

Straight macho nationalism

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SUMMARY: While both Polish mainstream and right-wing movement inherit aggressive homophobic discourses, gay mayors and even anti-homophobic Neo-Nazis seem to be evidence for a German paradise of (homo-)sexuality. The essay traces homophobic discourses in the imagery of the right-wing and the mainstream in post-'communist' Poland and compares them to the seemingly tolerant mainstream culture in Germany. The difference seems to be clear: in Poland homosexuality has become the ticket which stands for all the fears which are present in a rapidly changing (catholic) society; homosexuality in Germany is a commodity sold like everything else in capitalism - and has thus created space for sexual self-expression beyond heterosexism. Obviously, it's not that easy: homosexuality sells, but homophobia does, too. Besides other problems, the comparison highlights the danger of mistaking current capitalist cultural production for a emancipatory situation where multiple identities really could evolve without limits - may the latter be created by physical or epistemological violence or the coercions of the free market.

While members of the Polish far-right group *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-polish Youth) tried to stop the "Equality March" for tolerance and against discrimination in Poznan, Poland, on November 18th 2006, German neo-Nazi Axel Reitz might have written just another polemic against homophobia within the German far-right movement.

In political statements as well as in their specific discourse and use of images, Polish groups of the far-right are quite clear about their utopia: a homogenously heterosexist Polish nation of drop-dead Catholics. Yet, on the other side of the river, the brutal, aggressive and neo-fascist politics of the German far-right does not seem to have an in-your-face homophobia at the core of its inner and public agenda. Though there are various similarities and correspondences between the nationalist organizations in these two countries, the approach towards homosexuality seems to represent a distinctive difference.

As far-right movements always derive from and are linked to general discourses in the mainstream of their respective societies, I will in the following try to give hints which societal and cultural background it was that produced the discourses and images used by the far-right groups in order to effectively develop their politics. Since female

homosexuality does not play a significant role in this kind of male politics, I will only talk about the attitude towards gayness; and since it is too huge a variety and number of pictures one could analyze, I will focus on some examples that highlight the movements' approaches.

For the Polish side, this will include two significant images. The most popular icon used by far-right groups is a prohibitive sign showing two men having anal sex, reading "*Zakaz pedofowania*" - "Fags-pedophiles not allowed". We will see how different homophobic discourses intertwine in this picture. The other example leaves the area of strict far-right discourses and does show how the conservative part of the mainstream deals with an increasing public appearance of LGBTQ politics - using the language of an emancipatorian movement in order to repress the movement's activism.

Since the German discourse does not include such a militant homophobia as in Poland, it requires other pictures to describe the situation. I will analyze two recently published neo-Nazi anti-homophobic texts and I will try to look for homophobic traces in German neo-Nazi campaigns against child abuse. Before doing that, I will give some basic information about cultural and historic specificities that might have led to the remarkably different

situations in Poland and Germany.

0. Polish/German - Catholic/National-Socialist - Hetero/Asexual

It comes as no surprise that the cultural and societal reasons for the current situation in Polish and German society can be tracked down to the different experiences of the last 60 years. While a western-bound capitalist Germany was at least culturally fundamentally changed by the emancipatory political and sexual movements of the 60s, 70s and 80s, the Polish society was stuck in a heavy ongoing struggle against cultural and political restrictions by the "communist" regime - a struggle that was largely based on Catholic institutions or beliefs.

Especially a strong West-German gay and lesbian movement in the 80s started major transformations in the main discourses on homosexuality in general public. Though still facing prejudices and homophobia in daily life as well as in popular culture, not only the openly gay mayors of the cities of Hamburg and Berlin are evidence that homosexuality is tolerated and accepted in contemporary German society. Even the extreme right-wing could not ignore those major changes: referring to the culturally gay aspects in National-Socialism, the main neo-Nazi leader Michael Kuhnen had his coming-out in 1986, a scandal that split his movement into a pro-Kuhnen and homophobic wing. Current gay-friendly

neo-Nazi activists in Germany, still ideologically rejected from their political friends but more or less tolerated, are mainly referring to him and to his essay "*Nationalsozialismus und Homosexualität*" ("National-Socialism and Homosexuality"). Their ideology puts an almost asexual male national-socialist fighter into the broader picture of a movement for German supremacy that includes a struggle against a supposedly anti-German Catholic-Jewish tradition.

