.⁷² The Nazi Party forbade its members from any personal contact with Jews whatsoever.⁷³ After 1933, “Aryans” gradually broke off their

⁶⁸ Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts*, 162–163, 165; Caplan, “The Administration of Gender Identity in Nazi Germany,” 2.

⁶⁹ Report, April 3, 1939, Gestapo 16015.

⁷⁰ Nor are there any results of the surveillance.

⁷¹ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 111.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 182.

⁷³ Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York, 1998), 45.

friendships with Jews, until most were so isolated from Jews that they could easily ignore their plight.⁷⁴

Prompted by Gründel's denunciation, the Gestapo summoned a witness: they ordered Totzke's former landlord, Hans Hunsinger, to appear at their offices for questioning. Hunsinger had suspicions about Totzke, too, but his story did not match Gründel's. Hunsinger spoke of a social outsider, a man-hater who defied the National Socialist ideal of the unified "Aryan" nation, the "People's Community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*).⁷⁵ The statement that he signed quotes him as saying that "with Totzke, it's a question of a person who does not conform to the People's Community and cannot get along with anybody." Moreover, "She did not receive gentlemen visitors. She was opposed to men, allegedly because her father treated her mother very badly and her parents' marriage was in shambles."⁷⁶

Although Hunsinger thought that Totzke's putative blanket animosity toward men was worth mentioning, the officer who questioned him was not interested in it or in what it implied: lesbianism. What the Gestapo wanted to know was whether Totzke was an enemy agent. This is apparent from the questions the policeman asked. Like other such documents, Hunsinger's signed statement reads like a transcript of a monologue that he delivered. In fact, it consists of answers he gave to the officer's questions, and in places it betrays vestiges of the questions. For example, he seems to have initially addressed Totzke's supposed French connections in response to a direct question. He did not broach the topic on his own. The first time the statement mentions the French, the text jumps abruptly from an unrelated topic to a negative assertion, as if the officer asked about Totzke's "foreign connections" and Hunsinger answered: "She has two sisters from her father's second marriage, they live in Bamberg. I was not aware of whatever foreign connections Totzke had."⁷⁷ Hunsinger's statement contains five separate denials of any knowledge of foreign allegiances, spying, or sabotage on Totzke's part, including "I don't believe that Totzke is in any way an enemy of Germany or active in an intelligence service."

Totzke's connections to Jews also interested the officer, although not as much as the sabotage allegation did; the Hunsinger statement mentions Jews only once. The officer seems to have asked whether Totzke had Jewish friends. Hunsinger told him, "she was visited a few times by two or three Jewesses [*Jüdinnen*]," whose names he did not know.

There seems to be a puzzling incongruity between what Gründel said and what Hunsinger said. According to the former, Totzke was a saboteur for the French; the latter called her a nonconformist man-hater but knew nothing about sabotage. Hunsinger alluded to Totzke's apparent sexuality; Gründel did not. The two stories would not necessarily have seemed incongruous to the Gestapo officers who heard them, however, because a persistent bit of folk wisdom ties them together. According to common knowledge in Germany at the time, people cross-dressed because they were spies or criminals. In 1922, this assumption was conventional enough that the Berlin police called a press conference to dissuade the public from the "widespread idea . . .

⁷⁴ Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 40–46.

⁷⁵ Hunsinger statement, September 27, 1939, Gestapo 16015.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

that men who wear women's clothing or women who wear men's clothing . . . are disguised criminals—pickpockets, spies, traffickers of women [*Mädchenhändler*],” or so the *Berliner Tagesbericht* reported, informing its readers that cross-dressers were in fact transvestites.⁷⁸ During the First World War, the notion that transvestites were spies was so widespread that the leading advocacy organization for transvestites urged them to don the clothing of their birth sex for safety's sake. The group warned that because people assumed that cross-dressing meant one was a spy, transvestites might be arrested and shot.⁷⁹

The idea that transvestitism had something to do with spying or crime had a limited historical basis. Some spies did cross-dress, and some transvestites worked as spies.⁸⁰ Some criminals cross-dressed, too; for example, two men arrested in 1913 had disguised themselves as female beggars in order to case houses, according to a newspaper report.⁸¹ That the two things were connected was also an oft-repeated truism. From at least the late nineteenth century through the 1930s, police and criminologists, including Cesare Lombroso, identified cross-dressing as a technique of swindlers and con men.⁸² A respected sexologist of the Weimar period wrote, “the differentiation of the sexes by clothing is not only a social good, it also must be promoted by the state” in order to prevent “dangerous criminal activity,” because “criminals seek to hide from the authorities by wearing clothing that is not appropriate to their sex.”⁸³ Hirschfeld noted throughout his influential book on transvestitism that people who were not transvestites cross-dressed to commit all sorts of deceptive acts, including swindling and espionage.⁸⁴ Male pickpockets disguised themselves as women, he wrote, and female thieves and fraudsters disguised themselves as men.⁸⁵ He also related the story of a woman who disguised herself as a boy in order to attend school. When her identity was revealed, she was initially “taken as a spy,” but was let go after “her innocence was established” and people realized that she had not cross-dressed for nefarious reasons.⁸⁶

The conflation of cross-dressing with deception had an even more profound provenance. Many people who did not cross-dress equated transvestitism, and cross-dressing more broadly, with duplicity. In the late nineteenth century, a person's gender and social class could easily be read in his or her attire. This legibility was important. Europeans reacted with anxiety as ready-made clothing confused visible

⁷⁸ “Behandlung der sogenannten ‘Transvestiten,’” *Berliner Tagesbericht*, May 6, 1922.

⁷⁹ Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts*, 93. For another report of a transvestite fearing that she would be mistaken for a spy during wartime, see Emi Wolters, “Transvestiten im Weltkriege,” *Die Freundin*, March 16, 1932.

⁸⁰ Emi Wolters, “Transvestiten im Weltkriege,” *Die Freundin*, March 30, 1932; Wolters, “Transvestiten im Weltkriege,” *Die Freundin*, April 6, 1932.

⁸¹ Reported in the *Duisburger Generalanzeiger*, digested in “Transvestiten und andere Formen der Geschlechtsübergänge,” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Homosexualität* 14, no. 1 (1914): 211–221, here 216–217.

