



Eurozine Review

Razors in the pockets

Magyar Lettre tells of blood-feuds and sworn virginity; *Intellectum* hears why forensic scientists need people skills; *Mittelweg 36* returns ideology to the centre of the Soviet everyday; *Arena* outsources the brain; *Naqd* acknowledges the resourcefulness of migrants; *Arche* finds Belarusian literature in a vacuum; *L'Espill* reprints classics of Catalan nationalism; *Le Monde diplomatique* observes the world-wide identity pandemic; *Akadeemia* hopes Pavlov's reflex can save solidarity; and *Springerin* reviles capitalist blood sports.

Magyar Lettre Internationale 75 (2009)



Magyar Lettre Internationale publishes a [short story](#) by Hungarian–Armenian writer–anthropologist [Kinga Kali](#) (translated for Eurozine by Judith Sollosy). An Albanian girl is fleeing her rural clan, which lives according to the Kanun, the archaic Albanian legal code notorious for its blood feuds. The communist authorities are trying to stamp out the Kanun, while the girl's father is determined she upholds the family honour. In the absence of brothers, she is forced to become a "sworn virgin", an honorary male; this brings with it intellectual freedoms, but imposes physical hardships and denies her sexuality.

Hence she finds herself caught between two repressive systems: communism on the one hand, with its assault on traditional practices and the consolations of religion, and a cruel and backward patriarchy on the other. Raped by her father before her helpless mother, she flees across the mountains to the Bosnian city of Tuzla, the epitome of urban modernity, suffering further ordeals along the way. Yet what appears to be divine intervention inspires confidence that she will reach her destination and become "a respected woman and free, and never again a sworn virgin".

Culturalism: [Jens–Martin Eriksen](#) and [Frederik Stjernfelt](#) argue that the controversy on multiculturalism has changed the political fronts. While the Left defends respect for minority cultures, the Right stands guard over the national culture, these merely variants of a culturalist ideology.

Also: A selection of some of the best writers in Denmark today, including Henrik Norbrandt, Christina Hesselholdt and Suzanne Brøgger; Hungarian novelist and dramatist Andras Palyi talks about his revolt with his religious and conservative upbringing; and [Endre Kukorelly](#) reflects on Anglo–Hungarian relations (mainly from the perspective of football).

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Intellectum 6 (2009)



In *Intellectum*, forensic anthropologist [Sue Black](#) tells editor [Victor Tsilonis](#) how she came to work in a field that would horrify most people. "The truth is nobody ever really forces us to do anything. It does come down to a choice. Do we want to do it or not? Is there a responsibility on us to find it? Sometimes we forget that maybe we need to ask more questions and learn the truth about a situation we are getting into. Then we have the right to say no."

In 1999, Black joined a British UN forensic team investigating mass graves in Kosovo; it was one of the first of such missions, and the fighting had yet to cease entirely. "I was aware we were entering a war zone", she comments, "that there were snipers in the hillside, explosive devices and clothing with hypodermic syringes and razors in the pockets." Since then, Black has been to Sierra Leone, investigating the deaths of UN soldiers, and Iraq, where she identified the remains of reporters working for British television. Yet despite everything, says Black, she loves what she does:

"My job is to tell you what it is you are looking at, so as to be able to identify it. If it is human or not, and if it is which part of the human is it? Is there anything interesting about that part? And eventually it comes down to who the person is. It is not about how they died or about the nature of the death, it's about the person. Anatomy is a really people-based science."

Gaza: In January 2009, as "Operation Cast Lead" in the Gaza Strip drew to a close, the NGO Physicians for Human Rights brought a case against the Israeli state for failing to meet its international humanitarian obligations as an occupying force. The Israeli High Court ruled that the Israeli army "potentially" controlled Gaza during the hostilities (a positive ruling that overturned the narrower criteria of "actual" occupation); here, Susan Power analyses the legal status of the territory.