Obviously, the contemporary Polish society is lacking the experience of a cultural revolution that did partly free human sexuality from cultural and religious restrictions. Even worse, the leading role of the Catholic Church in the struggle against the "communist" regime lead to a huge influence of fundamental Catholic ideologies during the first and later years of the new Polish democracy. Misogynic and homophobic traditions are combined with the identification of Catholic Church and a strong nationalist notion - homosexuality is not only contradicting religion, but the whole idea of a "healthy" Poland. As a reaction to hitherto unknown gay and lesbian movements, an aggressive heterosexist religious nationalism shapes the mainstream and the right-wing and is trying to defend Poland against its enemies - this is seen as the fate of the eternally attacked Polish nation. Just like the mainstream, the extreme right is aggressively polish, hetero and Catholic.

The very specific phenomena of an antisemitic, anti-religious German National-Socialism and a Polish combination of a fundamentally Catholic Church with a strong nationalism in effect are the discourses that, influenced by the developments of the 20th century, are the roots of the current situations.

1. Poland: Homophobic right-wing in a homophobic mainstream

Though it is not easy to clearly distinguish right-wing and mainstream homophobic pictures in Poland, I will try to use one image as an example for each of them.

Hence, the first image shows the links between the right-wing, nationalist groups and the mainstream. In several campaigns, for example for the nation-wide elections in 2004 as well as in general propaganda, the slogan "Zakaz pedofowania!" is present. Maybe the best known homophobic image, it combines numerous discourses and can be found all over the country. It looks like this:



Normality is created when Otherness is manufactured and ruled out. We can see two visual levels in this image: one is the prohibitive sign, normative symbolism that tells us what we can do and what we cannot do. The form of the sign is known from the traffic system and many public places - where it is *organizing* normal life. The other level consists of two persons that supposedly are having anal sex, one of them showing a penis. (Though nothing in this picture tells us, that there isn't a dildo involved, on one or maybe even both sides. But perhaps that thought is a bit too adventurous for homophobic minds.) Gay sex in general is pictured here, gay sex is supposed to be

associated, gay sex is - if we take into account the first level - an obstacle for organizing normal life, it is preventing normality.

In some versions another way in that homosexuality is threatening normality is added. In the last years in polish language the term for "pederast" has taken the meaning of "gay". In this sense, in the slogan "Dzis homoseksualisci - Jutro pedofile" male homosexuality is identified with child abuse. Homosexuals, especially gays, are held responsible for all the evil threatening "Polonia" when "pedophilia, homosexuality and HIV/AIDS status" (Kitlinski, Anti-Gay Panic) are equated. The former head of Poland's State TV, Wieslaw Walendziak, gave evidence of this hetero fear of a non-heterosexual planet when accusing "sexual minorities and their supporters of all conceivable transgressions of morals (Kitlinski, Anti-Gay Panic)."

The image supposedly just dismissing anal sex in reality does a lot more. When "anal sex" is said (or drawn), many aspects of a supposed general homosexual attack[1] on Catholic Poland are meant: "(violent) gayness," "child abuse," "anti-Christian sin," "AIDS," "un-Polishness," "European (union) normality"[2] and many more. Every fear that the contemporary Polish society has to deal with is molded into the general image of the "destructive homosexual". Cultural and societal fears construct the inner

structure of this discourse of hate and aggression - and it seems that sexuality has become its outer lines, its surface. The Polish homophobic discourse has made the homosexual variation of sexuality its public frame, although it is far from a free public presentation of personal identity. Sexuality is a very public object of discussion and discrimination, it is seen on the physical and cultural outside of everyone, it is shaping everyone's identity. When the talk is about homosexuality, then below the surface it is about the Church, about the unemployment, about war, about whole "Polonia," too - and it is understood. This is fascinating politics of the imaginery: an iconographic image of anal sex is able to transport with it a whole discourse on the future of a society.

