

***Queerness—What Would the Queers Do?
Analytical Concepts, Fluidity, and the Potential
of Queer Semantic Fields for Global History***

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In 2017, queer activists in Russia began to alert the international community about new forms of concentration camps in the North Caucasus, releasing information on the incarceration and torture of queer individuals following top-down queerphobic policies by the authoritarian regime of Ramzan Kadyrov.¹ As the issue attracted international attention, journalists started questioning the Chechen leader. Kadyrov denied reports of human rights violations, retorting that such abuse could not take place in the south Russian republic because: ‘we don’t have those kinds of people here. We don’t have any gays. If there are any, take them to Canada.’² For Kadyrov, the use of ‘gays’ seems to be synonymous with all other forms of non-heteronormative desires and sexualities. This type of discourse is obviously not unique to the Russian Federation but historians specialised in Russian history have highlighted how queer politics has become an important tenet of culture wars beyond the Euro-American world, where populist or authoritarian leaders, such as Vladimir Putin, contrast a fundamentalist Christian vision of the world with a so-called ‘decadent western civilisation.’³ Dan Healey examines how so-called ‘anti-propaganda laws’ that muzzle queer activists in Russia are parts of an anti-Western and would-be anti-imperialist rhetoric, a counter-model to homonationalist discourses in the Global North.⁴ Leaving aside the bad faith arguments of populist leaders, what does that mean for historians writing a global history of queerness? Is queer history an imperialist project? Is using concepts such as gay and lesbian to describe experiences in the Global South a new form of cultural universalism? How can we write the story of gay Chechen men if they do not necessarily define themselves as gay?

¹ DAVID FRANCE, *Welcome to Chechnya* (USA: HBO Films, 2020); JOSHUA YAFFA, ‘Chapter 2: Beware of Dragons,’ in JOSHUA YAFFA, *Between Two Fires. Truth, Ambition, and Compromise in Putin’s Russia* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2020): 77–121.

² ADAM TAYLOR, ‘Ramzan Kadyrov says there are no gay men in Chechnya — and if there are any, they should move to Canada,’ *The Washington Post*, 15 July 2017.

³ DAN HEALEY, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). This is not only the case in the Russian Federation. For similar discourses in North America see ANNIKA BROCKSCHMIDT, *Amerikas Gotteskrieger: Wie die religiöse Rechte die Demokratie gefährdet* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2022).

⁴ DAN HEALEY, ‘Introduction: 2013 – Russia’s Year of Political Homophobia,’ in HEALEY, *Russian Homophobia*, 1–24.

Global historians are wary of the universalisation of concepts.⁵ Mapping dis/entanglements and dis/connections, they try to break free of diffusionist and colonial framings where ideas are born at the centre and circulated to the peripheries.⁶ One example of a diffusionist model of history would be David Armitage's research on the USA Declaration of Independence and its influence on political revolutions around the globe.⁷ This hazard is at the core of the tension between world history and global history. Scholars interested in writing the latter are no strangers to postcolonial critiques of their project.⁸ In short, writing a global history of ideas or a global conceptual history needs to consider the dangers of universalism, otherwise a global history of ideas becomes nothing more than an empty neocolonial vessel reproduced in scholarly disguise.⁹

Echoing these critiques of global history, queer history is not necessarily an all-encompassing project linking all queer experiences across the world. Evolving out of gay and lesbian history, queer history investigates sexualities at the margin, while also highlighting how deviances from the norm can also be found at the centre of dominant parts of society, and thereby questioning the idea of norms themselves.¹⁰ Like global history, queer history is a story of in-between, circulation, and entanglements. Unsurprisingly, the implications share the dangers of the global history project. In other words, how can we assess semantic fields linking different examples of queerness together across language, time, and space and how can we discuss queerness without falling prey to diffusionist tropes? Furthermore, by discussing queerness as a form and as a methodology, queer historians also need to provincialise Euro-American queerness. This means assessing power structures behind both the preponderance of Euro-American concepts and categories—for example gay, lesbian or trans—and readings of the queer past anchored in a Euro-American genealogy of queerness i.e., a narrative of queer supposedly started in Europe and being tied to European older

⁵ CHRISTOPHER L. HILL, 'Conceptual Universalization in the Transnational Nineteenth Century,' in *Global Intellectual History*, eds ANDREW SARTORI and SAMUEL MOYN (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 134–58.

⁶ SEBASTIAN CONRAD, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁷ DAVID ARMITAGE, *Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁸ KATJA NAUMANN, 'Long-Term and Decentred Trajectories of Doing History from a Global Perspective: Institutionalization, Postcolonial Critique, and Empiricist Approaches, Before and After the 1970s,' *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 3 (2019): 335–54; SAMIR AMIN, *Global History: A View from the South* (Dakar: Codesria, 2011); PAMELA CROSSLEY, 'Why Do Expectations Persist that Global History Should Be History?,' *Cromohs: Cyber Review of Modern Historiography* 2021, <https://doi.org/10.36253/cromohs-12614>; GABRIELA DE LIMA GRECCO and SVEN SCHUSTER, 'Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American Perspective,' *Journal of World History* 31, no. 2 (2020): 425–46.

⁹ MARGRIT PERNAU, 'Global History - Wegbereiter für einen neuen Kolonialismus?,' *Connections. A Journal for Historians and Area Specialists*, accessed 6 May 2023, <http://www.connections.clio-online.net/debate/id/diskussionen-572>

¹⁰ Birgit Rommelspacher, a psychologist, and educator, uses the term 'dominance society' to describe a social system which establishes hierarchies based on various forms of difference such as class, gender, and race. In this system, the dominant group is largely oblivious to their position of power and view themselves as equals, while remaining ignorant of the existence of their own hierarchies. See BIRGIT ROMMELSPACHER, *Dominanzkultur: Texte zu Fremdheit und Macht* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1995).

concepts such as Urnings, homophiles, etc.¹¹ Concepts and experiences of queerness from the Global South also need to be deprovincialised, meaning that queer historians need to understand other actor-based concepts linked to intimacy, sexuality, gender, and desire beyond the Euro-American world. They must realise how sexual and gendered mores elsewhere are not necessarily queer, in the sense of being marginalised and outside the norm, once they are localised.¹² A global queer history and a global history of concepts are thus not that different in their use of analytical concepts.¹³ Drawing connections beyond different actor-based concepts, analytical concepts allow discussions of various historical actors synchronically and diachronically—even against the grain—without universalising concepts or using diffusionist models. Analytical concepts form the fabric of a semantic web that allows us to map entanglements beyond problems of translation and beyond anachronism.¹⁴

In this article, I argue that global historians can learn from the fluidity and murkiness offered by queer theory and from interdisciplinary queer readings of history.¹⁵ Queerness as an analytical concept provides a link between historical experiences. This link, created by historians according to their research question, is an important methodological tool. Relational, entangled—and disentangled—across time and space, historical actors then enter into conversation with one another without using the same concepts, without defining themselves similarly and without being aware that they are part of a broader community. A queer Black queen, such as Marsha P. Johnson in New York City during the Stonewall uprisings, and a white German lawyer, such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs arguing for the rights of sexual misfits in Munich in 1867, did not necessarily have the same conception of their sexualities or of sexuality in general. They surely did not use the same concepts to reflect on what constitutes the queer subject throughout history.

