2.2 UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTIONS OF POWER, RIGHTS, AND RESOURCES

This book proceeds from a basic understanding that power, resources, and rights are distributed unequally and unjustly across the planet and within different societies. This inequality does not befall individuals haphazardly but follows certain observable lines of distinction that are drawn between different groups of people. Robin DiAngelo describes in a nutshell how power works to discriminate between people:

All major social groups are organized into binary (either/or) identities (i.e., male/female, black/white, straight/gay, rich/poor). [...] these identities depend upon one another because each identity is defined by its opposite (or *other*) [...]. Not only are these identities constructed as opposites, but they are also ranked into a hierarchy of *value* [...]. The identity group that is positioned as more valuable – the dominant group – will have more access to the resources of society. The group positioned as less valuable – the minoritized group – will receive less access to the resources of the society. (46ff)

Drawing these lines of difference serves the twofold purpose of stipulating who does and who does not get access to rights and resources and of rationalizing this unequal distribution by constructing the subordinated group as inferior, less deserving, 'naturally' endowed with fewer rights and resources.

It is important to remember that this unequal system of resource distribution does not follow 'natural' differences between people, but that it *constructs* the very differences it then uses to justify its unequal allocation of resources and rights. Grada Kilomba calls attention to this process with regard to how people are differentiated on the basis of a socially constructed category called 'race:' "One only becomes 'different' because one 'differs' from a group who has the power to define itself as the norm – the *white* norm [...]. In this sense, one is not 'different,' one becomes 'different' through the process of discrimination" (42).[5]

Because these lines of difference are constructed based on who has the power to set themselves up as the norm and the rightful recipients of rights and re-

---

5 Whenever I use the terms 'race' or 'racial' throughout this book, I always refer to historically contingent processes of racialization, which position people differently within the respective social matrix, *not* to any assumed biological differences between people. While this usage is (fairly) common in the U.S., it does not translate to the German context where the term 'Rasse' has a different history and has not been reclaimed for projects of empowerment and resistance.

sources, they also come into being, change over time and, in some cases, eventually disappear in accordance with shifting regimes of power. In most cases, these shifts happen gradually, with the boundaries around dominant groups expanding and contracting slowly and incrementally in response to shifting balances of power. However, it is in those instances when power shifts rather suddenly and dramatically that the historically contingent and malleable character of these lines of difference can be most clearly observed. In "The West and the Rest," for example, Stuart Hall illustrates how old lines disappeared and a new line was drawn in the context of the European colonization of the Americas, where the (enormous) differences between different peoples drastically decreased in importance because the colonizers insisted on "describing them *all* as 'Indians,' lumping all distinctions together and suppressing differences in one, inaccurate stereotype" (304). Under the new regime of power, it became almost inconsequential whether one belonged to the Quechua, the Caribs, or the Wampanoag. What mattered was whether one was marked for land and resource theft, labor exploitation, forced migration, cultural annihilation, and genocide by being subsumed under the colonial category of 'the Indian' or whether one belonged to the group of European settlers, who entitled themselves to the resources thus stolen and extracted and who, over time, came to see themselves as white and thus 'more human' than the 'Indians' they exploited.[6]

As the example of colonization clearly shows, rights and resources are not simply distributed unequally between people belonging to different groups; they are in many cases actively *withheld* or *taken* from one group and given to the other. I refer to the act of taking and/or withholding as 'oppression,' which DiAngelo defines as "hold[ing] down – to press – and deny[ing] a social group full access to resources in a given society. Oppression describes a set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, cultural stories, and explanations that function to systematically hold down one social group to the benefit of another social group" (44).

Valerie Batts spells out the systemic nature of oppression by identifying four levels at which oppression works: the institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and personal level. She defines the personal level as "prejudice or bias [... which] includes cognitive or affective misinformation or both" (51). Oppression works

---

6   Even though this is a general introduction to how oppression and privilege work to create unequal distributions of power, rights, and resources in general and across many different lines of separation, I draw most of my examples from the two systems of oppression most relevant to the present book, racism and cis_hetero_sexism.

within each of us by influencing how we think and feel, both consciously and subconsciously, about ourselves, other people, and the world we share.

The interpersonal level refers to "[b]ehaviors based on conscious or unconscious biased assumptions about self and other" (51). In all of our daily interactions, all of us who are privileged in some way act out oppression in myriad ways, large and small, ranging from how we look (or do not look) at other people to verbally and physically assaulting them.

On the cultural level, the dominant group has the "ability to define [its own] cultural preferences as 'right and beautiful'" (52). Cultural oppression works through 'common-sense' discourses, stereotypical stories, images, associations, and connotations that are reproduced in all the arenas of meaning-making: in the media, in advertisements, in art, in school books, and so on. Cultural oppression is used to define who counts as normatively human and to justify oppressive regimes so that they seem normal and unremarkable to those who benefit from them.

Institutional oppression is "the political, economic, educational, social, and historical power and access to institutionalize prejudices" (52). Patricia Hill Collins identifies an "emphasis on large-scale, interlocking social institutions" such as, within the U.S. context, the "legal system, labor markets, schools, the housing industry, banking, insurance, the news media, and other social institutions" as "[o]ne characteristic feature of this domain," which she calls the "structural domain of power" (*Black Feminist Thought* 277). Institutional oppression is embedded within the very institutions that structure our lives and it can be explicit and overt but often proceeds covertly through rules, procedures, and informal practices that appear neutral, even benevolent, while working to systematically disadvantage specific groups of people.

Beverly Daniel Tatum points out how important it is to keep in mind that oppression works on all four of those levels: Oppression "is not only a personal ideology based on [...] prejudice, but a *system* involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (7). Because oppression is systemic, it does not work 'in reverse,' i.e. it only works to target those further down in social hierarchies and cannot be leveled at those in power. As DiAngelo writes, "Oppression is different from prejudice and discrimination in that prejudice and discrimination describe dynamics that occur on the individual level and in which anyone can (and does) participate [..., but marginalized people] are not in the position to impose their prejudices on the rest of society" (45). If, for example, a queer person disparagingly calls a straight person 'a stiff,' this might be an act of prejudice, but LGBTIQ people do not have the "systematic cultural and institutional support" (Tatum 10) to institu-

tionalize their prejudice against straight people. The straight person in question will not suddenly lose the legal benefits and protections reserved for their particular way of relating sexually and romantically to other people, nor will the overwhelming cultural and social support for straight relationships suddenly be withdrawn simply because that person was insulted on the interpersonal level by a queer person. This insult is therefore not an instance of oppression in the sense defined here.

It is also important to emphasize that apart from being systemic and thus only working from top to bottom, never in the opposite direction, oppression exploits, marginalizes, excludes, and even kills people all "to the benefit of another social group," (DiAngelo 44, see above) either by shoring up the rights and resources the dominant group already possess or by creating and stealing new rights and resources they can use for their benefit. Through holding some people down, oppression lifts other people up. I refer to the resources and rights that some people have access to at the expense of others as 'privilege.' In every-day usage, to be privileged sometimes means to be fantastically rich, to belong to 'the 1 %.' However, in critical work on oppression, the word 'privilege' is used in a different sense. Privileges are "rights, benefits, and resources that are purported to be shared by all but are only consistently available to the dominant group. The fact that an assumed right is not granted to everyone turns it into a privilege – an unearned advantage" (DiAngelo 52).

Being privileged thus means having access to something that was taken from or is withheld from specific groups of people; i.e. something becomes a privilege as soon as it is not equally available to all people regardless of their social position. Most privileges feel unremarkable and ordinary to the people who have them because they never notice that not everybody is listened to as attentively as they are, does not have the same access to quality housing and jobs, or the same freedom to travel wherever they want.

Peggy McIntosh was the first scholar to describe the advantages that dominant groups (in her example: men and white people) receive as "privilege." She writes, "I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage" (147). In dominant discourses, oppression is, indeed, often presented as something that (inexplicably) disadvantages some groups of people while the advantages that are bestowed upon some as a result of taking rights and resources away or withholding them from others are carefully hidden from view. Without also paying attention to how oppression benefits some groups of people, who thus acquire a vested interest in upholding and even

extending oppression, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to understand why oppression persists so tenaciously.

As this short discussion of privilege already suggests, people who belong to dominant groups often have immense difficulties in grasping the workings of oppression or even acknowledging that oppression actually exists. As Sarah Lucia Hoagland puts it, "as we are materially privileged in particular ways, our epistemic abilities are suspect [...]. Our abilities of understanding and analysis have been undermined or compromised in key ways as a result of our material privileging" (112). In his book, *The Racial Contract*, Charles M. Mills describes the ways in which materially privileged people, in his case specifically white people, often prove incapable and/or unwilling to understand their own privilege and the oppression of others as

an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made [...]. To a significant extent, then, white signatories [of the Racial Contract] will live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland. (18)

Already in 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois made the reverse observation that oppressed people, in his case specifically Black people, "are gifted with second-sight in this American world [...]. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" ("Souls" 1730). Almost a hundred years later, Tatum concurs: "The truth is that the dominants do not really know what the experience of the subordinates is. In contrast, the subordinates are very well informed about the dominants" (24). Based on a conversation with María Lugones, Hoagland calls the way in which materially deprivileged people often have a much clearer understanding of how oppression both affects them and benefits others a form of "epistemic privilege" (112). It is important for people who are materially privileged in some respects to remember that our material privilege means that we do not have any first-hand knowledge of how it feels to be oppressed in this specific respect. Our privilege furthermore endows us with a vested interest in maintaining our ignorance because truly understanding how our privilege is bound up with other people's oppression is deeply painful, unsettling, and possibly threatening to the very system from which we benefit.

2.2.1 Racism in the U.S.

In this subchapter, I will elaborate my understanding of racism as one of the two systems of oppression that this book focuses on. The history of racism that is relevant for both the American and the European context has its roots in the European colonization project, which began in the 15th century. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant state in their seminal work, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, "It was only when European explorers reached the Western Hemisphere, [...] that the distinctions and categorizations fundamental to a racialized social structure, and to a discourse of race, began to appear" (61). What was distinctive about European colonialism was "that it came to encompass the entire world. Launched from Europe in the 15th century, it reached its zenith in the 19th century, by which time [almost] all nations and territories had been assigned a place in 'the modern world system'" (Omi and Winant 37). Because of the global reach of European colonialism, the system of racist oppression that it put into place continues to wield enormous influence the world over, or as Mills puts it, "we live in a world which has been *foundationally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global white supremacy*" (20).

When Europeans began their conquests in the 15th century, they did not yet divide the people of the world into different races and, therefore, did also not think of themselves as members of a white race superior to all other races. Steve Garner writes, "References to 'race' prior to the eighteenth century were much more ambiguous than we might expect [...]. The evidence suggests that ideas about explaining difference frequently focused on religion, climate and labour status, without giving the concept of 'race' the detailed content that it was to receive later" (6). Nevertheless, "the seizure of territories and goods, the introduction of slavery through the *encomienda* and other forms of coerced native labor, and then through the organization of the African slave trade – not to mention the practice of outright extermination – all presupposed a worldview which distinguished Europeans, as children of God, full-fledged human beings, etc., from 'Others'" (Omi and Winant 62). Even before the concept of race was fully developed, Europeans felt justified in stealing whatever they could from the lands they were able to reach and in exploiting and killing the people they encountered. While they did not divide people according to race per se, they nevertheless perceived the people they colonized as different from themselves – based on religion, culture, and language among other things – and these perceived differences were already enough to justify exploitation, theft, and murder.

