



Eurozine Review

Extra-parliamentary opposition 2.0

Blätter declares a revolution of the everyday; *Lettre Internationale* (Denmark) writes the history of global movements after '89; *Lettera Internazionale* sees a parallel reality outlive its origins; *The Hungarian Quarterly* asks whether the dog was wagged in central Europe; *Osteuropa* charts the post-communist curve; *Arena* wrangles over the burka and the niqab in Sweden; *Reset* seeks to redress Italy's political gender imbalance; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) is impressed by Michele Bachelet, Chile's first female president; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) does not expect a Copenhagen deal; *Arche* explores the common history of Belarus and Lithuania; and *A Prior* reinvents Flaubert as the cognitive proletariat's prophet of doom.

Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 12/2009



"Like so many international conferences before them, the Copenhagen negotiations will leave behind a disastrous image of insular summit diplomacy", write [Claus Leggewie](#) and [Harald Welzer](#) in *Blätter*. Time, then, for an extra-parliamentary opposition 2.0, where "local initiatives" lead the way in retrieving the "democratic competence" ceded to party politics and only seemingly compensated for by

electronic media.

"The revolution of today can only be a revolution of the everyday; the private is political. But today, unlike in 1968, this will apply not so much to questions of education, sexual freedom and the patriarchy, as to everyday living conditions," write Leggewie and Welzer. The extra-parliamentary opposition 2.0 "will not be animated by the spirit of pre-formulated social models that promise happiness for all", nor will it be a "classical movement 'from below' against 'the establishment'". Rather, via "collective learning experiences", it will allow "a collective feeling of identity to arise", one that "makes it possible to define what kind of society one wants in the future."

"If success, status and possessions are the primary sources of identity, then identity is endangered when conventional success remains absent and status and possessions disappear. [...] Without an escape to a future 'we' identity, it will be impossible to develop a new cultural project that addresses the problems and crises that have long been piling up — let alone solve them."

Controversy: Critics of the hostile remarks made about immigrants by the former SPD politician and member of the board of directors of the German National Bank, Thilo Sarrazin, in the German edition of *Lettre Internationale*,

were recently described as "intellectual cowards" by philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. "For years", writes *Blätter* editor [Albrecht von Lucke](#), "the neo-Nietzscheans have been trying to create a general acceptance for a higher degree of inequality in society. Obviously with success, as the recent debate shows. Especially in times of crisis, the attitude of the elite opinion-formers, for whom Sloterdijk acts as a mouthpiece, combines with an increasingly marked disposition of a middle class plagued by the fear of social relegation, who eagerly latch on to Sarrazin-type resentments."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 12/2009

Lettre Internationale (Denmark) 19 (2009)



Entitled "After the Fall", the Danish edition of *Lettre* maps developments since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Alongside translations of central essays by Samuel Huntington (on the denationalization of the American elite), [Mike Davis](#) (on slum ecology), Loretta Napoleoni (on the prostitution industry post-89) and [Karl Schlögel](#) (on Marijampole as the real centre of Europe), the issue features some enthralling original

contributions.

Danish cultural historian Mikkel Bolt describes the shifting forms taken by anti-globalization movements in the last twenty years. His comprehensive historical survey starts with the Mexican Zapatistas' revitalization of resistance movements and ends with the scattered appearance of today's factions, which have struggled to gain momentum after 9/11. Climate change and other environmental issues might constitute a new common cause, but Bolt's account is pessimistic: "The radical parts of the anti-globalization movement are, unfortunately, on the run, fighting for sheer survival." There are of course protests today, he concludes, but they are isolated and "appear to be purely defensive counter-reactions, rarely converging into a common critique".

Kafkaesque: *Lettre* editor Karsten Wind Meyhoff talks to Russian philosopher [Michail Ryklin](#) about the life of a dissident in Russia — and elsewhere: "If you've read Kafka you have the situation in a nutshell. In fact, we're living a Kafka life. But also the US has become Kafkaesque. Take Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib... Kafka wrote three books. *America* is a description of America. *The Trial* is a description of Europe. And *The Castle* is Russia after the October Revolution. Today, these novels describe the situation better than ever before."