Writing the history of queer misfits implies understanding codes and looking for what was silenced, erased, and deemed taboo. This is not without dangers. As Laura Doan warns us, looking for ancestral genealogies to confirm categories of identities in the present would be paradoxical for intellectuals trying to question and deconstruct

¹¹ This is the narrative brought forward by Robert Beachy. See ROBERT BEACHY, *Gay Berlin. Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014). For a summary of the era in Germany see CLAYTON J. WHISNANT, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History 1880–1945* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016).

¹² TOM BOELLSTORFF, MAURO CABRAL, MICHA CÁRDENAS, TRYSTAN COTTEN, ERIC A. STANLEY, KALANIOPUA YOUNG, and AREN Z. AIZURA. 'Decolonizing Transgender. A Roundtable Discussion,' *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2016): 419–39.

¹³ MARGRIT PERNAU and DOMINIC SACHSENMAIER, 'Introduction. Global History, Translation and Semantic Changes,' in *Global Conceptual History: A Reader*, eds MARGRIT PERNAU and DOMINIC SACHSENMAIER (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016): 1–28.

¹⁴ MARTIN FUCHS, 'Reaching out; or, Nobody Exists in One Context Only: Society as Translation,' *Translation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 21–40. For a visual example see SÉBASTIEN TREMBLAY, 'Visual Collective Memories of National Socialism: Transatlantic HIV/AIDS Activism and Discourses of Persecutions,' *German History* 40, no. 4 (2022): 563–82.

¹⁵ On queer readings see CHRISTOPHER EWING and SÉBASTIEN TREMBLAY, 'Introduction. Queer Imprints,' in *Queer Media in the German Speaking World: New Approaches to Print Sources*, eds SÉBASTIEN TREMBLAY and CHRISTOPHER EWING (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2024).

categories in the present.¹⁶ This is why, contrary to gay and lesbian history, queer history goes beyond the—also valid—impulse of identity politics. The idea is not to fix what was, but to show how mobile categories of analysis allow multiple readings of the past both diachronically and synchronically. These sorts of readings of what was and what is fluid should inspire global historians. Enthused by queerness as an analytical concept and queer readings across time and space, global historians could translate the conditional aspects of queer history, that is, the contextualisation and localisation of analytical concepts. They could then write a history of ideas with global pretences without falling prey to universalisms. By understanding the disruptive potential, but also the possible historiographical cohesion, heuristically offered by queerness as an analytical concept, global historians can appreciate multilinguistic, multitemporal, and multidimensional historical events or underline power structures at the core of their area of research. A reflection on queerness and fluidity thus contributes to other foci of global history.

This essay is an intervention divided in three sections that build upon each other. I first define what I mean by queer readings of the past and queerness as an analytical concept for the writing of queer history. I highlight the empirical repercussions of such an endeavour and emphasise how fluidity helps the creation of semantic fields. The second section uses a concrete example from my research on queer memories and queer experiences of National Socialism. By showing the frictions in collective memory and the writing of a queer history of German fascism and its commemoration, I stress the potential of queerness as an analytical concept by accentuating how its fluidity enables a democratisation of memory, allowing a much better diachronic analysis of the past. The memory of the Nazi persecutions of queer individuals has become something of an ‘international property’ and a vital component to the performative aspects at the heart of modern queer politics in Germany and abroad. Thus, the continued integration of queer history into that cultural memory—and the discussions and debates surrounding it—acts as a signifier on a more global scale through multidirectional identification processes and metaphors by non-German queer activists and politicians.¹⁷ Finally, the third section goes global, furthering the historical potential of fluidity across space and examining the synchronic prospective offered by analytical concepts, such as queerness, and then presenting its benefits for the writing of global history.

Queerness as an Analytical Concept. The Potential of Fluidity

Historians working on queer history have long been on the lookout for silence in the archives. Against the grain, they have first written what they believed was a genealogy

¹⁶ LAURA DOAN, ‘Queer History / Queer Memory. The Case of Alan Turing,’ *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 23, no. 1 (2017): 113–36.

¹⁷ MICHAEL ROTHBERG, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); ALEIDA ASSMANN, ‘The Holocaust: A Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community,’ in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, eds ALEIDA ASSMANN and SEBASTIAN CONRAD (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97–117.

of sexualities, desires, and intimacies at the margin. Understanding the various codes used by their historical actors, they knew that, for example, a German woman calling another *Freundin* (a female friend), could actually mean more than friendship.¹⁸ Soon, this gay, lesbian, or more recently trans history evolved beyond the idea of adding more voices to our writing of history.¹⁹ Queer history is about questioning the need of fixed sexual and gender-specific categories and binaries in order to understand sexualities at the margin, but also about questioning the main categories at the core of societies' conception of gender and sexuality.

Methodology-wise, this search for queerness, for norms, and things outside the norm has pushed queer historians to read the archive differently. To paraphrase Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, these readings can be both reparative or paranoid—they can be both on the lookout for erasure and hidden suffering (paranoid readings), or an assessment of pleasure (reparative readings) through centuries of silence.²⁰ In doing so, historians of queerness have not only learned the codes of the past, but also to question their own constructions.²¹ This has taken many forms, from deeper empirical research to reflections on positionality and the temporality of doing queer history.²² Through the institutionalisation of queer history and a certain longing of queer historians to belong to more canonical parts of the discipline, the form taken by queer history has evolved into its own language, its own subfield, with its own framings and institutions.²³ Nonetheless, queer paradoxically remains a fluid category. It marks a possible in-between, an amorphous space of possibilities between sexualities and gender expressions. Coming from outside the norm, it questions and deconstructs sexual and gender norms, eventually breaking free from binary models of analysis.²⁴ This is not without similitude to the transformation of global approaches to history, where ideas of core and peripheries, of postcolonial reparative and paranoid readings

¹⁸ *Die Freundin* was also the name of a magazine for queer/lesbian women published during Weimar. The magazine can also be read in a queer lens, expanding its taxonomy beyond cis lesbian desires. See ELIZABETH SCHOPPELREI, 'Speculative Formations: Trans Poetry, Taxonomies, and Communities in the Lesbian Magazine *Die Freundin* (1924-1933),' in *Queer Media in the German Speaking World*, eds TREMBLAY and EWING.