As David Theo Goldberg writes, while "the concept of race crept into European languages in the fifteenth century, [...] its scientific and popular usage peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" ("Social Formation" 295). Scientific racism came about as part and parcel of the Enlightenment project of ordering and understanding the world according to scientific principles. Nicolas Bancel et al. describe the rise of scientific racism:

Significant developments occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century, beginning with the formalization of racial taxonomies resulting from naturalist models that allowed for the differentiation between human groups according to somatic characteristics. The work of Buffon and Linnaeus, although incomplete, nevertheless proved foundational in this regard. New technological innovations during this period made it possible to refine the representation of racialized bodies, including a range of pre-anthropometric techniques that made the systematic and scientific classification of races possible. These techniques were soon accompanied by various 'indicators,' notably Camper's facial angles or Blumenbach's 'cranial volumetrics'; while enabling the strict separation of human groups, these techniques radically altered the way in which the human body was studied by underscoring the imperative of carefully recording physical specificities so as to better demarcate the boundaries between races. (2)

As this description shows, race theory was not an aberration from Enlightenment thought but an integral part of it, developed by the preeminent thinkers of the period and deeply entwined with state-of-the-art technological and scientific advances. "[R]acism is [...] politically inseparable from the project of modernity, due to the imbedded process of *categorization* undertaken in the Enlightenment" (Garner 91). In the arena of politics, this means specifically that democracy, while theoretically conceived as 'universal,' was originally not meant to include anybody but white, propertied men: "As the beginnings of what we recognize as modern states with varying degrees of democratic participation began to emerge across the West, the ideas incorporating 'the people' as citizens with rights excluded the poorer, the female and enslaved members of those societies, and cast the colonial subject as the opposite of the rights-bearing citizen" (Garner 92).

With regard to European philosophy, Omi and Winant assert that "most of the great philosophers of Europe, such as Hegel, Kant, Hume, and Locke, had issued virulently racist opinions" (63). These kinds of observations lead Mills to conclude that "[f]rom the inception, then, race is in no way an 'afterthought,' a 'deviation' from ostensibly raceless Western ideals, but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals" (14). It follows from both racism's deep roots in centuries of European colonialism and from its imbrication in the very Enlighten-

ment ideals that continue to inform the self-perception of white people in Europe and its settler-colonies – freedom, democracy, progress, faith in scientific methods – that definitions of racism that see "the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained" (Crenshaw et al. xiv) are insufficient.

Scientific racism, which conceived of race "as a *biological* concept, a matter of species" (Omi and Winant 63), legitimized a period of "explicit white racism" (Crenshaw et al. xv). During this "period of de jure white supremacy, the Racial Contract was explicit, the characteristic instantiations – the expropriation contract, the slave contract, the colonial contract – making it clear that whites were the privileged race and the egalitarian social contract applied only to them" (Mills 73). In the North American context, "[m]any laws parceled out differential treatment based on racial categories: blacks were not permitted to travel without permits, to own property, to assemble publicly, or to own weapons – nor were they to be educated [...]. '[B]lack' racial identity marked who was subject to enslavement, whereas 'white' racial identity marked who was 'free' or, at minimum, not a slave" (C. Harris 278). Similarly explicit laws also mandated the racially motivated differential treatment of Native Americans and non-white immigrants.

While the face of racism in the U.S. changed through the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow, the period of explicit, de jure racism lasted until the Civil Rights Movement. Omi and Winant see the Civil Rights Movement as the catalyst for a "great transformation:"

Beginning in the 1950s and more intensively in the 1960s, racially based social movements initiated a 'great transformation' of the American political universe, creating new organizations, new collective identities, and new political norms; challenging past racial practices and stereotypes; and ushering in a wave of democratizing social reform. The ability of racially based movements to rearticulate traditional political and cultural themes – first among blacks, and later among Latinos, Asian Americans, and Indians – permitted the entry of millions of racial minority group members into the political process [...]. Political mobilization along racial lines resulted in the enactment of reforms which dramatically restructured the racial order, reorganized state institutions, and launched whole new realms of state activity. (138)

While Omi and Winant are very positive, even celebratory, in their evaluation of the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement, others sound a much more cautious note and focus more on the potential that was not realized in the historic gains of the Civil Rights Movement and on the continued persistence of white

supremacy under a new guise. In the clash between Black nationalism and inte-
grationism, "black nationalism arguably had overtaken integrationism as the
dominant ideology of racial liberation among African-Americans, while virtually
all liberal and progressive whites embraced a theory of integration as the ulti-
mate definition of racial justice" (Peller 127f). The historic victory of integra-
tionism led to a fervent commitment "to the centralized policy of integration, but
little attention was paid to the integrity and health of black neighborhoods and
institutions. Integration of dominant institutions, rather than reparations from
one community to another, became the paradigm for racial enlightenment"
(Peller 150). This policy had disastrous consequences for Black institutions and
communities, while proclaiming a white-dominated multiculturalism as the ideal
that all should aspire to.

While Omi and Winant see the formation of racially based social justice
movements as the central legacy of the Civil Rights Era, many other scholars
have pointed to the submergence of overt, de jure white supremacy as the defin-
ing feature of the post-Civil Rights period. Mills writes, "the Racial Contract *has
written itself out of formal existence.* The scope of the terms in the social con-
tract has been formally extended to apply to everyone, so that 'persons' is no
longer coextensive with 'whites.' What characterizes *this* period (which is, of
course, the present) is tension between continuing de facto white privilege and
this *formal* extension of rights" (73).

There is now widespread agreement that "there is no biological basis for dis-
tinguishing among human groups along the lines of race" (Omi and Winant 55).
Explicit laws targeting U.S. citizens on the basis of race have been scrapped
from the books. We live in a period of time where "Western states now aim to be
'raceless', that is, where 'race' plays no role in the allocation of social positions,
which, ideally, are all down to the capacities of the individual" (Garner 96). Just
as states claim to be raceless and neutral in this contemporary period, so do peo-
ple claim to be 'colorblind.'[7] Within this dominant discourse, people claim "not
to see colour, only people. Indeed, in this view of the social world, racism is cre-
ated only by people evoking it. It relegates 'race' and racism to the past and is
grounded in the assumption that the Civil Rights Act of 1965 definitively abol-

---

7   I am referencing this ableist term in quotation marks here because it is often used in
    discourses about white people who claim not to notice race. However, I generally try
    to avoid this terminology because it uses disability as metaphor and misappropriates
    the experiences of actual colorblind people to describe the willful ignorance of white
    people vis-à-vis the reality of racism.

ished inequalities, so that everyone since then has been operating on a level playing field" (Garner 183).

The problem is, however, that while the Civil Rights Movement managed to push back against overt and explicit expressions of white supremacy, "the virtual end of Jim Crow in the 1970s did not mean the 'end of racism' (D'Souza, 1995) or even the 'declining significance of race' (Wilson, 1978)" (Bonilla-Silva, "Structure" 1362). In their introduction to their reader, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. write, "What we find most amazing [...] in retrospect is how very little actual social change was imagined to be required by 'the civil rights revolution.' [...] the very same whites who administered explicit policies of segregation and racial domination kept their jobs as decision makers in employment offices of companies, admissions offices of schools, lending offices of banks, and so on" (xvi). Gary Peller concurs in the same volume, "Even more dramatic than the continuity of personnel (since the particular people in power eventually age, retire, and die), the same criteria that defined the 'standards' during the period of explicit racism continue to be used, as long as they cannot be linked 'directly' to racial factors" (132). While the "great transformation" of the Civil Rights Movement led to remarkably little actual redistribution of resources (in terms of wealth, cultural capital, and access to quality jobs, housing, education, etc.), the things that *did* change, namely the law, changed in such a way that only the smallest fraction of racist acts and practices could actually be challenged before the courts. With recourse to Alan David Freeman's article "Legitimizing Racial Discrimination through Antidiscrimination Law: A Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine," Crenshaw et al. summarize the situation as follows:

The construction of 'racism' from what Alan Freeman terms the 'perpetrator perspective' restrictively conceived racism as an intentional, albeit irrational, deviation by a conscious wrongdoer from otherwise neutral, rational, and just ways of distributing jobs, power, prestige, and wealth. The adoption of this perspective allowed a broad cultural mainstream both explicitly to acknowledge the fact of racism and, simultaneously, to insist on its irregular occurrence and limited significance. (xiv)

The transformation of the Civil Rights Era thus gave way to what Bonilla-Silva calls a "post-racial racialism" ("Structure" FN 12, 1371), which is characterized by "racial practices that [...] (1) are increasingly covert, (2) are embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) avoid direct racial terminology, and (4) are invisible to most Whites" (*Racism* 476).

I briefly want to draw attention to two prominent features of this post-racial racialism that have not been mentioned so far. One is a broad shift from "past racist forms defining and fueling expansionist colonial aims and pursuits to contemporary expressions in nationalist terms [...]. Racism is taken now to be expressed increasingly in terms of isolationist national self-image; of cultural differentiation tied to custom, tradition, and heritage; and of exclusionary immigration policies, anti-immigrant practices and criminality" (Goldberg, "Introduction" xiv). This shift can be observed in both the U.S. and in Europe. Garner states that "[h]owever racism is defined by Western states, it excludes consideration of citizenship laws that include genealogical criteria; immigration regimes that place obstacles in front of developing-world nationals [...] and/or apply different laws to people who have asylum-seeker or migrant statuses; and security regimes that use racial profiling" (96), i.e. dominant definitions of racism tend to exclude precisely those areas where the supposedly raceless state most actively racializes people. While the laws no longer explicitly target *citizens* on the basis of race (with the recent exception in several European countries of people who have dual citizenship), the state's explicit treatment of *non-citizens* is an entirely different matter.

The other shift that has happened in the supposedly raceless state is that "more and more men and women of color have been invited into the offices of White Supremacy to share in the destruction of other men and women of color who are vulnerable, disfranchised, and rapidly being eviscerated through the policies of a multi-racial white supremacy" (Falguni). By becoming multiracial through the inclusion of select People of Color, white supremacy attempts to hide its racialized workings. Jodi Melamed has called the current racial regime "neoliberal multiculturalism," which she sees as "creat[ing] new privileged subjects, racializing the beneficiaries of neoliberalism as worthy multicultural citizens and racializing the losers as unworthy and excludable on the basis of [perceived] monoculturalism, deviance, inflexibility, criminality, and other historico-cultural deficiencies" (xxi). Under conditions of post-raciality, white supremacy has become flexible enough that "a selected and vetted segment of the minority population participates fully in the political system, which legitimizes the order racially and otherwise" (Bonilla-Silva ,"Structure" 1368).

Collins issues an important caveat with regard to these attempts at periodizing different systems of racial oppression: "color-conscious and color-blind racial formations do not displace one another. As structural forms of power, one or the other racial formation may predominate, yet typically they coexist. Racial formations have distinctive configurations of racial projects for which interest groups advance various interpretations of racial inequality" ("Definitional Di-

lemmas" 4). While the decades since the Civil Rights Movement were predominantly characterized by post-racial racialism, this does not mean that overt forms of racism have entirely disappeared. In fact, with the election of Donald Trump and his explicit support for anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies as well as leading right-wing extremists such as Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, "white nationalism – now rebranded as the 'alt-right' – crept further into the mainstream than it had in decades" (Beirich and Buchanan). In 2017, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that "Within the white supremacist movement, neo-Nazi groups saw the greatest growth – soaring by 22 percent from 99 to 121. Anti-Muslim groups also rose for a third straight year. After tripling from 2015 to 2016, they grew by another 13 percent [...] in 2017. Anti-immigrant groups also leapt, from 14 to 22 in 2017" (Beirich and Buchanan). As these numbers show, overt racism is currently experiencing a worrisome resurgence.