The destructive attack of the homosexual is what the second example deals with, too. The cover of the conservative weekly *Wprost* in June 2004 visualizes its opinion about heterosexism and equality.



Coming at the climax of a series of attacks by hooligans, neo-Nazis and Catholic citizens on rallies for sexual and civil equality in several Polish cities, it highlights the vicinity of right-wing and mainstream homophobia. Two aspects are important here, one of political content and one of political polemic. Beneath the title "*Dyktatura Równości*" ("Dictatorship of equality") in rainbow colours, the cover forces us to look into three eyes (one full male, on half female face) that are afraid of what they see. Both mouths have been taped, the

hands are still visible while taping the male mouth. The thumbs of the taping hands are in an erected position[3], framing the word "tolerance" that is silencing the woman and the man. This hetero couple - white, in their twenties, hygienically clean - is frightened by the violence against them and powerless, defenseless. *Wprost* imagines itself and the whole "healthy Polish nation" as attacked by a - faceless, ghost-like - repressive homosexual minority.

The second aspect of this image is about words and meanings: in the name of a normal majority under attack, *Wprost* is accusing the movements for cultural, economic, social, societal and sexual equality[4] of the violence it is in reality exercising against them. Like in Germany, where neo-Nazi groups are using an increasing number of emancipatory symbols and slogans[5], in Poland the conservative mainstream regards "discrimination [...] not [directed] against lesbians and gays, but against themselves (Kitlinski and Leszkowicz, Anti-Gay Regime)". In order to gain advantage for their discourses, homophobic conservatives are turning emancipatory expressions into polemics for nationalist use. Homosexuality appears as an aggressive act, its mere existence is violent, repressive and hostile. The majority that is setting norms and repressing non-heterosexual identities occupies the language of emancipation. At the same time, hools and neo-fascists stick to their direct, brutal language of open violence in the name of a normal

majority. Though talking different tongues, conservative discursive mainstream and violent nationalist streetfighters are acting from the same nationalist-Catholic, homophobic ideological base.

2. Germany: Neo-Nazi right-wing in a post-gay-movement mainstream

As mentioned earlier, even German right-wing politics depend on a given secularized German society, that in terms of sexuality currently is a quite open one. After the women's movement of the 60s and 70s and the gay and lesbian's actions of the 70s and 80s, feminism and homosexuality are widely accepted and the grounds on which a right-wing propaganda has to play upon. As a result, nationalist activists have on the one hand been socialized in a quite liberal sexual atmosphere themselves. On the other hand an aggressive homophobic discourse would not bring the best political results in a liberalized environment.[6]

The images of German nationalist movements and parties are dominated by antisemitic and racist visuality. Apart from the physically strong, male fighter in a racially perfect (Aryan) body, no significant positive or negative references to male homosexuality can be found easily. Still, gayness is a topic within the right-wing or neo-Nazi movement. Officially, in the main newspapers and by the main right-wing parties, homosexuality is condemned. The

Nationalzeitung (National Newspaper) and others reject the idea of gay marriage and a homosexual identity. A spokesperson of the biggest German neo-nazi party NPD (National-democratic Party of Germany) called the Christopher Street Day in Leipzig in 2005 a "mistake of human evolution" (Der Rechte Rand) and called for a campaign against homosexuality. But there are no rallies, no attacks against gay prides - in a German mainstream that strongly supports public appearance of sexual equality movements. No doubt there is a homophobic consensus in the strongly patriarchal right-wing movements, but there seems to be a tendency to see sexuality as a private matter. A closer look at the gay-friendly texts by Axel Reitz and Thomas Brehl may tell us more.

