

Reading the History of Society Through the Lens of a History of Sexuality

Lust und Verwundbarkeit [Desire and Vulnerability] exists at the nexus of history of culture, religion and gender as well as research on the Holocaust and is inspired by queer theory, disability studies and feminist thought. The historian Dagmar Herzog explores how discussions on sexuality shaped influential debates in the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century in Europe and the U. S. and how these debates impacted on sexuality, sexual orientation and the relationship between reproductive rights and disability.

The volume consists of two parts; a first and larger part compiles seven published scholarly articles and conference papers in English and German. The second part of the book consists of an interview with the author covering her bicultural background, professional development, research interests and key observations in her study of sexual history as well as questions relating to the contemporary U. S. In addition, the book includes the author's bibliography and an afterword by Norbert Frei, the editor of the Jena Center series *Beiträge zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Contributions to 20th Century History]. Overall, the book offers insights into Dagmar Herzog's interrogations into episodes of the history of sexuality as a history of society in the abovementioned space and period, the experiences and the intellectual and political environment that informed her thought and the context in which her work took shape.

Herzog draws upon diverse, but related bodies of thought. Reminiscent of early queer theorists in the U. S., the author suggests in her opening essay that treating sexuality as marginal produces a flawed understanding of key social and political transformations (7 f.). Her »insistence on integrating the history of sexuality with more traditional historiographical foci« (7) is programmatic for the larger part of the selection of articles, which cover issues ranging from memory-management in West Germany in the 1950s–1960s to the persistence of homophobia in psychoanalysis in the U. S. Moreover, the articles mirror the Foucauldian conviction that there is no ›truth‹ to sexuality. Rather, sexuality is shaped by continuous struggles over meanings in a field structured by historically specific relations of power (cf. 212).

As an overview of issues Herzog has delved into thus far, the volume covers a range of topics, yet recurrent questions tie several articles together. The articles

»Abtreibung, Behinderung, Christentum: Von der Geschichte der Sexualität zur Sexualpolitik der Gegenwart« [Abortion, Disability, Christianity: From a History of Sexuality to Contemporary Sexual Politics], »Umstrittene Freiheit: Die ›Sexuelle Revolution‹ in Westeuropa« [Contested Freedom: The ›Sexual Revolution‹ in Western Europe] and lesser so »»What Incredible Yearnings Human Beings Have: Sexuality in Europe in the Twentieth Century« are linked by the key question of whether the liberalisation paradigm appropriately captures developments regarding sexuality in 20th century Europe. It is particularly in the articles on the ›sexual revolution‹ that Herzog also enquires into how individuals experienced sexuality amidst ethical controversies over sexuality.

How concepts of sexuality travelled from Western Europe to the post-World War II U.S. and vice versa and how and why developments in psychoanalysis in the U.S. differed from those in West Germany is a key question linking the articles »Freud's ›Cold Wars‹: Christianization and Desexualization of Psychoanalysis in the Postwar United States«, »Von Ödipus zu Narziss: Die bemerkenswerte Beständigkeit der Homophobie in der Psychoanalyse« [From Oedipus to Narziss: The Remarkable Persistence of Homophobia in Psychoanalysis] and »Marx und Freud, Masters und Johnson: Kritische Sexualwissenschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland« [Marx and Freud, Masters and Johnson: Critical Sexology in the Federal Republic of Germany].

Herzog uses several methods to answer the questions outlined above. All articles are based on a large selection of various sources on one particular issue, ranging from theological and feminist publications to parliament documents, to name a few. These are in turn contextualised within a historically specific socio-political environment, allowing distinctions to be made within a culture in a particular period as well as between cultures, here: between developments among Western European countries as well as between West Germany and the U.S. Finally, Herzog reconstructs the past in »Sexuality, Memory, Morality: West Germany in the 1950s–1960s« using the method of reconstructing how each »constituency approached both the immediate and the more distant past through and against the interpretations of its historical predecessors« (8).

The interview »»Ich habe eine riesige Datenbank in meinem Herzen: Ein Gespräch über Sozialisation, Sexualgeschichte und die USA der Gegenwart« [I have a huge database in my heart: A Conversation on Socialisation, Sexual History and the Contemporary U.S.] traces how Herzog's family and bicultural background, non-academic and academic work experience and the socio-political environment in which her life and work developed inspired her research questions and shaped her perspective on the issues she engages with.

