

On the Importance of Queer Scholarship in Times of War

THIS EDITORIAL IS written at a time when media outlets all over the world are dominated by details of the humanitarian crisis brought on by the Russian invasion of and war on Ukraine, and the ensuing political conversations about what constitutes foundational concepts like democracy, nation, peace, security, state accountability and responsibility.

In feminist and queer academia and activist movements, statements of solidarity are being written and demonstrations are being organised. Many of us are sitting with colleagues, students, and friends from Ukraine, and dissidents from Russia, listening to their accounts of the atrocities of war, as we have listened to colleagues, students, and friends from other places before: Syria, Kosovo, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Kurdistan to name but a few locations.

Some of the analyses most urgently needed at this point are those that critically examine the relation between the Russian governmental propaganda claiming that the war on Ukraine is an operation to defend Russian interests and core values against “corrupt”, “perverse” Western influences, and that of reactionary anti-gender, homophobic and – especially – transphobic movements surging in Europe and beyond. Cues can be taken from the queer scholarly work already published, for example that on the use of the spectre of LGBT in nationalist move-

ments in Russia (Buyantueva 2018; Edenborg 2020), Hungary (Nuñez-Mietz 2019), Belarus (Frear 2021), and Poland (Žuk & Žuk 2020). Previous research will also remind us to not overlook the influence that the so-called culture wars in US politics has had on the developments in Russian political thought and rhetoric. Sociologists Laurie Essig and Alexander Kondakov remind us that the way in which Russian politicians have redefined homophobia as a sign of “spiritual superiority” and as taking a stand against “Western cultural imperialism”, lends plenty of its rhetoric from American conservatives, past and present (Essig & Kondakov 2019). Gender studies scholar Jennifer Suchland argues that in order to understand the function of the Russian government’s anti-LGBT legislation for their nationalist project, we must examine how Russia is entangled in “Eurocentric projects that define national (racialised) boundaries through sexual politics”; i.e., we need to pay heed to the fact that sexual politics are instrumental in nationalist projects, and that nationalist projects are reactive and co-formative (Suchland 2018, 1073).

In the wake of the war on Ukraine, right-wing, nationalist forces in countries around the world are feeding off the turbulence and tensions in global capitalist and military relations in order to further their narratives of domination and securitisation, whether it be through isolationist or expansive approaches. The Nordic region is no exception; indeed, it seems to be one of the hot-spots of etnonationalist, femonationalist, and, in some formulations, homonationalist narratives that portrait Putin’s war on Ukraine as an attack on a European way of life, style of governance and moral value system. “European” here becomes the familiar short-hand for white, Christian-secular liberal democracies that pride themselves on being tolerant and progressive on issues of racial and sexual diversity and inclusion, while upholding systems of governance that disproportionately discriminate and discipline racialised, gender and sexual non-conforming citizens (Bhambra 2009; El-Tayeb 2011; Farris 2017). It is therefore of the utmost importance that we now actively seek out and learn from scholarly work that shows how calls for the rights of women and sexual and gender minorities have been used to legitimise

anti-multiculturalism and Islamophobia in Europe. There are studies based in a plethora of geographic and cultural contexts (for the Nordic context, see for example Keskinen et al. 2009; Kehl 2018; Laskar 2015; on the particularities of the Nordic coloniality as manifested in the failure to recognise the rights of indigenous populations and the violent past and present of this denial of indigeneity, see for example: Kuokkanen 2017; Kyrölä & Huuki 2021; Öhman 2021), and rich queer theorising on how the colonial spectre haunts LGBTQ identity formations and organising. For example, Jin Haritaworn's beautiful *On queer lovers and hateful others* (2015) on how queer subjects can be loved, and receive recognition, only through the vilification and demonisation of racialised Others, ought to be canonised on our syllabuses, as ought Alyosxa Tudor's "Cross-fadings of racialisation and migratisation: the postcolonial turn in Western European gender and migration studies" (2018), which provides much needed tools to spot neo-colonial tendencies within our own disciplines.

It so happens that two of the texts in this open issue, Masha Beketova's "Methodology of Surzhyk", and Piotr Sobolczyk's "New Polish Queer Literature and its Anglosphere Reception", both engage with the intricate expressions of European colonial history, and presence, as played out in academic and adjacent cultural spheres. Beketova's contribution in the *We're here* section is a reflexive essay on the hegemony of the English language – written, spoken and as a means of expression and cognition – in European academia. What does it do to one's thinking to inhabit spaces where the *lingua franca* is a langue that harbours and exercises colonial violence? What are the potential, as well as actual, disciplinary tools at work in normative academic publishing processes: proofreading, peer review, language editing? Literary scholar Piotr Sobolczyk approaches the consequences of Western-centred cultural and scholarly discourses from a different angle, through a critical reading of the reception of contemporary Polish queer literature, and the exoticisation in British and US reviews. Both texts raise questions of particular urgency for Nordic, and European, queer and LGBTQ studies in war-mongering times.

