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Eldorado, a Berlin Transvestite and Queer Bar
(Photograph at GHDI)

- "1933 Election Campaign: Hitler's Election Posters Cover the Front of "Eldorado," a Berlin Transvestite Bar Closed by the Police (Early March 1933)." Digital image. German History in Documents and Images. Accessed March 7, 2019.
http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1881&language=english.
The image depicts "Eldorado," a transvestite bar that was closed in March 1933 by the city's chief of police. The windows were covered by swastikas and NSDAP election posters. Date of creation: Early March 1933, Author: NA

I will be talking about the history of cabarets in Berlin before and after the Nazis shut down the clubs and took them over for their own headquarters in 1933. This image found in the GHDI can also be found on **Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz** by searching *berlin 1933 wahlkampf*.

- "The Picture Agency Bpk Is a Central Media Service Provider of All Branches of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz) and of over 100 Major Museums and Libraries Abroad." *Bpk - Bildagentur*, www.bpk-bildagentur.de/shop.
Image number: 30013911
Description (originally in German): The police have closed the well-known Berlin restaurant for homosexuals "Eldorado" in Schöneberg, Motzstraße corner Kalckreuthstraße. Election propaganda for Adolf Hitler can now be seen on the facade and in the windows
Creation date: early March 1933
Location: Berlin
Systematik: History / Germany / 20th century / Nazi period / Domestic politics / Election of the Reichstag 5.3.1933 / Election campaign

*note: I will be using queer interchangeably with “homosexual”

*Transvestite is an outdated term, the identity used today is cross-dresser

In the 1920s Berlin had become famous for its liberal Bohemian atmosphere and sexual permissiveness. **Kabarett** was a form of musical theater where songs and skits oftentimes interacted with audiences through acts of satire, sex, scandal, and humor.¹ **Drag** culture became a staple for homosexual and transvestite people, it became crucial for their empowerment and created spaces where communities were built. In the 1930s, Nazis brutally suppressed kabarett and those who performed in them were sent to concentration camps.

There were several bars located in Berlin that catered to queer and trans people, however, the Eldorado chain was among one of the most famous and well known. Other bars catering to transvestites were Hannemann, opened in 1892, and later the Mikado Bar, the Monocle Bar, Silhouette and the Bülow-Kasino.² The founder of Eldorado was **Ludwig Konjetschni**, a businessman who was looking for a new lease of life for his kabarett and coffee-shop venture in Kantstrasse. He purchased the *Grand Cafe Luitpold* on Motzstrasse and opened the brand-new Eldorado early in 1931.³

Eldorado is a chain of three kabarett located in Germany. The original was located in Kreuzberg, which was one of the most important entertainment, living, and working districts of gay and lesbian Berliners.⁴ The name became famous as Eldorado was the only place that was public about what went on inside, and about its association with homosexual and transvestite people.⁵

Eldorado 1 opened in 1919. It was located on *Alte Jakobstrasse 60* in the Kreuzberg district of the city and was the only Eldorado not owned by Konjetschni. Wyandham Lewis, a Vorticist painter and author visited the kabarett. He wrote about Eldorado in his 1931 pro-Nazi book and described it as a sink of iniquity.⁴ Pro-Nazi writers would frequent these kabarett and write about the atrocities that went on inside.

¹ Video, Synopsis and History

² A Gender Variance Who's Who

³ Eldorado. Cabaret Berlin

⁴ Prickett, David James

⁵ The 1920s Berlin Project

Konjetschni opened Eldorado 2 on 22 March 1922 on *Kant-Strasse 24* in Charlottenburg. He advertised it in “gay and lesbian publications as “Treffpunkt der Internationalen Mondänen Welt” (Meeting Place for The International World).⁴ US novelist Robert McAlmon described [the drag culture] he saw at the bar. He wrote, one elderly variant loved to arrive each time as a different type of woman: elegant, or as a washerwoman, or a street vendor, or as a modest mother of a family. He was very comical, and his presence always made for hilarity.⁴

