Queer Experiences in the Holocaust: Introduction

Helen Finch[a] and *Rosie Ramsden[b]

[a]*School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds, U.K;* [b]*School of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, U.K*

r.ramsden@mmu.ac.uk/r.ramsden@leeds.ac.uk

Biographical Note - Helen Finch is Professor of German Literature at the University of Leeds. She has published widely on gender in German culture and on Holocaust literature including *Sebald's Bachelors: Queer Resistance and the Unconforming Life* (Legenda, 2013) and *German-Jewish Life Writing in the Aftermath of the Holocaust: Beyond Testimony* (Camden House, 2023). Her current research interests include queer memory in German literature, Holocaust translation and queer Holocaust literature.

Biographical Note – Rosie Ramsden is Lecturer in Modern German History at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is also Non-residential Fellow with the USC Shoah Foundation 2025-2026 and a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Leeds, and she is a former Montague Burton Postdoctoral Fellow in Jewish studies at the University of Leeds. Her research on gender and sexuality in the Holocaust has been or will soon be published in *Holocaust Studies*, *La Revue D'histoire de la Shoah*, *Women's History Review* and *Patterns of Prejudice*. Rosie's forthcoming monograph focuses on gender, memory and identity in women's Holocaust writing.

Queer Experiences in the Holocaust: Introduction

This special issue presents research into the experiences – the emotions, memories, practices, desires, relationalities, and imaginations – of queer subjects during and after the Nazi regime. The contributions go beyond attempts to record queer-identified people or the facts of behaviours relating to non-normative sexualities. Instead, they trace the obscured perceptions, opinions, and memories of those who participated in or witnessed queer behaviour during the Holocaust. Using multidisciplinary approaches, this special issue also discusses creative methodologies to approach queer experiences that have been affected by Nazi persecution.

Keywords: Holocaust; sexuality; queer; gender

What are "queer experiences in the Holocaust"? How might we unearth such experiences and enter them into the historical canon? What are the implications of these processes for our understanding and reconstruction of the Holocaust and the lives of its victims? In this special issue, six contributors present articles that animate the experiences – the emotions, memories, practices, desires, relationalities, and imaginations – of queer subjects during and after the Nazi regime. Far from an effort solely to record queer-identified people or the facts of behaviours relating to non-normative sexualities, this special issue traces the heretofore obscured perceptions, opinions, and memories of those who participated in or witnessed queer behaviour during the Holocaust, as well as ways of feeling queerly that have been affected by Nazi persecution. In doing so, this project is motivated by what Zavier Nunn describes as the "reparative' entry' of queer histories into the historical record in their own right, even where they have been overlooked as unrecountable, unthinkable, or insignificant in extant scholarship.[1] To begin to engage with and recover these complex lived realities, its interdisciplinary contributions move away from paradigms of persecution, instead drawing and building upon a diversity of queer methodologies which, in Jennifer Evans' words, 'emphasize overlap, contingency,

competing forces and complexity.'[2] By critically unsettling received narratives, questioning anew familiar sources and the assumptions that govern our analysis of them, and recentring embodied experience rather than homophobic discourse, this special issue makes a vital intervention in queering Holocaust studies, bringing into focus – and carving out space for – a multiplicity of queer experiences as told by survivors and their descendants themselves.

The reasons we specifically address "queer experiences in the Holocaust" in this special issue are threefold. Firstly, following Anna Hájková, we refer to behaviours, feelings and subjects as "queer" because "queer" is a referent that encompasses the spectrum of practices, emotions and bodies associated with non-normative sexualities, and indeed accounts for the fluidity and complexity of human sexuality, particularly in extremis.[3] At the same time, the use of the term "queer" resists ascribing anachronistic identities to subjects who may not have self-identified as homosexual or lesbian.[4] Thus, the term enables us to shift attention from tracing queer subject positions to exploring queer living situations in the Holocaust.[5] Secondly, to speak of "queer experience" is to avoid reinforcing the categories of persecution of the Nazi perpetrators and to disrupt the homophobic knowledge production replicated in many survivor testimonies.[6] Thirdly, we confront "queer experience" because it reflects the focus of this special issue on embodiment and discourse to understand, in particular, the perception and memory of those who engaged in or encountered such experiences in the Holocaust. Although it certainly includes them, we do not understand "queer experience" to refer solely to sexual experiences in the camps, but rather to incorporate a variety of practices, feelings and subjectivities – spanning myriad spatialities and temporalities – that pertain to same-sex sexuality. These heterogeneous experiences may not – and often do not – map neatly onto perpetrator-victim or heterosexual-homosexual binaries, nor onto the fixed models of

homosexual identity promoted by gay liberation movements in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1970s which drew on 'pink triangle legacies.'[7]