Thomas Brehl, in the 1980s a close political friend of the neo-Nazi leader Michael Kuhnen, who split the movement by having his coming-out in 1986[7], and Axel Reitz are two well-known members of the obscure openly neo-national-socialist group KdS[8]. In their latest - unbelievably badly written - texts "*Weg mit der Schwulenkeule!*" ("Get rid of the 'Gay cudgel!'"), responding to accusations they were gay, they reveal their ideology of gender, nation and Germanness. Reitz' and Brehl's view of history, society and their political struggle propagates the well-being of a hallucinated "German 'Volk'"[9] as the supreme goal. Every other cultural and political aim has to stand back when the existence of the

"Volk" supposedly is in danger. In this context, homosexual Germans can be part of a national struggle. Even when their sexuality is not reproducing and they are "contradicting the aim of 'securing the race'" [10], their "life was of some worth for the 'Volksgemeinschaft'"[11]. The homosexual race fighter has other values: free from family duties, he fights the war and shapes the culture of his people.

In tradition of the national-socialist ideology of the 1930s, Christianity is rejected and regarded as in opposition to nature and "Volk". This is an important point: with Christianity, Christian homophobia is put away. While trying to argue against discrimination of gay national-socialists, Reitz and Brehl happen to reproduce well-known liberal anti-homophobic argumentation: they reject "the tale that all gays would be abusing 'little boys'" [12] and even state that "sexual predisposition is in no way connected to character, moral and decency of a person"[13]. Measuring the possible use for their "German struggle," they are condemning the loss of gay national-socialists due to homophobia within their movement. The action of the (gay, national-socialist) person is of importance, not its sexual identity. Sexuality is the everyone's private matter; it is not identical with the political struggle. In this ideology sexual predisposition and habit are cut off from the surface of a political-personal "whole" (for example: Polish-

male-hetero-catholic) and moved into a private, personal, inner realm.

(We have to bear two things in mind. First, this is propaganda: there is no change going on in the neo-Nazi movement in Germany that would lead to a recognition of individual rights and more liberal politics. Second, the *KdS*, although its leaders are well-known and often appear as speakers at neo-Nazi rallies[14], does not play an important role in the German nationalist and neo-Nazi movement. Its politics are often laughed at and especially their gay-friendliness is seen as motivated by their own homosexuality.)

An indirect use of homosexual images may be found in neo-Nazi campaigns against sexual violence against children[15]. This is a popular topic of nationalist, right-wing campaigns, often calling for death penalty for "pederasts"[16]. Neo-Nazi politics are able to combine two aspects here: the widespread sentiment calling for a hard punishment (blaming the parties in power of being (too) liberal) and its own politics of securing the German "*Volk*". But the analysis of the images used seems to let us down. The visuality is focused on the children in danger. Powerless and defenseless, they are facing their enemy. Surprisingly, in the text accompanying the images this enemy is not constructed as foreign or different. There are no hints, as one could expect, to lust-driven "Jews" or "Africans,"

no hints to perverted homosexuals. The campaigns against child abuse seem to warn the nationalist activists of the "inner thread," the enemy in themselves. "Child abuse" is clearly not connected, at least not openly and aggressively, to male homosexuality.

3. *Note: Commercialized homosexuality and homosexualized capitalism*

Before proceeding to a conclusion, it is necessary bring to mind some decisive elements of the society we are living in. With a first superficial glance, the situation seems to be clear: in a liberal Germany gays can be mayors while in a repressive Poland everyone with a non-hetero identity has to live in fear of physical attack. (Right-wing movements are (as always?) simply brutalizing the mainstream ideology.)

But it is not that easy. The story of gay and lesbian liberation movements in Germany is both the story of repressive discrimination and of increasing public space, recognition and acceptance. For this tolerance, though, a high price was paid and there still is a lot of homophobic space in society to be liberated. If you look at it more closely, the picture of a gay paradise falls into pieces. There is still an atmosphere where non-heteros are afraid of having their coming-out, of being themselves in public. Popular and political culture[17] still is a home-zone of homophobic discourses that are

alive in media, commercials and everyday culture.

