NICOLE HIRSCHFELDER

Oppression as Process

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UMSCHLAGBILD:
Bayard Rustin, Mixed Media Art Quilt
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The image on the cover is a piece of patchwork art created for the Bayard Rustin Champions of Justice events in Little Rock in 2013 by the Chicana artist and activist Sabrina Zarco.

The work is 47" wide and 40" high. Its various rainbow patchwork pieces represent a variety of issues and social justice work. Each patchwork piece stands for a different cause: one fabric features portions of the U.S. Constitution, for example. This art work also pays tribute to the fact that Bayard Rustin, a renaissance man, greatly appreciated the arts himself. On his chest (lower left), the artist placed the Presidential Medal of Freedom that Rustin's partner, Walter Naegle, received from President Obama in 2013 on Rustin's behalf.

The original photograph of Rustin used for this image shows the activist who organized the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* as he stands in front of the March headquarters in Harlem, NYC, on Aug. 1, 1963, 27 days before the rally took place.

The backing of this work of art (which is not visible on this cover) is a pattern of bright yellow piece signs on black fabric. It is a nod to Rustin's pacifism and non-violence approaches to work and life.

Sabrina Zarco is an award-winning Chicana queer multi-media artist, activist, cultural worker and community educator. As a woman with Autism/Asperger's syndrome she uses her unique way of experiencing the world fused with cultural influences to create her visual artwork.

Like folk artists that came before, her work is a visual journal of her walk as a part of marginalized communities. Sabrina Zarco's work documents stories often overlooked by mainstream media. Her raw materials frequently include reclaimed items and fabrics giving artistic life to castoffs. She uses bright colors and images of her heritage juxtaposed with textural layers which may be beads, buttons, paint, drawing, photos, embroidery, and found objects to illuminate the stories in her artwork. These seductive surfaces draw viewers in to examine not only the materials of the work but the subject matter as well. Her work often explores and celebrates culture, women, social justice issues, environmental concerns, and the romance of everyday life.

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Acknowledgments

As this study developed through years of research & reflection, I would like to thank the following people & institutions in chronological order:

Contents

I   Introduction

'Oppression' is a telling term. On the surface, it appears to be a straightforward concept, easy to grasp and clear as to what it entails. 'Oppression' becomes elusive and vague, however, when attempting to pinpoint a singular meaning. This proves particularly perturbing when the goal is to fight or even eliminate such a camouflaged form of domination. Although 'oppression' suggests to primarily refer to direct acts of physical and verbal domination, it ultimately draws its force from the very aspects that the term *suppresses*. The realization that oppression also comprises "phenomena that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant"[1] can be confounding. It seems that the subtler the features of oppression are, the more powerful they prove. In other words, it is difficult to come to terms with oppression, because it immediately catches people's attention once it becomes evident. Yet, when its gestures, words, and structures are less overt, oppression is even more likely to completely escape people's notice.

This insight poses a challenge for the analysis of oppression. What instantly attracts attention is likely only to constitute the tip of the iceberg, or merely one facet of a much greater construct. That greater construct usually remains hidden because of the tendency to focus on the most glaring effect as a clear indicator of domination. Since people are inclined to perceive things in this reductionist mode, they often make judgments based on the evaluation of one specific situation, person, or incident. The philosopher and sociologist Norbert Elias coined the term *process-reduction*[2] to refer to this practice of blotting out the numerous

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[1] Iris Marion Young: *Five Faces of Oppression*, in: *Rethinking Power* (1992), p. 176.

[2] Norbert Elias: *What is Sociology?*, New York 1978, p. 111. Interestingly, the German translation of the term, '*Zustandsreduktion*,' places its emphasis on the fact that a process is reduced *to* a particular state, whereas the English term, '*process- reduction*' refers to the reduction of processes in the background of a particular state. Cf.: Norbert Elias: *Was ist Soziologie?*, Weinheim, München 2009, p. 122.

and complex processes leading up to what is then simply evaluated as *a* state.

The following study constitutes an attempt to counter *process-reduction*. By shifting the perspective, it seeks to question the abovementioned common method of approaching and viewing 'a case.' Accordingly, this project deliberately distances itself from any clear-cut, static notions of issues that may first render the illusion of providing clarity and distinctiveness, but instead frequently result in vague and rather simplistic ideas of highly complex matters, as mentioned initially. By adopting this different point of view, this study does not offer an immediate means to end oppression, but makes a case to cease thinking about domination as if it could be terminated immediately or easily. Whereas this outlook may appear rather petty at this point, it will be shown that the lack of this seemingly inconspicuous insight frequently accounts for the fact that oppression continues to operate without being noticed and hence without being fundamentally questioned.

