

Call for Participants

Queer Utopias: Imagining Futures without Borders

28–29 November 2024
Athens, Greece

You cannot take what you have not given, and you must give yourself. You cannot buy Utopia. You cannot make Utopia. You can only be the Utopia. Utopia is in the individual spirit, or it is nowhere. It is for all or it is nothing. If it is seen as having any end, it will never truly begin. We can't stop here. We must go on. We must take the risks.

—Ursula Le Guin

It is often imagined that people persecuted for their queerness will find a utopia in liberal Western democracies. The truth is that queer spaces in supposedly progressive countries can be ambivalent for displaced queer people. Not only do neoliberal structures intersect with racism, classism, and oppressive border regimes to make it difficult for displaced queers to find support; they also kill our imagination, and the right to dream and play. In particular, our bordered reality makes it difficult to imagine futures without borders.

Because what is a queer utopia? Ursula Le Guin once said that you can't buy or make a perfect world; you must be it. Utopias exist in the human spirit or not at all. It's a force that pushes us to go beyond our limits. Similarly, Susan Sontag compared humanity to people in Plato's cave, seeing only shadows of the truth. Therefore, utopias are like photographs, showing us ideal moments that our imagination strives for.

Thinking of queerness as something that hasn't fully arrived yet, that it is always on the horizon, it's about different forms of belonging that come together as a collective (Muñoz, 2009). Thus, we need to be critical of how utopias are represented. For instance, how LGBTQI+ rights are often portrayed as fitting into mainstream, capitalist, and heteronormative ideals. When looking at issues affecting queer and trans people, especially refugees, we see how racism and economic exploitation are connected with heteronormativity and cisnormativity. Western countries often present themselves as safe havens, but their border regimes erect legal barriers and enact systemic violence against queer people. Moreover, in the anti-gender politics rising in Europe, there is a danger of normative acceptance or apathy forming in relation to border violence, including the legal categories ascribed to queer refugees.

To challenge these postcolonial views, we should imagine new, hopeful futures inspired by everyday acts of resistance and disruptive moments. By refusing to let disappointments and state's bordering tactics define us, we embrace care and reshape LGBTQ+ politics with terms like "gender expansive" and "transfeminism."

We should immerse ourselves in the vibrant, emotional world of queerness and resist dehumanization. Utopia is about making the impossible visible. In doing this, we must be ethical and aware of the diverse vulnerabilities people face, especially in Europe. Understanding utopia requires knowing who controls our perceptions, like the guards in Plato's cave, mentioned by Susan Sontag.

Displaced queers create personal utopias in liminal spaces, often resisting (or being excluded from) milestones in hetero-time like marriage or children. They might only come out when they feel secure and rely on migrant networks of queer kinship and solidarity. They may accept protection in countries with high unemployment or move around to enjoy different freedoms, rejecting Western timelines of liberation. By recognizing this self-determined agency, we see how a mix of utopian yearning and queer imagination can drive political and social transformations (Muñoz, 2009).

On 28-29 November 2024, the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC) and the Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference (RIKK) invite you to a two-day seminar in Athens, with a welcoming dinner the night before. Together, we will create a space imbued with the spirit of abolitionist care and embracing queer methodologies, in which we can imagine new, hopeful futures inspired by everyday acts of resistance and disruptive moments.

We welcome abstracts that engage critically with the themes of queer utopia, bordering, belonging-in-difference and queer temporality in one way or another. Presentations can be grounded in scholarly research, artistic and/or political practice, and we welcome different formats of presentations, all of which offer innovative perspectives to our understanding of these themes. We invite both individual presentations and roundtables that engage with everyday practices of your work, whether you perceive possibilities or tackle the uncomfortableness within an imagined queer utopia without borders.

We encourage unique perspectives as our aim is to create an assemblage of diverse representations that transcend disciplinary boundaries, and institutional barriers. Please send abstracts that are no longer than 330 words—or contact us at the emails below for an alternative option.

To submit an abstract: please use this form: <https://tinyurl.com/QueerUtopiasSeminar>

Call for Participants closes: 16 September 2024 (11:59 pm)

Decisions: 30 September

Confirmation of participation: 14 October

Programme Finalised: 25 October

Seminar takes place: 28–29 November 2024

Please note: Participants from elsewhere should plan to arrive in Athens on the 27th (latest) and depart on the 30th (earliest) of November. A welcome dinner will take place in the evening on the 27th.

Code of contact: FAC is an antiracist feminist, LGBTQI+ affirmative space and the participation of trans, intersex, non-binary, queer, lesbian, bisexual, and gay people in the seminar is encouraged. No TERFS. Please read and commit to FAC's code of contact: feministresearch.org/code-of-contact

Fees: There are no fees to participate; participants are asked to support FAC (an autonomous, community-based research centre) by becoming a member: feministresearch.org/join

Travel stipend: We have a modest budget for travel costs; priority will be given to people with precarious employment and/or people with income disparities. Please indicate whether you need a stipend to participate on the form linked above.

More information: Please email akingvars@hi.is (Árdís) and info@feministresearch.org (FAC)

Organisers :

Dr. Aila Spathopoulou, Co-director, FAC/Lecturer at the University of Stirling

Dr. Anna Carastathis, Co-director, FAC

Dr. Árdís Kristín Ingvars, Adjunct at the University of Iceland

Dr. Guðbjörg Ottósdóttir, Associate Professor at the University of Iceland

Dr. Linda Sólveigar- og Guðmunds, Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Iceland

Dr. Maja Hertoghs, Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam

Dr. Myrto Tsilimpounidi, Co-director, Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC)

Dr. Thomas Brorsen Smidt, Project Manager at the Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference (RIKK)