Introduction:
Queering the Hegemonies of LGBT Historiography

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How does queer as a theoretical approach travel in time and space? When one looks at the 1990s anthologies and special issues about lesbian and gay studies and contrasts them with those produced in the new millennium (de Lauretis 1991; Abelove, Barale, & Halperin 1993; Hemmings & Felicity 1999; Corber & Valocchi 2003; Eng, Halberstam & Muñoz 2005), one can see how queerness disengages itself more and more from homosexuality. However, in the field of history the question about the emergence of homosexuality as a concept and practice that structures people's lives has remained an interesting one, while, thanks to queer impulses, it continues to get addressed and answered in increasingly nuanced ways.

Over the last decade a network of scholars, sharing a culture and a language, have produced in the U.S. a substantial corpus of work that could be called urban gay (and to some extent lesbian) history of the twentieth century, or, as Marc Stein puts it, U.S. LGBT historiography (Stein 2005). Because written in English and published in well-known venues, this scholarship has been easily accessible also internationally, not to mention appealing because of its high quality. Yet, for international scholars, reading U.S.-produced scholarship can at the same time be also somewhat frustrating, since often its approaches have only local relevance or applicability (see also Mizielinska in this issue).

The U.S. LGBT historiography includes studies that discuss either the urban gay geographies of metropolitan cities — such as George Chauncey's seminal work on New York City (Chauncey 1994) — or gay holiday resorts (such as Esther Newton's study on Cherry Grove (Newton 1993). These geographical sites are characterized by a high concentration of gay bars and clubs, and, consequently, an ample potential for cruising on the streets, parks and beaches. They thus constitute ideal environments both for lesbians and gay men looking for like-minded company and for scholars interested in studying the emergence and organisation of same-sex sexual subcultures.

It has already been pointed out by U.S. scholars that the scholarship's exclusive focus on gay costal meccas tends to obscure the fact that vibrant gay and lesbian communities may exist outside urban metropolises (Beemyn, ed., 1997). The groundbreaking study of Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993) on the working-class lesbian community in Buffalo, N.Y. has been followed by local studies about other sizeable cities, some with major concentration of political and cultural power (Stein 2000). All these studies followed John D'Emilio's (1983) lead by

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placing emphasis on the workings of well-established communities by self-identified lesbians and gay men.

However, it can be maintained that even this work remains urbanocentric. Subsequently it has been pointed out that even rural places less affected by industrialisation and urbanisation, and formerly considered inhospitable for gay life, have their own networks and forms cultural arrangements (Halberstam 2005, 26—45). Whereas earlier studies focussed mainly on sizeable urban gay subcultures and on the formation of gay communities, especially the work on rural cultures urges us to pay closer attention to the larger society and its dominant gender system. This approach is exemplified by John Howard's study (1999), which highlights the ways in which rural circumstances have shaped the patterns of male homosexuality in Mississippi.

Thus in the U.S. context recent gay and lesbian history writing has been dynamically revised over the past decade. The need for revisions does not pre-empt the notion "that the focus on community, which has to come to define the historical scholarship on lesbian and gay life, may distort or misrepresent the history of homosexuality in modern societies" (Corber & Valocchi 2003, 5). Although local LGBT histories admittedly have a tendency, and legitimately so, to focus on communities, we need to ask how these communities are perceived and treated in the studies.

If communities of self-identified homosexuals are seen as the given frame of reference for these studies, the danger of misrepresenting them as the universal breeding ground for homosexuality *per se* is evident. But the self-evident existence of such communities can also be questioned, and their respective shaping explored as a process. Hence both homosexual identities and communities will be seen as contingent yet contextualized, actively interacting with their surroundings, and in a constant process of becoming. Instead of assuming a certain universal trajectory, such an approach, greatly benefiting from Queer Theory and taking part in it, will allow us to recognize the variety of ways in which queer communities organize themselves, depending on local and regional differences.

