

Roundtable on the impact of COVID and Open Access on Gender Studies Journal

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sonstiges / other

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Petř, A., Gillis, S., Grenz, S., Madarova, Z., Munt, S. R., Panayotov, S., ... Lund Engebretsen, E. (2022). Roundtable on the impact of COVID and Open Access on Gender Studies Journal. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068211065138>

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to mitigate the negative consequences of Covid-19: on work-life balance, on early career researchers, on precariously employed academics, on academics with schoolchildren. The members of my virtual caring community must have experienced something similar, because the informal calls and emails stopped—I also stopped reaching out to others. My new research project began to stall, too. Administrative chores crowded out inspired ideas from my schedule—and from my mind. A list of virtual talks and workshops I meant to attend and did not manage to find the time for grew ever longer. Participating in academic activism through surveys and petitions made one aware of the surrounding hardship, in which most academics—and, particularly, women—found themselves. By the end of 2020 came the realisation that most of the things that made our profession rewarding had gone away, while the less enjoyable aspects remained. Gone were the “professional socials” at conferences or on campus, gone was interaction with students in three dimensions that would provide feedback on my performance and whether the students and I were on the same page during a class, and research became limited more or less to whatever I could do from my desk. Administrative load did not diminish, but rather intensified (I know because I kept track of the hours before the pandemic and during), I realised how much actual *paperwork* there was, as I stood daily at the printer and scanner in my home office, dealing with signing this or that piece of paper, since an e-signature was not enabled in most cases.

I remain sceptical about university administrations drawing lessons from the unique experience of the last year and a half that would truly consider its gendered dimensions, because they either remained unarticulated or became subsumed under other categories. I do retain hope, however, for a much larger impact at a societal level, because of the visibility of gender and pervasiveness of gender issues during the pandemic, such as the feminization of the frontline work in the health sector and essential services or the consequences of school closures, particularly for women. Gender can no longer be written off as a fashion or niche interest—or should not be, given the experience of the pandemic. As the public health crisis unfolded, governments had to concern themselves with embodiment—which bodies did what, for whom and with what consequences? —and make provisions for those (gendered) bodies, in order to navigate their countries’ through the pandemic. The pandemic also revealed the tragic inadequacy of the gendered imaginary of a security threat: the masculine-coded militaristic discourse of “enemy” and “combat” dominated the early months of reporting on the virus. By now (in autumn 2021) - at least in Austrian news - it is heard less and less. It has been replaced with “resilience”, a concept that was not prominent before and that does not seem to have gendered connotations in the Austrian context. There is now a question about the extent to which governments utilise this new visibility of gender for a productive “re-gendering” of research funding priorities toward making our societies more resilient to future public health or environmental crises.

Roundtable on the impact of COVID and Open Access on Gender Studies Journal

**Andrea Peť, Stacy Gillis, Sabine Grenz,
Zuzana Madarova, Sally R. Munt,
Stanimir Panayotov, Ghiwa Sayegh,
Erika Alm, and Elisabeth
Lund Engebretsen**

Knowledge production in gender studies needs journals as its lifeline not only because it offers academic authorization to the authors but also because that is the way to ensure the knowledge produced is shared widely. A number of gender studies journal editors were invited to an online roundtable discussion about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and of open access (OA) practices on gender studies journals, which took place as part of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2021 online Spring Symposium. The participants of the roundtable represent different types of gender studies journals: self-financed and published (*Identities Southern Europe, Kohl, lambda nordica*), project financed (*Aspekt*), institutional (*Open Gender Journal*), profit oriented with a national focus (*Gender*) and with a transnational focus (*Feminist Theory, Feminist Encounters*) financed by publishing houses.

Andrea Peťó: Thanks for accepting the invitation. What is the profile of the journal you represent? Give us a brief history! Who is the publisher and what is the journal's current funding situation?

Sally R Munt: *Feminist Encounters* started in 2016, when I was approached by the publisher Lectito to set up a brand-new feminist studies journal, based in the Netherlands (Lectito is a Dutch publisher). We are an interdisciplinary Arts, Humanities and Social Science journal that has an editorial board drawn from 25 countries; we are strongly internationalist in scope and have an editorial commitment to frame our content with feminist methods of intersectionality. *Feminist Encounters* publishes twice a year, in Spring and Autumn, and currently has recorded about 100,000 downloads a year, from all over the world. Issues have an average of 10 research articles, which are usually 10–11,000 words, plus book reviews. Lectito funds the journal.