Eldorado 3 was opened in 1926 by Konjetschni. It was formerly known as the Grand Cafe Luitpold, Located on *Lutherstrasse 30* in the main entertainment district in Schöneberg. The location of this bar was [opposite the famous Scala Variety Theatre], a promising place that was often featured in guidebooks and attracted celebrities.⁴ This bar stood out from the rest because it featured transvestite taxi dancers, where you could buy a chip in exchange for a dance. The venue was easily distinguished by a large banner that depicted face cut-outs of gender variant people in drag. It created a welcoming atmosphere with a displayed slogan that read, “HIER ISTS RICHTIG! (Here It Is Right),” and attracted many visitors and performers. It’s tremendous success was due to its location, entertainment, ability to attract celebrities, and openly queer atmosphere.

In 1932 chief of police **Kurt Melcher** implemented strict *Catholic policies* where all nightclubs with homosexual nature were subject to close at 10pm. As a result, many bars went private to surpass the law. Within two months of the Nazis’ coming into power in January 1933, with Adolf Hitler as the leader of the Nazi Party, all except for 15 of the best-known gay bars remained opened. Under enormous pressure and fearing for his family and livelihood, Ludwig Konjetschni closed the Eldorado and handed the premises over to the local *Sturmabteilung* (SA) [in 1933], many of whom had worked for him.⁶ He joined the Nazi party after and the SA turned Eldorado into their new headquarters where swastikas and election posters that read “Vote for Hitler- List 1” covered the windows.⁷

Although Nazis were sent out to persecute homosexuals, some were frequent visitors of Eldorado and other gay bars, while others worked in them. **Ernst Röhm**, commander of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) was seen at Eldorado having a conversation with a hostess while he was

⁶ March 5, 1933: The Infamous

⁷ GHDI Image

visiting with journalist Denis Safton. Safton commented about how no female hooker would talk like that to a previous customer in front of a stranger. Röhm snapped saying that the waitress was not his client but one of his *SA men*.⁴ In June 1934, the SA was *purged of homosexual Nazis* and those suspected to be. On June 30th, ex-Eldorado customer and SA commander was executed by his own Nazi Party.⁴ In the fall of 1935, Nazis put into effect anti-homosexual law Paragraph 175, forcing homosexual men, lesbians, and transvestites into concentration camps where they were identified using a pink triangle.⁶

Eldorado left behind both a famous and infamous legacy. It was famous for being open about its homosexual nature and infamous after Nazis raided it and took it over as their headquarters. Today the building is occupied by the Speisekammer Bio Supermarket. Original photographs from Eldorado are displayed in the foyer to commemorate its historical significance. In 1996, a new venue at Motzstraße 20 opened under the name Eldorado Music Bar and is currently operational.² Drag performers perform at the bar and a musical has been created to commemorate the legacy of Eldorado.



Grand Cafe Luitpold opened in 1888

Functioning cafe before Eldorado was opened in 1931

<http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Grand-Cafe-Luitpold-1913.jpeg>



Eldorado on *Lutherstrasse 30* in 1931-33

http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-1983-0121-500_Berlin_Bar_Eldorado1.jpg



Eldorado on *Lutherstrasse 30* after it was raided by Nazis in 1933

<http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Eldorado-nazi.jpeg>



Eldorado Speisekammer Bio Supermarket today.

http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/IMG_9003.jpg



Eldorado Music Bar at Motzstraße 20 opened 1996-present

http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/IMG_9001.jpg

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order

Prickett, David James. "Locating El Dorado: Berlin's GBLT Topography, Revisited." *Oral History Review*. December 20, 2005. Accessed March 07, 2019.

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/191356/summary>.

David James Prickett wrote an article on the history of Queer Berlin before, during, and after Nazis rose to power. His article offers experiences of queer and transgender people in Berlin during the 20th century. His journal helps readers analyze how the atmosphere changed in Berlin over time and how the Eldorado changed on the services it offered.

The 1920s Berlin Project. Accessed March 07, 2019.

<https://1920sberlinproject.wordpress.com/category/eldorado/>.