¹⁹ JENNIFER V. EVANS, 'Why Queer German History?,' *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 1–14.

²⁰ EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You,' in *Touching Feeling*, ed. EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 123–51.

²¹ JUSTIN BENGRIY, 'Can and Should we Queer the Past?,' in *What is History, Now? How the Past and the Present Speak to Each Other*, eds HELEN CARR and SUZANNAH LIPSCOMB (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021): 48–65.

²² CAROLYN DINSHAW, LEE EDELMAN, RODERICK A. FERGUSON, CARLA FRECCERO, ELIZABETH FREEMAN, JUDITH/JACK HALBERSTAM, ANNAMARIE JAGOSE, CHRISTOPHER S. NEALON, and TAN HOANG NGUYEN, 'Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 177–95; RACHEL CORBMAN, 'Does Queer Studies Have an Anti-Empiricism Problem?,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 57–62.

²³ DAVID L. ENG and JASBIR K. PUAR, 'Introduction. Left of Queer,' *Social Text* 38, no. 4 (2020): 1–24.

²⁴ For an example, see the history of heterosexuality as a concept from the perspective of queer history: HEIKO STOFF, 'Heterosexualität,' in *Was ist Homosexualität? Forschungsgeschichte, gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen und Perspektiven*, eds FLORIAN MILDENBERGER et al. (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2014), 73–104.

of the past, have rendered possible the analysis of global entanglements beyond binary spatial models of analysis, e.g., inside and outside empires.²⁵ To put it another way, queer history and global history already echo each other with their critical stance on centres and peripheries, and by offering a deconstruction of siloed analysis through the investigation of historical entanglements of genders and sexualities outside binaries, and transregional transfers outside a division of the world in clearly defined regional containers.

However, discussing the limits of a purely oppositional queer theory criticising norms for the sake of antinormativity, Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson nuance the now established anti-identarian posture of canonical queer thinkers.²⁶ Yet Wiegman and Wilson also state that ‘the bifurcation of the workings of a norm into centre and periphery is the conceptual miscalculation that underwrites the seeming good sense of antinormativity. In imagining the norm as a device that divides the world into centres and peripheries, antinormativity misses what is most engaging about a norm: that in collating the world, it gathers up everything.’²⁷ Choosing to investigate descriptors frequently associated with ‘norm’ as a concept—such as domination, homogenisation, exclusion, identity—Wiegman and Wilson highlight that the potential of exploring norms lies in their dynamism and fluidity.²⁸

Inspired by the search for queerness in the archive and its fluidity, global historians can similarly write a global conceptual history beyond binaries and fixed categories, on the lookout for amorphous analytical concepts to draw broader semantic fields. This fluidity is not a synonym for vagueness, but an invitation to go beyond actor-based concepts and identify connections across language, space, and time, while still using the words and communication networks of their historical actors.

Inspired by queerness, a global history of concepts draws connections through differences without imposing a model.²⁹ It provincialises, but also deprovincialises, alternating between the global, the local, and eventually, the glocal. Before moving to the global, the next section demonstrates the relevance of this fluidity and opening of categories of analysis for a history of concepts in a regional or national context.

²⁵ See here the important discussion of modernity beyond inside/outside divisions in: MONICA JUNEJA, ‘Viewing Europe, or Where and What is the “Outside”?’ in *Why Europe, Which Europe? A Debate on Contemporary European History as a Field of Research*, 23 October 2022, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://euro-pcdebate.hypotheses.org/1462>.

²⁶ ROBYN WIEGMAN and ELIZABETH A. WILSON, ‘Introduction: Antinormativity’s Queer Conventions,’ in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no 1 (2015): 1–25 (4).

²⁷ WIEGMAN and WILSON, ‘Introduction,’ 18.

²⁸ WIEGMAN and WILSON, ‘Introduction,’ 2.

²⁹ On the globalisation of queer see the important scholarship on queer geographies: JON BINNIE, ‘Locating Queer Globalization,’ in *The Globalization of Sexuality*, ed. JON BINNIE (London: Sage, 2004): 32–49; ARNALDO CRUZ-MALAVÉ and MARTIN F. MANALANSAN IV, ‘Introduction: Dissident Sexualities/Alternative Globalisms,’ in *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, eds ARNALDO CRUZ-MALAVÉ and MARTIN F. MANALANSAN IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 1–10; KATIE KING, ‘“There Are No Lesbians Here”: Lesbianisms, Feminisms, and Global Gay Formations,’ in CRUZ-MALAVÉ and MANALANSAN, eds, *Queer Globalizations*, 33–45.

Analytical Concepts for Better Clarity. Identifying Queer Victims of the Nazis

Following years of political and historiographical debates, the German Bundestag officially commemorated queer victims of the Nazis in the plenary room of the Reichstag in 2023. January 27 is usually a substantial event in the German political calendar. This has to do with the German reason of state being linked to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the Nazi past) but also with the performative aspect of memory at the centre of modern German life.³⁰ Actors and actresses were hired for the occasion to read testimonies.³¹ In the days prior to the event, experts in the field of law and history discussed and historicised German queerphobia in one of the houses of the Bundestag.³² The emphasis on queer victims did not eclipse or relativise other atrocities committed by the Nazis or the historical differences between the persecution of queer Germans and other Nazi crimes. For example, the fifteen thousand queer men³³ deported in concentration camps were not faced with automatic murder by the regime unless they were also Jewish, Roma, or Sinti. This does not erase the fact that they were horribly treated and murdered through the inhumane Nazi apparatus, but there was no concerted genocide of men ‘deported for homosexuality,’ which would have echoed the antisemitic and racist Nazi politics of exterminations targeting Jewish, Roma, and Sinti deportees.

Remembered alongside other groups of victims, for example, Jewish victims of the Holocaust, queer non-Jewish victims were honoured in this manner for the first

³⁰ On *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as reason of state see MANUELA BAUCHE, PATRICIA PIBERGER, SÉBASTIEN TREMBLAY, and HANNAH TZUBERI, ‘From Opferkonkurrenz to Solidarity: A Round Table,’ in *Memory Culture 2.0: From Opferkonkurrenz to Solidarity*, ed. MIRJAM SARAH BRUSIUS, special issue, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London* 44, no. 2 (2022): 32–85. See also MAX CZOLLEK, *Versöhnungstheater* (Munich: Hanser, 2023).