Queer Holocaust Studies: an emerging field

Queer Holocaust research has a history stretching back over fifty years, and parallel traditions of research into queer experience in the Holocaust have continued in the Anglosphere and in the German-speaking world. As W. Jake Newsome's important 2022 study *Pink Triangle Legacies* has shown, in the postwar period, research into queer victims of the Holocaust mostly took place outside of formal academic settings and, in Germany, by researchers who were not formally trained as historians.[8] The paucity, ambiguity, homophobia or destruction of archival evidence, a theme that is evident throughout the contributions of this special issue, led to the development of a rich dual methodology, combining archival research and oral history work with survivors of Nazi persecution. Both methodologies require knowledge of German, and despite the rich dialogue between the Germanosphere and Anglosphere, much German-language work remains untranslated into English and 'virtually unabsorbed in the English-language context.'[9] This is particularly notable in the case of the work of scholars and activists on lesbian and trans* women. For instance, though Claudia Schoppmann's important *Zeit der Maskierung*, drawing on oral history interviews to record lesbian persecution in the Holocaust – via surveillance, intimidation, harassment, and in some cases, deportation – was translated into English as *Days of Masquerade* in 1996, it remains the only book in English on lesbian history under the Nazis.[10] This is reflected in Anna Hájková's exhaustive online bibliography on lesbian and trans* women in the Holocaust, which runs to over 200 entries, the vast majority of which were produced in German and are untranslated.

Since the 2010s, and particularly since 2015, scholarship on queer experiences in the Holocaust has blossomed. In Germany, this reflects a changing political situation in which the victims of Paragraph 175 have been pardoned and recognized as victims by the Federal Government. However, the field is still structured by exclusionary mechanisms: research on women and particularly on queer, trans and nonbinary subjects remains marginalized, in part perhaps due to this continued focus on Paragraph 175 as the master determiner of queer experiences in the Holocaust. Key recent German-language publications include Michael Schwartz's *2014 Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus.Neue Forschungsperspektiven zu Lebenssituationen von lesbischen schwulen, bi-, trans- und intersexuellen Menschen 1933 bis 1945* (Homosexuals Under National Socialism: New Research Perspectives on the Life Circumstances of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, and Intersexual Persons from 1933 to 1945), which was distributed by the *German Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (Federal Agency for Civic Education) in an affordable paperback edition.[11] Alexander Zinn's study *Aus dem Volkskörper entfernt? Homosexuelle Männer im Nationalsozialismus* argues controversially that persecution of gay men in the Nazi regime was less rigorous than often thought, while his edited collection *Homosexuelle in Deutschland 1933-1960* (Homosexuals in Germany 1933-1969) emphasises continuities between persecution of queer subjects in Germany under the Nazi regime and in postwar Germany.[12] Zinn's work in another way continues mechanisms of exclusion: he also rejects claims that the Nazis persecuted lesbians due to their sexual orientation due to his reliance on legal methods of persecution as the main framework for exclusion of queer subjects during the Third Reich.[13] Lutz van Dijk, Joanna Ostrowska and Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska's detailed study of queer subjects in Auschwitz, *Erinnern in Auschwitz: Auch an sexuelle Minderheiten (Remembrance in Auschwitz: of sexual minorities too)* , a Polish-German

co-production, appeared in German in an independent queer press, owing to the difficult political circumstances obtaining in Poland at the time of its publication in 2020.[14] Hájková's 2021 *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub. (People without History are Dust)*, appeared in English translation by Will Jones in 2025, and uses a mixed methodology that deploys cultural studies and queer theory methods as well as historiographical methods. Crucially, it integrates the histories of men, women and gender non-conforming subjects.[15]

The histories of lesbian and queer women, as well as trans* and inter* histories in the Holocaust, havealso been increasingly traced using multiple, queer methodologies, owing to the difficulty in identifying these subjects in criminal archives. Women's sexuality played out more in private during the Holocaust, and queer women were persecuted in more subtle ways than the use of Paragraph 175 against men, even in Austria, where lesbian activity continued to be criminalised.[16] As a result, there is a dearth of legal source material pertaining to the lives of queer women. In addition, heteronormative – even outright homophobic – oral history interview frameworks, the homophobia of camp prisoner society, and the continued stigmatization of lesbian women in postwar Europe, have produced a testimonial silence from queer women who lived through the Nazi period.[17] This continues to be reproduced in the especially severe silencing of lesbian experiences in scholarship on the Holocaust. Likewise, there were no direct laws persecuting trans* and inter* subjects in the Nazi period – but many other ways in which such subjects could fall under suspicion.[18] The lives of these subjects, therefore, remain a particularly marginalised topic in Holocaust historiography. Indeed, despite efforts toward inclusivity, this special issue features only one article directly addressing queer women under the Nazi regime and none which consider the lives of

trans* and gender diverse subjects, and thus reflects that research continues to focus largely on cis gay men.