This very brief historical overview of the roots and current formations of racism in the U.S. presents a dilemma: How is it possible to arrive at a satisfactory definition of a phenomenon called 'racism' when explicit recourse to the concept of 'race' has characterized some, but by no means all periods of its existence? Paul Gilroy formulates that what is needed is "a theory of racisms that does not depend on an essentialist theory of races themselves" (Gilroy 264). I would go even further than Gilroy and say that what is needed is a definition of racism that does not depend on any theory of races themselves at all, whether race is conceptualized in essentialist or social-constructionist terms. If racism can only be located in those instances where at least some sort of underlying "theory of races" can be detected, it becomes very difficult to argue, for example, that anti-Muslim policies are racist when these policies never explicitly conceive of Muslims as a 'race' and their proponents ardently state that they do not believe in the existence of human 'races.' Yet such policies are clearly racist, even though they might employ a post-racial vocabulary.

Many definitions of racism, however, depend on the existence of at least an implicit 'theory of races' for there to be racism. Goldberg, for example, whose theory of racism satisfies Gilroy's demand of not relying on "an essentialist theory of races themselves," still writes that "[r]acists are those who explicitly or implicitly ascribe racial characteristics of others that they take to differ from their own and those they take to be like them. These characteristics may be biological or social. The ascriptions do not merely propose racial differences; they assign racial preferences" ("Social Formation" 296). According to this definition, people who operate from within a post-racial paradigm of denying the existence and importance of human 'races' could never be classified as racist because they do not "propose racial difference" nor do they "assign racial pref-

erences." Omi and Winant even require a rather narrowly defined recourse to a particular 'theory of races' when they state that "[a] racial project can be defined as *racist* if and only if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race*" (71). Garner also suggests that all definitions of racism have to make reference to an ideology according to which "the human race is divisible into distinct 'races', each with specific natural characteristics" (21). The problem is, of course, that under current conditions of post-raciality, in most white, liberal circles, it has become almost taboo to subscribe to such an ideology while racism itself has by no means disappeared from these circles.

In order to get away from the conundrum of having to identify an ideological investment in a 'theory of races' on the part of either individual actors or institutions, it makes sense to switch from the perpetrator's perspective, which is not only enshrined in anti-discrimination law but also in many popular understandings of racism, to the victim's perspective, which Freeman describes as follows:

From the victim's perspective, racial discrimination describes those conditions of actual social existence as a member of a perpetual underclass. This perspective includes both the objective conditions of life (lack of jobs, lack of money, lack of housing) and the consciousness associated with those objective conditions (lack of choice and lack of human individuality in being forever perceived as a member of a group rather than as an individual). (29)

In line with this perspective, Bonilla-Silva has proposed a structural approach to racism that identifies as racist any "difference in life chances" (*Racism* 470) between differently racialized groups. Ruth Wilson Gilmore's oft-cited definition of racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (27) follows very similar lines. Put bluntly, racism assigns life chances unevenly so that certain groups (the victims of racism) are vulnerable to premature death and to exploitation while they are alive.

While Gilmore's definition neatly manages to omit any reference to race, the problem (for the purpose of defining racism) is that this makes her definition so broad as to encompass other systems of oppression such as ableism, classism, and cis_hetero_sexism as well. I would argue that what makes racism distinct from other systems of oppression is that it creates different groups of people by *racializing* them. This idea is not new; many scholars have, in fact, proposed a similar approach. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, for example, propose a theory of "differential racialization" that describes "the ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shift-

ing needs such as the labor market" (8). Omi and Winant have proposed a hugely influential theory of "racial formation" that "emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the 'micro-' and 'macro-social' levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics" (4).

However, as this last example shows, scholars usually define racialization as the process of sorting people into different *races*. In contrast, I define racialization as the process of sorting people into different groups (which do not necessarily need to be conceived of as 'races') based on a flexible, yet limited set of characteristics. Specifically, racialization sorts people into different groups on the basis of phenotype, religion, nationality, ancestry, citizenship status, cultural customs, first language(s), name, or any combination thereof. The resulting groups can be conceived of as racial groups, but they can just as well be conceived of as ethnic, national, cultural, religious, linguistic, etc. groups. It is necessary to broaden our definition of racism beyond the scope of race because throughout the centuries, racism has always learned to articulate itself in the vocabulary most palatable to the people in power in a specific time and place. I still refer to this process of sorting people into groups based on a specific set of arbitrary characteristics as 'racialization' because the theory of racism was formed in the context of scientific racism and the assignment of differential life chances based on the invented category of human races still serves as the most blatant, obvious, egregious, paradigmatic manifestation of racism. In a way, one could say that Native Americans who were dispossessed, worked to death, or outright killed *before* the invention of race and people who are read as Muslim and who are targeted for surveillance, exclusion, and murder today *after* the theory of race has been discredited are both treated *as if* they belonged to a denigrated racial group, even though the vocabulary of race was neither used in the early period of European colonialism nor is it used today in many contexts characterized by post-raciality.[8]

---

8   In his book, *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World*, Paul Spickard makes a similar argument. He writes that colonizers who used religion to justify the line of difference they drew between themselves and the colonized "were making something like a racial judgment" (14). Even though they did not use the vocabulary of race in these specific instances, they still racialized the people they conquered by treating them as if they belonged to an inferior race and blamed this treatment on differences in religious practice.

2.2.2 Whiteness in the U.S.

Whiteness has been studied since people who began to think of themselves as 'white' first used their power to take resources and rights away from people who were not deemed 'white.' As bell hooks reminds white people, "black folks have, from slavery on, shared in conversations with one another 'special' knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people. Deemed special because it was not a way of knowing that has been recorded fully in written material, its purpose was to help black folks cope and survive in a white supremacist society" (165). In the late 19th century, Black scholars such as Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. Du Bois began to publish the first scholarly accounts of whiteness (cf. *Southern Horrors* and *Black Reconstruction*). Even though Black people and People of Color continue to publish on whiteness, what is seen as the 'field' of critical whiteness studies is commonly traced back to the 1990s when "whiteness studies burst onto the academic scene with three important publications, written by white scholars [...]. McIntosh's (1992) essay on white privilege, David Roediger's (1991) *Wages of Whiteness*, and Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters* arguably represent the beginnings of a focus on whiteness and white experiences" (Leonardo, *Race* 91). Some of the prominence of white people in critical whiteness studies is certainly due to the fact that, before the 1990s, Black people and People of Color only studied whiteness "as a secondary if not tertiary concern" (Leonardo, *Race* 91). Nevertheless, beginning in the 1990s, "whiteness and white people [came] to the center in an unprecedented and unforeseen way" (Leonardo, *Race* 91).

Since the explicit purpose of critical whiteness studies is to study whiteness in order to dismantle white supremacy, the centrality of white people in the field creates an obvious problem. As Robyn Wiegman puts it, "what is so striking about the history of Whiteness Studies is precisely how its intentions to counter histories of white self-obsession were consolidated through what in hindsight can only be considered ever more intense forms of white self-obsession" (190). Can white people, who benefit from white supremacy and suffer from a severe limitation of epistemic capabilities when it comes to the study of racism, really contribute to the dismantling of white supremacy by studying ourselves and being further rewarded for our study in the currency of academic jobs and publications? Given that this present book is part and parcel of this very conundrum, I feel that I have to share at least some partial thoughts on this question. To me, there is something deeply suspicious about white people profiting off of, let alone making a living off of the fight against racism. Nevertheless, I have also enormously benefitted from the work of white people who taught me either in

person or through their writing how to work against racism as a white person. Without adequate remuneration, their work would not have been possible (nor would mine, for that matter). Whether their work and/or mine actually contributes something useful to the struggle against white supremacy, however, can only be judged by the people targeted by the system of oppression we are attempting to dismantle.

It is a central tenet of critical whiteness studies that whiteness does not refer to "skin color, physiology, or biology" (Bilge 412). As Mills puts it, "*Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations*" (127). More specifically, "*Whiteness* is a privileged position within society"[9] (Walgenbach, *Die weiße Frau* 43). In fact, the whole point of racism is to endow people designated as white with privileges forcefully taken from and denied to people who are not categorized as white. In order to remind readers that white people are the primary agents and beneficiaries of racism, I sometimes use the term 'white supremacy' interchangeably with 'racism.' DiAngelo defines "white supremacy" as "the over-arching and all-encompassing system of white domination and the assumed superiority that legitimizes it [...]. Instead of focusing on how racism hurts people of color, [white supremacy] focuses on how it elevates whites" (125). Among the privileges granted to people categorized as white are "far greater political influence, cultural hegemony, the psychic payoff that comes from knowing one is a member of the *Herrenvolk* (what W.E.B. Du Bois once called 'the wages of whiteness') – but the bottom line is material advantage" (Mills 33). In his article, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," George Lipsitz describes some of the many concrete material advantages white people in the U.S. received during the 20th century:

During the new Deal, both the Wagner Act and the Social Security Act excluded farm workers and domestics from coverage, effectively denying those disproportionately minority sectors of the work force protections and benefits routinely channeled to whites. The Federal Housing Act of 1934 brought home ownership within reach of millions of citizens by placing the credit of the federal government behind private lending to home buyers, but overtly racist categories in the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA's) 'confidential' city survey and appraisers' manuals channeled almost all of the loan money toward whites and away from communities of color. In the post-World War II era, trade unions negotiated contract provisions giving private medical insurance, pensions, and job security largely to the mostly white workers in unionized mass-production industries ra-

---

9   "*Whiteness* ist eine privilegierte Position im sozialen Raum."

ther than fighting for full employment, universal medical care, and old age pensions for all or for an end to discriminatory hiring and promotion practices by employers. (372)

Up until the 1960s, many of the material privileges defining what it means to be white in the U.S. were explicitly written into the law. In his two-volume work *The Invention of the White Race*, Theodore W. Allen details how colonial law in Virginia and Maryland gradually created a class of white people entitled to special rights and benefits that were systematically withheld from people who were not categorized as white, particularly from those who were instead categorized as Black. Mills is certainly right when he writes, "'White' people do not preexist but are brought into existence *as* 'whites' by the Racial Contract [...]. The white race is *invented*, and one becomes 'white by law'" (63). It makes sense that, in her seminal article "Whiteness as Property," Cheryl I. Harris defines the privilege granted by one's categorization as white as a form of property:

Many theorists have traditionally conceptualized property as including the exclusive rights of use, disposition, and possession, with possession embracing the absolute right to exclude. The right to exclude was the central principle, too, of whiteness as identity, for whiteness in large part has been characterized not by an inherent unifying characteristic but by the exclusion of others deemed to be 'not white.' The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others form the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded. The courts played an active role in enforcing this right to exclude – determining who was or was not white enough to enjoy the privileges accompanying whiteness. In that sense, the courts protected whiteness as they did any other form of property [...]. 'White' was defined and constructed in ways that increased its value by reinforcing its exclusivity. (282f)

Chronicling the exclusivity of whiteness has been a central concern of critical whiteness studies in the U.S. Studies such as Ian Haney-López's *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, David R. Roediger's *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*, and Karen Brodkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and what that Says about Race in America* all demonstrate that "white" in the U.S. originally "meant Anglo-Saxon and the color line explicitly excluded other European groups, including the Irish, the Jews, and all Southern and Eastern Europeans" (Haney-López, "Social Construction" 34).

As this well-documented history shows, whiteness does not primarily refer to a specific phenotype but to a position of systemic racial privilege. In fact, under

conditions of neoliberal multiculturalism, even a few select people who do not (under the specific regime of visual racialization in the relevant local context) 'look white' can partake in the spoils of white supremacy. As these studies show, however, the reverse was not always true: not all people who 'look white' according to our current regime of visual racialization have also always been categorized as white in the sense that they would have fully benefitted from white privilege. In fact, who 'looks white' has been and continues to be a contested question, further lending proof to the fact that whiteness is "a product of social history, not science or biology" (Haney-López, "Social Construction" 37). We begin to 'see' those people as white who have been politically categorized as white and imagine that Jews, Roma, people from Eastern and Southern Europe, from Ireland and Turkey somehow do not 'look white' during periods when these groups are excluded from the exclusive club of whiteness. However, it is relevant for the present book that, within in the U.S., the boundaries of whiteness did "move[] outward to include all of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s" (Haney-López, "Social Construction" 37). People who 'look white' in the contemporary U.S. also receive the spoils of white supremacy. Italian, Polish or Irish ancestry does not cancel out current (and by now generational) white privilege.