³¹ TILMANN WARNECKE, ‘Jannick Schümann übers Erinnern an queere NS-Opfer “Ich zittere jedes Mal, wenn ich daran denke”,’ *Tagesspiegel*, 27 January 2023, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/der-bundestag-erinnert-an-queere-ns-opfer-eine-gedenkstunde-die-nachhalt-9251664.html>; SARAH BÖTSCHER, ‘Begriff “queere” Opfer des NS-Regimes sorgt für Diskussionen,’ *MDR Aktuell*, 27 January, 2023, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/politik/holocaust-gedenktag-sexuelle-orientierung-queer-100.html>. See also ‘Bundestag rückt queere Nazi-Opfer in den “Mittelpunkt” und sorgt damit für Empörung,’ *Focus*, 27 January 2023, accessed 6 May, 2023, https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/debatte-um-queere-ns-opfer-im-mittelpunkt-des-holocaust-tages_id_184189739.html.

³² The jurist Anna-Katharina Mangold and the historian Martin Lücke delivered poignant speeches regarding queer persecutions in the Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus of the German Bundestag. ‘Verfolgung, Widerstand und Selbstbestimmung queerer Menschen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,’ *Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*, 26 January 2023, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/aktuelles/gedenken-bedeutet-handeln/>.

³³ These are estimated numbers: RÜDIGER LAUTMANN, WINFRIED GRIKSCHAT, and EGBERT SCHMIDT, ‘Der Rosa Winkel in den Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern,’ in *Seminar: Gesellschaft und Homosexualität*, ed. RÜDIGER LAUTMANN (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1977), 325–65. See also the analysis of Andreas Pretzel regarding ways to investigate these persecutions: ANDREAS PRETZEL, ‘Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung — homosexuelle Männer während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus,’ in *Forschung im Queerformat: aktuelle Beiträge der LSBTI*-, Queer- und Geschlechterforschung*, ed. BUNDESSTIFTUNG MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD, *Queer Studies* 6 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 47–58 (51–54).

time, greatly irking right-wing pundits.³⁴ As previously mentioned, remembering one aspect of Nazi atrocities does not relativise the pain or the particularities of the suffering experienced by other victims. A former editor of the conservative tabloid *BILD* nonetheless denounced the event as queer propaganda and a relativisation of the Holocaust while participating in a contemporary debate on so-called ‘wokeness’ imported from the United States of America.³⁵ Simultaneously, conservative commentators—as well as some scholars—denounced the ideas of ‘queer victims’ of the Nazis. They condemned the use of ‘queer’ as an anachronism, a presentism imposed on the past and an identarian instrumentalisation of suffering.³⁶ The former Green MP Volker Beck also declared that ‘there were no *queer* victims of Nazism.’³⁷ This of course shows a fundamental misunderstanding of history as a discipline.

In the history of sexualities, queerness is often used as an analytical concept. That does not mean that queer historians think that their historical actors woke up one day in the early modern period, let us say in the South German town of Würzburg, and declared to each other that they felt ‘queer.’ Sexual historical concepts such as homo- or hetero- sexualities have a history of their own. Even sexuality itself has its own conceptual history. The idea of sex beyond reproduction is indeed a relatively new understanding of bodily pleasure and encounters in the Euro-American world. If a peasant named Martha in Würzburg had sex in the early modern period, she was not necessarily naming her relationships with her husband ‘sexuality,’ nor ‘heterosexuality.’ However, few would argue that heterosexuality cannot be a useful analytical concept to investigate early modern sexuality in Europe.³⁸ ‘Queer is an anachronism because there was no such thing as *queers* in the past’ is one of these sentences similar to ‘there are only two genders’ that may sound convincing, but, beyond their populist appeal, do not reflect scholarly debates and literature. There are myriad studies of sexuality in the early modern period; if historians are already and convincingly using a framework

³⁴ For a great introduction to queer Holocaust history read ANNA HÁJKOVÁ, *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub: Homophobie und Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021).

³⁵ See for example the column by right-wing pundit JUDITH BASAD, ‘Wie Politiker den Holocaust-Gedenktag für ihre ideologischen Zwecke missbrauchen,’ *Pleite Ticker*, 27 January 2023, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://archive.ph/2023.01.29-135714/https://pleiteticker.de/wie-politiker-den-holocaust-gedenktag-fuer-ihre-ideologischen-zwecke-missbrauchen>. Basad had previously tweeted about it. Her tweet—on the platform now known as X—is gone following judicial complaints according to German Law regarding hate speech: <https://twitter.com/JSevincBasad/status/1619308179724324866>.

³⁶ FREDERIK SCHINDLER, ‘“Queere” Opfer des Nationalsozialismus? Aus historischer Perspektive ist das Quatsch,’ *Die Welt*, 24 January 2023, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/plus243387555/Nationalsozialismus-Historiker-erklaert-die-ideologischen-Wurzeln-der-Homosexuellen-Verfolgung.html>.

³⁷ VOLKER BECK, tweet, 13 August 2022, https://twitter.com/Volker_Beck/status/1558216916589854720. Emphasis by me. Beck, himself a gay man known for his political campaigns for equality is not denying that there were no queer victims but refuses to use the word ‘queer.’ Concordantly to this essay, queerness would not be a concept he uses to describe himself, but could still be used as an analytical concept to describe his non-heteronormativity.

³⁸ HEIKO STOFF, ‘Heterosexualität,’ 73–104.

considered anachronistic by right-wing pundits, then we can surely do the same with queerness.³⁹

Historians of sexualities in Germany have focused on the rise of queer politics in the country, beginning with the Wilhelmine era and ending in the twentieth century. They argue that criminalisation of male-male sexualities during the Prussian regime facilitated scientific and political emancipation through resistance, leading to the creation of a male queer subject and the eventual destruction of the movement by the Nazis.⁴⁰ The second part of the twentieth century is often divided into different movements, such as the so-called ‘homophile movement’ of the 1950s and 1960s, the *Schwulenbewegung*—the more or less gay movement—of the 1970s, and the institutionalisation of queerness following the HIV/AIDS crisis. However, this chronology erases the ambivalence that many queer men felt about their identities and sexualities, leading to a binary view between ‘radicals’ and ‘assimilationists.’ It also silences the fluidity of sexual identities. Most of these men had sex with other men, sometimes exclusively, sometimes not. Some of these men fought for social change together, or completely despised each other and were in permanent conflict. Sexual identities could be at the core of these men’s politics, or solely an act of naming and listing their sexual experiences. In other words, queerness was expressed and conceptualised in many ways.