Feminist and queer researchers, however, have built on Schoppmann's work to create a richer picture of lesbian histories in the Holocaust, as well as of trans* and inter* histories. Natascha Bobrowsky's 2025 *Verbotene Beziehungen. Weibliche Homosexualität im nationalsozialistischen Österreich* (Forbidden Connections: Female Homosexuality in National Socialist Austria), for example, argues that when researching the persecution of women, it is essential to find methods to capture subjective experience.[19] Samuel Clowes Huneke has addressed both lesbian persecution in the Nazi era and limited lesbian tolerance under the Nazis, bridging the divide in scholarly interpretation of lesbian persecution and expanding the framework by which we understand the complex lived experiences of queer women under Nazism.[20] Others too, such as Laurie Marhoefer, have shifted attention from the arguably limiting concept of lesbian persecution, instead using a microhistorical approach to the analysis of a single Gestapo investigation to examine the risk under which queer women, gender-nonconforming and transgender people lived, in a Nazi German society which stigmatised same-sex sexuality, gender-nonconformity and transgenderism.[21] Zavier Nunn's recent microhistorical interventions in the Gestapo archives have also served to both complicate our understanding of the policing of trans people in the Nazi state, and to offer a 'reparative alternative' to the 'politics of victimhood,' therefore enabling entry of the trans feminine past under the Nazi regime into the historical record.[22]

Importantly, research into queer experience also continues to cross-fertilise research into sexual experience in general, and sexual barter and sexual violence in the Holocaust in particular. A recent special issue of *German History* on 'Sexuality, Holocaust, Stigma,' for example, saw interdisciplinary Holocaust scholars come together

to challenge the stigma related to sexuality in the Holocaust and trouble the scholarly processes by which it is upheld.[23] More recently still, a pioneering special issue of the *Journal of Holocaust Research* on 'Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust' made efforts to reinsert 'experiences that deviate from the main narrative' into the history of the Holocaust, casting light on such topics as sexual violence and same-sex practices among women, sexual exchange, and the sexual humiliation experienced by men and women at the hands of German perpetrators. This includes William Jones's work on exploitative sexual relationships, agency, and consent among Jewish men in the concentration camp setting, upon which they build in this special issue.[24] As Newsome's work shows, the field of queer Holocaust research is now long enough to have developed its own historiography, one continued by Sebastian Tremblay in *A Badge of Injury: The Pink Triangle as Global Symbol of Memory* (2023).[25]

Approaching Queer Experiences: Methodologies

As the literature review above shows, the traces of queer experiences in the Holocaust have been responded to by a wealth of interdisciplinary methodologies. Activist researchers in the field, while they acknowledge the comments made by such infamous perpetrators as Rudolf Höss, which objectified and topologized homosexual men and used their "criminal" behaviour to justify his actions as commandant of Auschwitz, use multiple methods to undermine, contextualise and resist the perpetrator gaze and homophobic language found in Nazi documents and memoirs.[26] One has been the activist collection of oral histories by historians, such as Claudia Schoppmann or Alexander Zinn, who sought out self-identified queer subjects to compile and write up their oral testimony to their experiences under Nazi rule.[27] The pioneering work done by these historians, along with the published memoirs by such self-identified homosexual survivors of the Holocaust as Pierre Seel or Gad Beck (analysed by Tudosescu and Finch in this special

issue) have provided a canon of queer Holocaust testimony for contemporary scholars to build on.[28]

More recently, a second methodological strand has developed: that of using queer methodologies to glean queer experiences from texts and testimonies by and about subjects that had not previously been identified or read as queer. Much of this work has followed the leads of Amy Elman, who in her 1999 queered reading of Anne Frank's diary called for a "reading between the lines" of historical sources to counteract the invisibility – and presumed heterosexuality – of lesbian and queer women within them, and latterly William J. Spurlin, who argued that 'theorizing lesbian existence must involve the careful and considered act of (re)reading against the grain of heteronormativity.'[29] Some of this scholarship has used the resource of existing oral histories and memoirs to pay close critical attention to moments where queer desire and experiences are mentioned or implied, for instance Rosie Ramsden's work looking at constructions of homophobia in survivor memoirs, or indeed the ongoing work on queering Anne Frank's diary by Elman and Cheryl Hann.[30] Some of this work has involved a scrupulous reading of Nazi archives to unearth the fates of queer subjects, such as Jürgen Pettinger's recent biography of an Austrian man executed by the Nazis for persistent 'antisocial' behaviour, including sex with men, *Franz: Schwul unterm Swastika* (Franz: Gay under the Swastika), or Marhoefer and Nunn's microhistorical approaches in the Gestapo archives.[31]