In the broader European perspective, regional differences can be observed in the way that societal changes such as changes in family structures and women's rights have taken place in an uneven pace. Tight and large families were a reality in Catholic Ireland up to the 1980s (O'Toole 2002), whereas in the Evangelic-Lutheran Finland the large-scale dissolution of the patriarchal family structure took place in the 1950s, this itself decades later than in neighbouring Sweden with its earlier industrialisation.

In Europe, with its languages, religions, laws and customs largely divided by national borders, it is evident that no evenly existing homosexual subcultures, communities and identities can be assumed. Not even the use of the concept of *homosexuality*, although coined as a word already in 1869, provides a shared point of departure before the mid-twentieth century. Hence all historical developments of concepts and practices regarding same-sex sexuality need, first of all, to be specified and localized.

Therefore, when Terry Castle (2003) suggests a Sapphic lineage directly from ancient Greek texts into modern English speaking literature, such a lineage should not be

just assumed, but needs to be studied in detail for other contexts – something Angela Steidele (2003) has meticulously done for the German speaking literature from the 1750s to 1850s. Nevertheless, for example in the case of Finland, with idiosyncratic language, the Sapphic legacy, including the words *lesbian* or *Sapphic*, remained almost nonexistent until the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the absence of Greek traditions the rural Finns developed an oral tradition about women who were engaged in *lättäpillun pelaaminen*, "playing a flat cunt" (c.f. Donoghue 1993, cited in Castle 2003, 35).

Similarly, when it comes to the (male) homosexual traditions in Finland, one doesn't find evidence of antique traditions but a genealogy pointing towards more recent influences from Germany and Sweden. This is evident in the slang word *hinttari,* which emerged in the bigger Finnish cities in the 1930s. While referring to faggots, it carried etymological traces from the German phrases *von hinten* and *hintenrum*, there signifying the practice of (same-sex) anal penetration (Borneman 1971). That the medicalised concept of a homosexual person replaced such phrases as *onanisti* (masturbator) in Finland only in the 1950s can moreover be concluded from the unsteady spelling of the foreign words, which oscillated between direct translations *homoseksuelli* or *homofiili* (from the Swedish *homosexual* or *homofil*) and modulated neologisms, such as *homoseksualisti,* and later on *homoseksuaali*.

Non-Anglophone European lesbian and gay histories, which do not follow the timing and trajectories suggested by Stonewall-inspired research (critique of which see Bravmann 1997), often seem challenging to audiences trained in Anglo-American context. But precisely therefore they can also offer innovative and surprising research approaches, consequently challenging views on issues that otherwise would be taken for granted. Unfortunately much of that work has been internationally received poorly or belatedly, partially because of the publishing decisions made by Anglo-American presses driven by the demands of their home-market. It took, for example, ten years for the groundbreaking study of the Danish sociologist Henning Bech about the lifestyles of modern homosexual men, *Når mænd mødes* (1987) to be translated into English as *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* (1997).

Nevertheless, the sociologists and historians Jan Löfström from Finland and Jens Rydström from Sweden have provided elaborate theses about the emergence and shaping of modern homosexuality in Nordic countries. By using materials from the rich collections of the Finnish Folklore Archives, Löfström has developed an argument about the emergence of the concepts of male and female homosexuality in relation to the emerging urbanisation and the simultaneously changing gender concepts in Finland. He explains the silence about homosexual deeds in the late 19th century Finland, evidenced by the archival materials, with a weekly pronounced gender difference in rural culture. He maintains that only after the turn of the twentieth century, when gender difference became more pronounced and thus a contested issue, also the gender of the sexual partner gained importance and same-

sex sexuality was considered significant enough to be reported about (Löfström 1994, 1999).

Jens Rydström has used for his prize-winning study *Sinners and Citizens* (2003) court and medical records to show how, in rural Sweden, male homosexual deeds were closely associated with bestiality. Only gradually a more modern understanding of homosexuality as practices of mutual masturbation entered the penal code and medical discourse as well as the sexual practices in male homosexual communities (For an overview about Nordic LGBT historiography see Rydström 1995; for research see Löfström [ed.] 1998).

