1 Introduction

1.1 WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS BOOK: A VERY BRIEF OVERVIEW

Have you ever been to a queer party, attended a reading by a trans author, or watched a lesbian movie and wondered where all the People of Color were? Well, the overwhelming whiteness of most lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter, queer (LGBTIQ) spaces and representations in Europe and its settler colonies[1] – unless they are specifically designated as by and for LGBTIQ People of Color – is not coincidental. In fact, already the very concept of 'the homosexual,' which provided the conceptual basis for gay and lesbian subject formation and for what would eventually become LGBTIQ social and political organization,

> is a theoretical construct which came about in the context of European modernity and which, from the beginning, was developed by distinguishing itself from the sexual practices of men in other geographical regions. This means that homosexual subject formation in itself – and until today – is only possible by distinguishing itself from the 'sex of the others.' (Çetin and Voß 12)[2]

1 I use the expression 'Europe and its settler colonies' when referring to the group of countries commonly denoted as 'the West' in order to remind myself and the readers that the term 'the West' actually has a hidden colonial and racial meaning in that it usually indicates those countries where white people of European descent constitute the dominant majority.

2 "'der Homosexuelle' ist ein theoretisches Konstrukt, das mit der europäischen Moderne aufkommt und von Anbeginn an in direkter Abgrenzung zu den gleichgeschlechtlichen sexuellen Betätigungen der Männer in anderen geographischen Regionen ent–wickelt wird. Gleichzeitig ist damit homosexuelle Subjektbildung per se – und bis heute – nur in Abgrenzung gegen den 'Sex der Anderen' […] möglich."

The whiteness of LGBTIQ contexts and the racist exclusions that perpetuate it are often normalized to such a degree that they become entirely unremarkable to many white people. However, LGBTIQ People of Color have organized against and spoken up against racism in LGBTIQ contexts loudly and clearly since before the Stonewall riots in 1968 (see chapter 2.3). Most white LGBTIQ people, though, have either ignored these criticisms entirely or have found ourselves incapable of creating less toxic spaces despite of what we see as our 'best attempts' at eradicating racism in our midst. While LGBTIQ People of Color have been at the forefront of intersectional[3] struggles for justice and the well-being of all, over the past few decades, white LGBTIQ people such as Milo Yiannopoulos or Alice Weidel, to name just a couple of the most extreme and well-known proponents of this brand of LGBTIQ politics, have increasingly become accomplices to right-wing movements demonizing People of Color, particularly people who are perceived as 'Muslim,'[4] while promising 'inclusion' into the mainstream to white LGBTIQ people.

As a white German formerly-lesbian-turned-queer trans guy disgusted with my own racism as well as that around me, I wanted to understand better why we white LGBTIQ people keep reproducing racism in our own communities as well as contributing to it on a national and even global scale. I looked at LGBTIQ comics from the U.S. as popular self-representations of what it means to be LGBTIQ in the U.S. From these self-representations, I hoped to gain a clearer understanding of how white LGBTIQ people see ourselves. How do we make sense of racism? How do we understand our own position in systems of white supremacy? How do we interpret our relationships to People of Color? How do we envision ourselves engaging systems of oppression intersectionally? Ulti-

3 You will find in-depth discussions of all theoretical terms and concepts referred to in this book in chapters 2.2-2.2.4. For now, please bear with me while I use these terms without explanation for the purpose of introducing the general structure of this book.

4 I put the term 'Muslim' in quotation marks because racism against 'Muslims' does not only target people who self-identify as Muslims but all people whom white people perceive to be of Arabic or Middle-Eastern origin, regardless of their religious affiliation (and regardless of their de facto nationality or place of origin). As Erik Love puts it, "wearing a hijab or a turban, having certain skin tones or speaking with certain accents are all physical markers that are enough to create a vulnerability to [anti-'Muslim' racism] in the United States. As a result of this racialized process, [anti-'Muslim' racism] affects Christians, Muslims and Sikhs from all backgrounds and, in particular, people who have ancestry in North Africa as well as in western and southern Asia" (402).

mately, I wanted to know if and how the ways we explain ourselves to ourselves stand in the way of our becoming effective agents for intersectional justice.