In their work, Sarah Ernst similarly used the video testimonies of the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive to consider how queering archival approaches can facilitate a shift away from 'the labels predetermined by an archive or perpetrator group or even individuals themselves,' and a move toward including in Holocaust historiography queer lives and narratives.[32] Uta Rautenberg's research has also moved

beyond the archives of the persecutors to trace homophobia in International Tracing Service documents.[33] Key to any work in the archive is an ethical methodology that seeks to resist the pathologizing and genocidal logic of those archives, as well as the homophobic attitudes of the survivors whose testimonies they in some cases capture. Queer methods of approaching archives and testimony, as both Nunn and Jacob Evoy suggest, can be seen as reparative readings in the sense of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a method that organizes fragments in a way that can generate hope as well as horror.[34]

Hence, ethical methodologies are of particular importance to the contributors to this special issue as they seek to explore queer experiences in the Holocaust. To an extent, they participate (if not explicitly) in a queer phenomenology, through seeking to engage with embodied experience over and above archival and documentary traces, and by recognising that embodiment is always also gendered through multiple factors. As Sara Ahmed has written, queer phenomenology emphasizes among other things the importance of lived experience, the way that emotions are directed towards objects in ways that reflect past histories, orientation and disorientation, and the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places.[35] Victim experience of the Holocaust was one of profound and brutal disorientation, and queer experience at times formed part of this disorientation, particularly in the case of coercive sex, which at times provided a mode of re-orientation as a survival tactic. Paying attention to such phenomenological matters, and the trace they leave in memory and memoir, helps recentre embodied experience, rather than homophobic discourse, in our analyses.

A final methodological strand explored in this issue is that of creative response to archival or narrative traces of queer experience. Artistic approaches, while at times glossing over historical complexities in order to produce commercially or politically appealing narrative, can also draw attention to the illegibility and stigmatised nature of

queer experiences in the Holocaust, creating spaces for uncertainty, emotion and imagination that query the possibility or even desirability of empirical knowledge of queer experience. Through unsettling epistemologies and received narratives, and drawing in queer temporalities and emotions, creative production affords a different, perhaps queerer, form of knowledge about experience in the Holocaust.

About this special issue

The contributions in this special issue build upon these important interventions in queering Holocaust studies, in particular bringing into dialogue these queer methodological and theoretical perspectives in their analyses. They offer novel and interdisciplinary readings of both new and familiar archival and cultural texts that pertain to queer experience in and after the Holocaust, focusing on the ways first- and second-generation survivors voiced or otherwise left traces of their own experiences. In their articles, the contributors address essential questions about the ways silences in the historical record pertaining to queer lives, perspectives, and memories in the Holocaust can be sensitively redressed, and how doing so can shape knowledge, representation and memorialisation of the Holocaust contemporarily through the inclusion of marginalised histories.

How, for example, might we trace queer experiences during the Nazi genocide of European Jewry and the persecution of other minoritized subjects by the Nazis, when the traces left behind are often not those of the persecuted subjects, but those of the persecutors? How do we avoid the well-known danger of redoubling the oppression and stigmatisation of victims by viewing them through the perpetrator's lens? Even if, as Hájková has shown, testimony to queer experience was left by victims of Nazi persecution, extreme homophobia still characterised much Holocaust testimony. What

silences, therefore, have been produced by stigma, shame and homophobia, and how can we trace queer experiences despite these silences? How do we trace not just the facts of queer practices, but the experiences of those who engaged in queer practices during the Holocaust? In their critical exploration of these questions, the contributors not only expand queer histories of the Holocaust, but further queer our approach to the study of the Holocaust by troubling our own impulses to privilege certain source materials, expressions, experiences, subjects, and forms of knowledge over others.

Maria Tudosescu's article re-examines Pierre Seel's memoir, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, as a unique account of the Holocaust through which the lost identities and experiences of men persecuted under Paragraph 175 are reclaimed on both an individual and collective scale.[36] Emphasising the role of storytelling in 'rescuing victims from obscurity,' Tudosescu considers the narrative strategy employed by Seel to voice not only his own suffering as a gay man in the Holocaust, but to shape his first-person memoir into an urgent call for the recognition of the atrocities suffered by queer people more widely under the Nazi regime, many of whom felt unable to tell their own stories. Here, the first-person testimonial project serves as an act of identity reconstruction for Seel in the wake of traumatic experience, as well as a form of historical testimony, Tudosescu argues, mobilised to reclaim the long-silenced perspectives of gay Holocaust victims. In her rereading, Tudosescu demonstrates, memoirs of queer lived experience can advocate powerfully for the inclusion of victim groups like homosexual men into dominant histories of the Holocaust, for they hold the power to challenge historical erasure through the reshaping of collective historical consciousness.