Although this study also addresses specific kinds of oppression, such as racism or homophobia, it deliberately does not position itself in the spectrum of works that focus on a particular form of oppression with regard to its respective implications for a distinct group.[3] As will become clearer in the course of the following chapters, one of the main ideas behind the approach at hand is to detect the general mechanisms of oppression that connect all the different types of discrimination. Thus, while a diachronic perspective will oftentimes be adopted towards certain forms of domination, this study does not seek to provide a historical or philosophical approach to the conceptualization of the phenomenon of oppression as such.[4]

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[3] The subsequently listed books each provide an approach to oppression that concentrates on certain forms of domination: *Explorations in Diversity: Examining Privilege and Oppression in a Multicultural Society,* ed. by Sharon K. Anderson and Valerie A. Middleton, Belmont, CA 2010; *The Matrix Reader: Examining the Dynamics of Oppression and Privilege*, ed. by Abby L. Ferber et al., New York 2008.

[4] The following works stand out with regard to these aspects: Simone Weil: *Oppression and Liberty*, New York 1958; John McCumber: *Metaphysics and Oppression: Heidegger's Challenge to Western Philosophy*, Bloomington, IN 1999; Ann E. Cudd: *Analyzing Oppression*, New York 2006.

In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the different dimensions of oppression, particular emphasis will be placed on the examination of the various social relations and mechanisms surrounding it. Since the goal is to analyze these processes as precisely as possible, a historical example will be employed in order to induce the respective findings from a concrete case. In this following analysis, the story of the civil, labor, and human rights activist Bayard Rustin (1912-1987) will be examined to serve as such an example. Rustin's case demonstrates a particularly insightful paradigm for the purposes of this study for several reasons:

First, the examination of Rustin's unique case allows for this examination to begin at the same starting point where assessments from the common perspective also frequently set in, namely with the evaluation of a concrete case, such as that of the life of a single individual. Whereas the point of departure is identical, it will soon become obvious that this study, which at first glance solely seems to focus on the single individual Rustin, turns out to deliver equally valid findings about the society in which this activist lived and by which he is remembered. In a similar vein, it will also become clear that what appears to be an examination of the past pertains just as much to the present and even to the future. Moreover, domination will be regarded as part of the concept of process that marks human relations in general.[5] Since this study will cover and move between various temporal levels at an analytical distance, the following examination of Rustin's historical case will disclose a wide spectrum of this aspect of process. It will thus not only be possible to take a closer look at Rustin's lifetime, but also at developments in

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[5] The objection that the terms 'oppression,' 'domination,' 'stigmatization,' 'ostracism' or 'marginalization' are not synonyms is certainly valid. However, it is important to understand that even seemingly descriptive terms are part of the reason why cases of 'true' oppression frequently cannot be found. The abovementioned descriptive terms immediately set the tone for the discussion of a situation, however. 'Marginalization,' for example, since it conjures up the image of a horizontal line, suggests that the marginalized group is on the same level as the dominant one. 'Dominance', by contrast immediately evokes the impression of a top-down principle. As these subliminal evaluations are constantly at work, this study deliberately uses the abovementioned terms not only in the context, but also as *part* of the phenomenon of oppression.

the past and the time after his death. This aspect is particularly fruitful because it will illustrate his story and the respective circumstances from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective.

Second, the examination of Rustin's story marks a rewarding example for this study because the biography of this Civil Rights activist apparently constitutes a case of someone who was able to defy oppression and apparently went against all odds. This evaluation is due to the fact that Rustin seemed to be comparatively immune to oppression during his life given some of the facets and qualities that characterized him: Rustin was black, gay, and a tireless advocate of labor rights. In addition to that he was a conscientious objector during World War II and later a strong advocate of Zionism.[6] Considering the political and social circumstances of his lifetime, it seems out of question that someone sharing only *one* of Rustin's qualities would suffer from a significant degree of oppression, or even be absolutely powerless. Rustin was indeed regarded as an outsider by many. In spite of (openly) being the man he was, he became Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mentor in 1956[7] and the chief organizer of the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* in 1963. Referred to as ''Mr. March''[8] even before the day of this legendary political rally, Rustin received exuberant praise for his hard work and expertise after it had taken place, and the event went down in history as one of the symbolic moments of the Civil Rights Movement.

With regard to oppression, the success story of Rustin's career might suggest that one can overcome even the most unfavorable circumstances if coincidence and chance are on one's side, or if one possesses great

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[6] ''Zionism refers to the social movement to establish a home in Palestine for the Jewish people. The initial formulation of this Jewish national independence movement is usually credited to Theodor Herzel [sic] [.]'' Louis Kriesberg: *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*, Oxford, UK 2007, p. 24, note 9.

For an insight into the complex relations between African Americans and Jews and its repercussions on 20th century society, see: Michael Lerner and Cornel West: *Jews and Blacks: A Dialogue on Race, Religion, and Culture in America*, New York 1996.

[7] John D'Emilio: *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, New York 2003, pp. 228 sqq.