Stanimir Panayotov: *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* has been published since 2001 and is run by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje, with Katerina Kolozova and Žarko Trajanoski as founding editors. We serve as a platform for theoretical production in Southeastern Europe, for making the region more visible and for enabling international debate between authors from both the “intellectual centres” and the “intellectual margins” of the world. *Identities* is particularly interested in promoting theoretical investigations that view issues of politics, gender and culture as inextricably interrelated. It is open to all theoretical strands, to all schools and non-schools of thought without prioritizing canons and their major figures of authority. Our passion is for topics rather than for philosophical masters. The journal was initially financially supported by the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, and over time it has continued to rely on various external funding sources. We currently mostly publish with the help of grants from both NGO donors and local ministries.

Stacy Gillis: *Feminist Theory* is entering its third decade of publication. It was first published in April 2000 and had three issues a year until 2019 when it moved to four issues a year (two of which are Special Issues). The journal is published by SAGE. The journal's Editorial Collective consists of scholars based institutionally in Australia, South Africa, the US, and the UK: there are nine Editors (including the North American Editor, a role required by SAGE). The Editorial Assistant manages the bulk of the administrative labour, while the Editors work with individual authors and Special Issues editors to prepare their work for publication. Articles are usually in the region of 7000–9000 words, and there are about 6–7 articles per issue. Shorter conversational pieces (up to 3000 words) are published in the Interchanges section. It currently does not publish book reviews. There were 130,000+ full text downloads this past year – and this has gone up year on year.

Sabine Grenz: In 2015 the general assembly of the German Gender Studies Association (fg-gender.de) passed a resolution to develop an electronic journal as location for their conference proceedings. The established task force coincided with other actors working on open access journals. Together they developed a working model and in 2017 the *Open Gender Journal* (opengenderjournal.de), a scholarly led peer reviewed open access journal, started publishing in the area of interdisciplinary Gender Studies. The journal mainly issues individual papers; however, they may be part of collections (e.g. conference proceedings) and are then also published as part of the particular collection within the repository GenderOpen on (<http://www.genderopen.de>) The Journal *GENDER. Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft* (www.gender-zeitschrift.de) is a multi-disciplinary peer reviewed journal that enables communication between gender researchers of different disciplines as well as between academia and relevant activists as well as practitioners. The journal is located at the University of Duisburg/Essen and was founded as a cooperation between the Network Gender Research in North Rhine Westphalia in Germany and a small but well-known feminist publishing house, Barbara Budrich, and is well received in the German speaking area. It publishes three thematic issues annually with an open section and one special issue. It is funded mainly through the network as well as voluntary labour by the editorial board and team.

Zuzana Madarova: *Aspekt* was established in 1993 as the first feminist cultural journal in Slovakia. Eleven years later, it moved online as webzin *AspektIN*. Both in print and online it opened new topics and as co-founders Jana Cviková and Jana Juráňová noted, “both metaphorically and literally built the vocabulary of emerging feminists and feminisms”. Currently, *AspektIN* translates between academic discussions and public discourse. Content is entangled with other activities of its publisher, the organisation ASPEKT. Publishing depends on our internal capacities and projects that constitute the main (though small) source of funding. We try to partially cover editorial work and fees for authors by grants, however, we end up doing much work for free.

Ghiwa Sayegh Kohl: *a Journal for Body and Gender Research* is a queer, radical publication from the South. Based in Beirut and existing outside of institutions, it is an archive that maps our political lives as theory. Through Kohl, we aim to question what and whose knowledges/sexualities are legitimate, challenge the means of production, and historicize (some of) our struggles in their multiplicity. While we are a transnational publication, we remain especially orientated towards West Asia and North Africa. As an

open access journal, we are looking to expand the boundaries of “publishable” knowledge and research, as well as collective feminist methodologies, so our queer radical imaginaries might be transformed.