The strengths of the book are manifold. First, the author's approach combined with innovative methods generates original contributions to the history of society. Second, Herzog's broad range of sources and a perspective that is – with some limitations – sensitive to gender, sexual orientation and disability as social relations of power contribute to differentiated and sharp-witted analyses

of episodes in 20th century history of sexuality in Europe, and by implication, to a history of emotions. Third, the contextualisation of the development of psychoanalytical thought into broader social debates in the U.S. and the Federal Republic of Germany presents a strong argument for theorising the relationship between history and theory. Fourth, by including an interview on the author's socialisation and professional development, the book is a prime example of making transparent the development of research questions and one's own standpoint as a researcher.

In her first article (»Sexuality, Memory and Morality: West Germany in the 1950s–1960s«) Herzog makes the perhaps most powerful case for interpreting traditional historical subjects through a history of sexuality. The author offers an explanation for the post-World War II focus on sexual morality rather than moral attention to mass murder as a site for »reconstructions of memory and meanings of Nazism« (8), debunks the widely held belief that National Socialist sexual politics was indiscriminately repressive (33) and points to the transformative power of the aforementioned fiction (35).

In contrast to most fellow historians of sexuality (211), Herzog complicates the notion of a progressive development of sexual liberties in Europe over the 20th century. Without denying an overall de-stigmatisation of sexuality in this particular space and time (77), Herzog points to recurrent conservative backlashes on national and global levels, discriminatory notions that accompanied liberalising efforts and ambivalences experienced in the course of the »sexual revolution« (cf. 78 f.), which in turn contributed to uncertainty and disillusionment, rendering sexual freedoms vulnerable (124).

It is particularly in the articles on memory-management in post-World War II West Germany and the »sexual revolution« in Western Europe that Herzog also enquires into how people experienced sexuality amidst ethical controversies over sexuality or in the aftermath of these debates. Informed by a feminist perspective, the author also considers different effects of sexual policies on (cf. 47) and conflicts over sexuality between common genders (117 f.). By highlighting the impact of debates and policies on how people experienced sex, Herzog also contributes to a history of emotions (cf. 79).

The articles on the development of post-World War II U.S. psychoanalysis and West German sexology lend themselves to a comparative history of Freudian thought. Herzog observes a desexualisation of U.S. psychoanalysis in the course of battles over the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis between 1947 and 1953 (129) and a persistence of homophobia and misogyny in various guises until the early 1990s (172). With regard to developments in West German sexology, she traces how radical readings of Freud, empirical studies on sexuality in the U.S. and critical theory inspired West German sexologists to produce empirical studies themselves (189), to develop critical perspectives on sexual politics (191) and to explore emotional aspects of sexuality (196).

Even the best book is not without some shortcomings. This one has structural and conceptual limits. While the interview on the author's socialisation and professional development and Herzog's article on sexuality in Europe in the 20th century give some hints at the research interests and questions that fuel her research, the book does not have an introduction or a conclusion to frame the wide-ranging work presented. Hence, the order of the articles only starts to make sense and the premises and applied methods only become obvious in the course of reading the book, and the reasons for the choice of her particular research nexus remain opaque until the interview.

Moreover, the author focuses on cisgenders only, i.e. male-bodied individuals who identify as men and female-bodied people who identify as women. Expanding a gender-sensitive perspective to less common embodiments of gender could have contributed to identifying a further ambiguity of the ›sexual revolution‹ and offered a more differentiated perspective on sexology in West Germany. While the author hails the at the time young sexologists in West Germany for their »virtually rebellious reaction to the conservative normativity [...] of the post-war period« (189), she does not consider the pathologisation and heterosexualisation of transsexual individuals some of the sexologists she mentions were involved with in the late 1970s.

Overall, Herzog's approach of reading episodes of the history of society through the lens of a history of sexuality, her differentiated perspective on causes and effects of sexual policies in clearly defined spaces and periods, the breadth of her sources and her contextualisation of theory into historically specific settings generate original perspectives on the history of the ›sexual revolution‹ in West European countries and psychoanalytical thought in the U.S. and West Germany and provide inspiration for further research.

Adrian de Silva

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