[8] Susanna McBee: *Organizer of D.C. March Is Devoted to Non-Violence*, in: *Washington Post*, August 11 (1963), p. A6.

will power and an exceptional personality. Other stories of individuals who also appear strong, proud, and fearless in spite of utterly problematic conditions, whose lives similarly strike one as liberated, and thus as the exact opposite of oppressed, may come to mind in this context. Seen from this perspective, they perhaps provide onlookers with hope and confidence that some individuals can indeed transcend oppression. Interestingly, the concept of *process-reduction* also pertains to these apparently entirely positive and empowering evaluations, however: onlookers find themselves attracted to a particular moment, or to a particular *effect* that makes them presume these individuals did not fall victim to oppression. People then want to believe that these few individuals are special and different from the amorphous mass called society. It is this immediate reflex to attribute success or failure to an individual's personality that marks one of the tendencies which this study will try to counter as a reductionist perspective. An important step to do so is not to stop with the essential individual and instead inquire into the wider social implications that is, to take society into account.

In view of this aspect, particularly the *posthumous* perspective on Rustin's story proves interesting, which also constitutes the third reason for employing his example in the course of this study. Indeed, the developments after Rustin died may be almost as surprising as the fact that he rose to power during his lifetime: for in the decade following his death, Rustin's name and story largely disappeared from the history books and public knowledge. Virtually unnoticed and apparently without any outward coercion or explicit intention, his story and contributions fell into oblivion resulting in the fact that few people today have ever heard his name.[9] This calls back to one of the observations about oppression made in the beginning, where it was stated that domination is most difficult to grasp when it is so subtle that certain actions, structures, or words do not even occur to one as being linked to oppression. With regard to this aspect, Rustin's case shows that the abovementioned stories of empowerment and liberation often appear in a different light if regarded in the context of larger temporal and social processes. Whereas Rustin's story – when judged by the time shortly after the *March on Washington* – may serve to prove that people who seize their chance in life can earn public

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[9]   John D'Emilio: *Reading the Silences in a Gay Life: The Case of Bayard Rustin*, in: *The Seductions of Biography* (1996), p. 59.

recognition, his example renders a very different message if one also takes his silencing, the fact that he was not talked about after his death, into account.

Indeed, Rustin's marginalized role in history and public knowledge appears fairly surprising. The interesting paradox that marks his story thus points to those parts of oppression that are *less* obvious: on the one hand, there is quite a considerable number of perspectives on his life that include not only his own narrative, but also that of contemporary witnesses, his surviving partner, companions, the FBI, and a comparatively small but certainly noteworthy number of scholars. On the other hand, however, the case of Rustin both was and continues to be characterized by a great degree of silence. While the Rustin estate with several thousand archived documents allows researchers to gain a comparatively nuanced image of certain aspects of his career, and the plurality of narratives about him suggest the existence of a fairly balanced account of the life of this Civil Rights activist, silence seems to remain an inherent part of his story. Considering silence and the things that are not said with regard to the issue of oppression, Rustin's concrete case allows for an inquiry into the social mechanisms that created and potentially continue to perpetuate this silence.

The fourth reason for singling out Rustin's specific example for analysis is that Rustin was a Quaker. As will be elaborated upon in greater detail over the course of this study, this spiritual belief profoundly impacted Rustin's life and career and constitutes a highly formative aspect for many facets that are often casually referred to make up someone's personality. Thus, taking (the development of) this religious community into account lays open the influence of (long-term) social relations in an individual's life. What marks yet another interesting aspect for this inquiry is that particularly orthodox Quakers – to which Rustin adhered – place a strong emphasis on the concept of *process*.[10] Accordingly, Quakers, in many cases share their own ideas and notions of terms that are commonly perceived as static and fixed. This fact often leads Quakers to a very different evaluation of what commonly used terms mean. Since in the secular world seemingly neutral words are usually presumed to denote the same meaning to everyone,

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[10] Pink Dandelion: *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers: The Silent Revolution*, Lampeter 1996, p. 121.

terms, but also their interpretation, remain unquestioned. Learning more about the theology and beliefs of Quakers will reveal the great difference that this change of perspective can make in people's lives, particularly with regard to oppression. Hence, considering Quakers' process-oriented notions of terms, Rustin's Quakerism serves as an example to illustrate what an alternative to *process-reduction* could look like in practice. This does certainly not mean to suggest that Quakers succeed at leading their lives completely without oppression, or that their community is free from *process-reductionist* thinking. However, gaining an impression of their different worldview will serve as an example of the great impact that modifications in perspective can have.

Before outlining this study's approach to Rustin's case in greater detail, introducing him and getting a short overview of his life will inform the subsequent organization and structure of the following analysis. It is important to point out that a comprehensive account of Rustin's biography will not be provided, just the most central aspects with regard to this inquiry. When needed for the examination of a specific situation in Rustin's life, those aspects will be elaborated on in more detail in the respective sections of this analysis. This project does not strive to offer an additional biography about him but only employs his case to lay open different mechanisms of oppression that can be transferred to the stories of other individuals as well as to entire groups or communities. That being said, this study sees itself as a complimentary contribution to the current literature on Rustin. Drawing from and reflecting upon research to date will thus be an integral part of the following chapters. While this study seeks to introduce a new and different perspective, which at times also entails criticizing the existent discourse on Rustin, it is not the intent of this study to discredit or dismiss anything that has been written so far – particularly because these works are also part of the developmental process of the study at hand.

