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Introduction

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The focus of this book is on the many far from predictable transformative political processes on gender, sexuality and coloniality that grow out of the broad range of bodies and actors engaged in politics outside the

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hegemonic order and in everyday activities. These processes are not conducted by states, governments or transnational nongovernmental organisations; rather, they are examples of politics in-between states, organisations and national imagined communities. In this first chapter we will introduce some of the main themes, regarding these processes we in our joint research programme have worked on over the last couple of years.

The context in which we write plays a crucial role in forming our focus on political movements emerging in-between and outside dominant political bodies locally as well as transnationally. As scholars positioned in Sweden, we are submerged in a narrative of this country as a secular, gender-equal and LGBTQI-tolerant nation, which is often considered a political role model for the rest of the world to follow (Puar 2007). Although scholars have shown how this progressive nationhood is strongly conditioned by racialised processes, heteronormativity and cisnormativity (Keskinen et al. 2009; Martinsson et al. 2016; Giritli et al. 2018), Sweden is still constructed through this neocolonial narrative, which is reiterated by political leaders, women's organisations, journalists, scholars and students both inside and outside Sweden. The notion of Swedish exceptionality and exceptionalism (Habel 2012) contributes to a national imagined community of modernity and secularism, bringing promises of a happy future for those who are included and invited into this society. However, not only is this hegemonic idea of being a role model imperialistic, but it also makes a range of political struggles and models less recognisable, easier to ignore and often even demonised.

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As feminist scholars drawing on postcolonial literature, we find these narratives of Sweden deeply problematic. They are blocking the development and political recognition of a pluralistic and radical democracy (Biesta 2006; Mouffe 2005, 2018) and need to be addressed and deconstructed in order to acknowledge transnational political and pluralistic understandings of the ongoing transformation of genders, sexualities and colonial orders. We need scholarly work and knowledge production that both scrutinise tropes such as this and acknowledge and study different transnational and national pluralistic struggles for equality, different forms of futures and multiple modernities and democracies (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012; Sigurdson 2009).

Our interest in the many struggles in-between and outside states and large organisations does not imply that we are uninterested in these bodies. Activists' relation to the state, as well as to transnational and nongovernmental organisations and the market, is decisive. However, rather than focusing on Sweden as a nation-state, we follow how activists—through a variety of different actions and labour—consciously and sometimes unconsciously disrupt, connect, make interventions into, recognise, use or interpellate the state, the welfare society, the market and local and transnational organisations and phenomena. One example presented in the book is that of trans activists in Sweden who interpellate the state as ethically accountable and thereby make state violence as well as state benevolence visible and acknowledgeable. Erika Alm argues that:

> the strategy to hold the state accountable can be understood as a way to repoliticise the state in a time when neoliberal processes of globalised economy, the expansion of multinational companies, and the commercialisation of civil society often are claimed to weaken the sovereignty of the national state.

In other words, the struggles we follow are not isolated, but very much engaged with and partly formed by states and both national and transnational norms and forces. As Linda Berg and Anna Sofia Lundgren write in their chapter about street art, this art:

> constitutes an interesting form of politics, situated somewhere in-between, or alongside, party politics and the practices of civil society.

The struggles that we have followed and analysed during the years we have cooperated led us to a range of types of political communities or collective political subjects. To exemplify, the notion of the modern Sweden creates feelings of belonging for some, like those positioned and self-identified as white, modern, secular women. Meanwhile, others are excluded (see chapters by Martinsson and Lundahl Hero) and face criticism for not fulfilling hegemonic notions of gender equality or modernity. They are otherized since they are understood as too religious, too black, too traditional or too exotic, and this status of otherness includes notions of not belonging nor feeling at home (Farahani 2015).