Rather than relying on periodisation, historians can use queerness as an analytical concept, bringing together different historical actors and semantic fields to reveal similarities and differences between movements. In this way, they would follow the work of global historians already using conceptual history for writing and understanding the entanglements in the archive.⁴¹ By mapping queerness as an analytical web of historical diversity instead of imposing fixed categories, historians can link different moments in time and prove that queer men were part of a community. There is no clear linguistic shift between one political representation of queerness and another, but examining the concept as an analytical tool can help scholars create a richer understanding of queer history. While no man during the 1950s is recorded as waking up one day and simply deciding to stop calling himself ‘homophile,’ historians can still link different moments in time and show that multiple homophile activists—a term used by some queer activists around the 1950s in the USA and West Germany⁴²—were indeed part of the same community as Marxist gay liberationists in the same countries in the 1960s and 1970s, even if both gay

³⁹ FRANZ X. EDER, *Sexuality in Premodern Europe: A Social and Cultural History from Antiquity to the Early Modern Age*, Eng. trans. JACOB WATSON (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023); Gary Ferguson, *Same-Sex Marriage in Renaissance Rome: Sexuality, Identity, and Community in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016). This is also true for other periods of European History: JACQUELINE MURRAY, ‘Historicizing Sex, Sexualizing History,’ in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. NANCY PARTNER (London: Hodder, 2005), 133–52.

⁴⁰ ROBERT BEACHY, *Gay Berlin*.

⁴¹ PERNAU and SACHSENMAIER, ‘Introduction.’

⁴² And in many other countries.

liberationists and homophiles often shunned each other.⁴³ They were part of a community of queerness. In other words, by employing semantic fields and analytical concepts, historians can illustrate entanglements beyond political divides.

Some subfields have attempted to address these issues. Historians of emotions have drawn on what caused men to fall in love, the desires they expressed, the fears they had, or the shame they buried. This approach allows for a nuanced and detailed genealogy of queerness, specifically of male-male sexualities, without imposing modern-day labels onto people from the past. Historians can observe categories of analysis without dictating terms to their subjects. Benno Gammerl's book, *Anders Fühlen* (feeling differently) is an excellent example of this methodology. By combining oral history with his own research in the archives, Gammerl traces the fears transcending various episodes of queer politics in postwar West Germany. Gammerl brings together homophile men from the 1950s and 1960s with gay activists from the 1970s and 1980s, ultimately re-periodising West German queer history by analysing moments of emotional affinity rather than political unity. Studying the sexual itself and investigating men cruising for sex, Christopher Bollas instead coined the term 'homosexual arena.' For example, a gay man urinating in a pissoir in the street of Berlin known for being a meeting ground for sex would recognise the public toilet as a part of an arena.⁴⁴ For the unaware soul wandering near the urinal, the space would merely be a place for relieving oneself. Police surveillance in these places would eventually also link all men having sex with men together.⁴⁵ All in all, Bollas' arena gives historians a form of connection through space and contextualisation. Using conceptual history, it is possible to hunt for queerness by drawing semantic fields. This approach would bring the same results as Gammerl and Bollas, but focuses on discourse produced by, and not about, historical actors.

Because queer theory does not suggest queer as a new identity, but rather as a deconstruction of identities, it underlines the fluidity beyond fixed categories of analysis. It also points out that sexual identities, if useful for an analysis, are plural and can change throughout one's life. Looking for queerness in the past also helps us to nuance generalisation and fixed periodisation. In the case of Germany in the second part of twentieth century, Craig Griffiths has done a wonderful job looking at homophile and gay overlaps in his book *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation*.⁴⁶ Benno Gammerl has done the same in German regarding the artificial distinction between a radical or assimilationist queer politics.⁴⁷ Beyond the German context, but remaining

⁴³ CRAIG GRIFFITHS, *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation: Male Homosexual Politics in 1970s West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 44–46.

⁴⁴ CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, 'Cruising in the Homosexual Arena,' in *Being a Character Psychoanalysis and Self Experience*, ed. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS (London: Routledge, 1992), 144–64.

⁴⁵ Urinals and other spaces used for public sexual encounters were also heavily surveyed by police authorities. Men arrested for sodomy or indecency in these places were regrouped together under the law.

⁴⁶ GRIFFITHS, 'The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation.'

⁴⁷ BENNO GAMMERL, *Anders Fühlen. Schwules und lesbisches Leben in der Bundesrepublik: Eine Emotionsgeschichte* (Munich: Hanser, 2021).

in the Euro-American world, Lauren Jae Gutterman looks convincingly at the queerness of heterosexuality in her book on heterosexual marriage as a emancipatory space for queer women in the postwar USA.⁴⁸

Using queerness as analytical concept in the writing of history therefore allows historians much more nuance in their diachronic or synchronic analysis of the past. As previously stated, an analytical concept is not the same as an actor-based concept; it is not a concept used by historical actors, but a concept valuable to historians reading the archive and analysing historical sources. This is convenient for creating semantic fields and making sense of the past, possibly linking political discourses. It also helps beyond language barriers. For example, it is possible in the case of transatlantic history to use queerness to discuss social movements in conversation within and beyond given national contexts, for instance, the German *Schwulenbewegung* and gay liberation in the USA. *Schwul*, also a pejorative epithet, became a word reminiscent of the anglophone 'gay' in Germany in the 1970s. *Schwul* has its own semantic history, like 'gay' in English or 'pédé' in French, yet they are all forms of male queerness politicised in the 1970s in the Euro-American world. Analytical concepts let historians investigate their sources beyond actor-based concepts. For example, the Gay Liberation Front Cologne was not politically aligned with the Gay Liberation Front New York even if they shared a name. The group based in the United States was known for its Marxism, and the one in North Rhine-Westphalia, a reformist alliance of activists, mainly refused to use *Schwul*, opting instead for the English word 'gay.' They were still both 'queer' groups in the sense that they were fighting for the rights of non-heteronormative men, albeit in different ways.