The issue of oppression certainly conjures up the concept of stigmatization. With regard to its thorough account on the impact of stigma on identity, Goffman's work remains unparalleled.[11] Stigma, "an attribute that is deeply discrediting"[12] as Goffman defines it, is attached to the dominated individual or group by the dominator(s). It constitutes a com-

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[11] Erving Goffman: *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York 1963.

[12] Ibid., p. 3.

ponent of oppression that simultaneously solidifies and reinforces the dominant norms and conventions. This study's employment of stigmatization is similar to that of Goffman's. When it comes to the effect of stigmatization on an individual, however, an examination of Rustin's case will illustrate how stigmatization by society does not always have to spoil the affected individual's identity *immediately*, or directly. Moreover, Goffman's distinction between *actual* and *virtual social identity*[13] is not of primary interest for this examination, because the goal is to place the emphasis on the power relations leading to a particular perception. Accordingly, since this text is mostly concerned with the exploitation of stigmatization as a means of domination that can also surface after a time delay or in the identity of groups, that were apparently *not* affected by a particular form of stigmatization, this approach will thus not be informed by Goffman's study beyond this point.

In a similar vein, Tajfel's work[14] on social identity, intergroup relations and in-groups and out-groups can certainly be considered fruitful for this inquiry, but will not serve as a direct vantage point for the following analysis either. The main reason for this decision is that Tajfel's experiments and publications deal with prejudice and mechanisms of social exclusion from the perspective of social psychology. While Tajfel's studies undoubtedly produce extremely valuable insights and also examine group dynamics instead of individual psychological reasons for favoritism and discrimination, they – *per definitionem* – do not (and thus cannot) offer the long-term, process-oriented perspective that constitutes the main interest of this study. Moreover, since the main purpose of psychological experiments is to render substantive results, these types of scholarly works automatically run the risk of adopting a *process-reductionist* point of view on the issues they examine. This does not mean to dismiss Tajfel's contributions, however, for they have truly advanced the analytical understanding of human interaction with regard to discrimination. It is just important to point out that the perspective of

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[13] Ibid., pp. 2 sq.; 19; 41.

[14] The following works provide an overview of Tajfel's most crucial contributions regarding the abovementioned issues: Henri Tajfel: *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology,* Cambridge1981; Henri Tajfel: *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Oxford 1978; Henri Tajfel: *Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, in: *Annual Review of Psychology*33 (1982), pp. 1-39.

this study oscillates between individuals, groups, and larger social structures that find various forms of expression.

Turning to the concrete example that will illustrate the larger argument of the following chapters, a brief overview of Bayard Rustin's life will now be provided. Rustin was born and raised in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Since his mother was very young when he was born, he was brought up by his grandparents. Especially his (grand)mother, who instilled Quaker values in Bayard and her other children, was an important figure in his life. Since the Rustin family lived near a white district in town, it was also common for Rustin to interact with white children in his integrated high school and at play from early on.[15] While it may not appear noteworthy at this point, the implications of the fact that the exact details of Rustin's educational background remain rather blurry will be of interest for the subsequent analysis. In 1933, Rustin, who was a talented singer and athlete, briefly attended Wilberforce University in Ohio. He soon left this historically black school, however, and began studying at Cheney State Teacher's College in Pennsylvania, "a Quaker-founded school for black students"[16] with a music scholarship in 1934. It was also in the course of his time at college in Pennsylvania that Rustin officially identified as a Quaker. This aspect will also be of particular interest later in this study.

Yet, after three years at Cheney State, where he had become involved with institutions of Quaker activism and learned more about the philosophy of non-violence, Rustin was expelled for reasons that remain unclear.[17] The inconsistencies and the different versions surrounding this incident will still be touched upon in the following. The same year Rustin left Cheney State, he moved to New York City in 1937 and enrolled at City College of New York. He was soon part of New York's music scene and became increasingly engaged in political activism.[18]

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[15] Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise: *Introduction*, in: *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (2003), p. xi. In order to avoid a wrong impression of the social atmosphere in West Chester at the time, it is important to note in this context that the school was only integrated because the quantity of black students was too low to sustain two segregated schools. D'Emilio: *Lost Prophet*, p. 13.

[16] Ibid., p. 24.

[17] Ibid., pp. 26 sqq.

[18] Carbado and Weise: *Introduction*, pp. xii sq..