Experiences of disbelonging can work as a foundation for joint political work and lead to the emergence of new political communities of belonging. Such communities can contest the normative structures from the constitutive outside; for example, queer activists may stand outside a heteronormative hegemonic community (hooks 2009; Ahmed 2004; Butler 1993). The political communities revolving around the rainbow flag are examples of communities partly outside the hegemonic order. The rainbow flag has been, and is, a fabric that has worked as a bonding object in heteronormative exclusionary contexts transnationally, nationally and locally. It has offered promises of a political community wanting a society beyond heteronormativity. When we began this project a couple of years ago, we had the impression that the rainbow flag in our part of the world had lost its critical potential. We believed the flag had been depoliticised due to homonationalism and pinkwashing until it eventually included everyone and thus hardly anyone. However, that has changed. In recent years, the right wing has grown stronger, and the flag is again beginning to be used as a node for anti-fascist work and communities with radical claims. However, the rainbow flag has not only played various historical roles relating to the sense of belonging or disbelonging. It has also played numerous roles in different contexts, irrespective of the right-wing movement. Cathrin Wasshede shows in her contribution that there are places and situations where the rainbow flag is radical, transformative and of importance for new communities to emerge. In her words:

> It is obvious that the rainbow flag is a very topical and emotive actant—and an empty signifier—in the Swedish political arena.

It is important for us to focus on processes of othering and emergences of communities not only inside Sweden, but also on a transnational level. Ignoring this could be tantamount to what Chandra Talpade Mohanty labels methodological nationalism (Mohanty 2003). Studying the process of othering transnationally makes it possible to discern communities, migrant movements and hierarchies and borders marked by colonialism, neoliberalism, racism, gender and class constructions on a level beyond the national while still recognising the impact of the construction of nations and of local and global discourses. Like Trinh T. Minh-ha, we want to challenge the idea of a global community that presumably has overcome frontiers (Trinh 2011). By following the processes of othering on a transnational level, one can study how both the frontiers and Sweden as an imagined community are formed in relation to other nations.

The interrelational character of places, nations and transnational spaces has relevance to the constitutions of political subjectivities (Massey 2005). Transnational connections are highly important for the contemporary labour of belonging and for the politics in-between and beyond hegemonic bodies. Members of religious and indigenous local communities, gender variant people, queers, feminists and body positivists are examples of actors that we have followed that find and create political liaisons and communities of belonging on a transnational level (Grewal 2005). A nation might be oppressive or practice exclusion, but local communities often transcend the nation to form part of transnational communities of belonging. For example: Cultural products such as the rainbow flag can function as reminders and markers of these wider communities. Sámi activists struggling against Swedish coloniality relate to an indigenous community across the borders of the Nordic nation states. Street art, as a political practice, is an example of an activity that, in spite of its very localised character, can transgress and connect over borders through digital means, whereas the dissemination of pink porn magazines during the second half of the twentieth century used more material ways to transgress borders, which could result in censorship if the materials were intercepted, as described in Pia Laskar's chapter. The digital space can be of immense importance for both the emergence and the existence of transnational communities and transnational activism. Another example of this is the body positivity activists that Anna Johansson writes

about in her chapter. They have become a transnational community on and through the internet. Their messages and practices spread rapidly, challenging oppressive body ideals and advocating diversity and acceptance of all body types. 'Digital media (including social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) plays a significant role in connecting actors who are far from each other and furthering protests localised in the peripheries', as Johansson writes, i.e. in the countryside or in parts of the world which are not at the centre of media attention. The digital sphere disseminates important information and serves as a medium that contributes to the population of space without being dependent on or confined by the geographical coordinates of that space (see Berg and Lundgren's chapter; and also Dahlberg-Grundberg and Örestig 2016; Sjöstedt Landén 2017).

However, the processes of disbelonging certainly do not always lead to political activism or to local or transnational political communities or practices. Processes of racism, sexism and homo- and transphobia are deeply harmful and experiences of othering can also result in depression, pain and trauma, which Diana Mulinari and Despina Tzimoula dig into in their chapter on Greek migrant women living in Sweden.

