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An Epilogue

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I den bästa av världar [In the best of worlds]
Den bästa av dagar [The best of days]
Vi slapp ju nazister [We did not have Nazis]
Så vad ska vi klaga? [So what should we complain about?]

In the above poem, trans* activist and spoken word poet Yolanda Aurora Bohm Ramirez (2018) names the ways the lives of specific groups of people in Sweden are threatened by the increasing neo-Nazi violence, and

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illuminates the response of the majoritarian population to these threats: their demands of silence where protest and criticism is made nearly impossible.

Calling ‘the best of days’ those in which ‘we’ (i.e. the feminist, Latina and trans*communities to which she belongs) are not the target of the Nazis, Yolanda asserts that the ‘we’ she belongs should not complain—rather, they should behave. Yolanda’s words act on the social contract imposed on Swedish ‘others’, where those who identify as being part of what is constructed as the ‘majority’ demand the performance of gratefulness in those constructed as Swedish Others, those who are tolerated.

Narratives of Sweden and representation of Swedishness need to be continuously challenged, revised and rewritten. From different perspectives other than those of banal nationalism, the everyday doing of nationalistic forms of exclusionary belonging. At the core of Sweden’s banal nationalism is its messianic fantasy to educate the world on gender equality. Swedish’s missionary agenda reflects the construction and reproduction of the binary opposition between the West and the Rest. A Rest that despite the success and visibility of feminist movements in the Global South, continues to be constructed by Swedish public and academic

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discourse as lacking 'feminist' knowledge. Our ambition is to unpack hegemonic ideas and practices that construct and represent this place in the word called 'Sweden', a place that many of us in diverse ways call our home.

Sweden is one of the countries in the Global North where neoliberalism has been implemented both radically and successfully. The country has witnessed an increase in social inequality and the systematic introduction of new public management within welfare institutions. There is no doubt that the historical period (1932–1990) during which the welfare state was imagined and constructed through the inspiration of social-democratic policies created conditions where class inequality decreased and gender equality improved. An improvement made possible through free access to health care, public education and the role that the state played in the decommodification of social reproduction. The social-democratic Swedish welfare state also established a humanitarian refugee policy and multicultural frames located in citizenship rights.

A frequently used narrative (employed by a number of feminists both in Sweden and abroad) is that the neoliberal shift witnessed in the 1990s is responsible for Sweden's present-day class inequality, racist violence and anti-gender mobilisation. We disagree. We would like to suggest that today's Sweden is also, to a certain extent, a product, an effect and a consequence of the structures of racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy at the core of the construction and expansion of the Swedish welfare state.

A colonial past and a neocolonial present mirrored in the systematic appropriation of the Sámi population's land and water, the support to Swedish located transnational corporations in the Global South and the over-exploitation of migrant labour. This is at the core of the construction of the Swedish nation-state and of the 'success' of the Swedish welfare state. Notions of gender equality and family–work balance were, and to a certain extent still are, created through the pathologising of homosexuals and transgender people, the ongoing exclusion of racialised bodies, the regulation of paid work through an ethnic and gendered segregated capitalist economy, and a narrow and problematic state regulation defining what a family is and who is a member.

We hope that this anthology opens up a different dialogue within and among feminist scholars and activists. A dialogue that challenges and

transcends both the problematic representation of Sweden as the promised land of gender equality and multiculturalism and the problematic representation of the paradise lost. These representations marginalise fundamental continuities between heteropatriarchal welfare capitalism and neoliberal anti-gender ethnonationalist capitalism.

In this anthology, we argue for feminist research that fractures images of the 'modern', progressive, secular nation, and in line with Michelle Bastian, 'disturb[s] the unilateral excesses of contemporary capitalist presentism' (2014: 4). There is no 'one way' or 'happy ending' for histories marked by colonialism and sexism. It is at the crossroads between a critical review of past narratives and a promise of possible futures acting upon the present that we have written this anthology. Narratives about the feminist, past(s) and future(s), where nostalgia for the 'paradise lost' can only be reached through colonial amnesia.

It is fundamental to identify, defend and celebrate many of the Swedish labour movement's visions at the core of the expansion of rights within the historical construction of the social-democratic welfare model. However, struggles against neoliberalism cannot be framed within forms of ethnonationalist nostalgia that are in search of a homogenous *folkhemmet* (home of the people) that never existed. Focusing on borders and transnational frames reads Swedish social formation - within specific (colonial) locations in the changing global division of productive, and reproductive labour and within Sweden's specific racial regime.

Transnational studies typically include a critique of the nation, and as feminist scholars situated in Sweden, we have problematised the imaginations of this specific nation. Through interviews, press material, social media, participant observations, street art, our own memory work, official state documents, and photographs, we have analysed how different categories of people talk and fight back and dream and demand livable lives doing what they can with the hope of creating futures that acknowledge. We have also explored the struggles just to exist as well as the expressions of depression and desire to enact revenge on a state that repeatedly embraces some and excludes—even repeatedly humiliates—others. Transnational feminist activists make feminist spaces, rewrite the past and present and affect imaginations in and for possible futures.

As feminist knowledge is often the target of harsh critiques, a (defensive) strategy might involve turning towards more inaccessible theories or focusing on well-established methods and problem formulations (that are apparently beneficial to society). It is not easy to stay with the messiness of the social, but as important as gender research is, it cannot be reduced to theoretical pirouettes or expected problem-solving. While feminist scholars in this anthology challenge notions of radical relativism, they also share a common epistemological understanding of the need to produce a plurality of knowledge that challenges Eurocentric notions of neutrality, objectivity, arrogant assumptions, and takes intellectual responsibility for possible future societies. Transnational feminists, activists and scholars, make feminist spaces, rewrite the past and present and affect imaginations in and for possible futures.

To make politics ‘in-between’ is to take politics seriously and make efforts to repoliticise what is seen as normal (e.g., a secular subject) and challenge borders and systems of classification. In our research on mobilisation, communities of belonging and politics in-between, we have seen attempts to exceed contemporary classifications. As feminist scholars, we also try to construct theories that ‘do’ the ‘in-between’—between science and politics, between our commitment to academia and our commitment to our communities, and between theoretical efforts and the messiness of everyday life.

In the last few decades, the inhumanity of neoliberalism and ethnonationalism has, in Sweden, been resisted by the heterogenous and vital mobilisation of transnational feminism that, through diverse experiences of injustice, name the world and create futures. This anthology is inspired by these communities’ courage and knowledge and writes itself in the search of many liveable (feminist) futures.

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