⁸² Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts*, 28–29; Krim-Kommissar T., “Geschlechtsfälschungen: Eine Plauderei über Transvestiten,” in Wilhelm Polzer, *Sexuell-Perverse*, no. 1 (Graz, 1930), 9–12, here 9.

⁸³ Albert Moll, *Polizei und Sitte* (Berlin, 1926), 25. See also Moll, “Die sozialen Formen der sexuellen Beziehungen,” in Moll, ed., *Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaften mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der kulturgeschichtlichen Beziehungen* (Leipzig, 1921), 313–460, here 386.

⁸⁴ Hirschfeld, *Transvestites*, 279, 281–282, 293, 295–296. On cross-dressing to avoid military service, see also “Transvestitismus,” in Polzer, *Sexuell-Perverse*, no. 1, 13–16, here 15.

⁸⁵ Hirschfeld, *Transvestites*, 284–287.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

markers of class and status, making it possible for female prostitutes to dress like ladies and vice versa. Social order, particularly in public spaces, depended on being able to recognize prostitutes and ladies by their clothing.⁸⁷ Likewise, with the emergence of transvestitism into the public sphere in the early 1900s, if one could “mistake” a person’s sex on the basis of his or her appearance, social order was threatened. The belief that trans people engaged in fraud by living as their true sex rather than the sex they had been assigned at birth has been identified by scholars in other contexts, such as among New York City officials in the 1960s.⁸⁸ To return to Germany in the 1930s and 1940s: if transvestitism was itself a form of fraud, transvestites must therefore have been skilled at disguise and deceit. These characteristics would also have qualified them to be spies. The Nazi-era study of transvestites asserted that “in public they endanger orderly life and the wellbeing of society” and that “their asocial dispositions, which are often paired with criminal activity, justify draconian measures on the part of the state.”⁸⁹

Even after Hunsinger denied knowing anything about sabotage on Totzke’s part, the Gestapo took the allegation quite seriously. Later, they asked Totzke about her foreign ties and questioned additional witnesses about whether she might be a spy; one denouncer corroborated Gründel’s story that she was secretly working for the French.⁹⁰ When the Gestapo searched Totzke’s apartment in 1941, they were on the lookout for signs of espionage. But the suspicion was unfounded. The Gestapo’s report on the search notes that they found no evidence of spying.⁹¹ Although it is impossible to know exactly what was going on in the minds of the police and neighbors who believed that Totzke might be a saboteur, the popular association of cross-dressing and spying must have augmented the credibility of the accusation, consciously or unconsciously. Other aspects of her life also fed into these suspicions, chiefly the fact that she hailed from the borderland region of Alsace, which had been part of Germany when she was born but had been incorporated by France following the First World War. When that happened, she moved across the border into Germany.⁹² Alsace had never been viewed as unproblematically German by many Germans, and many Alsatians had been enthusiastic to rejoin France following the war.⁹³ In addition, in 1938–1939, Totzke took French lessons.⁹⁴ Had her gender presentation been

⁸⁷ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), 50; Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1988), 180–181.

⁸⁸ Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore, “‘We Won’t Know Who You Are’: Contesting Sex Designations in New York City Birth Certificates,” *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 113–135, here 118–120. See also “Transgender Politician Faces Fraud Lawsuit,” *New York Times*, November 23, 2007.

⁸⁹ Voss, *Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Transvestitismus*, 40, 44.

⁹⁰ The report on the witness Heinz Knettel, an instructor at the music school, has him denying that she worked for a foreign intelligence service; June 15, 1940 (summary of statements by Gründel, Knettel, and Fritz Friedrich), Gestapo 16015. The witness Kraus said he did not think she was “an enemy of the state”; J. Kraus statement, March 14, 1940, Gestapo 16015. Interrogating Totzke for the first time, a Gestapo officer asked her about foreign connections; Totzke statement, September 5, 1941, Gestapo 16015. The denouncer M.T.K. fully endorsed the theory that Totzke was an agent of France; M.T.K. statement, July 29, 1940, Gestapo 16015.

⁹¹ Report, Gestapo 16015, 44.

⁹² Totzke statement, September 5, 1941.

⁹³ David Allen Harvey, “Lost Children or Enemy Aliens? Classifying the Population of Alsace after the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 4 (1999): 537–554, here 537–538.

⁹⁴ Totzke statement, September 5, 1941.

conventional, however, it seems unlikely that this alone would have led to an accusation of sabotage or, more importantly, to a serious investigation. Gender made the two initial accusations coherent. These apparently disparate stories about a suspicious person demonstrate how perceived gender nonconformity could draw the state's attention, but not in a simple way that explicitly referred to gender nonconformity or lesbianism.

IN THE MIDDLE PHASE OF THEIR investigation of Totzke, the Gestapo officers slowly gathered information. They did this chiefly from witnesses they summoned, but also from a second denouncer, from the criminal police (Kripo), and through a new round of postal surveillance (which revealed nothing). An accusation of lesbianism played a pivotal role at this stage. While the officers were not officially interested in lesbianism, some of Totzke's neighbors were quite upset about it, and their unease eventually helped the Gestapo with its objective of enforcing antisemitic laws. The differing interests of neighbors and police interacted to Totzke's detriment. This is most clearly demonstrated by an anonymous letter that was sent to the Gestapo. The one document in the file on Totzke that was not written by police, it expresses concern about lesbianism:

May 2, 1941

To the Würzburg Gestapo!

Miss Ilse Totzke, of Würzburg, Dürbachau, maintains a very intimate friendship with a 15-year-old Jewess, Schwabacher of Schiller St. Mrs. Schwabacher [the alleged fifteen-year-old's mother-in-law] has already made Miss Totzke understand that she does not approve of her visits at this time. Miss T., however, still comes nearly every day and stays many hours, usually from noon to evening, and she leaves right before Mrs. Schwabacher comes home. Miss T. seems not to have a normal orientation [*Veranlagung*], and it seems that she is imposing it on the young woman. She even said, "I have already brought the little one around, she is like me [*sie ist genau so eingestellt wie ich*]," by which she meant a man-hater [*männerfeindlich*].