In her article, Helen Finch reconceptualizes the memoirs of five gay German-Jewish Holocaust survivors: Alphons Silbermann, Gad Beck, Walter Guttmann, Jerry Rosenstein and Harry Raymon. Making a vital contribution to the limited yet pioneering

body of scholarship on sexuality among Jewish prisoners and broader Jewish queer experiences of the Holocaust, Finch provides valuable insights on the ways queer Jewish subjects testified to the intersection of Jewishness, persecution, and queer behaviour or feelings. A critical interrogation of the narrative construction of this intersection in the self-authored accounts of queer Jewish survivors, Finch's article illuminates the entwining of first-person experience of the Holocaust and frames of queer self-understanding constructed during the second half of the twentieth century. In contrast to memoirs written by non-Jewish survivors such as Pierre Seel, Finch contends, these memoirs construct gay Jewish identity as a source of resistance. In doing so, she demonstrates that these memoirs disrupt not only 'the competitive of parallel Jewish and gay Holocaust, but the paradigm of queer history as predominantly a history of loss, pain and shame.'

Tiarra Maznick's article explores the social dynamics of sexual deviance in Block 10 – the experimental sterilization block – of Auschwitz I. Drawing on a wealth of German-language oral histories, postwar testimonies and statements, and survivor memoirs, Maznick shifts attention from the pseudo-scientific experiments conducted on the Jewish women confined to the block and onto the ways in which they navigated pre-war sexual conventions during their detainment. Entering, for the first time, a queer history of Block 10 into the written historical canon, she examines expressions of queer desire and kinship among its female prisoners, shedding light not only on queer feeling and same-sex intimacy, homophobia, and the power dynamic that framed some sexual encounters between them, but on the power of testimonies of queer relationships to queer the ways the Holocaust is narrated and remembered in retrospect. Synthesising diverse queer approaches to historical analysis in her readings, Maznick's article makes a timely and important intervention in tracing women's queer experiences in the Holocaust.

William Jones offers a microhistorical example of experience of sexual violence and queer practices in the concentration camps by focusing on the testimony of one man: German-Jewish Holocaust survivor, Norman Jaffé. Jones's article explores the degree to which it was possible for survivors like Jaffé to both experience rape and forced relationships of sexual exchange in the camps, and find agency and relief in consensual queer practices. Though Jones acknowledges that most same-sex sex among male camp populations fell into the realm of sexual violence, they make the case that sexual relationships between male prisoners centred on 'connectivity, emotion, kinship or pleasure' were also possible. In their queered analysis of Jaffé's oral testimony, Jones thus demonstrates the power that queer understandings of the Holocaust have in deepening our understanding of human behaviour in extremis, and advocates for the sensitive evaluation of testimony for agency and consent. Fundamentally, Jones suggests, applying a queer framework to our study of the Holocaust facilitates the recognition of Holocaust experiences spanning the sexual spectrum – forced sex in the form of exploitative relationships, sexual barter for survival, and consensual same-sex sex – even where they have previously been silenced.

In their article, Jacob Evoy turns to the accounts not of Holocaust survivors, but their descendants, considering the role played by sex and sexuality in the LGBTQ+ children of survivors' narratives of their roots trips (journeys in which individuals connect with their heritage by visiting places of family or ancestral importance). Analysing oral history interviews they conducted with LGBTQ+ children of Holocaust survivors in Canada and the USA in 2019, Evoy shows that sex and survival were not only often intimately intertwined for the Holocaust's victims as events unfolded, but in the legacies of the Holocaust in the lives of survivors' descendants. In their mobilisation of queer sex, desire and intimacy in their accounts of their roots trips, some LGBTQ+ children of

survivors find an important way to narrativize their experiences and forge connections to their parents' difficult pasts. Ultimately, Evoy shows that sex and sexuality are both crucial to furthering our understanding of the wartime experiences of the Holocaust's victims and survivors, and are valuable categories of analysis with which to assess the Holocaust's intergenerational legacy.

Finally, ceramicist and craft-based media artist, Matt Smith, uses his article to reflect on his time as Artist in Residence at the Holocaust Centre North in 2023. In particular, he details his efforts to interrogate the archive for queer life stories and reckon with the fundamental complexities present in making visible LGBTQ+ Holocaust histories erased from traditional discourses and family histories. A consideration of his artistic practice and its navigation of erasure, loss and the continued stigmatisation of queer bodies in the museum, Smith discusses the three artworks he produced, their intervention in paying greater care to queer legacies, and the ways they highlight the role of the museum and the archive in perpetuating the silencing of queer histories. In this detailed reflection, Smith demonstrates a profound awareness of the possibilities presented by creative responses to queer Holocaust history in recovering the histories of marginalised subjects in the Holocaust.

