

Editorial

The Fading Appeal of Northern Europe Is a Chance for Academic Research

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All the glamour is gone – or at least it fades away. In September 2013, the Danish women’s magazine *Alt for damerne* (»Everything for the Ladies«) could still proclaim on its title page: »Live Nordic! That’s Why the Whole World Wants to Be Like Us« (»Lev Nordisk! Derfor vil hele verden være som os«; 37, 12 Sept. 2013). Two years later, the media presents us with a Scandinavia that deals with the refugee issue in a way that is neither Nordic nor compatible with a (stereotypical) notion of Nordic liberalism and liberality. It did not come as a big surprise that Sweden would call a halt to the influx of refugees and re-establish controls at the border to Denmark shortly after Christmas, considering that it had officially received most refugees per capita in Europe over many years. However, the obvious lack of sufficient consultation with the Danish neighbor shows how broken the Swedish-Danish relationship has become after 2001 when the *Venstre* (»Denmark’s Liberal Party«) government came into power with the support of the *Dansk Folkeparti* (»Danish Peoples’ Party«). This became very apparent when identification papers had to be presented when crossing the inner-Scandinavian border of Denmark and Sweden for the first time in 63 years. The initial temporary re-establishment of border controls (which, like a predictable domino-effect, Denmark introduced at the German-Danish border shortly after) questioned not only the Nordic cooperation policy since the end of World War II, but also the European cooperation in connection with the Schengen Agreement. In the same breath, the attempt to build a transnational Öresund region which would go beyond symbolical borders and which factually encompassed decades and billions of investments was laid to rest, too. Some observers would even draw a parallel to the end of Scandinavism after 1864.

Do we have to welcome back the nation state? For more than 200 years, Scandinavia has always, among other things, been considered a space of future: of a chiliastic future in a considerable part of the German discourse until 1945, and of a teleological »modern« future, first in the Anglo-American, later in the globalized discourse. However, nowadays the Scandinavian future looks more and more often like the past – or just like the bleak European everyday life outside of Scandinavia. Those who had hoped for a Swedish *Sonderweg*, at least

concerning the general boom of right-wing populism, were severely disappointed: The right-wing populist Sweden Democrats do achieve around 20% of approval in current opinion polls. With a certain delay with regard to Denmark, Norway, and Finland, a welfare-chauvinistic party could establish itself as a regular player in the existing array of political parties which will predictably push the other parties in terms of integration policy. As is generally known, Denmark, Norway, and Finland have already pursued a ›closed shop‹ policy for quite some time, inspired by right-wing populism. Recently on December 4th, 2015, the Danish Minister for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, also a member of Venstre, declared in parliament that she defines the principal task of the government to »make Denmark an unappealing place to come to.« In the same vein, the new year started with another tightening of the regulations for asylum seekers; at the same time, the Swedish government announced mass deportation for their part. According to the alleged reading in the 21st century, one should not take the imperative of solidarity in the welfare state model for a universal rule but as grounded in a kind of national insurance model.

Refugee policy aside, the charisma of Northern Europe, not to mention that of the »Scandinavian« or »Nordic model,« is fading away. The modifications which politicians have implemented since the 1980s in the Scandinavian welfare regime, as it was described by Esping-Andersen in 1990 (although the ideal-typical character of his model is often willingly ignored), did at first glance not result in a loss of prestige abroad. In 2013, *The Economist* still promoted »The Next Supermodel. Why the World Should Look at the Nordic Countries« (2 Feb. 2013): It was precisely their reforms that seemed to be a proof of the ›model's‹ viability. Yet, reports like those in *The Economist* tend to primarily see the reason for the positive image of the Northern European countries in the economic success. This is reinforced by the current debate of Norwegian economists whether the unemployment in their country might not exceed unheard-of 6% in the foreseeable future due to oil prices of \$30 and less. Apart from economic parameters, it has primarily been their concepts of society and their cultures which made Northern Europe so appealing – something that we have always put emphasis on at NORDEUROPAforum (see, for example, our special issue (2001:1)).