In the current era of post-racial racialism, white privilege is not formally enshrined in the law anymore. However, in the U.S., racial disparities in educational attainment, incarceration, wealth, income, and life expectancy are still as wide as ever, if not wider (see, for example, Alexander). As Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies" and the work that built on it have shown, white privilege still operates in subtle and not so-subtle ways, materially benefitting white people to the detriment of People of Color.

Under conditions of post-raciality, where any kind of reference to race is taboo, white people have, of course, begun to refer to themselves in non-racial terms (when they conceive of themselves as an identifiable group at all). Within right-wing discourses, references to 'Europeans,' 'Americans,' 'Germans,' 'Christians,' 'the West,' etc. are all veiled ways to refer to white people while trying not to sound racist. The context often makes it clear that 'Europeans' does not refer to European Muslims, for example, nor 'Germans' to Black Germans. While employing the language of nationality, religion, or geopolitics, the referent is always the group that benefits from white supremacy and that seeks to uphold and extend it: white people.

Outside of right-wing discourses, white people typically do not see themselves as part of a racial group at all. As Richard Dyer puts it: "Other people are raced, we are just people. There is no more powerful position than that of being

'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity" (1f). DiAngelo further explicates this dynamic connection between individualism and universalism. She describes individualism as "a storyline or narrative that creates, communicates, reproduces, and reinforces the concept that each of us is a unique individual and that our group memberships, such as race, class, or gender, are not important or relevant to our opportunities" (169f). She continues:

> Because whites are taught to see themselves as 'just human' and thus outside of race, we see our perspectives as objective and representative of reality [...]. I refer to this ideology as Universalism, and it functions in ways that are similar to Individualism. But instead of declaring that we all need to see each other as individuals (everyone is different), the person declares that we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same) [...]. Universalism often manifests in an unracialized identity which functions as [...] an inability to think about being white as something that would or could have an impact on one's life. (176)

In this sense, individualism and universalism in tandem lead to an ideology that refuses to see the differences that oppression makes by denying that people could be subject to group-specific differences in power, rights, and resources. Mills writes that the Racial Contract in its current, post-racial form prescribes an "*epistemology of ignorance*," which means that "*whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made*" (18). This epistemology of ignorance includes the inability of white people to see ourselves as part of the racial group that maintains and benefits from white supremacy. We also typically fail to perceive the group-specific particularity of our experiences, culture, and ways of making sense of the world.

Bonilla-Silva writes that contrary to common white self-perceptions, white people in the U.S. do have "a 'white *habitus*,' a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* whites' racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters" (*Racism* 104). It is actually rather unsurprising that white people in the U.S. should have developed their own particular culture, given that the vast majority of white people lead highly segregated lives: "whites live mostly in white neighborhoods, marry and befriend mostly whites, interact mostly with whites in their jobs, and send their children to white schools or, if they attend mixed schools, make sure they take most of their classes with white children" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism* 48). Bonilla-Silva states that "[t]he universe of whiteness navigated on an everyday basis by

most whites fosters a high degree of homogeneity of racial views and even of the manners in which whites express these views" (*Racism* 125).

Bonilla-Silva himself identifies several common frames, styles, and racial stories that white people typically use when talking about racism. Ruth Frankenberg and John D. Foster have conducted similar studies, in which they interviewed white people about their racial views and experiences, and came to similar conclusions in their books *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters* and *White Race Discourse: Preserving Racial Privilege in a Post-Racial Society*. DiAngelo also devotes two chapters in her book *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy* to "Common Patterns of Well-Intentioned White People" and "Popular White Narratives that Deny Racism."

The racial stories that Bonilla-Silva and DiAngelo analyze are short, 'common-sense' stock narratives such as "The past is in the past" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism* 77) or "I know people of color, so I am not racist" (DiAngelo 226) that white people frequently (re)tell in order to "strengthen their collective understanding about how and why the world is the way it is. [...] they also justify and defend [...] current racial arrangements" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism* 76). The stories I analyze in this book are much more complex and sophisticated than these stock narratives, yet they nevertheless express common ways that well-intentioned LGBTIQ white people make sense of the racialized world we inhabit. Their greater complexity does not change the fact that "storytellers and their audiences share a representational world that makes these stories seem factual" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism* 76). Whether in casual conversation or in the format of a graphic novel, white people share common stories about how we relate to People of Color that ultimately serve the purpose of comforting us and making us feel good about the place we think we occupy in the racial order.

2.2.3 Cis_hetero_sexism in the U.S.

Much like racism, the current cis_hetero_sexist system in the U.S. has its roots in colonialism, long before terms like 'homo- and heterosexuality,' 'trans- and cisgender' even existed. In their book *decolonizing trans/gender 101*, b. binaohan writes that "prurient, cis interest in the genitals and physiology of trans feminine ppl [...] started in the colonies. It started when white ppl began to interact with Indigenous ppls with different gender systems. Some of these gender systems allowed for more variation and pluralism of gender than they were really able to comprehend" (79). According to binaohan, in many cultures gender "is/was about the role you played in your community [...] your gender was/is re-

lational and not necessarily just a personal, 'private' thing" (115). binaohan analyzes "binarism" as "a tool of colonialism" (122) that allowed settlers to do two things: "first, conceptualize these unknown and incoherent genders, second, that once 'understood' they could work to eradicate these genders" (125). The eradication of transfeminine genders was necessary from the perspective of colonialism in order to remove transfeminine people "from spiritual roles and the power inherent in them [...]. And, in conjunction with this, focus on instituting a white hetero-patriarchal cis binary gender system, such that the priests and missionaries could establish and legitimize the political [...] power of the colonizer and/or the settler" (102).

While binaohan focuses on the colonial treatment of Indigenous genders, Mark Rifkin emphasizes the colonial assault on Indigenous kinship structures. In his book *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*, he analyzes the "organized effort to make heterosexuality compulsory as a key part of breaking up indigenous landholdings, 'detribalizing' native peoples, and/or translating native territoriality and governance into the terms of U.S. liberalism and legal geography" (6). He explicates that

the assessment of native peoples against the standard of conjugal domesticity in official and popular, as well as scholarly, accounts has served as a consistent means of constraining possibilities for self-determination by positioning 'kinship-based' native modes of governance as not really governance: defining sovereignty recognizable by the federal government on the basis of political institutions that are completely differentiated from familial relations [...]; depicting modes of governance in which these spheres are mixed as a perverse and primitive communalism that must be abandoned in favor of entry as citizens into the settler nation, itself signified by the division of the 'tribe' into privatized, propertyholding nuclear families through allotment. (16)

Rifkin shows that the colonial enforcement of the gender binary and heteropatriarchal family structures not only harms those Indigenous people who embody alternative genders and occupy specific (often spiritual) roles within their communities. It does not only weaken the spiritual cohesion of Indigenous peoples, but it delegitimizes kinship-based Indigenous sovereignty as a whole, thus transferring sovereignty and access to Indigenous resources (particularly land) to the colonists. Taken together, binaohan's and Rifkin's accounts demonstrate that the current cis_hetero_sexist system that relies on the construction of two binary, differentially valued genders, the members of which are expected to form heterosexual couples in order to raise children and acquire, consolidate, and pass on private property is by no means 'natural' and was brutally enforced in the colo-

nies in order to delegitimize other ways of being in the world with the ultimate purpose of transferring power and resources from Indigenous people to white people.

With regard to slavery, C. Riley Snorton elucidates a different modality of colonialism, the "ungendering of blackness" (74). When white Europeans turned the people they captured into "captive flesh" (Snorton 57) without regard for gender, kinship ties, and other social relations, they made it clear that they did not view enslaved people as people who could be placed within the heterosexual matrix at all. Judith Butler defines the heterosexual matrix that was and is opera-tive in Europe and its settler colonies as "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchi-cally defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (*Gender Trouble* 194, FN 6). Whereas Indigenous people who lived on the land that Eu-ropeans sought to colonize were often forced into this matrix, enslaved people were forcibly prevented from creating the social structures that would allow them to be meaningfully placed within it. As Snorton puts it, "the capacity for gender differentiation was lost in the outcome of the New World, ordered by the violent theft of body and land" (56). He argues that through this violent un-gendering, "captive flesh figures a critical genealogy for modern transness, as chattel persons gave rise to an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being" (57).

The categories of homo- and heterosexuality, trans- and cisgender that struc-ture the current cis_hetero_sexist system in Europe and its settler colonies were, indeed, developed long after the first colonial encounters and the institution of slavery, at the height of European imperialism. Significantly, the differentiation between homosexuality and heterosexuality was developed largely as a differen-tiation between white men. In "Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm," Mar-lon Ross notes, "While the perceived racial difference of an African or Asian male could be used to explain any putatively observed sexual deviance, racial sameness became ground zero for the observed split between heterosexual and homosexual Anglo-Saxon men" (168). In other words, colonial practice had long established the supposed sexual deviancy and/or deficiency of colonized and en-slaved peoples in the eyes of the colonizers, "consign[ing] people of color to an undifferentiated sexual savagery outside of the hetero/homo binary" (Rifkin 33), so that even progressive academics like Magnus Hirschfeld "developed 'the ho-mosexual' in direct opposition to the colonized and other men who were as-

cribed to be 'different'"[10] (Çetin and Voß 10). By differentiating "true homosexuals" from Italian, Turkish, and white working-class men who engaged in same-sex sexual activity, Hirschfeld made it clear "[t]hat, in classic European manner, the 'homosexual' means the white European man from the *bourgeois class*"[11] (Çetin and Voß 15). Even to be "properly deviant" was "predicated on being seen as racially capable of conforming to standards of healthful, disciplined, civilized sexual order in the first place; to be the subject of sexological designations like 'homosexual' is already to be understood as potentially a competent participant in modernity, which nonwhites by definition were not" (Rifkin 33). It is quite telling that as late as 1948, Alfred Kinsey could publish his influential report on male sexuality under the title *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, while stating clearly, "The present volume is confined to a record on American and Canadian whites" (76). Even in 1948, "American and Canadian whites" apparently still comprised the totality of all that counted as 'human' and data gathered on the sexual identifications, behavior, and fantasies of white men was seen as sufficient to reach conclusions about men's 'natural' sexuality.

Given all this, it comes as no surprise that "[o]ne of the main lessons of historical analyses of heterosexuality and homosexuality is the recognition that such concepts are peculiar to a very specific historical period, from the nineteenth century onward, in a distinct region of the world, largely Western Europe and North America" (Weeks 788). Prior to the 19th century, white Europeans did not classify people "in terms of a hierarchy of sexual 'types.' The tendency instead was to think in terms of people who, openly or covertly, occasionally or habitually, engaged in a variety of sexual acts. Some of those acts were more sinful than others" (Blank 2). Most white Europeans saw same-sex sexual activity as one among many sinful, even criminal sexual acts that all white people were potentially susceptible to. They did not, however, see this activity as constituting a specific subgroup of a particular type of person, partially because "[t]here was, quite simply, no 'social space' in the colonial system of production [in New England] that allowed men and women to be gay [...]. It is quite possible that some men and women experienced a stronger attraction to their own sex than to the opposite sex [...,] but one could not fashion out of that preference a way of life" (D'Emilio 7f). For many centuries prior to the 19th century and unlike many Indigenous societies, white European societies did not recognize any

---

10 "entwickelte den 'Homosexuellen' in direkter Abgrenzung gegen die Kolonisierten und weitere als 'anders' zugeschriebene Männer."