I live nearby in the neighborhood and have observed these visits for weeks. Every German knows and must know the laws, but for Miss T. they seem not to exist.

Heil Hitler.

Schiller Street ii⁹⁵

The letter contains evidence of two "crimes"—social relations between an "Aryan" and a Jew and the seduction of a minor by an adult. To the Gestapo, the first crime was extremely serious.⁹⁶ The second was indeed criminal (the law against adult-minor relationships was gender-neutral), but it was insignificant by comparison. Yet the person who wrote this letter seems to have been more concerned about lesbianism than about contact between "Aryans" and Jews, or for that matter, about the

⁹⁵ Letter of May 2, 1941, Gestapo 16015.

⁹⁶ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 156–157, 175–178.

sexual impropriety of Jews. Nazi-era discourses on the supposedly depraved sexuality of Jews would have made it relatively easy for this person to blame the alleged fifteen-year-old rather than Totzke, or at least to besmirch the Jewish woman as well. Yet the letter does not invoke the standard idea that homosexuality was an aspect of the “Volk-destroying influence of the Jews,” as an author in a Hitler Youth magazine put it.⁹⁷ Nor does it use the characterization of Jewish women as brazen seductresses of hapless “Aryan” men that was common in the trials of men accused of breaking the law against interracial heterosexual sex.⁹⁸ Indeed, the Jewish teenager’s sexuality is implicitly “normal.” The writer seems to be acting to protect a blameless teenage girl and to support her mother, who is presented as disapproving of lesbianism and seeking to put a stop to it. The letter even implies that its author, or someone he or she knows, has discussed the situation with Mrs. Schwabacher herself: the writer claims to know that the mother confronted Totzke. A conversation with Mrs. Schwabacher would constitute condemned contact with a Jew. Although any report that drew the Gestapo’s attention to a Jewish family boded ill for them, it seems likely that if the intention had been to harm the Schwabachers, the letter writer would have tried harder to implicate them.⁹⁹

The person who sent the letter was correct that a relationship between Totzke and a fifteen-year-old would have been illegal. But the woman by the last name of Schwabacher with whom Totzke was friends was not a teenager. She was Else Schwabacher, the thirty-five-year-old “Aryan” wife of a Jewish man who had left Germany for the United States. The letter writer was not the only one to mistake her for a Jew. For a long time, Gestapo officers also thought that she was Jewish. Else Schwabacher lived with her husband’s parents on Schiller Street, and Totzke visited her there.¹⁰⁰ If the letter’s author knowingly made a flimsy accusation to the Gestapo in the hope of achieving a self-interested resolution to a neighborhood conflict, he or she was certainly not alone in doing so.¹⁰¹ Nor was he or she unique in denouncing an alleged lesbian relationship. Historians have found a number of such cases.¹⁰²

But the Würzburg Gestapo did not consider lesbian seduction of a minor a pressing problem. They did nothing with the anonymous letter for the time being, aside from dropping it into their file on Totzke. They did, however, glean valuable infor-

⁹⁷ Walter Tetzlaff, quoted in Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 105.

⁹⁸ Patricia Szobar, “Telling Sexual Stories in the Nazi Courts of Law: Race Defilement in Germany, 1933 to 1945,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 131–163, here 147–148.

⁹⁹ Plötz describes another case in which an “Aryan” woman was denounced for an affair with a Jewish woman; “. . . ihre perversen Neigungen restlos bloß zu stellen,” 99, 103, 108–110. In this case as well, the denouncers seemed chiefly fixated on lesbianism, but their charges included political and racial “crimes” that were more interesting to the Nazi Party and to the state. Nothing came of their denunciations, however.

¹⁰⁰ Totzke statement, October 28, 1941, Gestapo 16015.

¹⁰¹ Robert Gellately, “Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic,” in Fitzpatrick and Gellately, *Accusatory Practices*, 185–221, here 198–204; Abke, *Sichtbare Zeichen unsichtbarer Kräfte*, 15.

¹⁰² Dobler, “Unzucht und Kuppelei,” 59; Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 42, 169, 209, 237; Herrn, “Transvestitismus in der NS-Zeit,” 355; Plötz, “. . . ihre perversen Neigungen restlos bloß zu stellen.”

mation from it. The letter included the name and address of a supposed Jew with whom Totzke maintained a relationship, which would later prove extremely helpful to the police as they sought to enforce antisemitic policy.

The middle phase of the investigation also raises the possibility that Totzke's gender nonconformity and apparent sexuality played a *sotto voce* role in the Gestapo's inquiry. Totzke's neighbors got suspicious because of whom she avoided and where she lived. Her choices in these matters seem to have been influenced by gender or sexuality, although not exclusively. The evidence for this is not strongly conclusive. Yet even in the absence of an unassailable conclusion, this evidence draws attention to important aspects of this history: the difficulties of parsing out just how gender and sexuality shaped a case like this one, and the need to look very closely to see their influence.

Totzke brought suspicion on herself in several ways. One was by living with Jews. Between 1932 and 1936, she sublet from three Jewish families in Würzburg.¹⁰³ She told the Gestapo in 1941 that it was all the same to her whom she rented from. But she also lived with Jewish families because, the Gestapo quoted her as saying, "As an apartment-seeker, it was, however, never easy for me to find accommodation with Aryan families."¹⁰⁴ That is, some "Aryans" refused to rent to Totzke. Whatever the reason was, it was obvious enough to the Gestapo officer who questioned her that he did not elaborate on it in the report. Had Totzke been foolishly forthright about her views on Nazism, "Aryans" might have declined to rent to her to avoid trouble. But although she opposed National Socialism and would later admit that to the Gestapo, with most people she was "very careful and reserved in what she said" about politics, to use the witness Hunsinger's words.¹⁰⁵ Of the nine denouncers and witnesses who spoke to the Gestapo about Totzke, only one reported that she had made specific statements against the regime. Many of this denouncer's claims turned out to be groundless, or so the police concluded.¹⁰⁶

"Aryans" may have refused to rent to Totzke because of her gender expression or because they assumed she was a lesbian. Jews would have been more likely to rent to her regardless of how they felt about her gender expression and sexuality, or anything else about her, for several reasons. As an "Aryan," she was in a relative position of power over them: an "Aryan" could make a good deal of trouble for a Jew. And they had far fewer tenants from whom to select: many "Aryans" would not live with Jews because of the relentless pressure to cut ties to them. Yet given their growing impoverishment, Jews had a keen need to sublet.¹⁰⁷ Totzke seems to have had genuine close relationships with Jews.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, reactions by "Aryans" to her gender and apparent sexuality may have given her additional reasons to live with Jews.