Coming back to the original example, it is very helpful to use queer as an analytical concept when examining the persecution of queer men by the Nazis. Once again, this is not to say that these men were calling themselves queer. Most of them were not calling themselves 'homosexual' either. Queer allows historians to respect these men and their right to self-expression. It allows nuance. It allows a better analysis. It is literally the opposite of an anachronism. Looking at Nazi Germany through the scope of queerness facilitates a deeper analysis of the period. Through the opening of historical analysis beyond categories created by the perpetrators, historians can use analytical concepts such as queerness to not only map the fluidity of male-male sexualities, desires, and intimacies, but also to draw connections between oppressions, democratising memories of the era.⁴⁹ Queer historians have done so by looking at the entanglements of structural violence and lesbian oppression during German fascism.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ LAUREN JAE GUTTERMAN, *Her Neighbor's Wife: A History of Lesbian Desire Within Marriage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁴⁹ Insa Eschebach argues that the opening of categories enables a democratisation of memory culture. INSA ESCHEBACH, 'Queere Gedächtnis: Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement und Erinnerungskonkurrenzen im Kontext der Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück,' *Invertito – Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 21 (2019): 49–73.

⁵⁰ LAURIE MARHOEFER, 'Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939–1943,' *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (2016): 1167–95.

Through an analysis of different expressions of queerness before and during this period, they have also revisited concepts of the past to identify and narrate trans experiences of violence at the hands of the regime.⁵¹

All in all, as debates and queer scholarship on contemporary German history reveal, an analysis based on conceptual fluidity leads to conceptual historians drawing more efficient semantic fields. In turn, these semantic fields have changed how queer history has been written in Germany, beyond fixed actor-based concepts, leaving more place for entanglements and ambivalence. On the lookout for a broader scope of experiences in the archives, queer historians of modern and contemporary Germany are now writing new genealogies of queerness, revealing new paths for the discipline—for example, a new history of interrelated social movements that were previously invisible in the archive.⁵² This national example is not the only path offered by using queerness as an analytical concept. Shimmers of queerness are even more appealing for a transnational perspective.

Entangled, Different, yet Similar. Global Queer Semantic Fields

During the last decades, queer history and the history of sexualities, like many other subfields of the discipline, have had their transnational, and eventually, their global turns.⁵³ Researching sexual entanglements without taking categories of analysis anchored in European concepts as point of departure has brought its share of methodological inquiries. Critiques voiced by scholars from the Global South have pointed out that provincialising European sexualities, desires, and intimacies also means questioning universal claims anchored in concepts such as homosexuality, gay, lesbian, or trans. It also means deprovincialising other concepts such as Hijra or Two-Spirit.⁵⁴ Yet the potential of queer theory, focusing on in-betweens and the murkiness of categories and identities, can help historians pursuing to write a global history of sexualities.

Using queer as an analytical concept here helps to put different realities in conversation with one another without only relying on concepts native to the Euro-American world. During my visit of an autonomous festival for radical queer politics

⁵¹ ZAVIER NUNN, 'Trans Liminality and the Nazi State,' *Past & Present* 260 (2023): 123–57; KATIE SUTTON, 'Sexology's Photographic Turn. Visualizing Trans Identity in Interwar Germany,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 27, no. 3 (2018): 442–79. See also BODIE ASHTON, 'The Parallel Lives of Liddy Bacroff: Transgender (Pre)History and the Tyranny of the Archive in Twentieth-Century Germany,' *German History* 42, no 1 (2024): 79–100.

⁵² SÉBASTIEN TREMBLAY, *A Badge of Injury. The Pink Triangle as Global Symbol of Memory* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024); JAKE W. NEWSOME, *Pink Triangle Legacies. Coming out in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

⁵³ MARGOT CANADAY, 'Thinking Sex in the Transnational Turn: An Introduction (AHR Forum Transnational Sexualities),' *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1250–57.

⁵⁴ MARGRIT PERNAU, 'Provincializing Concepts: The Language of Transnational History,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, no. 3 (2016): 483–99; CLAIRE PAMMENT, 'De/Colonizing Hijra,' *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (2021): 265–69; JASON RITCHIE, 'How Do You Say "Come out of the Closet" in Arabic? Queer Activism and the Politics of Visibility in Israel-Palestine,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 4 (2010): 557–75.

in Amsterdam in 2016, a workshop on trans rights in Europe evolved into a rich discussion on the uses of the concept ‘trans’ to define similar experiences of gender non-conformity or queerness by people coming from the Global South.⁵⁵ The instigator of this exchange emphasised the colonial difficulties of having to use Euro-American concepts, such as ‘trans,’ to describe their experience of not conforming to the gender identity and gender binary imposed on them at birth.⁵⁶ They reminded everyone how societies outside of the Euro-American world have different conceptions of gender identity, more than two genders, and how what would be considered trans and marginal in the Euro-American world would not necessarily be marginalised elsewhere. This can also be illustrated with the critique by Two-Spirit activists in North America, irritated by settlers describing Two-Spirit experiences as ‘trans’ with an Indigenous twist.⁵⁷

A focus on analytical concepts can help scholars highlight power imbalances between various experiences of queerness across the globe. Countries in the Northern Atlantic have predominantly focused on their own local queer origin stories, in effect reproducing a Euro-American understanding of queer history and of queerness. This is apparent in the literature on both side of the Atlantic. In the United State, the Stonewall myth centres a diffusionist model where a revolt in New York enlightens the rest of the world.⁵⁸ In Germany, a counter-narrative represents fin de siècle Berlin as the birthplace of queerness, of a so-called ‘homosexual identity,’ based on the criminalisation of same-sex desire, intimacy, and sexualities.⁵⁹ Differentiating between actor-based concepts while underlining multilinguistic semantic fields relevant to queerness can challenge these narratives, exposing their creation in and limitations to the Euro-American world. In other words, queerness as an analytical concept offers historians an enormous potential for disruption, emphasising the lacunae of a global intellectual history written in the Global North. This is necessary as these narratives—the Stonewall myth or the German invention of homosexuality—seek to construct an artifice, the idea that there is an identifiable origin of queerness. Provincialising Euro-American experiences of queerness by including them in a global history, or a fluid and decentred/broader semantic field of non-normative sexualities and gender

⁵⁵ The statement echoes similar discussions in academic journals. See JEFF ROY, ‘Translating Hijra into Transgender Performance and Pehchān in India’s Trans-Hijra Communities,’ *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3–4 (2016): 412–32. On the use of concepts such as trans for solidarity see GEE IMAAN SEMMALAR, ‘Unpacking Solidarities of the Oppressed: Notes on Trans Struggles in India,’ *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3–4 (September 2014): 290.

⁵⁶ For a critique of western queer spaces see YV E. NAY ‘The Atmosphere of Trans* Politics in the Global North and West,’ *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (2019): 64–79.

⁵⁷ EVELYN BLACKWOOD, ‘Native American Genders and Sexualities: Beyond Anthropological Models and Misrepresentations,’ in *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*, eds SUE-ELLEN JACOBS, WESLEY THOMAS, and SABINE LANG (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005): 284–96; MARGARET ROBINSON, ‘Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity,’ *Journal of Homosexuality* 67, no. 12 (2020): 1675–90.