While there are marked differences between various European countries in regard to emergence of the ideas, communities and public cultures around homosexuality, also the regional differences within those countries need to be considered. In the case of twentieth-century Germany this argument was presented by Kirsten Plötz already in 1992, when she questioned the popular understanding of the Weimar Republic of the 1920s as a golden time for German lesbians (Plötz 1992). She was able to show that such an interpretation might hold true for metropolitan Berlin (cf. Mayer 1981; Eldorado 1992), but could not be applied as such for provincial Hannover or more rural Hildesheim. In the meanwhile, in Germany exciting collections of local studies about mostly male homosexual subcultures have emerged, discussing not only the particularities of Hannover (Hoffschildt 1992), but also Cologne (Balser et al. 1994), Hamburg (Rosenkranz and Lorenz 2005), and certain quarters of Berlin (Dobler 2003; note also Hergemöller 1999 for a German overview of historical studies on homosexualities).

Corresponding local studies can also be found in Sweden, where substantial work has been done on several regions. Most impressive is the rich volume about the one hundred years of gay male life in Stockholm, from 1860 to 1960 (Silverstolpe et al 1999). Equally important work has been accomplished by Arne Nilsson, who has managed to record and study gay subcultures of Gothenburg from the 1930s to 1960s in a great detail (Nilsson 1995; 1998). Moreover he has, together with Margareta Lindholm, published a book about the lives of lesbians and gay men in Gothenburg of the 1960s to 1980s (Lindholm & Nilsson 2002), and most recently a monograph about gay life on the Trans-Atlantic liners which linked Gothenburg to New York (Nilsson 2005; see also this issue). This urban work contrasts nicely with Svante Norrhem's oral history based study about the well kept secret of rural homosexuality in northern Sweden (Norrhem 2000, 2001).

In Finland the LGBT historiography started with analyses of the 1894 criminalisation of homosexual deeds for both women and men. Whereas Jan Löfström (1998a) has studied the process of criminalisation itself, Kati Mustola (2000) has published on the dimensions of its execution, and Antu Sorainen (1998; together with Eve Hirvonen 1994; see also this issue) on the effects of legal proceedings for women in rural Finland. Moreover Olli Stålström (1997) has examined the medicalisation of homosexuality in Finland. Furthermore, Tuula Juvonen has studied Finnish homosexuality as a lived experience. Her work on the letters

and diaries of the late-nineteenth-century suffragette Hilda Käkikoski was followed by a local study, in which emphasis was placed on the crucial difference that gender makes in the lives of homosexual women and men in Tampere of the 1950s to late 1960s (Juvonen 1995; 2002; also in this issue). Tarja Hautanen (2004) has explored the organizing of lesbian and gay community in Turku from the 1960s to 1990s.

Recent works written about the history of European homosexualities of the twentieth century have undoubtedly been influenced by U.S. theorizing. However, at the same time they have self-consciously sought their own particular agendas. The articles in this special issue of *SQS*, *Queering Hegemonies in LGBT Historiography*, make it possible to problematise our received ideas of LGBT communities by taking a closer look at the ways that same-sex desires have been negotiated in some lesser-known European countries. Together these articles can be read as a further step in the existing queer critique of the biases inevitably inherent in local history studies.

As we have seen, metropolitan subcultures have been, and continue to be, a breeding ground for diverse, visible LGBT communities. Yet the cultural formations evident in these communities cannot be taken as a universal point of departure for queer theorizing. In particularly the sparsely populated Nordic countries and other "peripheries" provide radically different conditions for any subcultural life (Löfström 1998b, 7). Hence the following texts will show in detail the workings of heteronormativity but also demonstrate the innovative strategies used by homosexually inclined women and men in such settings.

The incentive for putting together this issue was the conviction that context matters, both that of a researcher and her research object. Therefore the empirical cases presented here are firmly located in particular places, when the pre-structured systems of thought, spatial conditions and social (im)possibilities of same-sex identifications, sexual identities, and communities are discussed. Taken together the texts also allow the reader to acknowledge the difference that cultural, religious, linguistic or national contexts make for the construction of concepts, practices and communities around same-sex sexuality (here the main focus is roughly 1930s to 1970s) – an aspect that often gets overlooked in works which relate to one country only, even when the racial and ethnic differences within that country are accounted for.