¹⁰³ Totzke statement, October 28, 1941. Attempts to drive Jews out of the economy began in 1933, but the project of driving Würzburg Jews out of their homes and into what were essentially ghettos—a few designated buildings, which quickly became grossly overcrowded—did not begin in earnest until after the pogrom of November 9/10, 1938. Roland Flade, *Die Würzburger Juden: Ihre Geschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Würzburg, 1996), 329–330.

¹⁰⁴ Totzke statement, October 28, 1941.

¹⁰⁵ Hunsinger statement.

¹⁰⁶ M.T.K. statement.

¹⁰⁷ On the economic exploitation of Würzburg's Jews, see Hans Steidle, *Neckermann & Co.: Die Ausplünderung der Würzburger Juden im Dritten Reich* (Würzburg, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 200–203.

Regardless of what her reasons were for renting from Jews—and they were probably multiple—the fact that she did so made the police suspicious.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, they cited her ongoing relationships with Jews in Würzburg as background for their decision to send her to a concentration camp.¹¹⁰

Totzke also avoided people. “[H]er behavior is just entirely suspicious; indeed, she makes an effort not to come into contact with anybody,” one neighbor’s statement alleged.¹¹¹ Hunsinger, her former landlord, reported that she did not “include herself in the building’s community and went her own way.”¹¹² In 1938, Totzke moved from Hunsinger’s building to a cottage from which she could come and go with some privacy. This struck the police as suspicious. The cottage was difficult to place under surveillance.¹¹³ She also often went out in the evenings and came back late, which made the family who lived nearby suspicious.¹¹⁴ But Totzke did not avoid everyone. She had an active circle of friends, some of them Jewish. She may very well have steered clear of some of her neighbors because she judged them to be regime supporters from whom she needed to conceal her friendships with Jews. If they were also hostile to her because of her gender expression and apparent sexuality, that would have given her additional reasons to avoid them. If she was having an affair with a woman, that, too, would have been a reason to avoid some people, to live in a building with a relatively concealed entrance, and perhaps to keep late hours. Other masculine women and/or lesbians living in Nazi Germany sought to conceal their sexuality from their neighbors.¹¹⁵ One woman entered into a sham marriage to a gay man when her landlady and the local Nazi Party official (*Blockwarte*) began snooping around, trying to find out if she and her girlfriend were lovers.¹¹⁶ Yet Totzke had other good reasons to avoid these neighbors and to seek privacy. The neighbors were, in fact, ready to tell the Gestapo incriminating things about her, including that she socialized with Jews. And the Gestapo was watching her.

Whatever Totzke’s reasons were for avoiding certain neighbors, and they were most likely complex, the very fact that she avoided them was itself suspicious. According to a report by the criminal police, “It seems rather peculiar that since April 1, 1938, Totzke has lived in a cottage [*Gartenhaus*] where she is for the most part unobservable [*unbeaufsichtigt*] and where her activities cannot be monitored.” Moreover, her new landlord had taken a long time to provide the required standard notification to police that she had moved into the cottage; therefore an investigation of Totzke for “matters of safety and espionage” was “necessary.”¹¹⁷ Totzke was caught in a vortex of suspicion. Her gender expression and apparent sexuality arguably worked together with other factors to accelerate its cyclical motion.

Yet it is important to note that the suspicion that adhered so stubbornly to Totzke was not triggered exclusively by her gender and apparent sexuality. For one

¹⁰⁹ Kriminalpolizei Würzburg an die Gestapo Würzburg.

¹¹⁰ Würzburg Gestapo report, March 29, 1943, Gestapo 16015.

¹¹¹ J. Kraus statement, March 14, 1940, Gestapo 16015.

¹¹² Hunsinger statement.

¹¹³ Report, February 2, 1943, Gestapo 16015.

¹¹⁴ J. Kraus statement; M.T.K. statement.

¹¹⁵ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 24–25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Kriminalpolizei Würzburg an die Gestapo Würzburg.

thing, the Gestapo had good reason to suspect her. She opposed the Nazi regime and was ultimately prepared to act to help Jews. In addition, she did a number of things that her neighbors and acquaintances found suspicious. Even before her first interrogation at Gestapo headquarters, she was picking up her mail at addresses that were not her own, to avoid postal surveillance. She did not work regularly, which neighbors noticed, in part thanks to her inheritance, which they did not know about. She kept unusual hours. She saw Jewish friends, something that most witnesses and denouncers mentioned.¹¹⁸ All of these actions sparked suspicions, or provided fodder for existing suspicions, and fed into the mild yet persistent anxiety that kept the Gestapo's file on her slowly growing. For at least one denouncing neighbor, and possibly for other witnesses and denouncers, antisemitism made all of the accusations cohere: Totzke went about with Jews because, like them, she was an enemy of Germany, and was, together with them, actively and clandestinely working to destroy Germany—hence the odd hours, the sympathies for the French, and the mysterious income.¹¹⁹ Yet for at least one other denouncer, the author of the anonymous letter, antisemitism was not a primary concern. Three witnesses said nothing about any ties Totzke might have to Jews.¹²⁰

THE HARROWING CLIMAX OF THE investigation demonstrates that by the fall of 1941, the Gestapo had developed an overriding concern: Totzke's relationships with Jews. And yet, at crucial turning points in the final phase of the investigation, the officers relied on information about Else Schwabacher that they had obtained from the anonymous letter, a letter motivated by a neighbor's worries about lesbian seduction. Those concerns aided the Gestapo in something that ostensibly had little to do with Totzke's alleged lesbianism: their efforts to isolate Würzburg's Jews.

