

# Apocryphal Queers and Gay Orthodoxy

Sébastien Tremblay

Freie Universität Berlin

In this piece I am linking Dirk Moses' German Catechism to the history of social movements in the FRG, underlining German gay liberation's own antisemitic past. I especially identify ways in which the weaponization of the Catechism by cisgendered white gay men enabled them to avoid, silence, and dismiss reflection about race and gender. Moses' framework allows a new analysis of contemporary intersectional politics, but my intervention goes one step further. I am inviting queer activists to revisit their own history and reflect on the genealogy of queer liberation. Doing so, I pinpoint ways in which an appropriation of the Catechism has hindered queer German scholarship.

Dirk Moses' intervention in *Geschichte der Gegenwart* has unleashed a wave of reactions. For those based outside of Germany, even specialists working on German history, the anger and vitriol of some of the responses may have been surprising. For those of us working and based in Germany, however, this was not the case. It is also not astonishing that this criticism came from outside of continental academic circles and that what Moses denounces as a German Catechism has been framed as a misunderstanding of the nuances of postwar German history. As a non-German born specialist trained in Germany, researching the memory of National Socialism from a global perspective, I am not new to these debates. What Moses calls a 'Catechism' challenges the idea that postwar German memory culture, fraught and complex, is by and large a story of success. This has broad significance, precisely because it calls into question a strong sense of pride and accomplishment around indeed what was a remarkable feat, that of coming to terms with an exceedingly violent past, a process that is of course, never truly complete. In my short missive here, I wish to question that success story by way of a brief look at the integration of queer history into German memory culture, and how tensions especially around race but also gender—within the queer community itself—suggest there is still much more work to be done.

Outside or inside of academia, many parts of the German Left rebuff global and transnational perspectives. In a city such as Berlin, this manifests in different forms, from rolling eyes in conferences to the paternalistic dismissal of international scholarship, especially around feminist, queer, and postcolonial theory. I do not agree completely with Moses that this German Catechism is everywhere. Yet it is multi-faceted, and takes many shapes. It is a new kind of commons where the ideas of nationalists and anti-nationalists sometimes mix and meet, from the AfD to the racist bubble of the so-called anti-deutsche "left," a strand of leftist politics that sees antisemitism taking root among progressives in the land of the Shoah, but also ends up reproducing islamophobic talking points found on the right end of the political spectrum.

I want to look at the ways in which this German Catechism is used by social movements in Germany, how victims of the priests themselves have become the inquisitors. As a queer scholar working on queer transatlantic memories of National Socialism, I am especially interested in how cisgendered white gay men like me, men whose gender identity matches their sex at birth, weaponized the Catechism and preached its Gospel to avoid self-reflection on racism.

The homosexual road toward the mainstream was a bumpy one to say the least. From the (re)discovery of the National Socialist persecutions of homosexualities to the decades-long fight for the deletion of the

paragraph of the penal code criminalizing non-heteronormative sexualities between men (§175), gay activists have suffered, were ostracized, and faced dire consequences for speaking out. This (still unfinished) fight was correctly framed as a struggle for human rights. In order to claim these rights, gay men linked their struggle to a past of injury, of victimization. This is not an instrumentalization of the horrors of National Socialism per se. Gay men in the 1970s were well aware that the version of §175 reformed by the National Socialists was only denazified at the end of the 1960s. Although Richard von Weizsäcker famously included gays in the list of victims of the Nazi regime in 1985, formal apologies and restitution came much later, in 2002, the product of tireless work on the part of queer activists. Despite these great strides, however, some gay activists used the long history of repression and resistance as a shield to protect them from engaging with real and ongoing tensions within the community around lesbian feminism, queer theory and anti-racist criticism of queer white supremacy.

In the early years of the postwar German homosexual liberation movement, many activists relativized the Holocaust itself. Debunked during the professionalization of gay and lesbian history in the 1980s, the myth of a hidden ‘Homocaust’ remained pervasive in the community. A mixture of antisemitic resentment toward Jewish victims of the Holocaust for having ‘stolen’ the spotlight on victimhood and a desire for recognition of queer suffering, at one point advocates even suggested that more homosexuals had been murdered than Jewish victims and that being a gay non-Jewish man in a concentration camp was a worse sentence than being a Jewish deportee. The stories of Jewish gay victims rarely came to light in this narrative. While it is true that many former adherents have since denounced this period of gay memory activism, German homosexual liberation and the manufacturing of a gay collective identity were anchored in antisemitic tropes and resentment.