⁵⁸ ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG and SUZANNA M. CRAGE, ‘Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth,’ *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (2006): 724–51.

⁵⁹ ROBERT BEACHY, ‘The German Invention of Homosexuality,’ *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 4 (2010): 801–38.

expression, eventually exposes the artificial (and often Euro/American-centrist) aspect of these origin stories.

If gender and sexualities have other signifiers outside of the Euro-American world, should we refrain from using concepts anchored in the Anglo-American Atlantic such as queerness? Surely, if a gender identity or expression of sexuality is not marginalised somewhere else, the focus on queerness, a deviation of the norm, becomes obsolete? On the contrary! Using analytical concepts allows global historians to assess their own position and provincialise the Euro-American world in their own writing, once again with the help of semantic fields. Wary of universalisation, they can avoid diffusionist models of queer history and focus on the fluidity offered by queerness. Historians already do this in European history between eastern and western divides. For example, Dan Healey and Francesca Stella reflect on possible concepts useful for a broader analysis of Soviet queerphobia across language.⁶⁰ By emphasising the fluidity of queerness, the possibility of change, and the refusal of fixed categories, historians of gender and sexuality can try to draw semantic fields of synchronous actor-based concepts focused on norms, while acknowledging that they change over time.

They can do so by criticising the hyperreal aspects of gender and sexuality in the Euro-American world. This entails an investigation of gender expressions and the construction of sexual concepts across time and space, and not research of sexuality and gender abroad as they evolved in the Euro-American world. Taking the Euro-American world as point of departure, this fluid study of queerness abroad could base its analysis in Europe or North America while provincialising its fundamental concepts through semantic fields, allowing a dialogue between spaces. This conversation can take multiple forms. For instance, it could look at the imposition of cultural norms on sexuality and gender expressions through empires, showing the transformation of actor-based concepts abroad and the marginalisation of what used to not be outside the norm.⁶¹ This angle of research would not only highlight the entanglement of queerness and coloniality, but could also complexify conceptual constructions of the non-European space as alien to queerness.⁶² This epistemological exchange could also imply a deprovincialisation of sexual and gender specific concepts, where historians start their study of gender and sexuality in the Global South and use their study to

⁶⁰ DAN HEALEY and FRANCESCA STELLA, 'La dissidence sexuelle et de genre en URSS et dans l'espace postsoviétique: introduction,' *Cahiers d'histoire russe, est-européenne, caucasienne et centrasiatique* 61, no. 2–3 (2021): 251–82.

⁶¹ SHANE DOYLE, 'Pandemics and Soft Power: HIV/AIDS and Uganda on the Global Stage,' *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 3 (2020): 478–92; JENNIFER BRIER, 'AIDS, Reproductive Rights, and Economic Empowerment. The Ford Foundation's Response to AIDS in the Global South, 1987–1995,' in *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*, ed. JENNIFER BRIER (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 122–55.

⁶² MARC EPPRECHT, *Heterosexual Africa? The Story of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008); SÉBASTIEN TREMBLAY, 'Homosynchronism and the Temporal-Memory Border: Framing Racialized Bodies, Time, and Mobility in German Queer Printed Media,' *SCRIPTS Working Papers*, working paper 21 (Berlin: Cluster of Excellence 2055 'Contestations of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS)', 2022).

better understand the construction of socio-cultural categories in the Euro-American world.⁶³ This provincialisation and deprovincialisation of gender specific concepts and concepts of sexual identity can only be done by assessing power structures and asymmetries inherent to the use of analytical concepts. To put it differently, the idea is not to find queerness abroad, but to use a concept such as queerness to link synchronous historical experiences lived, expressed, or imagined differently depending on regional contexts.

However, using queerness as ‘just’ an analytical concept does not exonerate scholars and activists in the Euro-American world, as the danger of reproducing colonial asymmetries through a search for queer experiences in other settings remains. Waltzing between provincialising queer experiences in the Euro-American world and deprovincialising concepts from the Global South is never an innocent endeavour; it is not a scholarly exercise that takes place in a vacuum. In *The Gay Girl in Damascus Hoax*, Andrew Orr exposes the ultimate danger of universalising experiences of queerness abroad for political gains in the Euro-American world, demonstrating how Thomas MacMaster, a white man from the United States of America, created and dissimulated the fake queer biography of a young girl supposedly living in Syria.⁶⁴ This hoax, which went viral, illustrates the longing for examples abroad to feed rudimentary political domestic discourse about other countries’ usually complex assemblages of sexual politics.⁶⁵ Looking for queerness abroad cannot be coupled with a desire to reproduce the colonial gaze. Orr points out that the success of the MacMaster hoax highlights Evren Savcı’s warning

that the dominance of the English language and American and British concepts in queer studies and activism creates a false sense of universality in scholars and activists’ imaginations that erases differences in meaning and objectives and which unconsciously essentialises language as a marker of distinct cultural groups.⁶⁶

Analytical concepts, such as queerness, still provide the transnational and multilingual approach to the circulation of knowledge so dear to global historians and so necessary to understanding a globalised world where activists and scholars alike are debating, criticising, or supporting international struggles of liberation. Here, a multilingual approach to research goes beyond simply studying language in its textual form. Incorporating visual languages into our analysis helps us to create a conceptual history of sexualities from a global perspective, which can lead to a new understanding of social movements. Visuals add a new dimension to our understanding and allow us

⁶³ For a great example of deprovincialising concepts see Léa Tosold’s suggestion to use Maria Beatriz Nascimento’s notion of Quilomba in the context of memory politics: LÉA TOSOLD, ‘The Quilombo as a Regime of Conviviality: Sentipensando Memory Politics with Beatriz Nascimento,’ *Mecila Working Paper Series*, working paper 41 (São Paulo: The Maria Sibylla Merian Centre Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America, 2021).

⁶⁴ ANDREW ORR, *The Gay Girl in Damascus Hoax: Progressive Orientalism and the Arab Spring* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023).

⁶⁵ ORR, ‘The Gay Girl in Damascus,’ 145.

⁶⁶ ORR, ‘The Gay Girl in Damascus,’ 11. Orr is referring to EVREN SAVCI, *Queer in Translation: Sexual Politics and Neoliberal Islam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 11–14.

to identify new connections and pathways for analysis. It is indeed possible for historical actors to use similar visual concepts without necessarily using similar textual ones.⁶⁷ By incorporating visual concepts, we can thus better understand social movements which are part of similar conversation locally or on the world stage or map the circulation of knowledge, even when there are no shared written communication networks or shared actor-based concepts.