In September 1941, the Gestapo summoned Totzke for questioning and carried out the search of her house that found no signs of sabotage or espionage.¹²¹ Despite three separate denunciations of Totzke, it had taken the police almost two and a half years to get around to interrogating her. Their decision to finally do so was probably prompted as much by national policy as it was by her neighbors' suspicions. In fall 1941, the regime was in the process of deporting German Jews to occupied Eastern Europe, where most would be murdered, succumbing to illness or starvation or violence in ghettos or work camps, shot by police or SS squads, or asphyxiated in gas chambers. Local Gestapo offices were tasked with arranging deportations. The Würzburg Gestapo deported the Jews of Lower Franconia by train in seven transports between 1941 and 1943; the first, of about two hundred people, left Würzburg for Riga

¹¹⁸ Three people, all of them witnesses rather than denouncers, did not mention Totzke's relationships with Jews: Georg Horn, Knettel, and Fritz Friedrich. Horn statement; report, June 15, 1940 (summary of statements by Gründel, Knettel, and Friedrich), Gestapo 16015.

¹¹⁹ In the allegations made by M.T.K. in her statement, suspicions circulated around a core vision of Jews as conniving, dangerous enemies of the nation. She even alleged that Totzke first came to her attention because "there was something Jewish about her [*sie einen jüdischen Einschlag hat*]." On this type of antisemitism, see Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).

¹²⁰ See note 118.

¹²¹ Undated report of the apartment search that took place on September 5, 1941, Gestapo 16015, 44.

in the early morning hours of November 27, 1941.¹²² Only fifteen of the Würzburgers on that first transport survived. The rest were worked to death in camps, gassed to death, shot in the course of a death march at the war's end, or otherwise murdered.¹²³ Friendships between "Aryans" and Jews threatened the smooth implementation of genocide. On November 24, 1941, the regime made it a crime for Jews and "Aryans" to be seen in public together. The Würzburg Gestapo was directed to confine any Jews who broke this law to a concentration camp, to arrest any "Aryan" violators, and to consider sending them to a camp as well, since they "still did not seem to grasp the most elementary essential concepts of National Socialism."¹²⁴

In two interrogations of Totzke in fall 1941, Gestapo officers displayed an increasingly keen interest in her Jewish connections. In the first interrogation, in September, they asked her about foreign connections and about Jews, and Totzke denied having any foreign ties but owned to having social contact with Jews. She said that she thought the state's persecution of Jews "is not right."¹²⁵ The officer who took her statement reacted rather calmly to her open opposition to state antisemitism. He let her leave without serving her with an official warning. But in the weeks that followed, other officers who were far less phlegmatic about Totzke's support for Jews got involved, and in October the Gestapo summoned Totzke for a second interrogation. The statement that resulted is overwhelmingly concerned with her ties to Jews. In it, Totzke readily admitted to having had Jewish friends in the past and to a current friendship with Else Schwabacher, who she swore was "Aryan." She repeated her disagreement with antisemitic policies.¹²⁶ This was quite unusual, either brave or stupid or both—unsurprisingly, most people refrained from criticizing the regime while under interrogation by the Gestapo.¹²⁷ The first interrogator had nevertheless treated Totzke mildly. The second interrogator was harsher: he confronted her with the anonymous letter. He did not care whether Totzke and Schwabacher were lovers. He cared that Totzke was violating antisemitic policy; he refused to believe that Schwabacher was "Aryan." The record of the second interrogation ends with Totzke quoted as saying that she knows she has been "seriously warned," and she is aware that "if there is another complaint against me for having contact with Jews, . . . I will face immediate arrest and transport to a concentration camp."¹²⁸

Totzke defied this order. She maintained her relationships with Jews and managed to evade the Gestapo, in part by spending time in Berlin. But in October 1942,

¹²² Herbert Schott, "Die ersten drei Deportationen mainfränkischer Juden 1941/42," in Albrecht Liess, ed., *Wege in die Vernichtung: Die Deportation der Juden aus Mainfranken 1941–1943* (Munich, 2003), 73–166, here 73, 80, 95, 103.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹²⁴ Gestapo Nuremberg to Würzburg, quoted in Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 182.

¹²⁵ Totzke statement, September 5, 1941.

¹²⁶ Totzke statement, October 28, 1941. Totzke's criticisms of antisemitism are quoted at length in Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 180–183. Doris Bergen writes that Gestapo-produced documents describing a person's opposition to anti-Jewish policy ought to be read with care, because "Nazi officials automatically accused anyone who opposed the regime of being somehow soft on Jews." Bergen, review of *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905–1944*, by Peter Hoffmann, H-German, H-Net Reviews, August 2006, 3. However, given Totzke's efforts to protect Jews, which are verified by Strauss's memoir, it seems safe to assume that she sincerely opposed antisemitic policies and that the statements in the Gestapo's file came from her own lips. Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 200–201.

¹²⁷ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 171.

¹²⁸ Totzke statement, October 28, 1941.

the Gestapo caught up with her, or so she believed. They mailed her a summons. Someone had reported seeing her leave town with an unnamed Jewish woman.¹²⁹ That same month, Else Schwabacher tried unsuccessfully to use Totzke's ration card, which to police indicated that Totzke still had contact with Jews.¹³⁰ To the Gestapo, the situation was not urgent. When Totzke did not respond to the summons, they apparently took no further steps.¹³¹ The relatively apathetic character of their pursuit of Totzke is probably related to the fact that around this time they discovered that Schwabacher was indeed "Aryan."¹³² But the new order to appear terrified Totzke.¹³³ She tried to go underground in Berlin, but found it impossible. Crossing the border into Switzerland seemed the only option.