Also: Russian-Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour's work "A space exodus" (Palestine on the moon! Political utopia or a real option?). And [Timothy Snyder](#)'s essay "[Holocaust: The ignored reality](#)", revealing the true dimension of Nazi and Soviet mass killing policies in the 1930s and 40s.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Lettre Internationale* (Denmark) 19 (2009)

Lettera internazionale 101 (2009)



"Has the Wall really fallen completely?" asks *Lettera Internazionale* of the twentieth anniversary on the collapse of the socialist system. Péter Nádas, whose contribution charts a long development from the communist past into the democratic present, answers in the negative.

Under the dictatorship and its commando economy there arose a shadow economy and a culture of simulation, which together made up a parallel reality. In this parallel world — aimless, without a future, and devoted solely to everyday survival — all qualities of civil behaviour were lost. It even took hold of language, which degenerated into the crude expression of contempt for one's self and others.

This anti-social parallel society survived the collapse, according to Nádas. It clings to its clandestine, corrupt structures, its raw forms of behaviour and its amoral language. Disastrously lacking in self-confidence and a sense of self-worth, which are linked with the eternal role as victim and the search for a scapegoat, not only is it no longer capable of remembering and working over the past, and of admitting its moral failure, but it is also irreconcilable with an economy of free competitors, legality and a democratic state order.

Russia: This former parallel culture is also in power in Russia. "The current leaders", writes historian Yuri Afanesev, "see in the Russian state an instrument for robbery at a national, or better still, at a global level." In their case, the old, messianic idea of empire that continued to guide Stalin's regime of terror is nothing but a bluff, writes Afanesev. In their war on the interior, however, the criminal mentality of the authorities has created the necessary conditions for the criminalization of the social fabric as a whole.

Also: In a "small apology for the book", Nobel laureate Le Clézio writes: "Culture is our common good, a good belonging to humanity. However in order for that to be true, one has to have the means to access it. The book, archaic as it is, is the ideal instrument for that." And editor [Biancamaria Bruno](#) notes that eastern and western European history-writing does not coincide.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Lettera internazionale* 101 (2009)

The Hungarian Quarterly 196 (2009)



Interviewed in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, historian [Mark Kramer](#) contests [Lazlo Borhi's](#) argument that the threat of regional chaos led the western nations to support preserving the *status quo* as the events of '89 unfolded:

"It's easy nowadays, with the benefit of hindsight, to argue that Western governments were too timid and too modest in their goals. But many people at the time were worried about the limits of Moscow's tolerance and the prospect of a violent crackdown if events proceeded too fast and too far. These concerns were perfectly understandable, even if ultimately unfounded."

People in eastern Europe like to think they played an important part in the changes of '89, points out interviewer and *HVG* editor András Schweitzer; at the same time, they are aware that "it is not the tail that wags the dog": "The drastic change in Soviet policy was a necessary condition, but it wasn't a sufficient condition", replies Kramer. "The sufficient condition was the combination of the change in Soviet policy and the willingness of millions of east European people to take that opportunity into their own hands and push for radical change before it could be stopped."

Roma: [Zoltán Tábori reports](#) from Tatárszentgyörgy, where in February 2009 a house belonging to a Roma was torched and the owner and his son murdered, the seventh in a series of attacks that left six Roma dead and three injured. Tábori's conversations with Roma and non-Roma villagers gives a disturbing insight into the spiral of crime and resentment in small communities facing increasing competition for employment and education.