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Mittelweg 36 1/2010



In *Mittelweg 36*, [Jochen Hellbeck](#) criticizes postmodernist historians' approach to everyday life in totalitarian societies. It underrates the role of ideology at the individual level, he argues, failing to explain why the Soviet and Nazi regimes generated absolute commitment.

What needs to be asked is "what ideology offered to individuals in substantive terms, independently of its instrumentalist uses. Why was it appealing, and what about it was appealing? Which parts of the ideological text did an individual appropriate, and what were the effects of this productive encounter between ideology and the self?"

Hellbeck is interested in individuals' "active and creative participation in the appropriation of ideology, a process that asked them to rework, rather than abandon, subjective experiences. Ideology worked by compelling individuals to read the world through its lens, to structure their sense of self and thereby render it meaningful. This was a creative task that could assume as many different shapes as the number of individual subjects it produced. Individuals poured considerable subjective labour into this process. Raising psychological experience to ideological consciousness was a demanding challenge that kept generating contradictions, moments of failure, and occasions of doubt."

Double persecution: The Bavarian communists Anna Etterer and Franz Schwarzmüller participated in the anti-Nazi resistance and were imprisoned in concentration camps, then emigrated to the Soviet Union where they were caught up in the Stalinist terror. Reinhard Müller reconstructs their biographies via official documents and letters:

"In these ego-documents, party loyalty combines with dissent, Bolshevik speak with Bavarian obstinacy. Going beyond communist myth-making, these personal accounts provide a means of interpreting the history of the communist mentality, of the ambivalence of dream and trauma during Stalinism."

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Arena 1/2010



In a thought-provoking section in the new *Arena* on "The dispersal of the individual", Isobel Hadley-Kamptz notes that the political and philosophical history of the western world is based on the idea of indivisible and isolated individuals, while both neuroscience and the digital revolution show that human creativity works differently.

"We are in the midst of an upheaval that is as fundamental as the introduction of the written word. What makes the computer and Internet revolutions so fascinating is that for the first time we are outsourcing our brains to something that immediately and in a measurable way talks back to us."

"In the instantaneous and eternal feedback loops that trigger our brains in discussions on IRC channels, on blogs and Twitter, or in the collective creativity taking place in EtherPads, mindsets are transformed from the experience of isolation to the experience of community. [...] Observed from the outside, these 'slime formations' might seem exclusive and elitist. An outsider might have difficulties entering, since the communication is so intensive that it takes place between words, in the direct contact points between the communicating minds. The boundaries of the shared brain have thus been redrawn, while the borders between individual subjects have been dissolved."

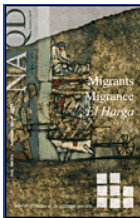
Male slime: The concept of "slime" is used also by [Karl Palmås](#) as a metaphor for understanding the socialization of the "dispersed individual". Taking his

lead from the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, Palmås [analyses](#) human society in terms of "information traffic". It is not the actions of individuals that are observed, as in the Foucauldian panopticon, rather those of the mass.

In a society where the individual has become unlimited, degrees of corporate and state surveillance are unprecedented. But "a world in which the individual is dispersed, along with the theories about this world, also has the potential to disperse power structures", writes Palmås. In the "sluggish hierarchy's pursuit of the force of interconnected minds [...] progressive no-longer-individuals can find new strategies."

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Naqd 26–27 (2010)



The new issue of Algerian journal *Naqd* tackles issues of migration, and particularly the resourcefulness of migrants. [Saïd Belguidoum reconstructs](#) daily life in a small shantytown (*bidonville*) founded by Tunisian immigrant workers in Cassis, near Marseille, in the 1960s. The settlement, a successful example of informal accommodation, survived until 2005, when its remaining inhabitants were re-housed in new social housing on the old site.

housing on the old site.

Drawing on a study from the mid-1990s, Belguidoum describes how the 100 mostly middle-aged male inhabitants formed a hidden ghetto, adapting to physical, material and legal restrictions. Life was extremely simple and cramped, with one communal television and clear separation between private, familial, social or religious spaces. Strict rules applied, against alcohol or having women as guests for instance, and a "village chief" was designated to represent the settlement to the authorities.