But Totzke did not plan to go alone: she would take Jews with her. According to the Gestapo's report of their interrogation of her following the failed flight into Switzerland, Totzke went to Berlin after receiving the new summons to implore Ruth Basinski and three other Jewish acquaintances to cross the border with her. Herbert Strauss, who recounts this in his memoir, was one of the three.¹³⁴ Only Basinski, however, agreed to go. The report includes the following statement from Totzke about her motivation: "I had sympathy for the forenamed Jew [Basinski] and wanted to protect her from evacuation." The document goes on to quote her explaining that she also wanted to leave Germany because she rejected National Socialism and the Nuremberg Laws.¹³⁵ The Würzburg Gestapo sent Totzke to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for having contact with Basinski, a violation of the law against socializing between "Aryans" and Jews.¹³⁶

Although Totzke's relationship with Schwabacher seems to have had the potential to raise suspicions of lesbianism, in light of the anonymous letter that alleged as much, and although her fidelity to Basinski also presented some grounds for an accusation of lesbianism, there is no record that the Gestapo asked her any questions about the nature of her relationships with either woman. Their failure to question her about these relationships, or to include the details in official documents if they did question her about them, was not due to demureness.¹³⁷ In at least one other case, police did interrogate lesbians about their sex lives.¹³⁸ But these officers took no official interest in the possibility of lesbianism.

Yet despite this lack of official concern, anxieties about Totzke's gender and sexuality served regime goals. The only informant who gave the police information that

¹²⁹ Würzburg Gestapo report.

¹³⁰ Report, October 13, 1942.

¹³¹ Würzburg Gestapo report.

¹³² Report, February 2, 1943. Upon discovering that Schwabacher was "Aryan," the Gestapo reported Totzke to the city labor office because she lacked a regular job. When Totzke did not reply to that office's summons, the Gestapo discovered that she had moved to Berlin. Neither agency seems to have done anything further about this.

¹³³ St. Ludwig Gestapo report.

¹³⁴ Totzke may have successfully helped other people cross the border. Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 203. The Gestapo suspected as much; Würzburg Gestapo report.

¹³⁵ St. Ludwig Gestapo report.

¹³⁶ Totzke survived several years of incarceration in Ravensbrück and was released from the camp at the end of the war. Liste betr. Deportierte aus Frankreich, die 1944/45 in Schweden angekommen sind, June 29, 1945, 78806710#1, ITS Digitales Archiv.

¹³⁷ Gestapo officers forced men accused of homosexuality and Jews accused of sex with "Aryans" to recount graphic details. Johnson, *The Nazi Terror*, 292.

¹³⁸ Dobler, "Unzucht und Kuppelei," 59.

they acted on about a supposed Jew with whom Totzke currently had regular contact was the author of the anonymous letter.¹³⁹ Opposition to lesbianism had motivated him or her to write, but Gestapo officers ignored that concern and used the information in the letter to enforce racial policy.¹⁴⁰

TOTZKE'S CASE CALLS FOR A RECONSIDERATION of an important debate about how the police operated under the Nazi state. In his work on the Würzburg Gestapo, Robert Gellately demonstrates just how dependent they were on denunciations. He asserts that through denunciation, people regulated their neighbors; it was "a kind of auto-policing, or at least an auto-surveillance system."¹⁴¹ Other historians have criticized this claim, arguing that the notion of "auto-surveillance" over-emphasizes the role of denunciation, making it seem as though the Nazis primarily used the tattling of neighbors to keep "Aryans" in line.¹⁴² In addition, denunciation did not always work. Gestapo officers could be quite lenient with "Aryans" who were not among their special targets, such as communists. They dismissed denunciations and let people off with warnings, particularly if they were first-time offenders accused of something minor, such as criticizing the regime.¹⁴³ This kind of leniency is apparent in Totzke's case. The first policeman who questioned her did not even warn her to cut her ties to Jews. The chilling threat that his colleague later forced her to sign was in fact standard for an "Aryan" first-time offender who did not fall into a target category.¹⁴⁴ When she continued her friendships with Jews, the Gestapo's reaction was sluggish. But Totzke's story also shows something that other studies have noted: even a "mild" reaction by the Gestapo could terrify people into changing their behavior.¹⁴⁵

In demonstrating the influence of witnesses, Totzke's case helps to resolve the discrepancy between the theory of "auto-surveillance," on the one hand, and the infrequency of denunciation together with the agency of the Gestapo in deciding how to act on denunciations, on the other: "auto-surveillance" did not mean that everyone was actually being watched, and the process that followed a denunciation shaped how the Gestapo viewed it. Witnesses drew attention toward some people and away from others. They had a good deal of control over what they said, although they did have to respond to questions. They could say very little, if they chose to. In the Totzke investigation, one witness who was questioned by the Gestapo, Georg Horn, a man who lived near her cottage, said he had not spoken to her much, had not seen anyone visit her, and did not know with whom she "kept company."¹⁴⁶ He suffered

¹³⁹ Gründel named a half-Jewish man who he claimed visited Totzke, but the Gestapo apparently did not pursue this allegation. The reasons for this are not clear in the file.

¹⁴⁰ This is an example of a phenomenon noted by Gellately: no matter the motive for a denunciation, it could help the Gestapo achieve its objectives. Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 149–150.

¹⁴¹ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 258.

¹⁴² Johnson, *The Nazi Terror*, 15–16, 19–20, 353–354, 362–367, 483–484; Hall, "An Army of Spies?"

¹⁴³ Johnson, *The Nazi Terror*, 20; Dörner, "Heimtücke," 247. Gellately also notes this; *The Gestapo and German Society*, 206–207.

¹⁴⁴ Dörner, "Heimtücke," 247–248.

¹⁴⁵ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 153; Dörner, "Heimtücke," 275–279.

¹⁴⁶ Horn was the first person to mention that Totzke often went into the city in the evenings, though his statement does not indicate that he made anything of the fact. Horn statement, November 24, 1939, Gestapo 16015.

no negative consequences. The Gestapo simply wrote up what he said and filed it away.