Interested in left-wing politics and racial equality, he also joined the Young Communist League (YCL). Particularly given the social and political situation of the time, the YCL appealed to many young people because they believed that "unlike most liberal proponents of racial equality, the Communists backed up their words with actions."[19]

Shortly after, Rustin discontinued his affiliation with the YCL because they had given up on their resistance to American involvement in World War II and sided with the Soviet Union, which was being invaded by Hitler's troops. Rustin was deeply disappointed by the stance his former party had adopted. From this point on, he even became a strong anti-Communist.[20] It will still become clear, however, how much this short membership would affect Rustin's public image. Soon after his break with the YCL, Rustin started working with A. Philip Randolph, a highly influential African-American labor leader. In spite of the fact that the radical views of the young Rustin were not always in line with those of Randolph's, the two maintained a close, familial relationship throughout their lives. Since Rustin felt drawn to activism and pacifist resistance, he became a founding member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and involved with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). He organized and took part in several actions of civil disobedience in the United States. Already in the early 1940s, more than a decade before the legendary bus boycott of Montgomery, Rustin conducted bus boycotts and nonviolent action in the South.[21] It was also in this decade that Rustin started publishing articles and essays on civil and human rights issues.[22]

Apart from his activism at home, he travelled abroad to learn more about protest techniques in other countries. In 1953, however, he resigned from all his duties in FOR when he was sent to jail after a sexual encounter with two men. In spite of the official release from his responsibilities, Rustin kept in touch with the people in FOR. In the mid 1950s, these contacts then turned into a new engagement for Rustin when he

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[19] Ibid., p. xiii.
[20] Daniel Levine: *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement*, New Brunswick, NJ 2000, pp. 20 sq.; 194.
[21] Carbado and Weise: *Introduction*, p. xviii.
[22] For a collection of Rustin's writings between 1942 and 1987, cf.: *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. by Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, San Francisco 2003.

was asked to support Martin Luther King, Jr. in his preparations for a *March on Washington*. Rustin became King's mentor and the two spent months preparing the event. Shortly before it was supposed to take place, however, their cooperation ended with Rustin's resignation as King's advisor. The reasons for this abrupt break will be explored later in this study, because that will prove very insightful with regard to social dynamics and oppression. A few years later, the two reconciled and Rustin became the chief organizer of the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* in 1963.

After the March, Rustin placed less emphasis on protest and became more political. He took on the position of the executive director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute in 1965 and worked on broadening the Civil Rights agenda particularly by advocating for labor rights. This step did not remain without criticism.[23] What caused even greater controversy, however, was that Rustin turned to more conservative views in certain realms. While he remained liberal on gay rights issues, particularly his support of Israel and the fact that he did not take a strong stance against the Vietnam War left many of his former radical pacifist allies disappointed. His increasing engagement for refugees and non-democratic countries abroad likewise strengthened the impression of many former allies that Civil Rights were not Rustin's first priority. Since this phase tends to be referred to as one of the main reasons for Rustin's posthumous marginalization, the social dynamics connected with this controversy will be analyzed in greater detail. After a life full of activism, Rustin died in 1987 from cardiac arrest in a New York hospital.[24] Towards the end of this study, the aftermath of his death will be elaborated upon more thoroughly with regard to the issue of his silencing.

Against this background, the organization and structure of the following chapters will now be explained in greater detail, since they are closely intertwined with the larger argument of this study. With regard to the core idea of the approach at hand, it is again important to keep in mind that the analysis of Rustin's concrete example serves to lay open general mechanisms of domination. A chapter will thus oftentimes start out with the current account of a particular event or situation and then demonstrate how a change in perspective also modifies evaluations of

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[23] Carbado and Weise: *Introduction*, p. xxxii.
[24] D'Emilio: *Lost Prophet*, p. 493.

said incident. At other times, a particular, abstract pattern of oppression will be outlined and then be illustrated by Rustin's case. In order to offer an alternative to *process-reduction*, considering the long-term developments and processes behind a certain situation only constitutes one component. As mentioned earlier, the other component is to develop a relational and dynamic notion of a variety of terms that are commonly perceived as static. This means, for example, that the individual and society, or the past and the present, will *not* be regarded as self-contained entities but as closely intertwined concepts.

In order to be able to carry out this shift in perspective, it will be helpful to adopt a theoretical framework that reflects the overarching idea of this study's approach, on the one hand, and that offers the analytical tools to examine Rustin's case precisely, on the other hand. Chapter II will thus introduce the specific operationalization of insights from two theorists in the field of figurational sociology. The perspective, premises, and key concepts of figurational sociology will be outlined and it will also be explained why a combination of insights from Norbert Elias' and Pierre Bourdieu's theories marks a crucial step for the subsequent analyses. The following, first examination of Rustin's case will begin by scrutinizing the laudatory descriptions of his charisma. Since this positive quality seems to have nothing to do with oppression at all, the study's shift in perspective will disclose its connection by distancing the term 'charisma' from a merely personal notion and instead bring its social dimension to the fore.