It is this specific quality of capitalist culture that is able to buy and sell it both: gay culture and homophobia. The German official Christopher Street Days, ripped of their original subversive character and transformed into apolitical advertising consumer events, and mass media productions like "The L-Word" or "Queer as Folk" are totally integrated into a capitalist industry of cultural production. The identity of being "gay" has become a good that is sold like everything else in a free-market economy. After they lost their emancipatory character (a mayor like Klaus Wowereit in Berlin is still deporting refugees into countries where they are facing torture and death, even though he is gay), homosexual struggles have been absorbed and have become part of the heterosexist cultural game of capitalist society. Normativity is still reigning; transsexual, intersexual, queer or whatever-you're-into identities do not fit into existing categories and thus are repressed. Repression against sexuality and individual culture is no longer executed by batons, prison and physical violence, but by the structure of consumer identities in a society that transforms everything into goods to be sold. And even in this context, the last years have brought an increasing number of blatant sexist images in mass media and popular culture.

Of course, that does not mean that everything is the same.

Obviously, everyone facing physical violence from heterosexist society and individuals is right when she or he (or whoever) finds it *better* to live without this violence. I am trying to make this point: both situations, from their respective points of view, need to be changed fundamentally. Brutal violence, open repression and censorship have to stop - but if they do, not everything is won. Commercialized homosexuality does lead to more space for sexual and individual expression of one's self, but a homosexualized capitalism still is capitalism with all its structural violence, commercial culture and the force to sell everything what you've got.

4. Conclusion: Deconstruct everything.

It comes as no surprise: two societies with a strongly different past provide different mainstream discourses for different far-right politics. Still, to imagine neo-fascist members of NOP or the All-Polish Youth attacking a leading German neo-Nazi and ideological ally like Axel Reitz because of his opinion that sexuality is a private matter is irritating. Two main reasons might have lead to this strange constellation.

First, mainstream and right-wing discourses in Germany and Poland are in opposition to each other in many aspects. On the one hand, a capitalist secularized and homosexualized society with a phenomenon like the revolt of '68 was built on the ruins of

a National-Socialism that once was accepted by the majority. On the other hand, a young capitalist democracy that has its own history of right-wing politics, a repressive "communist" regime and a strong Catholic-nationalist notion faces discourses on culture and society that still need to be shaped. Hence, both what is argued about in Poland and what is already agreed on in Germany is: *normality* .

Second, homosexuality in German discourse is one aspect of culture and society within many. In Poland, it has become a general metaphor for the fate of the country. The society is on many levels - mass media, cultural production, politics, daily life - in the middle of a struggle that one could either call a war of culture or a quarrel for discourses. In any way, conservative, liberal and right-wing are fighting to push through their idea of normality. It's a process that involves the whole society and all its fears - but the name of the game is gayness. The sign may read "*Zakaz pedofowania!*" but its aim is to stop anything contradicting repressive Catholic nationalist values. While "*Zakaz!*" is a conservative and right-wing attack on all cultural levels, the "gay cudgel" is a neo-Nazi attempt to liberalize the German neo-Nazi movement. The images used in both societies relate to the scale of the conflicts: homophobia is the conservative and right-wing tool in order to gain a hegemonic position and a reaction to a hitherto unknown offensively LGBTQ movement.

Due to a widely present homosexual culture in Germany, the German right-wing has no grounds for engaging in the same fight. In contrast, they partly oppose the vision of the heterosexist religious male with their strongly patriarchal idea of an asexual national-socialist warrior. Of course, this discourse is in no way related to an idea of an emancipatory breaking-up of heterosexism. Like some parts of an "unpolitical" gay culture, national-socialist images and visuality (Leni Riefenstahl, for instance) are hyped and adored. They come together to form a certain kind of homosexuality that is reproducing male dominance by its construction of an exclusive supremacy of the male body.