The current record low of applications for Scandinavian studies at German universities can also be regarded as an indicator of Northern Europe's fading glamour. Admittedly, the boom in Scandinavian studies has always been dependent on factors which representatives of this discipline have greeted with a bland smile, namely a fascination with ›Northland‹ that is reminiscent of the Wilhelmine era, with a noncritical enthusiasm for *the* Scandinavian welfare state as an alleged ›third way‹ between capitalism and communism, a (reading) socialization with children's books by, for example, Astrid Lindgren or Tove Jansson, identity-establishing pop-cultural subcultures with a preference for Norwegian or Finnish metal music variants, Kaurismäki or Dogma films, and, of course, the inevitable Scandinavian crime thrillers. The international success story of TV series like *Forbrydelsen* (›The Killing‹), *Borgen* or *Broen/Bron* (›The Bridge‹), which were labelled ›Nordic Noir‹ for reasons of cultural marketing, has been a late flaring up of this international visibility of popular Scandinavian

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culture. It is quite telling that productions like *Arvingerne* (»The Legacy«) or *1864*, which have been purchased by many broadcast stations during the production process because of the previous Danish success, could not tie in with earlier times. What will be the reasons for high-school graduates in the future to decide in favor of Scandinavian studies?

However, the fading glamour of the Northern European cultures and societies also bears a chance because nothing is more harmful to academic curiosity and reputable research than sclerotic discourses about specific cultures. The Northern European cultures and societies have always been more conflicting, diverse, and complex than their popular image that has been propagated in their own, domestic and even more so in the international media. A critical and differentiated research on Northern Europe and its many facets is needed, particularly in such testing times, and may now, as the change happens, be even heard more clearly. *NORDEUROPAforum* provides this needed space.

As border controls are brought back into use, it is even more important to advocate the notion of openness and transgressive research – be it regional or cross-disciplinary – that has been pursued by *NORDEUROPAforum* since its foundation. This thematic concern is mirrored in the form of our open access publications that we have offered our readership since 2006. This means that we provide our world-wide reading public with free and unconditional access to all articles and reviews directly after their publication. The »golden way« is not a one-way street for us. Rather, it also enables our authors to submit and publish their texts at no charge – yet in strict accordance with our quality management: Each article submitted to *NORDEUROPAforum* is first reviewed internally before it is decided upon whether it will undergo a double blind peer review. Only after a positive evaluation, the article will be edited and revised in close consultation with the author. For that matter, we refrain from a transfer of rights for publication since the articles are published under a free license: All contributions to *NORDEUROPAforum* are first editions that become quickly and widely disseminated by means of our online publication channel. Our publications not only address colleagues of various academic fields, but also intend to build a bridge to an interested reading public which thereby gets access to current research on Northern Europe, too.

In addition, the expansion of our editorial staff during the last year accounts for the interdisciplinary character of *NORDEUROPAforum*: Friederike Felcht (Frankfurt/Main), Judith Meurer-Bongardt (Bonn), Ian Peter Grohse (Münster), and Kate Heslop (Berkeley) reinforce the literary and historical expertise of the journal. We are glad about their support and extend a warm welcome to them. This year, we are going to produce a special on »Biopolitics in Scandinavia in Literature, Culture, and History« that is based on last year's work group at the 22nd study conference of Scandinavian studies (Arbeitstagung der Skandinavistik) in Cologne.

The website of *NORDEUROPAforum* was slightly reshaped in order to get an even more user-friendly interface with easy access to articles, reviews, and other pieces of information. Relevant news and comments can further be found and posted on our NOfo blog and on social media like Facebook and Twitter.

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Knowing that the re-establishment of (disciplinary) borders is no sparkling alternative and that the ›glamour‹ of NORDEUROPA*forum* is far from disappearing, we are looking forward to a new year with multifaceted articles and comments.

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