The emergence of communities in-between hegemonic political bodies, or in-between the national and transnational, are processes loaded with messiness and friction. As we draw on two quite different thinkers, Chantal Mouffe and Anna Tsing, the method of following leads us to places and situations ruled by disorder and contradictions. According to Mouffe, the existence of many contradictory interpellations makes it possible to understand oneself, the community and the society in multiple ways (Mouffe 2013). It is possible to understand oneself through both Islamophobic or sexist discourses and democratic ideals and decolonial or queer politics. Such contradictory interpellations make it obvious that society could be organised differently. Frictions and contradictions therefore become important for political subjectivity to emerge and for the ongoing production of communities. Tsing stresses the importance of cross-cultural and long-distance encounters in the production of cultures:

> Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call 'friction': the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference (Tsing 2005: 4).

Inspired by Tsing's work, we follow emerging movements and communities and how they are produced through connections and contaminations pertaining to not only national, but also global or transnational bifurcations (Tsing 2015). The concept of friction is important for us when we approach and analyse contexts and cultural processes. Through memory work (Haug 1992), some of us study the friction in-between the religious and the secular as manifested in our memories of childhood and adolescence. The contexts in which we grow up, which we studied through our memories, were marked by ambivalent interactions in-between secularism and Christianity. By studying such encounters and interconnections in context, we are able to form notions and political visions for another society or, for that matter, another world order. The idea of Swedish exceptionalism, disbelonging and friction and other tropes are fundamental elements of the political processes and struggles that we were interested in. Hence, this book draws on a range of different examples of friction, including those relating to different understandings of the state and to the interconnections in-between the local, national and transnational spaces where unexpected—or predictable—articulations become possible.

As scholars, we come from different disciplines and theoretical traditions, but all of us focus on situations and movements that are far from pure and straightforward. We understand them not only as examples of frictions, ambivalences, unpredictable rhizomes, wounds, paradoxes or contradictions. The mobilising around the struggles and state interpellations on which we focus is far from logical, transparent and pure. This means that the processes that make up the politics in-between nations might reiterate neoliberal ideas, be pragmatic, use money from the porn sector or make alliances with enemies. The struggles we follow are not always formulated or exercised in intersectional ways and therefore do not only challenge transnational and national ideas of genders, sexualities, racialisation and coloniality, but also reproduce them. For instance, one might consider the aforementioned body positivist movement, which is struggling for the right for people to look any way they want to or have to—a movement that still seems to continue to celebrate the white, able, tall, cisgendered body. The exclusion of the black body becomes even more prevalent, as Anna Johansson shows in her chapter, when this

movement is played out in a Swedish context, where whiteness is closely connected to the Swedish nationality and the concept of race is nearly erased from the public rhetoric.

Politics in-between communities of belonging and national imagined communities are formed through notions of temporality. Just as different pasts and futures are crucial for the imagined community (Anderson 2006), a community of belonging need not be limited to a now or a here. It could breach from the past to the present, over to the future, bringing with it ideas about who the members in the community were in the past and who they as a group may become. Narratives about now and then are constitutive for futures that are possible to imagine. Temporality is not a neutral and innocent way of ordering time, as temporal narratives ordering time are thus complicit in ordering space, as well as creating hierarchies of us and them, of an inside and an outside; they comprise a worlding process (Massey 2005; Hall 1990). How we imagine the past and who is included in narratives of the past has consequences regarding who is imagined as part of the future. According to David Scott (2004), different notions of 'future' always refer to a specific notion of the past—a certain idea of where it all began and which people were the subjects of those beginnings and societal transformations. When we articulate the past and its subjects, we also give form to the future.