11 "Dass es bei dem 'Homosexuellen' in klassischer europäischer Manier um den weißen europäischen Mann der *bürgerlichen Klasse* geht."

type of social role that allowed at least some people to embody non-traditional genders and/or engage in non-stigmatized sexual activity beyond procreative sex between a woman and a man.

It was only when industrialization and capitalism inducted more and more people in Europe and its settler-colonies into wage-labor that allowed them to live independent of the economic family unit and that led them to seek work in the rapidly growing cities that "it was possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity – an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex" (D'Emilio 8). City life in particular opened up new possibilities in these societies: "The familial and neighborly social control of the small town could not function in the larger cities, particularly for the young single men and women who came to the city to find jobs [...]. Even before rental apartments came on the market, boardinghouses and hotels made it possible to conduct a clandestine pre- or extramarital affair" (Greenberg 355).

While larger cities allowed for greater sexual freedom for at least some people in European and settler colonial societies, access to this freedom was more restricted for women than it was for men:

The Kinsey studies of the 1940s and 1950s found significantly more men than women with predominantly homosexual histories, a situation caused, I would argue, by the fact that capitalism had drawn far more men than women into the labor force, and at higher wages. Men could more easily construct a personal life independent of attachments to the opposite sex, whereas women were more likely to remain economically dependent on men. (D'Emilio 9)

Neither he nor any other historian I consulted on the history of homo- and heterosexuality in Europe and its settler colonies offers a comparable analysis of racial disparities when it comes to accessing this colonial European model of a gay identity and way of life. Given the huge and persistent wealth and income inequality between white people and People of Color and Indigenous people, it is probably not too far-fetched, however, to speculate that most people who were interested in and able to "organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex" and who were part of "the formation of urban communities of lesbians and gay men" (D'Emilio 7) were white (settlers).

It was in these mostly male, mostly white urban subcultures that men who had sex with men began to think of "sexual orientation as a relatively stable trait and discussed it within a framework of causal determinism" (Greenberg 407), a conception that differed significantly from the here-to-fore common assumption

in their societies that same-sex sexual activity was simply a type of illicit act. The term 'homosexuality' first appeared in print in two pamphlets published in Leipzig in 1869 by Karl Maria Kertbeny as part of "an unsuccessful political campaign to prevent homosexual sex from being criminalized by the newly formed Federation of North German States" (Halperin 130f). What distinguished the term 'homosexuality' from other popular terms at the time like "'contrary sexual feeling,' 'sexual inversion,' and 'Uranian love' [... was that it] was not coined to interpret the phenomenon it described or to attach a particular psychological or medical theory to it [... It] simply referred to a sexual drive directed toward persons of the same sex as the sex of the person who was driven by it" (Halperin 131). While the concept of homosexuality was largely developed by doctors in medical terms, "physicians did not invent the notion of an essential homosexuality. It was a product of the urban male-homosexual networks and subcultures that had developed in European cities well before the late nineteenth century. The participants in those subcultures contributed actively to the development of what eventually came to be called a 'medical' conception of homosexuality" (Greenberg 486). As these subcultures grew and as the concept of homosexuality gained popularity, it made "*homosexual object-choice itself* function as a marker of sexual and social difference" (Halperin 132) mostly among white people.

However, early sexological accounts often lumped together homosexuality, intersex conditions, transgender identification, crossdressing and other non-normative ways of doing gender and having sex in their descriptions of "sexual deviancy." It was only over the course of several decades that doctors, LGBTIQ people, and the wider public began to differentiate

conditions of bodily sex from conditions of gender identity and conditions of sexual desire. By the end of the 1950s, for example, 'hermaphrodites,' or people who had both male and female gonads, were more clearly distinguished from 'transsexuals,' whose gender identities did not correspond with their bodily sex, and also from 'homosexuals,' whose erotic longings were for members of their own sex. (Meyerowitz 7)

The relatively new availability and immense publicity of medical transition in Europe and its settler colonies contributed to this process of increasingly seeing the physical sex of the body, an individual's sense of gender, and their sexual desires as separate spheres. Doctors first began to perform gender confirmation surgeries in Germany in the 1920s (Meyerowitz 5). "The sex-change experiments in Europe reached the United States through the popular culture. From the 1930s on, American newspapers and magazines – and later radio, television, and

film – broadcast stories on sex change. The stories in the press allowed a few American readers to imagine surgical sex change and seek it for themselves" (Meyerowitz 5). It was not until Christine Jorgensen's medical transition in Denmark became sensational news in the U.S. in 1952, however, that "[t]ranssexuality, the quest to transform the bodily characteristics of sex via hormones and surgery" (Meyerowitz 5) became a well-known phenomenon in the U.S. "In 1949 Dr. David O. Couldwell, a psychiatrist, used the word *trans-sexual* to refer to people who sought to change their sex. After the press reports on Jorgensen, Harry Benjamin, an endocrinologist, publicized the term and the condition it described. Soon other American doctors and scientists joined in a public debate on the pros and cons of sex-change surgery" (Meyerowitz 5f).

After the 1950s, medical transition slowly became more available, though access to it remained highly restricted and not only because of the prohibitively high cost of treatment: "the group [of doctors] that endorsed surgery set up a gatekeeping system that allowed them to control access to treatment [...]. In sum, the doctors rejected candidates who would not conform after surgery to the dominant conventions of gender and sexuality" (Meyerowitz 225). Given how raced and classed "dominant conventions of gender and sexuality" are, it is likely that this gatekeeping system ensured that the people who were given access to medical treatment were not only mostly young and able-bodied but also white and middle- to upper-class, thus further enshrining the whiteness of "legitimate deviance" in the field of gender and sexuality.

By suggesting that medical intervention must be the end-goal of all transgender identifications, the publicity surrounding medical transitions also further contributed to the de-legitimization of Indigenous genders that function beyond the binary of male and female and do not require any type of medical intervention and it eclipsed other, non-medicalized ways of leading transgender lives. Snorton, for example, discusses two cases of Black trans women who were well-respected members of their respective Black communities both before and after Jorgensen popularized the possibility of medical intervention. Because they were recognized as women not by medical doctors but by the communities in which they lived, Snorton identifies "an alternative set of relations – that of black sociality – as the site for [their] gender articulation" (162). Their gender articulations depended on "knowledge systems unrecognized by colonial authority" and gestured toward "a different, and perhaps decolonial, understanding of the bod[ies they] inhabited" (Snorton 162). binaohan similarly points out that "a medicalization of gender shifts the focus from how a person's gender is embedded within a socio-spiritual community, to a function of their body [...]. It also instantiates a larger colonial notion that identity and being is primarily a 'pri-

vate' and 'personal' affair [...] that by operating on that singular unit, by operating on the body, that this is the means by which we become who we are" (62). The medicalization of transgender identifications thus bolsters white colonial authority, overshadows alternative pathways of gender recognition, and conceals the communal dimensions of gender.

U.S. cis_hetero_sexism is a complex system of oppression to grasp. It primarily targets societies that do not operate on the basis of the heterosexual matrix. White people have treated cultures that are not based in such a matrix (and that have consequently also not developed the corresponding oppositional categories of 'homosexual' and 'transgender' as they are understood in Europe and its settler colonies) as "comparatively backward, not to say primitive, innocent as they are of the 'sexuality' which is one of the signatures of Western modernity" (Halperin 13f). The cis_hetero_sexist attempt to obliterate alternative ways of organizing society corresponds in some ways to lann hornscheidt's concept of "categorical gendering," which ecs[12] defines as "the basic assumption that there is nothing beyond gender in all its varied types of realization as a form of human existence"[13] (*feministische w_orte* 132). Cis_hetero_sexism cannot imagine, let alone comprehend, ways of organizing society that do not fundamentally rely on the categories of gender and sexuality and, on the flipside of the coin, it refuses to recognize the gender identities and social-sexual relations of those who, like enslaved people, are not deemed human in the full sense of the word. What I call cis_hetero_sexism is "a tool of colonialism (like racism)" (binaohan 122) that "serves to centre the white, colonial gender system. It serves to forcibly make it the comprehensive framework in which we view all gender" (binaohan 126) and to position as less than human all those who are denied recognition within the white, colonial gender system.

Within this system, however, cis_hetero_sexism also targets individual people who do not conform to the norms of the heterosexual matrix, i.e. people whose bodily sex cannot be categorized as either male or female at birth, people who reject or disidentify with the sex they were assigned at birth, and people who have sex and build relationships outside of the monogamous union of one cis man and one cis woman. Hornscheidt refers to these aspects of cis_hetero_sexism as "two-gendering"[14] (*feministische w_orte* 76), "hetera-

---

12 'Ecs' is the pronoun hornscheidt uses.

13 "die grundannahme, dass es nichts jenseits von gender als menschliche existenzform in allen seinen unterschiedlichen realisierungsformen gibt."

14 "zweigenderung."

gendering"[15] (*feministische w_orte* 96), "couple-normativity"[16] (*feministische w_orte* 99), and "cisgendering"[17] (*feministische w_orte* 114). This creates a rather complex situation where white LGBTIQ people both benefit from cis_hetero_sexism (as a tool of colonialism) and have their life chances reduced (compared to white people who are straight and cis) because they do not embody the norms of cisgendered heterosexuality.

This is further complicated by the fact that whereas colonized and enslaved people initially had no say in how white people categorized them and how these categorizations were used against them, gay people "themselves were a central driving force behind their clear categorization, specifically to be able to partake in the privileges of white, bourgeois men"[18] (Çetin and Voß 23). The constitution of gay people (and later transgender and intersex people) as a group was never just an act of oppression; it was always also an act of self-actualization on the part of LGBTIQ people aimed at recognition by and inclusion into the white (settler) state. In her article "Celebrated Diversity. Controversial Heterogeneity. Pacified Provocation: Sexual Ways of Life in Late Modern Societies,"[19] Antke Engel argues that (white) LGBTIQ people in Europe and its settler colonies were so successful in their quest for inclusion that queer analyses of systems of oppression can no longer exclusively focus on "exploitation, oppression, and discrimination along naturalized, seemingly stable social categories, but have to consider forms of differential inclusion and pluralist integration as mechanisms of power"[20] ("Vielfalt" 44). When analyzing cis_hetero_sexism, it has to be kept in mind that "certain forms of homosexual existence are not only seen as assimilable, but figure as ideal examples of civic-minded, consumerist-capitalist citi-

---

15 "heteragenderung."

16 "paarnormativität."

17 "cisgenderung."

18 "Sie haben ihre klare kategoriale Fassung ganz zentral selbst betrieben, gerade um an den Privilegien weißer bürgerlicher Männer Anteil haben zu können."

19 "Gefeierte Vielfalt. Umstrittene Heterogenität. Befriedete Provokation: Sexuelle Lebensformen in spätmodernen Gesellschaften."

20 "auf Ausbeutung, Unterdrückung und Diskriminierung entlang naturalisierter, scheinbar stabiler sozialer Kategorien beziehen, sondern müssen auch Formen differenzierten Einschlusses und pluralistischer Integration als Machtmechanismen in Betracht ziehen."

zenship"[21] (A. Engel, "Vielfalt" 46); they are seen as "the epitome of successful, creative individuality"[22] (A. Engel, "Vielfalt" 52) and "the embodiment of a private solution for a problem caused by socio-economics"[23] (A. Engel, "Vielfalt" 54). Antke Engel argues that, to a certain extent, the norm itself has been pluralized in order to offer the most privileged LGBTIQ people an attractive, nonstigmatized place in society that functions to give everybody else the illusion that the pitfalls of neoliberalism (i.e. the dismantling of any kind of social safety net) can be successfully managed while taking advantage of its offer of limitless individual freedom.