The contributions to this special issue evaluate published French- and German-language memoirs, oral histories, legal testimony, and artworks and artistic practice. In their synthesis and application of innovative queer methodologies, such as Smith's artistic response to the 'slipperiness of queer Holocaust memory' and Evoy's evaluation of queer sex in the identities of LGBTQ+ children of survivors, the contributors make a persuasive case for the expansion of queer, reparative approaches to Holocaust history within and beyond the academy. By centring the reflections and perceptions of survivors and their children, as well as queer experience over subject positions, the contributors add their

voices to recent scholarship focused not on frames of persecution or identity, but on the perceptions, memories, feelings and imaginations of those who encountered or participated in queer experiences under the Nazi regime. In their consideration of the spectrum of queer experiences in and after the Holocaust, from those of the children of survivors to those of queer Jews who fled into exile, to those of imprisoned subjects who engaged in queer behaviours, the contributions illuminate some of the ways that queer legacies of the Holocaust have been transmitted, mediated, and recovered.

Yet, while the contributors to this special issue proffer answers to vital questions about how queer experiences in the Holocaust might be traced without replicating the oppression of the Holocaust's victims, they are by no means exhaustive. Indeed, there remain significant areas ripe for further research and exploration. Artistic and cultural responses to queer Holocaust memory both hold the potential to memorialise queer lived experience and challenge its historical erasure, and to make visible queer affect, perception and imagination often glossed over by the empiricism of scholarship. (Jennifer Evans's chapter and Anika Oettler's volume on the Berlin memorial for the homosexuals persecuted by the Nazi regime are pioneering works in this regard.[37]) In particular, queer Holocaust literature, such as fiction (e.g. Martin Sherman's pioneering play *Bent*, or Marlen Schachinger's 2013 novel *¡Leben!*) and poetry (e. g. by lesbian Holocaust survivor Irena Klepfisz), could be further utilised as a vehicle for the production of queer knowledge and the espousal of ambiguity as it relates to queer experience in the Holocaust.[38] While such literature may not form a coherent genre, it forms a tradition of attempting to imagine the Holocuast queerly that goes back over fifty years.[39] Additionally, rather than an approach to Holocaust history that demarcates competing and mutually exclusive Jewish and gay Holocausts, greater attention needs to be paid to the ways that age, gender, sexuality, religion and religiosity, and persecution intersect with

queer feeling and behaviours, and how this might complicate the framework by which we understand the lives of queer – and indeed, all – subjects in the Holocaust. Multidirectional memory, too remains an underutilised theoretical tool in queering the Holocaust, one that can facilitate less a confrontation between queer and Jewish Holocaust history and memory, and more a productive co-remembrance and cross-fertilisation that can nuance our understanding of the lives of all victim groups.[40] Lastly, research on gender-diverse subjects remains in its infancy, with the work of Laurie Marhoefer, Zavier Nunn, William Jones and others on trans* and gender-nonconforming subjects in the Holocaust signalling the way for an expanded focus on these marginalised histories.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)

Beck, Gad, and Frank Heibert, *Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin*, trans. by Allison Brown (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999)

Beck, Gad, *Und Gad ging zu David: Die Erinnerungen des Gad Beck. 1923 bis 1945*, ed. by Frank Heibert (Edition día, 2012)

Bos, Pascale R., 'Barter, Prostitution, Abuse? Reframing Experiences of Sexual Exchange during the Holocaust', *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 225-252

Boxhammer, Ingeborg and Christiane Leidinger. 'Sexismus, Heteronormativität und (staatliche) Öffentlichkeit im Nationalsozialismus. Eine queer-feministische Perspektive auf die Verfolgung von Lesben und/oder Trans* in (straf-)rechtlichen Kontexten', in Schwartz, Michael, ed. *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus: Neue Forschungsperspektiven zu Lebenssituationen von lesbischen, schwulen, bi-, trans- und intersexuellen Menschen 1933 bis 1945*. (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 93-100

Clowes Huneke, Samuel, *I will Not Abandon You: Queer Women in Nazi Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2026)

Clowes Huneke, Samuel, ‘Heterogeneous Persecution: Lesbianism and the Nazi State’, *Central European History*, 54:2 (2021), 297-325

Clowes Huneke, Samuel, ‘The Duplicity of Tolerance: Lesbian Experiences in Nazi Berlin’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 54:1 (2017), 30-59

Elman, Amy R., ‘Lesbians and the Holocaust’, in *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation*, ed. by Esther Fuchs (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999), 9-19

Ernst, Sarah, Queer(ing) Holocaust Video Testimonies: Introductions, Explorations, and Reimaginings, USC Dornsife Center for Advanced Genocide Research, Youtube, 2024

Evans, Jennifer and Elissa Mailänder, ‘Cross-dressing, Male Intimacy and the Violence of Transgression in Third Reich Photography’, *German History*, 39:1 (2021), 54-77

Evans, Jennifer, ‘Introduction: Why Queer German History?’, *German History*, 34:3 (2016), 371 – 384

Evans, Jennifer, ‘Harmless Kisses and Infinite Loops: Making Space for Queer Place in Twenty-First Century Berlin’, *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (2014), 75-94.