Two Years with *lambda nordica*

With two years as editors of *lambda nordica* to reflect on we want to take this opportunity to say a few words about the practicalities of our editorial processes, extend our thank-yous to our editorial team, and sketch the way ahead.

With time comes change, and with the second issue of 2022 in print, and digitally open access, we are sad to be saying goodbye to our book review editor of three years, Elin Abrahamsson. We sincerely want to thank Elin for her outstanding work; she has guided reviewers with a gentle but firm hand and kept the standards high and the review selection relevant and enticing. At the same time, we invite our readers to join us in welcoming *lambda nordica*'s new eminent book review editor collective: Marie Dalby, Matilda Lindgren, and Sara Salminen – all three are PhD candidates in Gender Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. We are confident that their collective work with the review section of *lambda nordica* will be a praxis-forging project in the “ecology of editing and publishing” (Björklund & Dahl 2020, 10).

These past two years, we have also had the privilege of working with two very capable editorial secretaries: Emil Edenborg and Evelina Liliquist. In our first year as editors, Emil was our stable point of reference, and we are thankful for the continuity that this brought. Evelina has been instrumental in the project of developing *lambda nordica* that we have embarked upon this past year, and onwards. We want to thank them both for their deep commitment to queer publishing and scholarship, and for the ambitious efforts they have made to facilitate our editorial work. As of late, *lambda* has been featured in a variety of scholarly and cultural outlets, for example in a round-table on the impact of COVID and open access for Gender Studies journals in *European Journal of Women's Studies* (March, 2022), and in the Norwegian LGBTQ magazine *Blikk* (December, 2021). On a more general level, the editorial team has worked on strengthening the journal's visibility in social media channels, and we are seeing a marked increase in submissions to the journal, which is both promising and inspiring.

When we, as new editors, set out to broaden the scope and sustain the

relevance and timeliness of *lambda nordica*, one of our strategies was to reach out to the wider queer and LGBTQ scholar community with calls for themed issues, with the hope of tapping into the current, vibrant conversations in the field. These annual calls for themed issues have been richly rewarded and bring the promise of scholarly explorations of issues ranging from the tensions and temporalities of Pride parades, queer grief, and digital sexualities, to troubling racism, the queering of intimacies, families and companionships, Nordic homonationalisms and right-wing politics, and the queering of national histories. In other words, we are confident that *lambda* will continue to grow and flourish as an accessible and initiated platform for queer scholarship in and on the Nordic context and beyond, and we are honoured to be able to play a part in this development.

The Current Issue

The current issue, nr. 2/2022, is an open issue that compiles two research articles, one on LGBTQ people's experiences in Swedish Christian free-church environments and one on a Finnish community art project on queer heritage, an essay on the reception of Polish queer literature, a *We're here* that thematises the colonial hegemony of English in European academia, and three reviews of newly published books.

In "Tensions, Power and Commitment: LGBTQ and Swedish Free Churches" Charlotta Carlström analyses LGBTQ people's narratives of their experiences of Swedish Christian free-church congregations. Based on material collected through participatory observation of meetings in a study group on LGBTQ in the free-church environment, Carlström sketches the range of heteronormative expressions the participants testified to having encountered, from the silencing of LGBTQ experiences to ostracisation and conversion therapy. She notes how an intolerant culture, that excludes LGBTQ people from participating in spiritual tasks for fear of their queerness being contagious, is allowed to flourish with reference to the sanctity of religion. Openness, and the willingness of allies to question heteronormative practices, are described as avenues for change.

The heritagisation of queer pasts is the focus of Visa Immonen's article "What is Queer Heritage? Queercache and the Epistemology of the Closet". Immonen takes his departure from *Queercache*, a community art project in Helsinki that used the principles of geocaching to showcase queer stories and memories in the cityscape, in his critical theorisation of our practices of commemorating non-normative lives and expressions. The article raises the question of whether the nurturing of queer heritage tames and disarms this heritage, turning it into a product to be consumed, or whether the queer archive should be understood as a form of knowing.

Piotr Sobolczyk's essay and Masha Beketova's *We're here*, outlined above, conclude the section of scholarly texts.

The review section includes two reviews of recent dissertations, Fanny Ambjörnsson's review of Lena Sotevik's *Barbiebröllop och homohundar* (2021), a title that explores queerness in relation to children and childhood; and Cai Wilkinson's review of Katharina Kehl's *The Right Kind of Queer* (2020), an analysis of how race, gender and sexuality play into constructions of Swedishness. In addition to this, Jenny Björklund's *Maternal Abandonment and Queer Resistance in Twenty-First-Century Swedish Literature* (2021), a monography that tarries with and troubles motherhood, is reviewed by Olivia Noble Gunn.

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