When Sweden constructs itself as the political subject of transnational transformation of gender equality and welfare society, it reproduces itself as a historical and future subject. Sweden is portrayed as the more or less natural leader of this modern and secular project, telling others to follow its lead for a global happy ending in the future. These 'fundamentalist'— in the sense that only one way is thinkable—secular ideas can only accommodate one single future, a future that reproduces notions of the dangerous religious and traditional other that stays 'behind', thereby silencing notions of multiple futures and making them impossible. Secularism is thus not only used as a tool against fundamentalist religious notions that question, for example, the right to abortion and LGBTQI rights, but also becomes a fundamentalist and dogmatic force in itself, making some lives more liveable than others (Scott 2018; Martinson 2017; Asad 2009; Mahmood 2009). With the imagined community of Sweden comes an idea of being at the forefront of a linear development

of modernity and secularism, meaning that the Swedish take on modernity is so closely intertwined with secularity that it is almost impossible to conceptualise one without the other.

This linear story of progression gives hope and political direction to those who identify with and are identified as part of the hegemonic secular modernity and those who are included in the putative modern communities. For others to take part in this hegemonic linearity, a radical assimilation is demanded, but this level of assimilation is beyond reach—and not even desirable—to many subjects that have other experiences and horizons of expectations (Koselleck 2004). It demands, as Mikela Lundahl Hero shows in her chapter, that those who aim to participate in Swedish public life as professionals should shake hands like 'Swedes' do, without gender discrimination. To demand separate hours in the public swimming pools is to position yourself outside the modern secular timeline. Or, as described in Lena Martinsson's chapter, you are not counted as part of modern, gender-equal society and its hopeful future if you keep wearing the veil and do not adhere to the norms and regulations of what is identified by the hegemonic order as neutral clothes. If this exclusionary discourses and practices are adhered to, many of the struggles that we have followed seem not to have a future. In artwork painting by the Sámi artists Sofia Jannok and Anders Sunna, this non-future is visualised. The canvas depicts a skeleton of a reindeer dressed in traditional Sámi clothing throwing a lasso. The dead reindeer can be understood as a symbol of the non-future of traditional reindeer herding, as discussed in Berg and Lundgren's chapter, thus contesting the notion of a sole hegemonic future. In other words, the artwork suggests that another future could have been possible (cf. Edelman 2004). The same goes for the work toward gender equality: the pursuit does not have to be secular and there are other paths to walk. Another example that can be considered is a prosaic, less outspoken, but transformative political practice that points out a possible future challenging the notion of the religious as something traditional. In this example, the veil is articulated with and used in sports or swimming contexts or other settings in dominantly secular European societies (Berg and Lundahl 2016). A future may also be visualised when the notion of secularism as a necessary part of modernity and the secularity–religion binary becomes severely questioned through political

analyses and work. With a political strategy or activity come ideas about a future full of both hope and despair.

To imagine, articulate and think about the future does not necessarily mean creating a romantic idea of prosperity. It can also, as Anna Tsing writes, mean acknowledging that 'there might not be a collective happy ending' (2015: 21). Scott (2004) argues that a romantic view of the future omits conflicts and frictions. It might be possible to imagine a future as neither dystopia nor utopia, neither without conflicts nor with endless wars. Pluralism, conflict, friction and agonism are not only unavoidable, but also a condition for democracy.

1.1   To Follow and to Be Interrupted

To study politics beyond and in-between organisations and states demands its own methodology. Such a methodology must make it possible to focus on unexpected connections, mergings and interruptions as well as observe when something seems to become sedimented and normalised. Inspired by rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), we use what we call a method of following, convinced as we are that political movements spark action, make new connections, are being transformed and transform. We also believe that these transformations and connections can contribute to creating new hegemonies. By using the method of following, we acknowledge that the work we do has both temporal and spatial dimensions. As scholars we literally come after something has happened, and even if we are situated in time and place, formed as scholarly subjects in an entanglement of societal contexts and connections, we also become touched and moved in the practice of following (Haraway 1988; see Wasshede's chapter).