Subsequently, a closer look at the structure of the dominant narrative about the Civil Rights Era will raise the question of how far its very setup was complicit in Rustin's omission. Taking a critical look at the historiography about the Civil Rights Movement in the context of Rustin's case will show that and how the symbolic structure of domination finds new channels. With regard to the concrete example of Rustin, this is primarily the case through historical narratives and the images of well-known Civil Rights leaders. The final section of the second chapter will then be devoted to the fact that it was especially members from specific groups, such as the gay community, who fostered Rustin's remembrance after an approximately decade-long silence about him. The observation that Rustin had to be *re*-discovered by these groups will serve as a starting point to look at oppression as a phenomenon that proves extremely powerful, for it pervades dominated groups, who then

perpetuate the pattern of domination. With regard to the entire project, chapter II can thus be seen to provide an impression of Rustin's case in a nutshell, so to speak, because it introduces some of the immediate as well as some of the posthumous forms of marginalization that he had to endure. It also makes obvious, however, that Rustin could not be broken easily and that he was a tireless activist.

Chapter III will be concerned with the reasons for these latter facts. Especially the theoretical concept of *habitus* will illuminate the profound impact of (primary) social relations on Rustin's life and his life-long political and social engagement. Since it marks the most formative aspect in this regard, a long-term perspective will be adopted in order to explore Rustin's Quaker socialization in greater detail. On the one hand, learning about Quakerism will show why Rustin seemed to be less prone to oppression than others. On the other hand, however, it will also make some of Rustin's choices comprehensible that – from a non-Quaker point of view – would result in a very different evaluation. In the course of this chapter, it will become increasingly clear that the lack of knowledge about the theology of Quakers not only leads easily to uninformed judgments about Rustin's individual actions and decisions, but also about other people who are *apparently* akin to him but who were not socialized with Quaker values. With regard to oppression, this chapter will thus show that the deficient awareness of an individual's (social, spiritual, etc.) background is likely to reproduce the dominant schemes of evaluation and thus perpetuate oppression. In spite of this insight, chapter III primarily serves to explain the empowering influences in Rustin's life that 'balanced out' other power relations which negatively affected him, such as white supremacy, for example. Regarded on a general level, the presence of factors that work against domination can also be observed in other individuals or groups, however.

Chapter IV marks an important part of this study with regard to the issue of Rustin's silencing, since the various forms of discrimination to which Rustin was subject *during his life* are frequently seen as reasons for the fact that he was not awarded a prominent place in the history books *later*. As these 'explanations' are rarely questioned, they tend to result in the rather inconsiderate acceptance of the fact that these stigmatizations exist. It will be shown, however, that different kinds of discrimination, such as homophobia, are not really concerned with the 'problem' they pretend to address but only mark justifications for the

oppression of certain individuals and groups. The examination of (the background of) the different kinds of stigmatization in Rustin's life will reveal that basically all of them find a breeding ground in the past and often even form new outlets in order to maintain the power structure in place by replaying well-known patterns of oppression. Since these past developments often tend to be blotted out, however, because the evaluation tends to focus on Rustin's *specific* situation, a decisive key to understanding *current* oppressive dynamics at play is lost.

That being said, homophobia, the Red Scare, and finally the accusation of 'selling out' in Rustin's life will primarily be analyzed with regard to these aspects' factual accuracy, on the one hand, and their underlying pattern of oppression, on the other hand. Thus, chapter IV marks a thorough examination of the forces working towards the stigmatization of Rustin before the phenomenon of his silencing will be explored.

Chapter V will focus on silence and silencing with regard to Rustin's case and oppression in general. Countering *process-reduction* may have appeared relatively easy when concerned with the analysis of the various empowering and dominating forces in Rustin's life in the course of the previous chapters. Yet, adopting a perspective that does not slip into *process-reduction* will prove considerably more challenging when it comes to the silence about someone. Since silence (subconsciously) frequently tends to be considered a state, it will require more analytical effort to shift the perspective at this point. After some remarks on silence with regard to oppression and power, a closer look at Quakers' notion of *Silence* will offer a process-oriented perception of silence. In this context, the commonly held belief that the silence about an individual or group is immediately to be seen in line with oppression will be scrutinized. Then, the study will take a very different approach to silence and focus more on its oppressive forces. Since 'taboo' plays an important part in connection with domination and is also marked by silence, its role in Rustin's case will be explored. At this point, it will become possible to delineate the relation between the concept of 'taboo' and the phenomenon of (Rustin's) silencing. In view of Rustin's slowly growing popularity, however, it will also become relevant to ponder the question if the fact that Rustin's story is obviously not taboo any more can really be seen as an indicator for the complete extinction of taboo in his case. Finally, the issue of Rustin's silencing will be taken up again by focus-

sing on the actual proceedings of this phenomenon. Since the fact that Rustin has recently received more public attention immediately tends to be regarded as 'a success' compared to the previous period of silencing, this perception will be explored from a figurational perspective and provide a different impression of this assessment.