As these complexities show, cis_hetero_sexism affects LGBTIQ people very differently. While Indigenous people and the descendants of enslaved people still feel the devastating effects of the attempted obliteration of their ways of life, after the passage of gay marriage, the lifting of the ban on gay people serving in the military, and the explosion of favorable representation of some segments of the LGBTIQ community in mainstream media, the most privileged LGBTIQ people in the U.S. can almost not be said to be the victims of any kind of oppression at all anymore (cf. T. Murphy). Instead, they have now become neoliberal model citizens. Between these two poles are many LGBTIQ people whose life chances are variously impacted by cis_hetero_sexism in the areas of interpersonal violence (in intimate, institutional, as well as public spaces), as well as lack of (useful) cultural representation, legal recognition (for themselves and their families), and access to desired medical treatment, education, housing, employment, etc.

The oppression of LGBTIQ people has been called by different names. "[T]he word *homophobia* is arguably the most recognized term used to describe the marginalization and disenfranchisement of lesbians and gay men" (Dermer et al. 325). The term "first appeared in Kenneth Smith's 'Homophobia: A Tentative Personality Profile' and George Weinberg's *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, both published by 1972" (Hanhardt 112f). The term 'transphobia' was formed in analogy to the earlier term to describe the "discrimination directed toward people who are or are presumed to be trans" (James-Abra et al. 1367). While these are the two most commonly used terms to discuss the oppression faced by LGBTIQ people, they are anything but ideal to denote systems of op-

---

21 "bestimmte Formen homosexueller Existenz nicht nur als integrationsfähig angesehen, sondern als Vorbilder zivilgesellschaftlicher, konsumkapitalistischer Bürger_innenschaft figuriert werden."

22 "Inbegriff erfolgreicher, kreativer Individualität."

23 "Verkörperung einer privaten Lösung für ein sozio-ökonomisch bewirktes Problem."

pression. Barry D. Adam succinctly summarizes the existing critiques of this terminology:

[Homophobia] is a term rooted in psychology, suggesting a parallel to other phobias (Weinberg, 1973). It locates the problem as one of fear, attitude, or prejudice, and points toward a person's mental state as the core issue. The pervasiveness of individualist, psychological explanations of social problems in liberal, democratic nations creates an environment that favours 'homophobia' as the widespread, 'common sense' explanation in Anglo-American societies. 'Homophobia' denotes an irrational fear or a set of mistaken ideas held by prejudiced individuals; its alleviation then likely comes through therapy or education. In other words, the term already endorses an analysis, and a problematic one at that. (388)

I agree with Adam that the analysis implied in terms ending in '-phobia' is deeply problematic because it "tends to highlight individual, microlevel prejudices rather than focusing on prejudice, discrimination, and oppression at the macrolevel" (Dermer et al. 327). It is because of this false and misleading analysis of the nature of systemic oppression that I do not use either of these terms in my work.

Another term that has enjoyed increasing popularity is the term 'heteronormativity,' which "was first used by Michael Warner in his introduction to the issue Fear of a Queer Planet of the journal Social Text (1991/1993)" (Wagenknecht 18). In a much-quoted definition, Peter Wagenknecht defines the term as follows:

The term names heterosexuality as the norm of gender relations that structures subjectivity, life praxis, the symbolic order, and the arrangement of social organization. Heteronormativity pushes people into the shape of two bodily and socially clearly distinguished genders, whose sexual desire is exclusively directed at the respective other. Heteronormativity functions as an a priori category of understanding and posits a bunch of behavioral norms. Those who do not conform to it, are discriminated against, persecuted, or annihilated [...]. At the same time, heteronormativity regulates knowledge production, structures discourses, guides political action, determines the distribution of resources, and functions as a mode of allocation with regard to the division of labor.[24] (17)

---

24 "Der Begriff benennt Heterosexualität als Norm der Geschlechterverhältnisse, die Subjektivität, Lebenspraxis, symbolische Ordnung und das Gefüge der gesellschaftlichen Organisation strukturiert. Die Heteronormativität drängt die Menschen in die Form zweier körperlich und sozial klar voneinander unterschiedener Geschlechter, de-

This definition makes no mention of heteronormativity as a tool of colonialism, but it does offer a good description of how the oppression of LGBTIQ people works within Europe and its settler colonies. Even within this context, however, I find the term itself less than satisfying. First of all, it shares a problematic aspect with Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix. Both terms do not just refer to the heterosexual organization of society but also (necessarily) to the enforcement of the gender binary. However, while the former is clearly named in the term, the latter is only implied and thus tends to be under-emphasized, which is rather unfortunate, given the persistent foregrounding of matters of sexuality over matters of gender in LGBTIQ contexts. Adam articulates another problem with the concept of heteronormativity. He delineates the concept's roots in "[p]oststructuralism [...] queer theory [...] grounded primarily in literary theories" (388) and then goes on to posit that

Like other postmodernisms, queer theory's focus on text has ironically turned analysis away from questions of the national and international control over the production and distribution of public discourses and away from analysis of fundamental, long-term social changes that reconstitute the conditions for the emergence, growth, and survival of homo-erotic peoples and cultures. (399)

I share his assessment that queer theory has a tendency to neglect the material forces shaping the actual life chances of LGBTIQ people and I find it mirrored in the term 'heteronormativity' itself. The term sounds theoretical and clean and suggests that the oppression of LGBTIQ people is merely about how closely one does and does not approximate certain social norms. The fact that the failure to approximate these norms can have severe consequences on the power, resources, and rights people have access to and can literally kill people tends to disappear behind the smoothness of the term. This problem is highlighted by the fact that the oppression of LGBTIQ people is, so far, the only system of oppression that is referred to in terms of 'normativity.' This terminological anomaly suggests that its workings and effects somehow differ substantially from those of other systems of oppression like racism, sexism, ableism, or classism.

---

ren sexuelles Verlangen ausschließlich auf das jeweils andere gerichtet ist. Heteronormativität wirkt als apriorische Kategorie des Verstehens und setzt ein Bündel von Verhaltensnormen. Was ihr nicht entspricht, wird diskriminiert, verfolgt oder ausgelöscht [...]. Zugleich reguliert Heteronormativität die Wissensproduktion, strukturiert Diskurse, leitet politisches Handeln, bestimmt über die Verteilung von Ressourcen und fungiert als Zuweisungsmodus in der Arbeitsteilung."

For all these reasons, I prefer to use the term 'cis_hetero_sexism' although it, too, is by no means perfect. I created this term based on the term 'heterosexism,' which, like homophobia and heteronormativity, has been used to refer to the oppression faced by LGBTIQ people. One of the reasons why I base my terminology on this term rather than on other possible alternatives is that, as Dermer et al. note, "[t]he term *heterosexism* was created as a parallel to language that externalized other isms, such as racism and sexism" (327). To me, it makes sense to refer to all systems of oppression with recognizably similar terms. I like that the term 'heterosexism' "references sexism and racism as sibling concepts and likely comes out of movement activism faced with the multi-faceted and systemic forms of their opposition. Heterosexism offers a more sociological notion of something structured, institutional, and material, as well as ideological" (Adam 388). That latter aspect is particularly important to my conception of different systems of oppression and it seems to me that the term 'heterosexism' captures much better than 'homophobia' or 'heteronormativity' that the oppression of LGBTIQ people is a system of oppression like any other that works on the personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and materially disadvantages the people targeted by it while benefitting the people who wield and uphold it.

Just like the term 'heteronormativity,' 'heterosexism' unfortunately references sexuality more than gender. People have developed parallel terms such as "cisgenderism" (Lennon and Mistler) and "cissexism" (Serano) to refer to the specific oppression faced by people who do not fit neatly into the gender binary. Hornscheidt developed an even broader model of "genderism"[25] (*feministische w_orte* 61) that encompasses not only categorical gendering, two-gendering, hetera-gendering, couple-normativity, and cisgendering (see above) but also "reprogendering"[26] (*feministische w_orte* 107) and "androgendering"[27] (*feministische w_orte* 86). Hornscheidt understands androgendering as treating white, able-bodied men as the (non-gendered) general human norm and argues that most common conceptions of sexism only focus on androgendering while neglecting all other forms of gender- and sexuality-based oppression (cf. *feministische w_orte* 86f). I agree with hornscheidt (and Lennon and Mistler and Serano) that it is important to name different aspects of gender- and sexuality-based oppression. Sometimes it does make sense to differentiate clearly between them when looking at particular instances of oppression where only one of these

---

25 "genderismus."

26 "reprogenderung."

27 "androgenderung."

aspects is present. However, it seems to me that more often than not several of these aspects appear simultaneously and also slide into each other in ways that make it hard to draw the line between one and the other. Verónica Caridad Rabelo and Lilia M. Cortina conducted a study on workplace harassment, for example, in which "no group emerged whose victimization solely consisted of heterosexist harassment. This suggests that, in LGBQ work lives, harassment on the basis of sexual orientation almost always coincides with gender-based harassment" (384). To me, heterosexism and cissexism and most of the other forms of oppression that hornscheidt analyzes do not constitute different systems of oppression but different aspects of one system of oppression which I call cis_hetero_sexism. I decided to use underscores to highlight the slippery nature of the different aspects constituting this system of oppression. While I do see very clear elements of sexism in the workings of cis_hetero_sexism (and therefore chose to place a second underscore between 'hetero' and 'sexism'), I would differentiate this system of oppression from sexism, simply because, even though the groups targeted by these different systems of oppression overlap, they are by no means coextensive.

The biggest problem I see with the term 'cis_hetero_sexism' is that just like all the other terms discussed so far it does not name the colonial roots and uses of cis_hetero_sexism, which makes it very easy to forget that cis_hetero_sexism not only targets LGBTIQ people but whole Indigenous societies and also targets Indigenous and LGBTIQ People of Color very differently than it targets white LGBTIQ people. Hornscheidt in fact proposed "genderism" as a new term instead of sexism partially because work on sexism does not pay enough attention on how sexism is imbricated with racism and ableism (cf. *feministische w_orte* 50-67). While I applaud hornscheidt's intention, unfortunately I also do not see how the term 'genderism' itself calls any more attention to the interdependence between gender- and sexuality-based oppression and racism and ableism than sexism (or cis_hetero_sexism) does. So far, I have not come across a term that would convincingly accomplish this goal. Until such a term is developed, I will make do with the term 'cis_hetero_sexism' while attempting to emphasize the colonial and racist implications of this system of oppression.

When referring to the group of people targeted by cis_hetero_sexism, many people use the term 'queer' "as an umbrella term for anyone who is not *heterosexual* (attracted to the 'opposite' sex) or *cisgender* (remaining in the gender that they were assigned at birth). It is a snappier and more encompassing word than the ever-extending LGBTTQQIA, etc. alphabet soup" (Barker Scheele 11). While I agree that 'queer' is "snappier," sleeker, easier to write and read than an acronym, I still see many problems with its use as an umbrella term, which ulti-

mately led me to abandon it in favor of the rather unwieldy term 'LGBTIQ.' For one thing, I find it rather doubtful that 'queer' is "more encompassing" than 'LGBTIQ.' Cherríe Moraga points to the problem that the term 'queer' (much like the term 'gay') tends to be associated more with men than with women: "One of the things about *queer* that I think is dangerous is that the term includes men. There is great promise and there are great problems in that. The greatest problem is that feminism can disappear" (68). I would add that the term not only has a tendency to disappear women, femmes, and feminism but also once again privileges sexuality over gender because it tends to be associated more with people who primarily fail to approximate the norms of the heterosexual matrix in the realm of sexuality than with those who do so primarily in the realm of gender.

The term 'queer' has also been critiqued for its lack of inclusivity from anti-racist and anti-imperialist perspectives even though Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us that long before 'queer' became *en vogue* as a designation of cutting edge (and mostly white) activism and theory in the early 1990s, "[i]n the '60s and '70s it meant that one was from a working-class background, that one was not from genteel society" ("To(o) Queer" 166). She writes that for this reason she actually prefers 'queer' to 'lesbian' and 'homosexual' because "for me there is still more flexibility in the 'queer' mold, more room to maneuver [...]. A mestizo colored queer person is bodily shoved by both the heterosexual world and by white gays into the 'lesbian' or 'homosexual' mold whether s/he fits or not" (166). Nevertheless, in the same article, Anzaldúa also writes that "[q]ueer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences" (164).