The full [table of contents](#) of *The Hungarian Quarterly* 196 (2009)

Osteuropa 11/2009



The end of the Soviet Union was no mere change of political order but the dissolution of a way of life, writes [Karl Schlögel](#) in an essay on Russia twenty years after 1989. What is mutually exclusive elsewhere stands next to one another in Russia: boom towns and ghost towns, dynamism and stasis, personal responsibility and the authoritarian state. "Russia was fortunate to be able to enjoy a regular income from oil and gas,

however also unfortunate, because it relieved the country of the inevitable pressure to modernize."

"Now that the global crisis has also gripped Russia, and the reserves are largely exhausted, the moment of truth has come — as it has everywhere. [...] Perhaps it is only now that the authoritarian notion of wanting to control this large country via a power vertical from top to bottom will become impossible. [...] Perhaps only now will it become apparent what the political subordination of the press and the transformation of television into a conformist world of advertising, soap operas, soft porn and pseudo-patriotic retro-culture has contributed to the crippling of social vigilance and presence of mind, without which the country cannot find a way out of the crisis."

Poland: [Boguslaw Bakula describes](#) how a cultural "autism" that had developed in Poland during communism gave way to "nomadic discourses" when political restrictions and censorship fell away after '89. "The silent transcendence of the victims — an attitude that fed on the conviction of superiority of the national tradition over the [...] imposed rules of Soviet social life [...] collided with a new opponent: the West. Propagating consumerist, mostly atheist forms of participation in society, it threw into question a cultural model in which a sole ideological force (party, nation, church) dominated."

"One of the paradoxes of the upheavals", writes Bakula, "was that the Left, formerly the bearers of the communist state, rapidly changed its image by emphasizing its proximity to postmodernism, feminism and liberalism, and by

periodically coming forward as pro-American. Those who had returned from exile, meanwhile, instead of worldly open-mindedness, often brought with them a provincial culture marked by extreme religiosity, distrust of western liberalism, and not seldom racist prejudices. The rapid takeover of the local press by German companies was often perceived as an attack on Polish identity; ironically, however, today it is precisely these publications that defend the idea of a 'small *Heimat*' against a centralist state."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Osteuropa* 11/2009

Arena 6/2009



This autumn, the debate about the veil finally reached Sweden. Wrangling about the *hijab*, the *burka* and the *niqab* has for a long time been a feature of the public discussion in most European countries with Muslim populations, but it was only recently, when two women at a school in Stockholm were forbidden to wear the *niqab*, that the Swedish debate took off. *Arena* asked several pundits for their opinion on whether a ban on the *niqab* and the *burka* in schools and in public places is discriminatory.

Most seem to agree that a general ban is a bad idea but that certain professions come with a dress code. "It is for example not suitable for a social worker to make a home call in a Muslim family scantily clad", says [Pernilla Ouis](#). Similarly, the "suitability" of the veil must be judged on a case to case basis.

Andreas Malm, author of the widely discussed book *Islamofobi* (Islamophobia), goes further: "If the *niqab* is oppressing women, this can't be changed by legislating against it — just as you can't forbid women to have twelve children, or to become housewives or porn actresses. You have to be very naive to think that the European wave of veil bans has been motivated by feminist convictions."

Journalists Haideh Daragahi and [Arne Ruth](#), on the other hand, stress the veil's function as a symbol of "a social message that describes women as different and inferior but also controllable". Their conclusion is that all forms of the veil, including the *hijab*, should be forbidden for children under the age of 18. For adults the veil should be voluntary, but society — especially the women's movement — must make sure that women who regard the veil as necessary or acceptable are aware of the implications of the *hijab* from a rights perspective. "Moulding opinion against sexual discrimination is a form of democratic educational work", write Daragahi and Ruth. The state should support such endeavours, but "limit itself to rights-based education and uphold laws and regulations that prevent all types of discrimination on the grounds of group affiliation".

Also: The [RiLi interview](#) with [Nancy Fraser](#), where she talks about the fall of communism and the future of leftist politics; and *Arena* also publishes [Timothy Snyder's](#) essay "[Holocaust: The ignored reality](#)".