II Power Struggles at Every Level: The Complexity of *Established-Outsider Figurations*

As has been outlined in the introduction to this study, Rustin's case constitutes a peculiar kind of marginalization: He experienced discrimination during his lifetime, he was initially largely ignored by historiography after his death, and, in spite of some degree of public and scholarly attention, he *continues* to be viewed mainly as an 'outsider'[1] when people bring his situation to light. Nevertheless – and this is what makes his example 'peculiar' – he also exerted a comparatively great deal of influence in the course of his career and thus seems to have defied oppression to a certain extent. At first glance, the aforementioned facts indeed render the impression of a contradiction: A person who "violated virtually every political and personal taboo in twentieth-century America"[2] nevertheless received more public recognition during that time than after his death, when allegedly discrimination of people like him, of blacks or homosexuals for instance, had decreased significantly. This chapter will begin by exploring how this apparent inconsistency has been perceived and explained thus far from various perspectives. Simultaneously, the *social* relevance of Rustin's personal story will emerge as figurational theory will be used to scrutinize the (at times covert) substantialist[3] reasoning typically applied to Rustin's case.

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[1] The respective titles of D'Emilio's book, *Lost Prophet*, or Kates' and Singer's movie, *Brother Outsider* (Nancy D. Kates and Bennett Singer, *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*, Documentary, Biography (California Newsreel, San Francisco, CA, 2002) indicate the perception of Rustin as an outsider.

[2] Jerald E. Podair: *Bayard Rustin: American Dreamer*, Lanham 2009, p. 1.

[3] *"Substantialism* views identity as founded on a substance, which can be either an individual soul […] or a body that can be individuated spatio-temporally [.]" Olivier Houdé: *Vocabulaire de Sciences Cognitives*, New York 2004, p. 180. "Substantialism means that there is an unchanging core to things[.]" Laurence W. Wood: *God and History*, Lexington 2005, p. 32.

However, before outlining the most important aspects with regard to the theoretical framework, a first brief summary of the subdivisions will provide an overview of the topics discussed in this chapter: section II.1 will deal mainly with the impression Rustin left on people during his lifetime and hence scrutinize the concept of charisma. This 'gift' frequently was and is attributed to Rustin and consequently tends to be cited as evidence for his *individual* qualities in relation to his success. The figurational analysis will show, however, that the common usage of the term 'charisma,' resulting in a seemingly positive assessment of a person, can easily distract one from the significant impact of social interdependence. In this context, the Eliasian notion of (group) charisma will offer a different perspective on the concept of charisma that tends to be viewed predominantly through the lenses of individuality and contingency. It is also this very insight – that any individual is interdependent, as any person is part of a network of several figurations – that makes Rustin's apparently singular case relevant for (today's) society.

Section II.2 will accordingly take a closer look at both the leadership structure and the public reception of the Civil Rights Movement and discuss the role they played in Rustin's omission, and more generally speaking, in the issue of oppression. While this part on the discourse of the Civil Rights Movement introduces yet another structural perspective on Rustin's alleged *personal* contribution to his own marginalization, it also argues on the level of his concrete case that the mere telling of Rustin's story would have had an effect on the common narrative about the Civil Rights Movement. This insight is important at this point, for it marks a crucial asset of the theoretical approach: instead of merely focusing on the impact of objective structures, figurational sociology also takes the *agent* and her potential influence into account. While this sequence is mainly concerned with the fact that few people today[4] know

> "Substantialism insists that mechanisms are exclusively composed of concrete entities, or to be more precise, that the entities of which mechanisms are composed are primarily physical. The substantialist assumes that an entity only really exists if and to the extent that it exists materially; symbolic forms and representations are granted a solely epiphenomenal status." *Frontiers of Sociology*, ed. by Peter Hedström, Björn Wittrock, and Institut international de sociologie World Congress, Leiden, Boston, MA 2009, p. 156.

[4] This refers to the year of 2012.

Rustin as one of the Movement's key strategists, although he had been fairly popular while he was still alive, it will also show the significance of a seemingly singular case for larger past and present social dynamics.

Section II.3 will return to the initial observation that Rustin was repeatedly pushed to the fringes of society both during and after his life. The reasons for the persistence of these signs of oppression will be explored on both an individual and a social level. In this context, particularly the long-term social perspective will reveal that Rustin was by no means as immune against stigmatization as it may superficially appear due to the common narrative about Rustin's individual charisma, for example. Yet this analysis will also externalize some of the (figurational) reasons why he can perhaps be regarded as *less* susceptible to oppression than others. Hence this part marks the transition to the next chapter on those figurations in Rustin's life working against stigmatization and possibly enabling him to rise to power.