Witnesses had power. A denunciation could go nowhere if a witness refuted it, particularly if the witness was someone whose word carried weight with the police. When a truck driver denounced a soldier for a tirade against the regime, for example, the case was dismissed after two other soldiers claimed that the accused man had said nothing of the sort and no other witness could be found to up back the denouncer.¹⁴⁷ When the Cologne Gestapo investigated alleged anti-regime statements made by several “Aryans,” the testimony of twelve witnesses eventually convinced them to drop the matter. They especially put stock in the word of one witness, the wife of a man who had joined the Nazi Party before 1933.¹⁴⁸

Totzke could not count on much protection from witnesses. With one exception, they all told police that there was something suspicious about her.¹⁴⁹ Most of the suspicions they voiced were quite vague. They said she opposed National Socialism or that she refused to conform to the People’s Community, but save for one person, no one provided any damning details. The only person who could recount a specific anti-regime statement made by Totzke was a twenty-year-old neighbor, but the veracity of what she told the Gestapo is questionable.¹⁵⁰ Otherwise, no witness or denouncer reported a specific anti-regime statement. Most of those who claimed that they had seen Totzke with Jews were hazy on the details. A neighbor whom the Gestapo had summoned, Jakob Kraus, said that a man had visited Totzke about a year earlier, and that he thought the man was a Jew, but he did not know his name, and he had seen the “presumptive Jew” only that one time.¹⁵¹ These testimonies were extremely short on specifics, to the point where witnesses like Kraus at times seem to have been straining to tell Gestapo officers what they wanted to hear. Yet the amorphous suspicions they voiced kept the investigation alive. She was “a loner who refuses to conform to the People’s Community,” said a newspaper manager who acted as a witness, a man who otherwise had little to say about her and had no details to illustrate his charge that she rejected the People’s Community aside from a vague claim about her having “fanciful” and “distorted” ideas.¹⁵² “I cannot gather from Totzke’s behavior that she could be an enemy of the state,” Kraus said, noting that she always returned his “Heil Hitler” greeting, and yet he concluded, “her demeanor is quite suspicious.”¹⁵³

Totzke clearly lacked the social capital that would have protected her from these witnesses or made her less suspicious to them. This social capital did not consist of how she got along with and was perceived by everyone. Rather, her lack of social capital resulted from the fact that she was not integrated into a particular network of

¹⁴⁷ Johnson, *The Nazi Terror*, 336–337. See also 297–299.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 346. For a similar example, see Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2001), 195–196.

¹⁴⁹ The exception was Georg Horn.

¹⁵⁰ I doubt the accuracy of this statement because this denouncer, M.T.K., made much of Totzke’s supposed plans for military sabotage on behalf of the French, an allegation that police later deemed unfounded. In addition, M.T.K. claimed in her statement that Totzke never returned her “Heil Hitler” salutation, but her father said that Totzke always returned his; J. Kraus statement. Apparently she returned other people’s as well, as no other witness or denouncer mentioned the “German greeting,” and had Totzke made a habit of omitting it, they most likely would have mentioned that to the Gestapo.

¹⁵¹ J. Kraus statement.

¹⁵² June 15, 1940 (summary of statements by Gründel, Knettel, and Friedrich).

¹⁵³ J. Kraus statement.

certain people, people whose word Gestapo officers trusted. The police listened to people like Gründel, the first denouncer, a man who taught at the university well after the purge of Jews and leftists, and also served in the military. They wanted to talk to the newspaper manager, who held his position in part because he had supported the Nazi “coordination” of the press.¹⁵⁴ They summoned Totzke’s former landlord, Hunsinger, but not her current landlord, probably because they had reason to trust Hunsinger. Respectability in the eyes of such people and closer relationships with them would have protected Totzke. Denunciation as a phenomenon was certainly not limited to Nazi-era Germany. Neither was the influence of witnesses in denunciation-based policing.

The Gestapo’s system also opened up possibilities for denouncers and witnesses to get someone in grave trouble by telling the police things, such as about the person’s sexuality, that did not actually conflict with the law. As other studies have shown, the ability to manipulate the denunciation system in order to police one’s community or to settle neighborhood or family grievances was one benefit that the state offered to wily “Aryans,” and it bound them to the state.¹⁵⁵ People sometimes used this power to try to gain the upper hand in conflicts even if they had little to do with National Socialism—family members’ use of denunciation to try to stop domestic abuse is one example.¹⁵⁶ Gestapo officers could ignore self-serving reports if they did not coincide with the police’s own priorities; they also followed up on information that interested them even when it came from denouncers who were pursuing obviously selfish ends. In Totzke’s case, several denouncers and many witnesses did eventually put the Gestapo onto the scent of a real “crime.” Neighborly activism could be about things that were not even illegal, such as lesbianism or perceived gender nonconformity. This put someone like Totzke at risk.

TOTZKE’S CASE ALSO INVITES CONCLUSIONS about gender and sexuality. One is that the category “lesbian” can be productively complicated. It is not enough to know that a woman was, or allegedly was, a lesbian. Women had varying gender presentations, and masculinity put some women at greater risk of running into trouble with the state. Other studies reinforce this conclusion. Margarete Knittel said that after 1933, a lot of lesbians in her circle let their hair grow out and wore feminine clothing because they thought it would protect them from rude remarks on the street.¹⁵⁷ The woman who tried to hide her sexuality by marrying a gay man was verbally harassed nevertheless because she kept her pageboy haircut.¹⁵⁸ Feminine lesbians were also compelled to conceal their sexuality, but their gender presentation, which could enable them to pass for normal, made it easier for them to do so. In addition, racial status made a significant difference. Had Totzke been Jewish, the Gestapo would have

¹⁵⁴ Fritz Friedrich, June 15, 1940 (summary of statements by Gründel, Knittel, and Friedrich).

¹⁵⁵ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, 262; see also Joshi, *Gender and Power in the Third Reich*. Ebner argues that in Fascist Italy, denunciation produced regime loyalty; *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy*, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Joshi, *Gender and Power in the Third Reich*, 51–61.

¹⁵⁷ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 24–25.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

acted against her swiftly and decisively.¹⁵⁹ This was also surely the case for lesbians in other times and places.