Constant ambiguities "between the explicit and the implicit, ephemeral and durable" characterized this way of life. Offending against planning permission would jeopardize their home, preventing them from improving their standard of living, though these builders and manual workers by trade would have been well equipped to do so. Nevertheless, the "silent" inhabitants could take advantage of their "forgotten" employment status in not needing to pay rent. Paradoxically, the settlement became a "place that protected them from the outside world", from "an otherness which they were wary of" but also "which they knew did not want them".

Victimization: Emmanuel Terray observes that NGOs defending illegal immigrants in Europe stress the denial of their human rights and the need for compassion. This typecast "victim" status may be accurate, but it takes insufficient account of the *proactive* aspect of migrants, who take charge of their own destiny with remarkable resourcefulness.

[More](#) about *Naqd*

Arche 10/2009



Arche publishes a lively roundtable discussion with writers and publishers on the problems facing contemporary Belarusian literature, moderated by the poet Andrei Chadanovich. The debate quickly centres on the question of Belarusian identity, with Viktor Martinovich remarking that, "when we talk about Belarusian writers, there is at least the language factor. When we talk about Belarusian art, and try to determine whether Marc Chagall was a Belarusian artist or not, or perhaps a Jewish artist, the language factor is absent; colours all speak the same language."

Martinovich would himself like to be perceived as a Belarusian author, despite the fact that his recent and highly acclaimed novel *Paranoia* is written in Russian and published in St Petersburg. Finding a Belarusian publisher for his "tale of love in a time of dictatorship" — moreover one that would have got the book into the shops and paid him a share of the profits — would have been impossible.

That the Belarusian book market (or bazaar, as Chadanovich puts it) yields little for its authors is something Uladzimier Arlou knows from bitter experience; writers are not to be blamed for having to depend on commissions and patronage, he says. For that reason, Barys Piatrovich believes that writers and publishers should be courageous enough to "collaborate" with the authorities up to a point; in his journal *Dziejaslou*, he tries to emphasize the literary value of a text over political considerations, and to present contemporary Belarusian literature in all its facets.

Martinovich sees a central problem in the fact that the state controls the channels of distribution: for that reason alone Belarusian literature cannot be commercially successful. How, wonders Chadanovich, is the author of the great Belarusian novel supposed to subsist until the royalties and fee come with publication? Perhaps set themselves up abroad, like the novelist Alhierd Bacharevich? "Belarusian literature is distributed like marijuana", adds Maria Martysievich. Nevertheless, the real reason the Belarusian novel has such a hard time, she conjectures, is because the Minsk underground, with its two lines, is just too short for readers. The only hope rests with the regional trains...

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L'Espill 32 (2009)



"A third of all human deaths — approximately 18 million a year — have poverty-related causes," writes philosophy professor Rosa Canal in *L'Espill*. Indeed, recent world events as disparate as the Haiti earthquake disaster and the furore surrounding Barack Obama's bid to introduce universal health care in the US have highlighted that access to adequate healthcare and medicine are still issues that affect both the poorest and the richest nations.

Canal argues that the pharmaceutical industry itself has done much to exacerbate the problem of global poverty. The large firms' monopoly on the market, and the fact that numerous patented drugs are sold at as much as 1000 times their cost of production, are the major factors making medicines inaccessible to an even wider range of people.

Regional discontent: Rafael Xambó reviews Antoni Segura's new book *Euskadi. Crònica d'una desesperança* (Basque country: A chronicle of despair), which records the complex twists and turns of the Basque conflict from the origins of ETA in the late 1950s up until the present day. "This is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand more about the Basque situation," writes Xambó.

Catalan classics: Joan Fuster, the literary pride of Valencia and arguably the most important Catalan essayist of the post-civil war generation, was a great advocate of *Països Catalans* (Catalan countries) and a key leader of Valencian contemporary nationalism. Baltasar Porcel was a Mallorca-born writer and journalist who spent much of his latter years in Barcelona, until his death in 2009. Best known for his novels, articles and short stories in *La Vanguardia*, Porcel was also a strong advocate for the autonomy of the Catalan people. Articles by both writers are reprinted in this issue.