The full [table of contents](#) of *Arena* 6/2009

Reset 115 (2009)



Reset may have altered its format — it has become smaller and easier to handle — but its perspective of "liberal reformism" remains the same, according to the publisher [Giancarlo Bosetti](#). Taking its starting point with the sex scandals surrounding Silvio Berlusconi, *Reset* devotes a feature to the "female future". American feminist [Martha Nussbaum](#) notes in interview the achievements of the emancipation movement, as well as the goals not yet reached, which above all include the equal positioning of men and women in politics.

In order to change a situation where the body is "the only link between men and women in politics", and "a career in the entertainment industry the only hope and dream of young Italian women", journalist Mariella Gramaglia offers ten practical suggestions to Gianfranco Fini, current president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. Her advice includes employing a commission of female lawyers to check legal norms against sexual representation. This demand is all the more timely, given that in Berlusconi's Italy, as Carola Susani points out, the sexual predisposition of women is a criteria in the appointment of (female) political staff.

Sonia Ghandi: The Italian-born Sonia Ghandi, who serves as prototype for women in politics, adorns the cover of the issue. Claudio Landi follows her trajectory from the side of her husband, who was murdered in 1991, to adroit leader of the Indian National Congress party. By declining the post of Prime Minister she was able to weaken Indian nationalism. The intelligent strategy of sharing power with a Sikh, despite the fact that her husband's killer belonged to the same religious group, was of historical significance and contributed much to the success of the Indian National Congress in the last elections, writes Landi.

Also: The philosopher [Ramin Jahanbegloo](#) looks at the revolts following the presidential election in Iran and at the weak reaction of the West, which he argues has been completely subordinated to the nuclear question.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Reset* 115 (2009)

Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) 12/2009



"I am a woman, I am a socialist, divorced and an agnostic. Thus I am combining four grave sins. But we will work together perfectly well", Michele Bachelet assured the high-ranking members of the military when she was appointed Chilean minister of defence in 2002.

Her sins did not prevent the Chileans from electing Bachelet as Chile's first female president in 2005, writes Libio Pérez in the German edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*. With her agenda of "social protection", she has changed the political culture of the country dramatically, writes Pérez: "Michele Bachelet improved public healthcare, introduced a savings system for pensions that provides more than a million people with a 'solidarity pension', and established a network of 300 crèches that has facilitated the integration of women into the labour market."

Although Chile will celebrate its 200th anniversary of independence in 2010 while still marked as a "developing country", and although inequality of income distribution has hit a record, the country was affected much less by the financial crisis than most others. "Bachelet's economy team took counter-cyclical precautionary measures. When the price for copper was at an international historical high, income was saved and more than 25.5 million US dollars accrued. [...] When, at the beginning of 2008, the first signs of recession showed, Bachelet opened up the public savings box. This mainly explains her popularity."

Yet Bachelet did not follow the Latin-American fashion of changing the constitution in order to run for a second term, and will leave the presidential palace in March. The first ballot of the presidential elections last Sunday saw the conservative candidate, billionaire Sebastian Piñera, in the lead.

Exponential singularity: Philippe Rivière presents Singularity University in Silicon Valley, a new academy for futurologists based on Moore's Law: the number of transistors that can fit onto a computer chip at the same cost doubles every two years. The same goes for technical progress as such, which proceeds exponentially. "Singularity", Rivière writes, "marks the point when technological development will be so fast that a person of average intelligence will not be able to follow it."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) 12/2009

Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 12/2009



Riccardo Petrella sees little, if any, hope for a "Copenhagen deal" in spite of all good intentions: "The leaders of the planet's two main polluters [the US and China] agreed to work for the success of the Copenhagen conference [...], but they did not specify how they would contribute to this."

The situation appears absurd, continues Petrella, "considering that the awareness of a global 'environmental crisis' has reached even the dullest of minds. Never before have so many spoken up to limit -- and in the long run to remove -- two large obstacles: the commercialization of our planet, and the 'historical' refusal of the US to agree to anything that limits their freedoms and interests."