The spatial dimension implies that we move in-between different contexts and places as well as over borders. We are interested in connections, reiterations, disruptions and transformations rather than trying to understand a more or less sharply marked culture (Marcus 1995). We follow artefacts such as the rainbow flag and the veil, as well as money, porn, bodies and street art (Grewal 2005). Discourses and series of episodes such as debates in media and political processes are also important

empirical material. The material has taken us over a range of different borders and boundaries, such as those in-between different nations, the secular and/religious divide, in-between civil society and the state, as well as through different norms, times and temporalities.

The concrete work of following can be done in many different ways and result in different forms of knowledge. Through the following of some pink porn producers, Laskar shows how money and sexual liberation have been intertwined in unforeseen ways, a connection that does not always align with how activists usually imagine the past of gay liberation. The pink porn economy shaped certain queer communities of belonging and politics while excluding and colliding with others. Further, in Alm's chapter, following a political process on trans rights over time and across the border in-between civil society and the Swedish state makes it possible to discern actions that impact the struggle against neoliberal governance. To follow the veil through different contexts also takes the scholar to a range of conjunctures for geo- and body politics, making it possible to conduct comparisons in-between different articulations in different parts of the world. The veil is also a product in a market for fashionable hijabis and, not least, a familiar textile possible to recognise and (dis)identify with around the globe. Another piece of fabric, the rainbow flag, connects to neoliberal transnational forces as well as to progressive notions of communities beyond heteronormative societies. The artefacts impact differ with context and the connections they support are impure and ambiguous.

Additionally, these examples illuminate the importance of the economy. While classifying this as an essential category would risk oversimplifying, it can be considered one of many important governing forces that transform and become transformed in articulations with other discourses, artefacts and materialities in different contexts (Brown 2015; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). For instance, Lundahl Hero's chapter shows that some versions of Swedish mainstream feminism adapted to current neoliberal and individualistic power structures and thereby lost a lot of its radicalism.

By following artefacts, debates and processes of importance for the politics of gender, sexuality and coloniality, we have met with a plethora of activists and political communities. The artefacts have an impact on connections to national and local contexts, but the same is also true in

reverse: those contexts transform the role of the artefact (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013).

In the chapters of Wasshede and Martinsson, the authors analyse their own reactions to, notions of and emotions generated by Pride events and a demonstration on International Workers' Day. Wasshede uses auto-ethnography to analyse herself and her own positions and experiences 'as a lesbian, feminist, former activist, academic, Swedish, able-bodied, middle-class, mother, etc.' in order to understand the feelings and frictions of belonging and disbelonging. Martinsson analyses her own hopefulness when she follows the demonstration, perceiving it as an expression of being in a privileged position in the society of modern Sweden, a nation with an assumed bright future.

In pursuing our interest in activism, we have also been interrupted. Two of us followed the path of a group who did not become political subjects or create political communities of belonging. Diana Mulinari and Despina Tzimoula's chapter consists of a revisiting of data collected years ago. They had interviewed Greek women living in Sweden. These Greek women not only refused to become welfare dependent, but also chose not to become political subjects or 'good activists'. Instead, the informants were depressed and longed for home, feeling that they had made mistakes. Their life choices made us confront our own modernist views, with implicit implications for the desirability of Swedish society. The interruption forced us to pose questions as: What frames are we using, and what are they hiding? Which life is normalised and nourished through our work and the frames we construct? Mulinari and Tzimoula's chapter challenges the expectation that scholars tend to project on those we study—especially if they are framed as foreign or other—and on their presumed radicality and activism.

The usage of diverse material from cultural artefacts, memories, interviews, political processes and debates can help us avoid falling into analytical and ethical traps. We are convinced that these different sorts of material can together contribute to the recognition of many political struggles and processes in-between but never exactly in hegemonic orders. It is impossible to predict whether these processes are or will be good or bad, democratic or undemocratic. However, these pluralistic and diverse political struggles make clear in all their variety that there is not just one

way to organise society or to understand oneself or one's communities. They can contribute to a radicalisation of democracy by making more images of the future possible, thereby hopefully making more lives liveable.

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