The *Berlin Project* is a website dedicated to the long-lasting legacy of Eldorado. A musical was created to commemorate the famous performers and the nightlife of queer Berlin. The creation of this project is significant in that it allows people today to have a close personal experience that queer and trans Berliners had in the 1930s. This website provides information on the remaining Eldorados today. One is a supermarket and the other is a bar where drag performers perform.

"A Gender Variance Who's Who." Christina Jwar (1901 - 1986) Nurse. Accessed March 07, 2019. <https://zagria.blogspot.com/>.

This website is devoted to transgender history. It is important in understanding what happened to transgender people in the 1930s. This website highlights the stories of famous transvestites and drag performers who were well known in the Eldorado bars. Although my research was not focused on the performers, it is crucial to know who was performing in these bars, as they were the same people who were being sent to the concentration camps to be killed. This website helped my research in that it provided clear information on the different types of Eldorados that were located in Berlin and what took their place before the bar existed and after it was shut down by Nazis. This website also provided information on Nazis who were homosexual or expected to be, and about what happened to them after they were identified as gay.

This website displays the history of transgender and queer people throughout history. It devotes a section to the history of queer and transgender people in Berlin in the 1930s. Empowering their gender identities and expressions through the form of leisure activities

such as drag performances and queer nightlife, as well as their oppression as the Nazis developed laws to control their identities, which eventually led to mass incarceration and internment in the concentration camps. The website gathers information from about 19 outside sources. Below I have listed some of the most relevant ones for my research:

Christopher Isherwood. *Goodbye to Berlin*. London: Hogarth Press, 1939.

This book contains a chapter titled "A Berlin Diary," pages 287-317. It puts into perspective the stories of queer and transgender Berliners as well as Nazis and their experiences with living authentically in the nightclubs, up to their experienced oppression, mass incarceration, and experiences in concentration camps.

Mel Gordon. *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin*. Federal House, 2006: 118-129, 289-291.

This book contains photographs of queer leisure time, and expression through nudity and drag performance. Pages 208-215 contain information on the oppression of queer and transgender people, page 211 contains a picture of Eldorado after it was taken by Nazi soldiers. It also contains information on the persecution of gay Nazis after the nightclubs are closed.

Wyndham Lewis. "The Berlin Eldorado". *Hitler*. Gordon Press, 1931.

This book contains a section called, "The Berlin, Eldorado," pages 21-30. It talks about the history of Eldorado and Hitler's interaction with homosexual and transgender people in Berlin during the 1930's. It draws on his ideologies and opinions of viewing queer as being inferior and a greater problem in Germany.

"Eldorado." Cabaret Berlin. Accessed March 07, 2019. <http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/?p=11>.

This article addresses the complicated history of Eldorado and of Ludwig Konjetschni, the founder of Eldorado. It entails information on his motives to open Eldorado and other queer bars. It also explains how he devoted his life to the Nazi Party after queer bars were shut down in hopes that he would escape danger. This website also contained the pictures of Eldorado before, during, and after the Nazis took it as their headquarters.

"March 5, 1933: The Infamous Gay Nightclub the Eldorado Cafe In Berlin Closes As Nazi LGBT Persecution Begins." Back2Stonewall. January 23, 2019. Accessed March 07, 2019. <http://www.back2stonewall.com/2017/03/march-5-1933-eldorado-cafe-berlin-closes-nazi-lgbt-persecution-begins.html>.

This article is important in that it provides information on what happened to Eldorado and other queer bars in Berlin after the Nazis came to power. It provides a timeline of the different regulations and laws that were created to suppress homosexuals and cross-dressers in Berlin, which ultimately led to the mass arrests of LGBT people in concentration camps.

"Video, Synopsis and History." '33 (a Kabarett). Accessed March 07, 2019.

<https://www.33kabarett.com/video-synopsis-and-history.html>.

This website provides a brief history of Eldorado and of Kabarett in Berlin Germany. It highlights its significance in providing a platform for queer and transgender people, as well as drag performers to express themselves. It also talks about the musical company that performs on Eldorado in Berlin today. Their mission is to continue the legacy of Eldorado and teach its history.