The special issue is opened by Antu Sorainen's article, which contrasts the famous British legal cases of Oscar Wilde, Maud Allan and Radclyffe Hall with a Finnish rural case of Herb Grove from 1951-1954, in which eight women were charged with "fornication with a person of the same sex". The discussion and juxtaposition of different legal traditions allows Sorainen to ask critical questions about the role of legal system and court cases for creating homosexual discourses and identities – an universalizing legal fiction that has been taken for granted by much of earlier research.

Eibhear Walshe takes Britain as one of his points of departure in his article, which discusses the difference that moving between places can make to the possibilities of

expressing and living out one's same-sex sexuality. His case is based on the life of an Irish-born author Kate O'Brian (1897-1974), who moved to London in 1923, and back to Ireland in 1950, before eventually returning to England ten years later. Analysing the respective same-sex subcultures available to O'Brian, Walshe is able to show that London provided a critical mass of bohemian women both to allow her same-sex liaisons and to encourage her to take up the topic of homosexuality in her books. However, according to Walshe, such a lesbian subculture was not present for her in her Catholic country of origin. Hence, when returning back to Ireland, O'Brian made friends with a circle of literary gay men instead.

The importance of gender is also emphasized in Tuula Juvonen's article, which looks at the possibilities available for women and men to live out their same-sex desires in the 1950s and 1960s Tampere, Finland, where homosexual deeds for both women and men were still illegal. The analysis of the uneven existence of same-sex sexual representations about women and men in the media and the asymmetrical access to gendered public spaces for sexual encounters helps to explain the fact that it was much more difficult for women than to men in post-war Finland to identify themselves with their same-sex desires and to form public communities accordingly.

With Arne Nilsson's article we cross again national borders as we step on board of Gothenburg-based Swedish Trans-Atlantic liners and luxury cruisers. Nilsson analyses the spatial and economic features which framed the same-sex sexual lives of ships' male crewmembers, and how the concepts and practices around male same-sex sexuality travelled from ashore to aboard, and got transformed on ships by the particular confinements but also unique possibilities available there. Nilsson's work moreover highlights the effect of the marked changes in the gender conceptions in the 1960s Sweden on the homosexual life on the ships.

This special issue concludes with an article by Joanna Mizielinska. Like Nilsson, Mizielinska is interested in travelling and transformation, yet not so much of people but of ideas. She is intrigued by the way that Queer Theory has travelled from the United States to new contexts, and makes the community of Finnish queer scholars and their work around the concept of queer into her case of point. Can one actually translate *queer*? What does the translation (or, just as crucially the non-translation) of the word into Finnish accomplish? What kinds of theoretical discussions does *queer* smuggle into new contexts? In her critical text Mizielinska strongly argues for the necessity of a radical reconsideration, in Finland as in Poland, of the theoretical concepts and approaches that have been developed in other cultural contexts. Simultaneously her article also makes a strong case for the necessity to have publications such as *SQS*, where such discussions can take place.

Together the articles published here seek to clarify how the existence and availability of cultural and material spaces as well as various concepts about same-sex sexual desire affected the lives lived by women and men in the middle of the twentieth century. Articles also both point out and exemplify how sexual and theoretical ideas and

practices travel between urban and rural areas, centres and peripheries, and one country and another. At the same time they make it obvious that the researchers who are studying local same-sex and queer communities are themselves implicated in similar processes.

The authors hope that the articles collected here will provide inspiration for those who, just like they, struggle to find new ways to make sense of local same-sex sexualities in places that might be smaller in scale and considered more peripheral than the more prominent urban and metropolitan centres in the U.S. Moreover we continue to look forward to more work by Eastern and Southern European scholars on the diverse sexual genealogies that these other European "peripheries" will have to offer for the history of sexuality.

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