

‘Gays and Lesbians of Color’). This is a common practice to highlight that these are political self-definitions shaped in response to racism, *not* descriptions of skin-color or other physical features. Even though the term ‘white’ is also not to be misunderstood as an apparently ‘self-evident’ description of a particular range of skin colors, I specifically do not capitalize this term because whiteness denotes the dominant position within racist and colonialist systems of oppression. It refers to the group of people who, for the past 500 years, have invented, upheld, and benefitted from racism and colonialism. The term ‘white’ can therefore never be understood as a positive self-identification that marks a position of resistance against oppression.

I attempt to reproduce quotations exactly as they were originally written. I do not follow the custom of marking ‘mistakes’ by including [sic] in quotes. To me, this practice feels condescending and elitist in that it upholds standards of ‘correct language’ and shames authors who for whatever reason cannot or do not want to conform to that standard. I realize that not marking ‘mistakes’ leaves open the question whether the ‘mistakes’ are part of the original text or due to my erroneous copying of the text. This ambiguity is the prize that has to be paid for respecting the authors’ own spelling and word choices, regardless of whether or not I deem them to be ‘correct.’

Because my first language is German and this book was written in a German context, it includes a comparatively large number of quotes from German authors. All translations of these quotes are mine unless otherwise noted. Because the entire book is written in English, I do not presume that all readers understand German. For this reason, I put the translated quotes in the text and the original German versions in footnotes so that they do not interrupt the flow of reading.

I quote a large number of texts that liberally use various forms of emphasis. For ease of reading I do not specify each time that the emphases were, indeed, part of the original. I specifically note whenever I added an emphasis of my own.

### 1.3 HOW I CAME TO WRITE THIS BOOK

I grew up as an only-child in one of the more working-class dominated, but still solidly middle-class suburbs of Frankfurt/Main during the 1980s and 90s. Both my parents worked in large, international banks in Frankfurt. When I was two, my mother quit her salaried job to become my full-time caretaker. Parts of my family have deep roots in the area in and around Frankfurt. Other parts hailed

from Northern and Eastern Germany and France. For all my life, my family has seen itself and has been seen by others as white and West-German. All of my immediate family members can be considered middle- to upper middle-class. As far as I know, none of the family members I have personally met have ever identified as LGBTIQ.

Given my social location in the matrix of Cold War and post-Cold War West-Germany, my conscious experiences of oppression began when I came out as a lesbian as a late teen at the turn of the millennium. In the years that followed, I slowly came to learn about feminism and the gay and lesbian movement. While I began to develop a first understanding of the oppression I experienced as both a woman and a lesbian, it did not, at first, occur to me to interrogate my privilege and the ways in which I oppressed others at the same time as I grappled with my own experiences of oppression.

It was not until I came to do a Master of Arts in Theological Studies at Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) in Boston from 2004 to 2006 that I began to learn the words and concepts that allowed me to recognize and think about the racism that had (unbeknownst to me) structured my entire life. EDS offered a mandatory class called “Foundations for Theological Praxis” to all its incoming students. The class was, in essence, an anti-racism training because EDS rightly believed that all theological (today I would simply say: all) praxis (in the contexts of North America and Europe, which are the contexts I am concerned with in this book) will go deeply astray if it does not take the twin systems of European colonialism and racism into account as two of the foundational systems of oppression organizing life and death in large parts of the world for the past 500 years.

While “Foundations for Theological Praxis” did indeed prove foundational in my own process of coming to terms with what it means to be a white, middle-class scholar of American studies in Germany, it took several years, many more classes at five different universities, many, many, many books and articles written by amazing Scholars and Writers of Color (and a few white ones), several deep friendships with People of Color (and a few white ones), who graciously taught me most of what I know and practice today about intersectional activism and thinking, and several painful, exhausting, transformative conflicts about racism in the LGBTIQ scene and at the university in Berlin for me to come to see racism as *the* central problem in the LGBTIQ contexts that (used to) feel most like home to me.<sup>5</sup>

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5 This is not to say that other systems of oppression, particularly sexism, classism, and ableism, have not also caused deep rifts and exclusions within LGBTIQ contexts. However, at least in the contexts that I am familiar with either through personal expe-

I wrote this book as a white, queer trans guy who has benefitted (and continues to benefit) from white supremacy and who has (inadvertently) reproduced much of the racism and the white supremacist ways of making sense of myself and the world that I critique in this book. In all likelihood, there are still ways in which I perpetuate white supremacy even in this very book that I wrote to critique it. The fact that I was socialized into and benefit from the systems I am trying to critique constitutes a serious limitation of this book. Nevertheless, I believe it is imperative for white people that we articulate to the best of our abilities the innumerable ways in which we are, indeed, the problem, as George Yancy reminds us: “*to be white [...] is to be a problem*” (“Un-sutured” xiii). If we cannot name how, precisely, we are the problem, we have no hope of ever becoming less of a problem. And if we do not articulate the understanding we have reached so far, we can also not be criticized and held accountable for our thinking and our actions that follow from our thinking.

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rience or through my readings on LGBTIQ issues, the most explosive, enduring, and divisive conflicts were, in fact, caused by racism. As I will elucidate in later chapters, the offer of mainstream inclusion for some LGBTIQ people has also been used to justify racist politics beyond LGBTIQ contexts. As my discussion of the case of Cuba will show (see chapter 5.2.1), this same co-optation strategy has also, on occasion, been used to further the goals of capitalism, but its main impetus lies in the advancement of racist agendas. Both of these observations, the particular virulence of racism within LGBTIQ contexts and the co-optation of LGBTIQ politics for racist ends, have led me to focus my study on racism rather than on other systems of oppression.