Erika Alm and **Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen** *lambda nordica* is a peer reviewed, open access academic journal for LGBTQ and queer studies dating back to 1989. It is the oldest of its kind in Nordic Europe and evolved in close dialogue with LGBTQ activist movements. *lambda nordica* is independently published and funded by Amundson's fund. It has an international advisory board of profiled queer scholars, and an editorial board of Nordic-based scholars. Interdisciplinary and intersectional in its scope, it publishes work from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The annual four issues publish researchers and artists from the Nordic region and beyond and have a global reach.

Andrea Pető: It is assumed that COVID increased the popularity of online digital content, while the number of submitted articles decreased. What has been the impact of COVID on journal submissions, topics, staff, authors, distribution?

Sally R. Munt: The effect of the COVID pandemic on *Feminist Encounters* during 2020 and so far in 2021 has been more personal than structural. As Chief Editor, I do most of the work of the journal, alongside our Managing Editor - Rose Richards from Stellenbosch University, Cape Town, South Africa. In March 2020 I contracted COVID, was acutely ill, and over a year later have not/will not fully recover, having been left with permanent disability. I took early retirement from the University of Sussex, UK because of COVID. So, yes, COVID has directly impacted the journal. We had a couple of authors who lost close family members during the editing period in 2020, who nevertheless delivered their copy on time with a short delay only of a couple of weeks. On reflection, the production flow was not affected by COVID, and I wonder how unhealthy that is: faced with existential threats, perhaps we all withdraw into our regular, ordinary tasks.

Stanimir Panayotov: At the height of the first lockdown in 2020, we tried to see in the COVID19 pandemic an opportunity for theoretical production and discourses that can support the development and mission of *Identities*, rather than defeat it. As a result, we produced a special issue on lockdown theory (Vol. 17, No. 1, Summer 2020), which gathered mostly invited edited texts for initial publication on our website. Thus, instead of expecting to feel the impact of COVID19 on us, we sought to impact the pandemic through our own initiative. Recently, however, we started to realize that the pandemic might actually be affecting our submissions: for the past 4 months we have been trying to solicit quality papers for a special themed issue (to be published in late 2021) - we received very few, and some irrelevant, submissions. We normally try to publish both commissioned and unsolicited texts, but currently we do feel that it is possible our situation might be changing during 2021.

Stacy Gillis: The Editorial Collective of *Feminist Theory* made a decision early on during lockdown to slow down, and to allow the authors and reviewers the space and time to do their work. It has become increasingly more difficult in the past five years to find reviewers for articles, and this was exacerbated during lockdown, meaning that some articles were waiting over a year for reviews to be returned, which is not ideal. During the first twelve months of the pandemic the one major shift in terms of the

journal submissions was that the number of articles written (single-authored) by men increased five-fold, while the number of submissions from women (single-authored) remained commensurate with previous years.

Sabine Grenz: There was no feasible impact concerning submission rates. Since the journal is very young, it is still difficult to find reviewers. Hence, it is difficult to decide whether COVID influenced the decisions of potential reviewers. However, publication processes have been slowed because the already heavy workloads of authors, editors, and reviewers have been greatly increased by the need to make adjustments to working from home with regard to conducting research and undertaking online teaching.

In *GENDER COVID* did not have any impact on the number of submissions in 2020, but there was a discernible increase in 2021. However, what did slowdown was the review process. It was more difficult to find reviewers and they needed more time. Furthermore, authors needed more time for revisions and the thematic issue editors responded to correspondence more slowly than usual. Moreover, because of technical problems related to home offices (e.g. access to specialised software) and the loss of casual office contacts, managerial processes have taken more time than usual. In order to react to the pandemic, the editors initiated a thematic issue on "The good life in times of crisis – Gender relations put on trial". Here, a sufficient number of abstracts for articles were submitted. However, because the research was done simultaneously with writing the papers, several authors asked for an extension of deadlines for their articles. Subsequently, it was difficult to find reviewers for this issue.