Fauroux, Camille, ‘Shared Intimacies: Women’s Sexuality in Foreign Workers’ Camps, 1940-1945’, *Germany History*, 39:1 (2021), 37-53

Finch, Helen, ‘Queer Holocaust Literature, in *The Cambridge Companion to Holocaust Literature*, eds. Erin McGlothlin, Stuart Taberner, forthcoming.

Fries, Kenny, Dorota Glowacka, Atina Grossmann, Anna Hájková, Björn Krondorfer, Regina Mühlhäuser, Joanna Ostrowska & Zoë Waxman, ‘“I Still Struggle to Ensure that I am Truly Listening”: Understanding Gender, Sexuality, and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust. A Conversation’, *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 181-205

Glowacka, Dorota and Regina Mühlhäuser, ‘Gender-Based and Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: On the Importance of Writing this History Today’, *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 173-180

Glowacka, Dorota, ‘Sexual Violence against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-So-Silent) Silence’, Germany History, 39:1 (2021), 78-99

Hájková, Anna, *People Without History Are Dust: Queer Desire in the Holocaust*, trans. by William Jones (University of Toronto Press, 2025)

Hájková, Anna. *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub: Queeres Verlangen im Holocaust*. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2024)

Hájková, Anna, 'Introduction: Sexuality, Holocaust, Stigma', *German History*, 39:1 (2021), 1-14

Hájková, Anna, 'Between Love and Coercion: Queer Desire, Sexual Barter and the Holocaust', *German History*, 39:1 (2021), 112-133

Hájková, Anna, 'Queer History and the Holocaust', *On History* (2019)

Hájková, Anna, 'Why We Need a Queer History of the Holocaust' (2020)

Hann, Cheryl D., '"If Only I had a Girlfriend!": Toward a Queer Reading of The Diary of a Young Girl', MA diss., Dalhousie University, 2016

Jones, William Ross, '"You are going to be my Bettmann": Exploitative Sexual Relationships and the Lives of the Pipels in Nazi Concentration Camps', *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 253-272

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You', in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003)

Marhoefer, Laurie, 'Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939-1943', *The American Historical Review*, 121:4 (2016), 1167-1195

Marhoefer, Laurie, 'Transgender Life and Persecution under the Nazi State: Gutachten on the Vollbrecht Case', *Central European History*, 56:4 (2023), 595-601

Matkowska, Justyna, 'Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Romani Women and Girls in Occupied Poland during World War II', *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 292-315

Mühlhäuser, Regina, 'Understanding Sexual Violence during the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research and Sources', *German History*, 39:1 (2021), 15-36

Newsome, W. Jake., *Pink Triangle Legacies: Coming Out in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2022)

Niere, Angelika, *Homosexualität in der Holocaustliteratur [Homosexuality in Holocaust Literature]* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021)

Nunn, Zavier, ‘Against Anticipation, or, Camp Reading as Reparative to the Trans Feminine Past: A Microhistory in Nazi-Era Vienna’, *Gender & History*, 36:1 (2024), 191-207

Nunn, Zavier, ‘Trans Liminality and the Nazi State’, *Past & Present*, 260:1 (2023), 123-157

Pettinger, Jürgen, *Franz: schwul unterm Hakenkreuz [Franz: Gay under the Swastika]* (Vienna: K & S, 2021)

Ramsden, Roseanna, ‘Something was Crawling all Over Me’: Queer Fear in Women’s Holocaust Testimonies’, *Holocaust Studies*, 26:3 (2020), 401-415

Rautenberg, Uta, ‘Homophobia in Nazi Camps’, PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2024

Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009)

Schachinger, Marlen. *¡Leben!: Roman* [Life: A Novel] (Vienna: Leykam Verlag, 2013)

Schoppmann, Claudia, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbian Women during the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)

Schwartz, Michael, ‘Verfolgte Homosexuelle – oder Lebenssituationen von LSBT*QI*? Einführende Bemerkungen zu einem Forschungsfeld im Umbruch,’ in Schwartz, Michael, ed. *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus: Neue Forschungsperspektiven zu Lebenssituationen von lesbischen, schwulen, bi-, trans- und intersexuellen Menschen 1933 bis 1945*. (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 11-18

Seel, Pierre*, I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Basic Books, 2011)