Discussions about antisemitism and relativizing the Holocaust resurfaced again during debates surrounding the creation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Activists at the time, some Jewish and some not, denounced the casting into stone of only one narrative of the horrors of National Socialism while pointing out the singularity of the murder of the European Jewry. Opponents took to the pages of the German feuilleton to express outrage at the idea of commemorating the Holocaust simultaneously with other atrocities committed by the National Socialists. At the time, gay activists expressed solidarity with survivor communities, especially with Romani victims. This changed in 2008. This spirit of solidarity with other victims quickly dissipated as plans gelled for a monument to gay victims across the street in the neighbouring Tiergarten. Mainly at the commemoration and inclusion of lesbian oppression, by anchoring their argument in legal definitions over a rich historiography that showed women experienced persecution too, albeit in different forms. Invited to share the bread and wine of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), gay activists preached the German Catechism to secure the recognition of gay memories of victimization at the expense of others. In the end, feminists were able to and of the monument to reflect a more diverse set of victims of historical and contemporary homophobia, but this was no easy feat. And while the monument is an important part of the German memory field today, the text on its memorial plaque betrays other tensions and blindspots within the queer community especially around race, as it hints that homophobia is not home grown in Germany, but something that comes from away. Indeed, the inscription underlines how: “because of its history, Germany has a special responsibility to actively oppose the violation of gay men’s and lesbians’ human rights. In many parts of the world people continue to be persecuted for their sexuality, homosexual love remains illegal and a kiss can be dangerous.” This focus on liberal queer inclusion as a test of democracy is similar to some North American homonationalist narratives, where Germany is even praised as an example of queer politics for its connection to a redeemed violent past of persecutions.

The queer German Catechism has also been used to silence anti-racist intersectional queer scholarship. Together with their longstanding position on Palestine and feminist interventions in gender theory, which itself has caused controversy in German academic circles, philosopher and activist Judith Butler has borne the brunt of animus within mainstream gay circles. When Butler turned down a Civil Courage Award in Berlin in 2010 citing racism within the queer community, they became persona non grata for a large part of the German Left. Indeed, in declining this prize bestowed yearly by Germany's biggest Pride Event, Shortly thereafter, Butler and any scholar associated with them became the focus of intense political campaigns inside and outside of German academia. It became easy for gay chauvinists to reject critical queer scholarship by offering Butler up as a pagan hierophant to the Catechism. From the pages of the anti-deutsch magazine *Jungle World* to a whole series of books printed by the publisher Querverlag, the term queer itself was turned into an antisemitic epithet. Key concepts in the international literature around Homonationalism and Pink Washing became taboo inside and outside of German academia. Jasbir Puar and others joined the ranks of heretics and pagans for their work on post-colonial queer studies and Islamophobia. This has hindered queer and intersectional methodological investigations of Germany's gay, lesbian, and trans histories, to say nothing of shifting attention away from tangible, lived forms of antisemitism and Islamophobia that countless Jews and Muslims face in today's Germany. In other words, a repetition of and a national focus on the Gospel have blurred the line between denouncing antisemitic practices in the writing of history and the rhetorical use of essentialist tropes to discredit international scholarship.

Weaponizing the German Catechism, gay priests have not only managed to demonize queer and feminist theory, but they also seek to frame anti-racist and postcolonial scholarship as an attack on the *vivre ensemble*. Presenting queer and anti-racist critique as an antisemitic import has allowed cis gay white men in Germany to dismiss these criticisms as irrelevant and sinful. Beyond a critique of gay white supremacy, it also presents studies on intersectionality as some sort of rear guard attack on an anterior period of togetherness beyond categories and identities. Not only did contestation and conflict always exist in the queer community, but the creation of the community itself was based on a perspective of history and memory that wouldn't survive the inquisition nowadays. In other words, weaponizing the German Catechism has allowed cis white gay voices to ignore historic and ongoing tensions within Germany's queer communities. Instead, they claim to protect a memory and a contemporary politics of queer struggle that is universal, but which in actuality is cis, white, and male.

Displacing the blame onto the oppressed by using memory and national virtue is usually something seen on the right end of the spectrum. When members of the antideutscher left meet in a pub in the Berlin borough of Neukölln to discuss a so-called 'Muslim problem,' when international academic discussions on homonationalism are booed, and when Jewish queer voices are silenced by non-Jewish pundits, it is time to reshape our understanding of both antisemitism and racism in the queer community and in queer academia, beyond a sense of unbridled accomplishment and pride. Dirk Moses' intervention is important for our understanding of queer activism in Germany. Framing German memory as a sort of civic religion is provocative yet it pushes us to understand the complex ways in which social movements sometimes use its gospel to avoid reflection on race.

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