At first, however, the most important aspects regarding the theoretical framework of figurational sociology shall be outlined. Figurational sociology is concerned with the various and increasingly interdependent entanglements (figurations) between individuals, and thus allows one to account for the fact that both actions of and interactions between individuals are always to be tackled with regard to their respective dependencies on others. Consequently, 'the individual' and 'society' are not regarded as separate entities.[5] Instead, emphasis is placed on their interconnectedness, which also implies, however, that the "homo clausus,"[6] or in other words, an *essential*, personal identity that is completely independent from society, does not exist.[7]

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[5] The aforementioned thoughts summarize arguments from: Norbert Elias: *Die Gesellschaft der Individuen*, Frankfurt am Main 1987; Norbert Elias: *The Norbert Elias Reader: A Biographical Selection*, ed. by Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell, Oxford 1998; Norbert Elias: *Was ist Soziologie?* Weinheim, München 1978.

[6] Norbert Elias: *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, ed. by Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Stephen Mennell, Oxford 2000, p. 472.

[7] Tim Newton and Dennis Smith: *Introduction: Norbert Elias and the Civilized Organization*, in: *The Civilized Organization: Norbert Elias and the Future of Organization Studies* (2002), pp. xii sq.

On an abstract level, this insight may not strike one as particularly groundbreaking. Thanks to the insights of Marx, the notion of the *social being* has advanced to common knowledge.[8] As Rustin's case shows, on the other hand, the (posthumous) discussion of an actual person's life immediately tends to fall back to the very notion of an individual, contingent case in which both success and failure are attributed to *personal* 'qualities,' 'faults,' or simply to chance rather than taking the aforementioned social and long-term dynamics into account. But when it comes to specific types of oppression, such as homophobia or racism, it is long-term developments that particularly need analysis in order to understand both the prevalence and the persistence of certain structures in 'individual' modes of thinking.

An analytical look at Rustin's personal story can indeed illuminate the power of larger, social dynamics and disclose discrepancies between commonly held beliefs and practices. For example, while the interconnectedness between the individual and society may be *considered* valid and perhaps even be deemed common sense in theory, the actual silence about Rustin's story soon after his death indicates that this consensus neither stands the test of time, nor that of concretion. This insight will be of particular interest for this study's perspective. Especially the application of the abstract idea of interconnectedness between the individual and society to the concrete case of a person proves very interesting in this context. Since the *accumulation* of various stigmatizations in Rustin's story points to the influence of *social* power dynamics, the figurational perspective reveals new fields of inquiry where examinations of the mere *individual* case usually tend to stop.

As already mentioned, a combination of the insights of two of the central scholars in figurational sociology, Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu,[9] will be employed in order to carry out not only a thorough but also innovative figurational analysis. The merging of their theories will prove useful to this inquiry, because it will offer a more nuanced understanding of the various figurations to be examined. When analyzing the specific dynamics within and between particular figurations, this study

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[8] Karl Marx: *Early Writings*, London 1992, p. cccliii.
[9] The following article provides one of the few scholarly works that view Bourdieu and Elias in relation to each other: Bowen Paulle, Bart van Heerikhuizen, and Mustafa Emirbayer: *Elias and Bourdieu*, in: *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays* (2011), pp. 145-72.

will mainly operate with the terminology of Elias' theory of *Established-Outsider figurations*. Moreover, some of Elias' thoughts on the *social habitus* will be employed in order to capture his specific notion of the term. Bourdieu, however, will also be utilized and supplement the existent range of analytical tools with further insights on both, his concept of *habitus* and his closely related notion of *social fields*. Moreover, Bourdieu's different forms of *capital*, or his thoughts on *class* and *distinction*, will serve as additional devices to precisely analyze Rustin's individual case, on the one hand, and to relate the findings from this examination to larger social dynamics, on the other hand.

The aforementioned terms and the following brief explanation of the two central concepts among them should only be seen as a first overview of the theoretical framework. Throughout this study, various other aspects of both Elias' and Bourdieu's works will be employed. Their respective theoretical implications will be subsequently elaborated upon in the course of the more detailed analyses. At this point, in order to understand how these various concepts stand in relation to each other, the general perspective from which to approach Rustin's case will be introduced. In this regard, it is important to know about both the basic idea of any *Established-Outsider figuration*,[10] as well as the role *habitus* and *field*[11] play *within* this structure.

To begin, the so-called *Established-Outsider figuration* requires some preliminary remarks. This particular kind of figuration lies at the

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[10] It is important to mention at this point that this study deliberately employs a slightly modified model of *The Established and the Outsiders*, since this examination is mostly concerned with the basic structure of this figuration and later employs Bourdieu's terminology for a more nuanced analysis. While Elias and Scotson distinguish between several zones or neighborhoods in their study, this inquiry, for reasons that will be expounded upon later, does not place an emphasis on the different (spatial) areas where people live. Instead, it focuses on the dynamics between people. For the full account of the original work, cf.: Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson: *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*, London 1994.

[11] Since *habitus* and *field* are basically to be seen as intertwined concepts in Bourdieu's theory, they are counted as one component here. The *Established-Outsider figuration* constitutes the other component that will be elaborated upon in the following.