One symbol connected to German queer history exemplifies this claim. The pink triangle, a symbol invented by the Nazis to brand queer men in concentration camps, was recuperated by queer activists in 1970s West Germany and then in multiple places across the world. By focusing on this symbol, we can come to various conclusions.

First, activists in Europe and North America used the horrors of the Nazi dictatorship to advocate for their cause, despite linguistic divides. They used a shared political language rooted in common fears of collective destruction and trauma, evoked by the tragic fate of the queer victims of the Nazi dictatorship. Notwithstanding linguistic and political differences, activists were able to frame their struggle beyond their local context. Second, without necessarily using the same taxonomy, or without employing the same concepts, they referred to queerness, sexual identities, and gender expressions that could be fixed or fluid, but were nevertheless entangled. Third, the story of the pink triangle serves as a powerful example by connecting emotions, collective memories, and political communication. Through examining the trajectory of the pink triangle, we can track the associated fears surrounding sexual identities beyond looking for words that could be lost in translation. Recent scholarship in the history of concepts has linked visual languages with a history of emotions analogous to Gammerl's work.⁶⁸ Following these new methodologies on the affective power of visuals, it is possible to see how searching for certain symbols both synchronically and diachronically creates new semantic fields. The pink triangle illustrates once more this way of looking for queerness as an analytical concept by focusing on the visual. It has become a symbol of queer resistance and remembrance due to its multilayered appeals to memory. It serves as a reminder of the persecution of queerness during the Nazi dictatorship and is a symbol commonly used among queer activists and organisations. The rebaptism by queer activists of rue Alexis Carrel, named after a known eugenicist, to rue du Triangle Rose (Pink Triangle Street) during a conference in Paris in 1992 is one among many examples of its use as a symbol of recollection and commemoration.⁶⁹ In more recent years, it has also been used by groups supporting queer individuals fleeing concentration camps in Chechnya, indicating the symbol's

⁶⁷ On visual concepts see IMKE RAJAMANI, 'Pictures, Emotions, Conceptual Change: Anger in Popular Hindi Cinema,' in *Global Conceptual History*, eds SACHSENMAIER and PERNAU, 307–35.

⁶⁸ MARGRIT PERNAU and IMKE RAJAMANI, 'Emotional Translations: Conceptual History Beyond Language,' *History and Theory* 55, no. 1 (2016): 46–65; MARGRIT PERNAU and LUC WODZICKI, 'Entanglements, Political Communication and Shared Temporal Layers,' *Cromobis: Cyber Review of Modern Historiography* 21 (2018): 1–17.

⁶⁹ TREMBLAY, *A Badge of Injury*, 84.

adoption and highlighting the ongoing struggles of queer individuals worldwide for recognition, rights, and safety.⁷⁰

The initial draft of a report on sexual minorities that was prepared for the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations even referred to the pink triangle as a so-called ‘patent of nobility’ for queer politics in the twentieth century.⁷¹ This kind of interpretation could lead historians to believe and reproduce globally diffusionist models of Euro-American queer history. Indeed, the triangle has been incorporated in the visual language of various queer organisations across the world, including Malaysia and Hong Kong. In other words, by finding pink triangles existing outside of the Euro-American world, would historians not be simply emphasising the diffusion of the symbol from the queer Atlantic to the rest of the world?

No. By creating semantic fields related to the pink triangle and queerness, a deeper understanding of global queer politics can be obtained, thereby highlighting the power dynamics between the Global North and Global South. The use of the pink triangle has gained significance as a global political symbol and its use by different groups reflects the diversity and complexity of queer movements worldwide. Hence, we can identify similarities as well as differences in political discourse by studying the symbol’s exposure, providing insights into globally prevalent queer entanglements. We can then do so without falling prey to diffusionist models of global intellectual history.

The symbol of the pink triangle is not a ‘patent of nobility’ but a signifier, a proof of global entanglements. To put it another way, identifying the pink triangle is not only a proof of queerness in Malaysia, but an example of the circulation and adoption of actor-based concepts from the Euro-American world in service of political rhetoric elsewhere. Beyond the diffusion of Euro-American concepts and examining the adoption of referents from the Euro-American world, scholars using queerness as an analytical concept emphasise that groups such as Pink Triangle in Kuala Lumpur are not necessarily only adopting sexual identities from elsewhere to define themselves. They refer politically, willingly, and even perhaps strategically, to other actor-based historical concepts. Once again detecting queerness through semantic fields and a study of the reception of Euro-American concepts, this transaction also pinpoints the agency of historical actors in the Global South, while identifying global entanglements.

Conclusions

Are there ‘gays’ in Chechnya? There’s certainly queerness in the South Caucasian republic. Following the opening of the poignant documentary *Welcome to Chechnya* by US filmmaker David Frances at the Berlinale in 2020, the protagonists of the films—a group of Russian activists helping queer individuals to leave Chechnya and providing them with shelter—came on stage to the applause of a sold-out movie theatre in east Berlin. Present on that day, I noticed one of them was wearing a pink triangle as a

⁷⁰ TREMBLAY, *A Badge of Injury*, 226.

⁷¹ TREMBLAY, *A Badge of Injury*, 194.

brooch. They also mentioned the Nazi persecutions of queerness while discussing the horrors of the Kadyrov regime. If queer is an English word with its own background and form, then using it as an analytical concept, finding queerness in the archive, does not equal imposing a Euro-American actor-based concept on historical actors elsewhere. Tracing connections, we can assess queerness and find solidarity.

Queerness, through its amorphous form, permits a merging of different historical voices and allow scholars to write an intellectual history synchronically and diachronically. It does so by allowing fluid semantic fields of actor-based concepts, inviting historians to question and provincialise sexual concepts of identity and gender expression beyond fixed categories. In perpetual dialogue and constant movement, the writing of a global intellectual history inspired by queer history is not only about adding voices on the margin to bigger diffusionist narratives and genealogies, but an invitation for historians to deconstruct fundamental historical concepts at the base of their inquiries. In a more local context—such as the memory of Nazi atrocities and the persecution of same-sex desires, sexualities, and intimacies—this opening of fixed categories implies a democratisation of memory culture and opening of categories created by perpetrators. It adds nuance to historical research and calls for better analyses in the archives. In a global perspective, it broadens the global historians' multiperspectivity, enables a reflection on epistemological power in the archive, and unveils power asymmetries. Learning from queer history, global historians can assess global entanglements and write a new intellectual history beyond fixed categories without giving prominence to European concepts.