Zuzana Madarova: The pandemic arrived in Slovakia together with a new neo-conservative government. While the former hit our personal and professional lives, attacking it in waves, the latter initiated a full-frontal anti-gender attack and substantially limited funding for feminist organizations. Consequently, we had almost no financial support for *AspektIN* in 2020. All this intensified the personal and institutional insecurity we have been experiencing for years. On the other hand, we were not pressured by deadlines and pre-set topics and were able to publish texts about the gendered implications of the crisis or even take some time to process what was happening to us. Interested in how others were experiencing the new reality, we initiated an open call to share stories from the pandemic. This ongoing initiative aims to publish marginalized voices, render care work visible, and challenge mainstream understandings of what counts as work or knowledge.

Ghiwa Sayegh For contexts fraught with occupation and war (military and economic), it is impossible to dissociate the material conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic from the structural injustices already in place on a global scale. Since *Kohl* is based in Beirut, we were severely hit by the economic crisis. As the publication world moved towards online work, setting up platforms and new infrastructure, bank restrictions meant that we could not purchase any subscriptions online, and had to rely on solidarity from allies living abroad until we could find an alternative. While the situation was exacerbated by the lockdowns and mobility restrictions imposed due the pandemic, our communities were especially affected by economic sanctions as well as the explosion at the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020. It has pushed us to further challenge writing as an individualistic process geared towards production, and to favour instead collective and collaborative methodologies of writing and doing or writing *as* doing.

Erika Alm and Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen The most direct impact of the pandemic on *lambda nordica* has had to do with longer review, revision and editorial processes – many scholars are inundated with work and related stress, or are suffering directly or indirectly from Covid-19. Still, we have had the honour to publish timely pieces on how it has become painfully apparent the pandemic amplifies already established systems of discrimination, exploitation and violence, hitting those already living under what black history and literary scholar Saidiya Hartman calls “the everyday state of emergency” the hardest. But on the whole, we can see how scholarly work has slowed down due to partial and complete lockdowns of educational institutions and extended social support systems, which has effects on a small academic journal that relies on the voluntary and paid work of small-business collaborators.

Andrea Pető: What is the impact of Open Access the number of journal articles, authors, topics, funding?

Sally R Munt: *Feminist Encounters* is an online, Open Access journal, the costs of publishing are met by Lectito and fees are not charged. Lectito has expressed its desire to continue to meet the costs of funding the journal as a political commitment. I worked out that in terms of time, the cost of processing an article from submission to final copy is about €2000, if people were paid on an hourly basis. It disturbs me that we academics sometimes expect this labour for free, that we don't see it as labour, but we call it “good citizenship”. My own view is that attitude is outmoded and reflects the privilege of academia as a “gentleman's profession” not to be sullied by financial interests. And yet – much of this editorial work is done by women in low-paid work. As an industry (which is what academia is, after all), perhaps we might reflect more on the complicated morality of this position.

Stanimir Panayotov: As *Identities* is published independently by ISSH-Skopje, and as we transitioned to full gold Open Access status back in 2013, we do have insight into readability and citations thanks to our (free) publishing platform. Just the very act of going full OA, however, is a cumbersome process, and not exactly “free”: it involves huge archival work and web maintenance tasks, publishing platform notwithstanding. It does not feel to us that our OA status has generally increased submissions, and often discoverability does not match relevant submissions. Because we are geographically situated and show awareness of this in the journal, we tend to receive submission on “Balkan” topics that do not necessarily fit our mission. Lately, we have been able to publish issues with the support of regional foundations and national institutions, but more and more it feels like the actual physical copies are a token of academic prestige for the authors and few readers. The impact of OA, in short, for us does not translate into more and flexible funding. It gives us unique publicity and discoverability, but it does not transform in any serious way our material existence.

Stacy Gillis: As far as *Feminist Theory* is concerned OA has not (yet) had a discernible impact on articles or topics. SAGE operates an Open Access Portal, that supports their hybrid OS publishing option. None of the editors are paid for any of their labour in terms of working with authors/special issues editors to develop the submissions: this labour is ‘given’ to SAGE in order to make a profit for them. The journal receives a portion of the royalties, which pay for an Editorial Assistant, a Proof-Reader (employed because the out-sourcing of copy-editing by SAGE resulted in numerous errors), the Annual Essay Prize, and any editorial travel for meetings.