My in-depth analysis of two comics by two of the most well-known – and most explicitly anti-racist – white LGBTIQ comic artists in the U.S., Alison Bechdel's *Dykes To Watch Out For* and Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby*, suggests that the stories white LGBTIQ people tell about ourselves might indeed pose some problems if we truly want to address our complicity in white supremacy. Judging from these two comics, which are extremely popular among progressive, leftist, intersectionally-minded white LGBTIQ people such as myself, it seems that we enjoy reading stories where white people who are openly and proudly LGBTIQ are represented as racially aware yet virtually non-racist ourselves and LGBTIQ communities as effortlessly diverse without ever being embroiled in any sort of conflict about racism. It appears that we might be prone to equate racism and cis_hetero_sexism – even see cis_hetero_sexism as the currently more urgent issue – yet fail to conceive of the very real effects racism has in the lives of LGBTIQ People of Color. If we can only recognize racism in the abstract, 'somewhere out there,' but not as something we benefit from and (re)produce in our relationships, communities, and politics, it becomes easier to understand why we not only continuously fail to show up for racial justice but actually keep stewing in our own racist juices.

I was also interested in how LGBTIQ People of Color represent themselves and the LGBTIQ communities to which they belong. How do their self-representations differ from those of white LGBTIQ people? Where do they challenge white discourses and what kinds of counter-narratives do they offer? I analyzed Jaime Cortez's *Sexile/Sexilio* as one example of a counter-narrative that decenters white LGBTIQ people and our assumptions, centering the resilience of LGBTIQ People of Color facing multiple interlocking systems of oppression instead. As my analysis shows, even though stories like *Sexile/Sexilio* are neither about nor for white people, white people can still learn a lot from them. *Sexile/Sexilio* asks white readers to re-evaluate the homonationalist stories we have been telling ourselves and to replace them with more nuanced understandings of the complicated ways in which cis_hetero_sexism, racism, and U.S. imperialism intersect and the role white LGBTIQ people play in all this.

All in all, this book is an invitation to white LGBTIQ people to make explicit our implicit assumptions about the workings of racism within LGBTIQ communities and beyond, to take a good, long look at how we (would like to) see ourselves, to challenge ourselves to let go of flattering myths of white LGBTIQ innocence, and to replace them with an honest appraisal of the precise ways in which we actually are the problem. Only if we are clear about how we contribute

to the upholding of white supremacy, can we begin to imagine other ways of being in relation and join LGBTIQ People of Color in their struggles to dismantle white supremacy.

1.2 A FEW WORDS ON FORMAL DECISIONS

In this book, I sometimes use first-person plural pronouns (i.e. 'we,' 'us,' and 'our') when writing about white people, LGBTIQ people, and/or white LGBTIQ people. I belong to all of these groups and I find it important to remind myself as well as the readers of this book that I am part of the dynamics I am analyzing here. I experience oppression and I contribute to the oppression of others. I am part and parcel of what I write about not an 'objective outsider' writing about 'interesting phenomena' that have nothing to do with my life. The 'we' I use in this book is a small 'we' if you will. It indicates my inclusion in the groups I am writing about, but it does not necessarily include you, the reader. Sometimes you will be part of the 'we' I use, sometimes you will not. My use of 'we' in no way tries to subsume you or make any kind of assumption about you. I simply try to be honest in marking where I stand. If you are not part of the 'we' I use, then we are in some sense separated by our experiences of the systems of oppression I write about. I believe it is important to be honest about these separations as well because only if we acknowledge them, do we have any chance of overcoming what separates us.

Sometimes I also use third-person plural pronouns (i.e. 'they,' 'them,' and 'their') when I write about groups to which I belong. This is to indicate that even though oppression separates us into different groups who share certain experiences, we are not all the same, neither with regard to our position vis-à-vis other systems of oppression nor with regard to our politics. Thus, when I write about white people and/or LGBTIQ people who I feel have little in common with me, I often use third person plural pronouns to indicate a measure of distance. Neither commonality nor distance are absolute, of course, so that my choice of pronouns is largely dependent on my idiosyncratic sense of proximity as well as the specific flow of my argument. So bear with me if you stumble across my pronoun usage, and let them be a reminder to you that oppression positions and separates us but does not determine us.

I capitalize all terms referring to groups that have formed and chosen to name themselves in resistance against racism and colonialism, such as 'Black,' 'Indigenous,' 'People of Color' (and other compounds like 'Women of Color' or