Aggressive Catholic-nationalist homophobia or neo-Nazi politics in a supposedly liberalized mainstream: all three of them have to be deconstructed. This, if we really have something in mind and do not want to end in the repressive boredom of liberal capitalist culture.

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[1] An attack that once was given a name by the weekly "Wprost" by coining the absurd term "Homintern" (Kitlinski, Anti-Gay Panic). Although funny in a way, it is still stunning that the journalists from "Wprost" actually dared to add "communism" to the crimes committed by homosexuals.

[2] While campaigning (in vain) against Poland becoming a member of EU, right-wing groups put "European norms" in opposition to "Polish norms". The image used was easy: two (German looking) snobbish and arrogant European males and their wild male child were threatening the Polish average family, smaller in height, and their polite little son. Thus, Poland: healthy hetero family; EU: gay subversive economic enemy.

[3] Which may lead to the association of a penis and gay oral sex. This may correlate with the stereotype of violent gay sexuality or with the one of transgressive seduction acted out by gays. In any way, the threatening penis-thumb is an image of the supposed repression of the normal by the sexual minority.

[4] Apart from questions of sexuality, it is very convenient to silence other political claims by "playing the gay-card". This is, what is done when politicians and the media are referring to equality actions as "gay rallies".

[5] Including Che Guevara and Rosa Luxemburg. But also red flags and subcultural codes of the radical left are used by young German neo-Nazis. In 2006, neo-Nazis even tried to disguise their politics by marching with banners reading "Against intolerance and fascism!". Postmodernity finally reaches German countryside boneheads.

[6] Still, one should be very careful with this analysis. Sexual freedom is no one-way-system and progress can always change into repressive politics. In addition, even with homosexuality being commercialized into the mainstream, German popular culture is subject to an enormous roll-back of misogynic-heterosexist visibility in the last 20 years. There still is a lot of work, activism and subversion to do on the way to a nice non-heterosexist society.

[7] Kuhnen, one of the most charismatic leading German neo-Nazis in the 1980s, died of AIDS in 1991.

[8] "Kampfbund deutscher Sozialisten" - Fighting League of German Socialists

[9] "Volk" is an expression describing the specific German concept that combines German tradition, soil, culture and national community. It includes a more closed and aggressive racist notion than the English term "people".

[10] "Dem Gebot der Rasseerhaltung widerspricht sie schon mal nicht, ..." (Brehl, Schwulenkeule)

[11] "...dann hat sein Leben durchaus auch im Sinne der Volksgemeinschaft seinen Wert gehabt." (Brehl, Schwulenkeule)

[12] "...und so sollte auch mal Schluss gemacht werden mit dem alten Irrglauben, dass Schwule allesamt 'auf kleine Jungs' stehen." (Brehl, Schwulenkeule)

[13] "...dass die geschlechtliche Veranlagung eines Menschen mit Charakter, Moral und Anstand gar nichts zu tun hat." (Reitz, Schwulenkeule)

[14] Axel Reitz, for example, was in 2006 one of the speakers at the annual neo-Nazi rally in Halbe, near Berlin. Halbe hosts the biggest cemetery of German Wehrmacht-soldiers, dying in the last weeks of World War II. Mourning their supposed sacrifice for the German nation (neglecting the criminal character of the German war,

massacres, cruelties and the participation in the Shoa), neo-Nazis hold one of their biggest and most important rallies in the small village every year.

[15] I'm using this rather complicated expression instead of "child abuse," because I'm wondering if such a thing like "abuse" exists, what "child use" than would be.

[16] Though one wonders if parties like the NPD will change their politics after one of their member of federal parliament in Saxony was sacked in November 2006. The police did find tons of child pornography on his computer...

[17] In December 2006, a politician of the governing conservative party CDU and member of federal parliament of Saxony (again...), insulted the liberal parts of the political elite, calling them "multicultural fags".

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