Sabine Grenz: From the very beginning the *Open Gender Journal* was conceptualised as an open access journal. As such it is based on a completely different model than most other journals. It is based on what is now called 'diamond' open access publishing which means that it is peer reviewed, scholarly led and completely free for authors. It is listed in open access directories such as the DOAJ. Journal contributions are under the license "Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International". This means that copyright remains with the authors and published papers can be used free of charge under the terms of the license. So far, each volume (year) entails 6–12 articles. The journal is currently supported by the German Gender Studies Association, the Margherita von Brentano Centre for Gender Studies (MvBZ), FU Berlin, Gender Studies in Cologne (GeStiK), University of Cologne, the Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies (ZtG), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and the Gender Research Office (RGF), University of Vienna. In addition, several other centres allow their staff to work on the editorial team and some scholars offer their time, some of them with skills in digital technologies, design, proofreading etc. Members of the editorial team have different inter-/disciplinary backgrounds, levels of academic experience and belong to different institutional contexts. Their joint portfolio reflects the inter-/trans- and post-disciplinarity of Gender Studies. Next to Permanent members of the editorial team are supported by temporary collection editors. Thus, the journal is based on an immense and collective voluntary effort. In terms of open Access, *GENDER* follows the green standard: after two years of publication it provides open access to articles. In order to make these contributions more visible, the journal cooperates with GenderOpen, a recently established open access gender platform, where all authors can publish their open access articles (www.genderopen.de). The main problem with open access is that it creates costs like all publishing does. As a consequence, the journal offers the golden open access publishing only to authors or guest editors who are able to pay a fee to cover the costs. In this respect, the main pressure stems from big publishing houses who are able to publish special deals for universities and libraries (e.g. for Germany: <https://www.projekt-deal.de>).

Zuzana Madarova: Since it went online, *AspektIN* has been free of charge. Therefore, open access has not impacted our work. What seems to have left a mark is a more general turn towards academic capitalism. Seeking mostly indexed international journals, there is little capacity left for academics to publish in platforms such as *AspektIN*. Moreover, students and young researchers who used to publish articles based on their theses and appreciated the learning experience with proper editorial work, have nowadays one or more jobs outside academia to make ends meet. Our communication with them often goes silent after some time.

Ghiwa Sayegh Not only is *Kohl* open access, but it also locates itself as functioning outside of institutions. The question of access and making knowledge freely available for readers and writers alike, is to create alternatives to a global system in which knowledge is accessible to some (mostly white, cis/het men in the north), while others can only ever be objects or subjects of research. Our purpose is not to compete with such platforms, but to create something else altogether. Our authors, therefore, are also the accomplices with whom we create communities across borders. We rely on external funding from feminist donors; although it is an imperfect system, it has allowed us to bypass the institutional

orders of academia and publication, although we remain quite involved with them from an epistemological standpoint.

Erika Alm and **Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen** *lambda nordica* is not only an academic journal but also aims to provide a broader platform to support and promote queer scholarship, debate, and community, inside and beyond the academy. In this pursuit its status as open access, with no fees for neither authors nor readers, is vital. The multilingual publishing, online and in print, with articles in the Scandinavian languages and English run side by side, is part of this ambition. For decades the journal has resisted the pull of the commercialized academic publishing industry, and as the relatively recently instated editors-in-chief we are deeply committed to continue this path of independent academic publishing. The aim is to continue to queerly develop the generative and collaborative potentials of this position, whilst being aware of the fact that this independence is reliant on the unpaid and sometimes not adequately acknowledged labour of editors, reviewers and contributors.

Andrea Pető: Please give a closing statement about the future of your journal: what are the most important factors influencing it, how do you see its future?

Sally R. Munt: All academic journals are moving online, which is a good thing for trees, and for wider access. Global publishers have made fortunes from academic print journals for many years, and that money pot is quickly drying up due to technological change. The traditional publishers are often keen to discredit online journals partly as a form of protectionism, as feminists we need to be alert to that kind of gatekeeping, and perhaps also be realistic about the labour costs involved. If your typesetting is outsourced to India because labour is cheaper there, what are the ethics of that for a feminist journal? We need to rethink derogatory labels like “predatory” journals – predatory for whom? The power relationships in global academic publishing are currently unstable, and some of our assumptions can be perhaps embedded in forms of tradition and elitism that we may wish to challenge, or at least treat with caution.