Those in power have reduced the question of the future of mankind to the "economically effective" management of natural resources, based on confrontations between the interests of the free market economy, where the survival of the fittest is what counts. "This has made it impossible to negotiate a real global political agreement about the future of mankind and life on Earth," states Petrella.

Palm balmy: As an example of a market-based use of resources, Cédric Gouverneur writes about the redistribution of crops in Indonesia, where palm oil has taken over as the main product. A largely self-sufficient people now finds that a product that was meant to increase their wealth, and which should even be environmentally friendly, is instead making them poorer. Forests have been replaced with palm oil plantations, enriching a few people while stealing

the livelihood from the majority. "The companies are only thinking of financial gain and not of the sustainable management of resources, which is what we had for generations", Sugino, a local elder, tells Gouveneur.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) 12/2009

Arche 9/2009



Arche features Lithuanian historians selected specially for the Belarusian readers by Darius Staliunas, whose book *Making Russians. The Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* has generated discussion about the common history of Belarus and Lithuania in the nineteenth century.

The issue opens with a preface by Stockholm-based Belarusian historian Andrej Katlarchuk, who tries to answer the question why current Belarusian historiography is so backward and provincial in comparison to its Lithuanian counterpart.

Starting in the fifteenth century, Ruta Capaite draws on contemporary correspondence to discuss everyday life in the court of Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania, including receptions, feasts, the exchange of gifts, entertainments (musicians, jesters, dwarves, hunting) and information about the Duke's health. Moving into the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Inge Luksaite leaves no doubt that the affirmative action of the Prussian rulers towards ethnic minorities, above all the support of publishing in the native language, provided a sound basis for the Lithuanian national revival.

Entering the nineteenth century, Darius Staliunas highlights the ambiguity of Russian imperial policy towards Belarusians, which despite dogmatism gave some opportunity for Belarusian nation-building.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Arche* 9/2009

A Prior Magazine 19 (2009)



In *A Prior*, Rudi Laermans analyses the extension of the neoliberal market model into the realms of healthcare, education and culture: "Governmental bodies non longer deal with citizens but serve clients, and at high schools and universities professors don't instruct students but offer educational goods to consumers. [...] Government agencies or universities are publicly rated after extensive audits by expert commissions that take into account the average customer satisfaction and a handful of output indicators (in the case of universities, the number of publications in international journals and the amount of money raised). The ratings stimulate competition and give the neoliberal gardening state criteria for future levels of funding."

Reinventing Flaubert: Olivia Pender's project based on Flaubert's novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, presenting a series of texts and images on topics following the chapters of the novel. They include an interview with former EU

Commissioner for Agriculture Franz Fischler (Chapter II, "Agriculture, Landscape Gardening, Food preservation"), who describes how "farmers like somebody who is able to speak the same language and who knows how to milk a cow. [...] It doesn't make sense if you speak to a farmer and you use pictures from a philosopher". The sense of the superfluity of intellectual knowledge runs throughout the work:

"Bouvard and Pécuchet live amidst a pre-industrial culture of embedded knowledge, where ancient practices endure, even flourish", writes Neil Cummings. "On the other hand, everything they know is learned vicariously, acquired, studied and accumulated as capital to be reinvested. And yet, as their financial capital dwindles, all their knowledge is returned to them as failure; incapable of feeding themselves, unable to socialize, Bouvard and Pécuchet are alienated from life itself. [...] Flaubert's satire foresaw the middle class as a new cognitive proletariat. Adrift in a world of their own making and alienated by knowledge, this is the curse of the middle class, and we are all middle class now."

The full [table of contents](#) of *A Prior Magazine* 19 (2009)

The Eurozine review is published with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union and Allianz Kulturstiftung.

Published 2009-12-16
Original in English
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