Kathy J. Cohen echoes and extends this analysis when she states that many "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people of color [...] express their interpretation of 'queer' as a term rooted in class, race, and gender privilege. For us, 'queer' is a politics based on narrow sexual dichotomies which make no room either for the analysis of oppression of those we might categorize as heterosexual, or for the privilege of those who operate as 'queer'" ("Punks" 451). Summarizing critiques from both within the U.S. and outside, Wiegman writes that "the term 'queer' has been read for its geopolitical provincialism, if not as a symptom of the imperialism of U.S. cultural and conceptual idioms altogether" (330).

In my eyes, a term that has a strong tendency to exclude women, femmes, feminism, trans, inter, and gender-non-conforming people, People of Color, poor

people, and people who operate outside of colonial European frameworks, already disqualifies itself as a usable umbrella term to refer to the people targeted by cis_hetero_sexism. However, the use of 'queer' as an umbrella term is even further complicated by the fact that the term is sometimes also used to denote a specific kind of anti-cis_hetero_sexist politics, namely one "characterized by critiques of gender binaries and heteronormativity and often by metadiscursive practices, epistemological uncertainty, and skepticism about universal categories and essentialisms" (Gardiner, "Queering Genre" 189). While people who favor this approach often see 'queer' as antithetical to any kind of coherent identity, there are also many people (including myself) who "choose to self-identify as queer. Queer signals something more (post), more complicated, more in your face, more slippery, more performative. Queer is more virtual, less essentialized" (Morris 195). People often choose this identification precisely because if offers more openness and space than other, more clearly defined terms of self-identification. Given that 'queer' is thus used to refer to a particular kind of politics that some, but by no means all people who are targeted by cis_hetero_sexism subscribe to as well as a specific self-identification of some, but certainly not all LGBTIQ people, it only creates terminological confusion to use 'queer' as an umbrella term as well.

For all these reasons, I decided to use the acronym LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter, queer) as an umbrella term to refer to the group of people targeted by cis_hetero_sexism. The term 'LGBTIQ' is also not without its problems. Most obviously, it is just as colonial as 'queer' in that all of the terms that make up the acronym were developed within the same white, colonial framework as 'queer.' Furthermore, it occludes the fact that cis_hetero_sexism also targets colonized and enslaved people who could be labeled as cisgender and heterosexual within a white, colonial framework. The acronym also names only some of the most common self-identifications that people who are targeted by cis_hetero_sexism have chosen for themselves and thus disarticulates not only Indigenous and decolonial self-identifications but also newer, less common ones that originated within white, colonial frameworks. Furthermore, it suggests that all people who are targeted by cis_hetero_sexism (or at least the ones specifically named by the acronym) share common political interests, which is decidedly not true, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that some inter people have repeatedly questioned whether the inter movement should be aligned with the LGBT movement at all (to name only one of many examples). Nevertheless, I find the term 'LGBTIQ' still more useful than 'queer' not only because it avoids at least some of the problems of the term 'queer' but also because it highlights the fact that cis_hetero_sexism targets a diverse group of people for different

reasons and in different ways. I do not understand the specific terms that make up the acronym as encompassing the totality of all people targeted by cis_hetero_sexism. Rather, it is important to be clear that the specific terms mentioned in the acronym are only some of the terms used by the people it is supposed to refer to. I have chosen a version of the acronym that seems broad enough to me to gesture towards the diversity of the group of people targeted by cis_hetero_sexism, while still being a bit more manageable than some even longer versions (like the above quoted "LGBTTQQIA").

2.2.4 Intersectionality

As my discussion of racism and cis_hetero_sexism has already suggested, different systems of oppression do not operate entirely separately from one another. Already in 1977, the Combahee River Collective, a Black lesbian feminist collective from Boston, issued a famous statement calling attention to the fact that it was necessary to "struggl[e] against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" simultaneously because "the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (177). In her 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," Crenshaw built on previous activist theorizing in anti-racist, LGBTIQ, feminist contexts to coin the highly influential term 'intersectionality' to refer to, as Collins summarized it more than 25 years later, "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" ("Definitional Dilemmas" 2). I understand my current project as part of the tradition of intersectional research that has developed in response to Crenshaw's original theorizing and in this chapter I will explain both my own understanding of the concept as well as situate my project within the broader research tradition.

Even though Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality,' Collins also reminds us that "similar ideas that neither have been acknowledged as intersectional nor have experienced the widespread visibility and influence currently enjoyed by intersectionality as a field of study also exist" ("Definitional Dilemmas" 7). For example, she writes that "[i]ntersectionality as a knowledge project remained unnamed as such during the 1980s, the major decade when its ideas but not its name were incorporated into the US academy. During this period, the phrase 'race, class, and gender' emerged as a placeholder umbrella term into which ideas from several social justice movements coalesced" ("Definitional Dilemmas" 9). Because intersectional activism and intersectional theorizing existed

before the term as such was coined, I will take the liberty of also referring to activism and theory that was developed before 1989 or without a clear reference to Crenshaw's work as intersectional if it proceeded from an understanding of different systems of oppression as interconnected. In a second very influential article from 1991, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," Crenshaw describes her own project as follows: "I have used intersectionality as a way to articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy generally. I have also used intersectionality to describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism" (1265). The term 'intersectionality' was thus developed in the specific context of analyzing and addressing the oppression Women of Color face within the U.S. From the beginning, however, Crenshaw made it clear that "the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color" ("Mapping" 1245, FN 9).

I will now proceed to elucidate my understanding of intersectionality by addressing some of the criticisms that have been leveled at the concept since its formulation. Many of these criticisms take as their departure the fact that Crenshaw used intersectionality to analyze both the interactions of systems of oppression and the positionalities (experiences, identities) of the people whose lives are shaped by these systems of oppression (as the above quote demonstrates, for example). In her book, *Terrorist Assemblages: Terrorism in Queer Times*, Jasbir K. Puar issued an influential critique of intersectionality as purely a "model of identity," which she faults for "demand[ing] the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time" (212). Crenshaw, however, did not primarily deploy intersectionality as a model of identity at all. She was interested in how "the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" ("Mapping" 1243) and she wanted to "embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women" ("Demarginalizing" 140) in order to address the oppression facing Women of Color – not in order to develop a sophisticated theory of identity. Crenshaw embraces "identity-based politics [as] a source of strength, community, and intellectual development" ("Mapping" 1242) in the struggle against oppression. However, she sees identity-based politics as a "process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual" ("Mapping" 1241f). Organizing with other people who are positioned similarly to oneself vis-à-vis different systems of oppression (and who thus share certain experiences and possibly also certain aspects of their identities) is useful in understanding how these systems

of oppression work and how they can be challenged. It is not an exercise in building models of identity or in fixing those identities.

Accordingly, in this book I am also not focusing on identities per se but on how people understand oppression and their relation to it and which paths of action appear reasonable to them based on that understanding. My understanding of intersectionality thus follows Antke Engel's et al.'s position in "Kreuzweise queer: Eine Einleitung" where they suggest "to use the term *intersectionality* in the sense of intersecting power relations and not identity positions"[28] (12). In my view, these intersecting power relations give us differential access to power, resources, and rights and, in this sense, they *position* us differently within a deeply stratified social system. It is this position I refer to when I write about people being men and women, straight, cis, and LGBTIQ, white and of Color, middle-/owning-class, working class, or poor, currently able-bodied and disabled, etc. These positions matter because our differential access to power, resources, and rights shapes who we are, who we (can) become, and what kinds of politics will probably appeal most to us because they serve our best interests, but it does not determine either our identities or our politics. I am interested in how intersecting power relations position us differently within society and how these positions in turn shape our identities and politics, but I do not think that intersectionality as a concept offers an exhaustive model of identity or allows for predictions of politics based on positionality. In my view, both our identities and our politics are shaped by so much more than our positions within intersecting systems of oppression. Treating intersectionality as if it offered these things does a grave disservice to the usefulness of intersectionality as a theory and to its political impetus.

While Puar faults the concept of intersectionality for stabilizing identities across time and space, hornscheidt criticizes that "verbal categorizations form the basis of speaking about interdependencies, but at the same time verbal categorizations also make the conceptualization of interdependencies problematic. Verbally based and transmitted categorizations lead to a notion of categories as natural, underlying, monolithic, and separable entities"[29] ("Sprachliche Kategorisierung" 82). Since hornscheidt sees the act of verbal categorization itself as

---

28 "den Begriff der *intersectionality* im Sinne einer Durchkreuzung von Herrschaftsverhältnissen und Machtrelationen und nicht von Identitätspositionen zu verwenden."

29 "sprachliche Kategorisierungen zwar die Grundlage des Redens über Interdependenzen bilden, aber zugleich auch das Problem ihrer Konzeptualisierung sind. Sprachlich getragene und vermittelte Kategorisierungen führen zu einer Natürlichkeitsvorstellung von Kategorien als vorgängige, monolithische und trennbare Größen."

"an important dimension of verbal discrimination"[30] (*feministische w_orte* 150), ecs postulates that "the creation of livable worlds" hinges on the question "how terms like gender, race, class, sexuality that favor monolithic conceptions can lead to more complex ideas about categorization"[31] ("Sprachliche Kategorisierung" 83).

In my observation, white, currently able-bodied, non-poor LGBTIQ people are typically the most vocal group when it comes to addressing the violence inherent in labeling and categorizing people, possibly because LGBTIQ people in general tend to be particularly affected by this form of violence and because white, currently able-bodied, non-poor LGBTIQ people also tend to be shielded by our privilege from many other forms of violence. Speaking from a Black feminist perspective, Crenshaw writes, "for the most part, the dimension of racial domination that has been most vexing to African Americans has not been the social categorization as such, but the myriad ways in which those of us so defined have been systematically subordinated" ("Mapping" 1298). Crenshaw identifies "thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others" as "a large and continuing project for subordinated people" ("Mapping" 1296f). She writes that "this project's most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies. This is not to deny that the process of categorization is itself an exercise of power, but the story is much more complicated and nuanced than that" ("Mapping" 1297). While I see this debate as mostly a question of differing emphases, not of mutually exclusive positions, I agree with Crenshaw here that categorization itself is often not the most urgent concern in addressing intersectional oppression. I do not share hornscheidt's analysis that intersectionality as a concept is particularly prone to unduly reifying categories, nor do I share hornscheidt's conviction that simply developing "more complex ideas about categorization" in and of itself will do very much to create more livable lives for people beyond the LGBTIQ spectrum.

Katharina Walgenbach's critique of intersectionality is not so much directed at the potential for reifying categories per se as at a tendency she sees to conceive of categories as essentially independent of one another except at the point of intersection. To her, this tendency is problematic because it suggests the no-

---

30 "eine wichtige dimension sprachlicher diskriminierung."

31 "Schaffung lebbarer Welten;" "wie monolithische Vorstellungen favorisierende Benennungen wie Gender, Race, Klasse, Sexualität zu komplexeren Vorstellungen von Kategorisierungen führen können."

tion of a "'genuine core' of social categories"[32] ("Gender" 23). She proposes "to proceed from *interdependent categories* instead of interdependencies *between* categories [...]. For the category of gender, this means that it has to be seen as structured heterogeneously *within itself*"[33] (61). Walgenbach particularly criticizes Crenshaw's use of the metaphor of the traffic intersection: "A traffic intersection, after all, suggests that the categories gender and race exist separately from one another *before* (and also *after*) their meeting at the intersection"[34] ("Gender" 49). Crenshaw herself explicates how she understands her own metaphor:

> To bring this back to a non-metaphorical level, I am suggesting that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women – not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. ("Demarginalizing" 149)

This quote links back to the point I made above about intersectionality being primarily about *systems of oppression* and how they affect different people, not about the nature of either identity or "categories." It also demonstrates the flexibility in Crenshaw's own thinking about intersectionality. The strength of the traffic intersection metaphor lies precisely in illuminating that the oppression that Black women face sometimes looks like the oppression other women or other Black people face, sometimes like a combination thereof, and sometimes like something else entirely. The concept of intersectionality calls attention to the fact that systems of oppression interact with one another in complex ways: they are played out one against the other to further divide people from each other; they work in tandem to build nothing but walls around some people; they piggy-back off one another to intensify the oppression of specific groups of peo-

---

32 "die Vorstellung eines ,genuinen Kerns' sozialer Kategorien."