Stanimir Panayotov: Even if we are able to have a set number of issues of *Identities* sold that will cover our basic needs to remain digitally on the surface, our future does seem to be locked between gold OA status and subsidiary funding. We are a very small team and even dividing work tasks and responsibilities is at times a burdensome responsibility on its own. We envisage continuing our efforts to be indexed and abstracted in relevant services and databases, and for the time being we reject the ongoing war between indexing companies and OA’s denialism of impact factors, as we strive to be visible in both. Our hope is that over time our national institutions will start supporting us to cover costs of indexing and data base services, which are impossible to bear on our own. At the moment, this is a hope rather than a plan, but we remain positive that sooner or later we will be recognized by our own institutions as one of the foremost Macedonian and Southeast European journals in the humanities.

Stacy Gillis: *Feminist Theory* is committed to theoretical pluralism and feminist diversity: it brings together perspectives from across the broad spectrum of the humanities and the social sciences, and the full range of feminist political and theoretical stances. The Editorial Collective firmly believes that feminist solidarity is as urgent now as it has ever been, and that feminist theory can help us analyse and respond to the world today: political, economic, emotional, structural, geographic - and more - challenges

that are the focus of the journal. *Feminist Theory* is actively exploring how to meet the publishing challenges of the next decade, and beyond, and is working with sister journals to disrupt some of the publishing hegemonies that have held sway in academia since the academic publishing expansion in the late 1990s.

Sabine Grenz: From 2017–2019, OGI immensely profited from being a pilot journal of the *Open Gender* Platform project that was funded by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). Since then, it is supported by the four centres and the voluntary academic work. For expanding the journals services, two of the centres (MvBZ and GeStiK), supported by the German Gender Studies Association, handed in a funding application to the main German funding agency, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). Moreover, costs such as design, proofreading etc. need funding, too, and the coordination needs continuity. For this reason, the editorial board and editorial team are cooperating with different actors and institutions to develop a sustainable funding structure. As a consequence: even though the model is very different, the problem of smaller publishers/journals remains the same: long term funding is an issue, especially when it is meant to be open access. The publisher of *GENDER* Barbara Budrich aims to develop their open access strategy in general in order to be able to offer golden open access. To this end, they cooperate with various actors in the field. One major actor in the German speaking area is the network ENABLE (<https://enable-oa.org>) in which university libraries, open access directories, publishers, journals work together in order to develop sufficient financial support for open access. Subsequently, opportunities for green open access are further developed by cooperating with different data bases. Furthermore, for more visibility the journal has the ambition to be listed (e.g. on SCOPUS), however, here the German language that enables close cooperation in German speaking area proves to be a challenge.

Zuzana Madarova: AspektIN is situated between academia and civil society. Its future is impacted by political decisions about gender equality, civil society, and academia, as well as by the capacities and will of feminist activists and scholars. So far, the institutional structures proved to be less stable than feminists' persistence, but we know it is unsustainable. Perhaps the shared challenges experienced in academia and civil society can lead to joint search for more promising publishing process.

Ghiwa Sayegh While *Kohl* provides decent work conditions for its staff and translators, the future of the publication itself is not dependent on financial transaction. We are archiving our realities, so our political visions materialize. We can only do so by reaching out to each other across borders and the different lockdowns we have been confined to by nation-state logic. Because our praxis is so, our future is queer, feminist, and transnational.

Erika Alm and Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen As we wrote in our editorial we are at a time where antigender politics, queer bashing and racist nationalism is on the rise globally and as well as in Nordic Europe, it is vital for us to balance the need to safeguard queer scholarship and scholars, and the need to scrutinize the conditions for critical queer research. Currently, we are discussing with our editorial board and other collaborators in the Nordic region how the journal and queer/feminist publishing can best meet this challenge in the future. Another issue that impacts on the future of the journal is deliberating whether *lambda* shall discontinue as a print journal and only publish online, as

printing costs are considerable. Finally, as a small, Nordic-based journal we aim to continue to offer a publishing platform that challenges oft-presumed Nordic particularity but also the Anglo-U.S. hegemony of queer and LGBTQ scholarly publishing and knowledge production.