In addition, Totzke's case demonstrates that historians of lesbians ought to also consider trans identity categories. Transvestites were sometimes at risk, particularly if they were perceived to be breaching gender norms. Not all transvestites were perceived to be doing so. Some passed. For example, a person identified in police documents as "Agnes S." lived as a man, and neighbors and people on the street took him to be a man.¹⁶⁰ When transvestites did not pass, they ran a greater risk. In the cases examined by Jane Caplan in which female-to-male persons got into trouble with authorities, it was perceived female masculinity that irritated the police. For example, although the neighbors of "Agnes S." believed that he was a man, police did not. He was detained for wearing men's clothing and identified by police as a "female transvestite." "Agnes S." was subjected to a humiliating interrogation about sexual practices and admitted to affairs with women. Police made him pledge to wear clothing that would make him "immediately recognizable as a woman."¹⁶¹

While sexual outsiders and gender nonconformists are subjected to all kinds of vexing circumstances that other people do not face, "persecution" is not always the best way to describe those circumstances. This was also the case in other historical contexts. In the history of the Nazi period, the term "persecution" implies a state campaign against a targeted group. This meaning seems to be what those who objected to the inclusion of lesbians in the Berlin memorial had in mind when they asserted that no woman was "persecuted by National Socialism" because of homosexuality. Historians have shown that for a number of targeted groups, including men accused of having sex with men, persecution was far from simple and straightforward.¹⁶² Although Totzke's alleged lesbianism and gender nonconformity was not the reason the Gestapo ultimately sent her to a concentration camp, it clearly made her an object of suspicion. That suspicion meshed with the Gestapo's priorities. The result was a four-year-long investigation that caused real suffering and terror and ended with Totzke's incarceration in Ravensbrück. To assert that this was not "persecution" oversimplifies the circumstances of a gender-nonconforming woman or transvestite in a strictly heteronormative society where female masculinity had negative connotations for the average person but was not illegal. Surely this was a form of persecution, and the notion that, as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's online encyclopedia puts it, "most lesbians in Germany were able to live relatively quiet lives, generally undisturbed by the police," is not the full story.¹⁶³ To get closer to the full story, it is necessary to seek something aside from state persecution like the campaign against male homosexuality.¹⁶⁴ Rather, historians need to consider the concept of risk. Though not the subjects

¹⁵⁹ See the histories of Jewish women in Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*.

¹⁶⁰ Caplan, "The Administration of Gender Identity in Nazi Germany," 2–3.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² For example, in "The Denial of Homosexuality," Geoffrey Giles shows that in certain cases the SS treated male homosexuality within its membership with leniency. Remarkably, even race could at times be quite plastic, as when German officials sought to define people in occupied Eastern Europe as "ethnic Germans." Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 569–582.

¹⁶³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Lesbians and the Third Reich," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005478>.

¹⁶⁴ On this see also Dobler, "Unzucht und Kuppelei," 61.

of an official state persecution, gender-nonconforming women, transvestites, and women who drew negative attention because of their lesbianism ran a clear, pronounced risk of provoking anxiety in neighbors, acquaintances, and state officials, and that anxiety could, ultimately, inspire the kind of state violence that Totzke suffered.

None of this is easily encapsulated in a memorial. The several memorials built in central Berlin in recent years, the largest of which is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, have always been intended as far more than places at which to grieve; they are, among other things, interventions in contemporary politics and attempts by the German nation to move beyond the past.¹⁶⁵ Especially in the case of the memorials to lesser-known victims, such as the Roma and homosexuals, they are also attempts to ensure that certain of the dead, long forgotten, have a place in public memory.¹⁶⁶ The memorials thus mark episodes in our unending, strained, always shifting struggle to relate to the past: that is, they are engagements in the practice of history. Yet, does the form of a memorial compel us to seek a certain kind of relationship to the past, one that is relatively straightforward, not demanding of our analytical energy and not hard to explain? A straightforward relationship would make it easy, when we pause in the rain at the edge of the Tiergarten, to imagine the dead we have come to remember, and to quickly grasp the contemporary political agenda that their murders prompt us to defend.¹⁶⁷ What opponents of including women in the memorial video seem to be calling for is proof that a woman was persecuted by National Socialism *solely* for lesbianism, and not under Austria's gender-neutral anti-homosexuality law.¹⁶⁸ In 2012, a proposal to put up a plaque commemorating lesbian women at Ravensbrück was rejected on the basis of this criterion.¹⁶⁹ But Totzke's case demonstrates that it would be a falsification of history if the memorial to murdered homosexuals perpetuated the notion that the Nazi state dealt out violence and suffering in only a simple fashion. It

¹⁶⁵ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago, 1997), 167–173.

¹⁶⁶ On the Roma memorial and the evolving relationships among the new Berlin memorials, see Nadine Blumer, "Disentangling the Hierarchy of Victimhood: Commemorating Sinti and Roma and Jews in Germany's National Narrative," in Anton Weiss-Wendt, ed., *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York, 2015), 205–228.

¹⁶⁷ In discussions prior to the construction of the memorial, people questioned whether a memorial is a good way to convey information about history; Tomberger, "Das Berliner Homosexuellen-Denkmal," 192. The question was also raised during the long effort to establish the nearby Topographie des Terrors site; Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, 154–173. Some of those who favored an exhibition on that site over a monument wrote in 1983, "characteristic of a monument is the reduction of a complex development to a single aspect that the monument's sponsors have identified as the most important," which "prevents the observer's own confrontation with the complex historical event" (quoted *ibid.*, 168). One wonders whether the resources spent thus far on Germany's national Holocaust memorials would not have been better spent on exhibitions such as the one that was eventually built at Topographie des Terrors.

¹⁶⁸ Zinn, "Homophobie und männliche Homosexualität in Konzentrationslagern," in Eschebach, *Homophobie und Devianz*, 79.

¹⁶⁹ Schoppmann, "Lesbische Frauen und weibliche Homosexualität im Dritten Reich," 85; "Verfolgung nicht bewiesen: Keine Gedenktafel für lesbische Frauen in Ravensbrück," http://www.queer.de/detail.php?article_id=18253. This decision by the Brandenburg Memorial Foundation (Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten) seems odd in addition because there are documented cases of women being confined in Ravensbrück at least in part for lesbianism. For one such case, in which lesbianism seems to have been the only accusation, see Schoppmann, "Lesbische Frauen und weibliche Homosexualität im Dritten Reich," 90. For cases in which lesbianism was not the main accusation but was noted by the authorities as an additional factor, see Schoppmann, "Elsa Conrad—Margarete Rosenberg—Mary Pünjer—Henny Schermann," 100–103, 105–107; Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität*, 242–244.

would, in addition, obscure the complex ways in which contemporary anti-gay and anti-trans sentiments continue to function in societies that have eliminated explicit legal persecution.

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