33 "statt von Interdependenzen *zwischen* Kategorien von *interdependenten Kategorien* auszugehen (Walgenbach 2005 a u. b, 48). Für die Kategorie Gender bedeutet das, diese als *in sich* heterogen strukturiert zu sehen."

34 "Suggeriert eine Straßenkreuzung doch, dass die Kategorien Gender und Race *vor* (und auch *nach*) dem Zusammentreffen an der Kreuzung voneinander getrennt existierten."

ple; they blend into each so as to become almost indistinguishable, making it hard, at times, to know what hit you when you are faced with this twisted mess coming at you from all directions.

However, building on Crenshaw's theorizing, it would be a limitation not to recognize not only "an interlocking, but also a relative autonomy of all forms of domination"[35] (A. Engel et al. 11); or, as Jennifer C. Nash puts it, "In analysing race and gender both as co-constitutive processes and as distinctive and historically specific technologies of categorization, intersectionality scholars will be able to offer insights that far exceed imagining race and gender as inextricably bound up" (139). While systems of oppression structure large parts of life in any given society (which is precisely what makes them systemic), they are not all equally salient in all situations. It happens quite frequently that one or two of them will be more relevant in a particular situation than others. As Crenshaw, Antke Engel et al., and Nash all point out, some forms of oppression target all members of a subordinate group, regardless of how else they are positioned. In these instances, it might be helpful to simply address the problem faced by all members of a particular group instead of emphasizing that the members of this group are otherwise differentially affected by other systems of oppression.[36]

I agree with Walgenbach that it is important not to treat these particular instances of oppression as the 'core' or as representative of the respective system of oppression. However, I find it unnecessarily limiting to proceed as if all systems of oppression were always and under all circumstances entwined with one another. I find it particularly damaging to essentially substitute intersectional analyses with analyses of only one category that is then conceived of as interdependent. In my understanding, intersectionality as a project is big enough to also accommodate analyses of the sort that Walgenbach proposes. However, they should not be the only model of how to do intersectional analyses because whenever one decides on one category to be analyzed in its interdependence

---

35 "ein Ineinandergreifen, aber auch eine relative Autonomie aller Herrschaftsformen."

36 This is not a call to ignore relevant intersections where they exist or to focus *only* on those instances of oppression that target all members of a particular group. In fact, I will offer a critique of activism that seeks to do just that in the following chapter. I am simply supporting a broad and flexible concept of intersectionality here that *also* allows for critiques and activism that focus on the workings of a single system of oppression in instances where such an approach seems appropriate to the situation at hand and politically useful. Reflexively demanding that all systems of oppression have to be considered and addressed simultaneously at all times misreads the complex and flexible workings of power and hampers both critique and activism.

with all other categories, one invariably treats this category as primary and all others as only important insofar as they intersect with the category in question. Walgenbach concedes that if gender is treated as an interdependent category, then "class or ethnicity also have to be conceptualized as interdependent categories"[37] ("Gender" 61). However, even though she writes that they "have to" be treated in that way, she herself does not do so, nor (to the best of my knowledge) do any of the other gender studies scholars who find it more adequate to speak of gender as an interdependent category than of intersectionality. This leads me to suspect, along with Jennifer Petzen, that Walgenbach's theoretical move of "[f]oregrounding gender as a category of analysis allows the concept of intersectionality to become palatable to white-dominated gender studies departments and universities, and made less threatening" (296). Re-centering gender in the analysis in this way, far from being more adequate to the complexity of oppression, actually needlessly sacrifices the complexity of analysis that intersectional theorizing had already reached.

In fact, in my eyes, one of the most important contributions of the concept of intersectionality is to call attention to the fact that no system of oppression is a priori primary or more important than any other (though certain systems of oppression might become more dominant than others in specific historical contexts). As Collins puts it, "Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (*Black Feminist Thought* 16). She has coined the term "matrix of domination" to describe how each society is characterized by a specific interplay of different systems of oppression that all work at different levels, which she calls "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power" (*Black Feminist Thought* 18), but which I refer to in a slightly different ordering, following Batts, as the institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and personal levels (see chapter 2.2). Collins emphasizes the historically contingent nature of matrices of domination: "Just as intersecting oppressions take on historically specific forms that change in response to human actions [...] so the shape of domination itself changes. [...] any matrix of domination can be seen as an historically specific organization of power in which social groups are embedded and which they aim to influence" (*Black Feminist Thought* 228).

Nash, who treats intersectionality mainly as a theory of identity, charges that "[g]enerally, intersectional literature has excluded an examination of identities that are imagined as either wholly or even partially privileged, although those

---

37 "dass dann auch Klasse oder Ethnizität als interdependente Kategorien konzeptualisiert werden müssen."

identities, like all identities, are always constituted by the intersections of multiple vectors of power" (10). While it is true that the concept of intersectionality was developed first and foremost in order to call attention to how different types of oppression interact in the experiences of Black women, early proponents of intersectionality also pointed out that where there is oppression, there is also privilege. Even in her earliest article on intersectionality, Crenshaw challenged white feminists to recognize "how their own race functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism and, moreover, how it often privileges them over and contributes to the domination of other women" ("Demarginalizing" 154).

Collins also explicates that, within any historically specific matrix of domination, "all individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege [...]. Depending on the context, individuals and groups may be alternately oppressors in some settings, oppressed in others, or simultaneously oppressing and oppressed in still others" (*Black Feminist Thought* 246). Walgenbach, who examined the complicity of white women in colonial projects in her book, "*Die weiße Frau als Trägerin deutscher Kultur:" Koloniale Diskurse über Geschlecht, "Rasse" und Klasse im Kaiserreich*, echoes Collins when she writes, "Through diverse relations of power and domination and their interdependencies, a social space is created in which subjects are positioned in different ways. They can be privileged in some respect and subordinated in another. The positions of victim and perpetrator are therefore not dichotomous any more"[38] (*Die weiße Frau* 53).

In her article, "Colorblind Intersectionality," Devon W. Carbado also states, "Intersectionality applies even where there is no double jeopardy. Indeed, the theory applies where there is no jeopardy at all" (814). She particularly criticizes intersectional projects "in which whiteness helps to produce and is part of a cognizable social category but is invisible or unarticulated as an intersectional subject position" (817). According to her, "framing whiteness outside intersectionality legitimizes a broader epistemic universe in which the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of white people travel invisibly and undisturbed as race-neutral phenomena over and against the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of people of color" (823f).

My project is part of this admittedly less influential, but still existing trajectory of intersectional projects that focus on the complex interaction of both op-

---

38 "Durch diverse Macht- und Herrschaftsverhältnisse und deren Interdependenzen wird ein sozialer Raum hergestellt, in dem Subjekte in unterschiedlicher Weise positioniert sind. Sie können dabei in mancher Hinsicht privilegiert in anderer subordiniert sein. Opfer- und Täterpositionen stehen sich damit nicht mehr dichotom gegenüber."

pression and privilege within an intersectional matrix of domination. In particular, I attempt to take up Carbado's challenge to name the whiteness of LGBTIQ people as a specific social location that is characterized by a specific interplay of both oppression in the realm of gender and sexuality and racial privilege. Projects of this sort are urgently needed because, as Collins puts it, "[a]lthough most individuals have little difficulty identifying their own victimization within some major system of oppression [...], they typically fail to see how their thoughts and actions uphold someone else's subordination" (*Black Feminist Thought* 287). Crenshaw writes about "the need [...] to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, 'home' to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home" ("Mapping" 1299). I also feel this need to challenge groups that are home to me, but not because I would typically experience marginalization within them – quite to the contrary: I feel this need because I see how many people are not "made at home" in these groups and I also see that the ways in which I and other white people uphold racial domination are one important factor in alienating people who should actually feel at home within these groups. For me, analyzing how privileged people uphold their_our privilege and thus contribute to oppression is not an end in itself but rather serves the purpose of enabling people to counter privilege and oppression more effectively.

Since all matrices of domination consist of multiple intersecting systems of oppression that work on different levels of society to either oppress or privilege certain groups of people, they are extremely complex and almost impossible to grasp and analyze in their entirety. Carbado et al. therefore write, "Any analysis must necessarily limit itself to specific structures of power [...]. All intersectional moves are necessarily particularized and therefore provisional and incomplete" (304). This is due both to constraints of time and space and to the limitations of the person carrying out the analysis. Because of our differential epistemic privilege and because of differences in how much time and energy we are able and willing to invest in understanding specific systems of oppression, we all necessarily have a better understanding of some systems of oppression than of others. If we want to aim for a more comprehensive analysis, we need to work collaboratively in groups of people who are positioned differently vis-à-vis different systems of oppression. Since this particular book, for example, is the work of only one person, I focus on the two systems of oppression that I am most familiar with: cis_hetero_sexism because it targets me and the theoretical knowledge I gained at the university is complemented by my experiential knowledge of how cis_hetero_sexism operates both in Germany and in the U.S.; racism because I had to witness at close and painful proximity its destructive effects that I and other white people wittingly and unwittingly inflict upon People of Color. Even

though I have spent considerable time and energy unlearning my own racism as much as possible and learning how to identify it in both myself and the world around me, however, my understanding of racism differs from my understanding of cis_hetero_sexism because I am not targeted by its unrelenting violence. Focusing on the intersections between these two systems of oppression does not mean that sexism, classism, ablism, and other systems of oppression that I might not be (as) aware of are not relevant for the comics I analyze. It simply means that my analysis is, for the most part, limited to the aspects I am most familiar with. This does not make my analysis untrue, but it does make it incomplete and it risks coming to conclusions that might have to be revised once more attention is paid to the systems of oppression that I did not focus on.

2.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERSECTIONAL LGBTIQ POLITICS IN THE U.S.[39]

Intersectionality is, of course, not only a theoretical concept, which functions as a research paradigm, but is also embodied in and articulated through much political activism. In the following chapter, I will not only outline the history of intersectional LGBTIQ activism but also point out how and why it is often left out of many accounts of LGBTIQ history. This historical overview serves to further situate both the comics I analyze as well as my own research project within a history of intersectional LGBTIQ activism and theorizing.

In the U.S., queer comics in general are a product of LGBTIQ activism and culture 'after Stonewall.' The Stonewall riots, which took place at the Stonewall Inn in New York on June 27th, 1969, marked a turning point in LGBTIQ organizing in the U.S. While the Stonewall riots were not the first time that LGBTIQ

---

39 This chapter has an unfortunate metronormative bias. In his book, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, Scott Herring details how queer studies tend to treat LGBTIQ life in large urban areas as the normative ideal and really as the only worthwhile reference point for LGBTIQ life in general. This chapter, too, draws only on examples from New York and the Bay Area in this short overview of the history of intersectional LGBTIQ politics. This is not to say that these kinds of politics were only practiced in urban locales. It is rather a reflection of the metronormative focus of the two books that serve as my main sources, Emily K. Hobson's *Lavender and Red* and Christina B. Hanhardt's *Safe Space*. Where LGBTIQ histories in other locales are relevant for my analysis, I include them in more detail in the respective chapters.