Snyder, Carli, ‘Asking about the ‘Unspeakable’: Joan Ringelheim and Early Research on Sexual Violence and Same-Sex Practices among Women during the Holocaust’, *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 206-224

Spurlin, William J., *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality under National Socialism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009)

Tremblay, Sébastien, *A Badge of Injury: The Pink Triangle as Global Symbol of Memory*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

van Dijk, Lutz, Joanna Ostrowska, and Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, eds. *Erinnern in Auschwitz: Auch an sexuelle Minderheiten* [Remembrance in Auschwitz: of sexual minorities too] (Berlin: Quer Verlag, 2020)

Westermann, Edward B., 'Crossing the Threshold of Sexual Violence: Humiliation and the Practice of Performative Masculinity', The Journal of Holocaust Research, 38:3-4: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence during the Holocaust (2024), 336-35

Zinn, Alexander. *Homosexuelle in Deutschland 1933-1969: Beiträge zu Alltag, Stigmatisierung und Verfolgung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020)

Zinn, Alexander. *Aus dem Volkskörper entfernt?: Homosexuelle Männer im Nationalsozialismus* [Removed from the Ethnic Body? Homosexual Men in National Socialism] (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2018)

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Leeds School of Languages, Cultures and Societies' Key Topics Fund, which funded the workshop that led to this publication. They would also like to acknowledge the support of Anna Hájková for her expert input at the workshop and encouragement of the project.

---

[1] Nunn, 'Against Anticipation'

[2] Evans, 'Why Queer German History?', 371

[3] Hájková, 'Queer History and the Holocaust'

[4] Hájková, 'Queer History and the Holocaust'

[5] Schwartz, 'Verfolgte Homosexuelle', 11

[6] Hájková, *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub*

[7] Newsome, *Pink Triangle Legacies*

[8] Newsome, *Pink Triangle Legacies*

[9] Hájková, 'Why We Need a Queer History of the Holocaust'

[10] Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*. Samuel Clowes Huneke's forthcoming book, *I Will Not Abandon You: Queer Women in Nazi Germany*, is due to be published in Spring 2026 with Toronto Press

[11] Schwartz, Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus

[12] Zinn, *Aus dem Volkskörper entfernt?,* 2018; *Homosexuelle in Deutschland 1933-1960,* 2020

[13]; Hájková, 'Queer History and the Holocaust'.

[14] Dijk et al, *Erinnern in Auschwitz,* 2020

[15] Hájková, *Menschen ohne Geschichte*; Hájková, *People without History*.

[16] Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 20.

[17] Hájková, 'Queer History and the Holocaust'

[18] Boxhammer and Leidinger, 'Sexismus, Heteronormativität und (staatliche) Öffentlichkeit', 95.

[19] Bobrowsky, *Verbotene Beziehungen*, 30.

[20] Clowes Huneke, 'Heterogeneous Persecution', 297-325, and idem, 'The Duplicity of Tolerance', 30-59.

[21] Marhoefer, 'Lesbianism, Transvestitism', 1167-1195. See also idem, 'Transgender Life and Persecution', 595-601

[22] Nunn, 'Against Anticipation', 191-207. See also idem, 'Trans Liminality', 123-157

[23] Hájková, 'Between Love and Coercion'; Mühlhäuser, 'Understanding Sexual Violence'; Fauroux, 'Shared Intimacies: Women's Sexuality'; Evans and Mailander, 'Cross-dress, Male Intimacy'; Glowacka, 'Sexual Violence against Men'

[24] Glowacka and Mühlhäuser, 'Gender-Based and Sexual Violence', 173; Snyder, 'Asking about the 'Unspeakable"; Bos, 'Barter, Prostitution, Abuse?'; Westermann, 'Crossing the Threshold of Sexual Violence'; Jones, "'You are going to be my Bettmann"

[25] Tremblay, *A Badge of Injury*.

[26] Niere, *Homosexualität in der Holocaustliteratur*, 66

[27] Not sure whether we ought to reference Schoppmann and Zinn here again

[28] Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*; Beck, *Und Gad ging zu David*; Beck and Heibert, *Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Berlin*

[29] Elman, 'Lesbians and the Holocaust', 10; Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 68

[30] Ramsden, '"Something was Crawling All Over Me"'; Hann, '"If Only I Had a Girlfriend!"'

[31] Pettinger, *Franz*

[32] Ernst, Queer(ing) Holocaust Video Testimonies

[33] Rautenberg, 'Homophobia in Nazi Camps'

[34] Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading'

[35] Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology

[36] Seel, I, Pierre Seel

[37] Evans, 'Harmless Kisses', 2014; Oettler, *Das Berliner Denkmal*.

[38] Sherman, *Bent*, 1978; Schachinger, *¡Leben!*.

[39] Finch, 'Queer Holocaust Literature', forthcoming.

[40] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*