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Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 2/2010



A spectre is haunting Europe, writes [Remi Nilsen](#) in *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo). The political Right wants a debate about national identity, with the aim of excluding anyone who falls outside. In Denmark, the attempt to identify "Danish values" has been going on for a decade, through the method of negation: pointing out what is *not* compatible.

They are not alone. In Switzerland, a referendum went against the building of minarets, and in France Michele Alliot suggested that men who let their wives wear a burqa should lose their citizenship, since "they seem not to share our values".

Nilsen warns: "The tendency to qualify citizenship is built on a creepy logic from the first half of the last century, when European states abandoned the idea that citizenship is an undeniable right and instead introduced the notion that it is something one has to earn. [...] Instead of universality, equality before the law, there is a new force that wants to hand out rights based on super-judicial ideas about each individual's closeness to certain 'values'. What gives these 'values' a certain value is a little muddy."

Identity pandemic: The Ivory Coast and Uzbekistan are two seemingly incompatible cultures, yet each represent a perfect example of the application of identity politics, writes Laurent Bazin. Comparing the two "makes it possible to grasp the difference between the nationalism of the 1950s and 60s, which was based in de-colonization, and the nationalism which took over in the 1990s, which is often a reconstruction of original identities."

Both countries are now dependent on a construed identity of origin that is deeply restrictive and exclusive. And in both cases, the situation is made worse by the economic crisis. "Uzbekistan has gone from being a superpower to a society in ruins, paid work has all but dried up, life is a gamble. The country is struck by mass-poverty and people are fleeing. In Ivory Coast, the financial crisis of the 1980s led to factory closures and mass dismissals. Structural adjustment programmes disqualified the elites and threw shadows over a

nation that saw itself as the most developed of the West African countries", states Bazin.

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Akadeemia 2/2010



In the 1990s, social sciences emphasized the survival of the fittest. Networks of support were downrated and individual responsibility was all the rage: every man for himself. But then came the economic crisis, and with that the demand for a network of solidarity, writes Mare Leino in *Akadeemia*.

The precondition for solidarity is empathy, he states, drawing on the works of the American social psychologist George Herbert Mead. In larger groups, both empathy and solidarity decrease because of dispersal of responsibility. Another factor is the level of familiarity: communication problems between strangers inhibit generosity, which is why urban dwellers are considered less helpful. People in stressful environments protect themselves from emotional pressure by paying less attention to those in need. What seem to be acts of solidarity within a group can also be fear of condemnation or unwillingness to take risks.

Leino still finds that the concept has its use. "It cannot be excluded that people need a symbolic safety net. An appeal to solidarity does not cost anything but it can trigger a positive, if vague, association with something great or beautiful. Perhaps something resembling Pavlov's reflex is formed — when appealing to solidarity, at least people do not do anything foolish; some will stand to attention, some may even do a good deed."

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Springerin 1/2010



"What is the 'artificial world model' that contemporary civilization has come to embody under the influence of speculative finance?" In an issue of *Springerin* on globalism, Brian Holmes sees at the heart of present-day capitalism a hunting-party of animalistic traders fanatically chasing down derivatives, one another, and the savings of small and gullible investors. This has transformed society into what James K. Galbraith calls "predator states": "a form of governance without any notion of solidarity, which encourages everyone to aspire to the condition of the hunter, while at the same time delivering them over to the opposite fate of the prey."

Now, as the speculative economy lies in ruins, how are other destinies to be imagined? "What has disappeared from the networked cultures of casino capitalism is the willingness to engage in political conflict, even while the civilizational forces of Thanatos, or unbridled aggression, bear down on the biosphere. Now it is those aggressive drives that must be sublimated and channelled into a necessary struggle. Rather than draping aesthetic and epistemological veils over blatant expropriation, shouldn't artists and

knowledge workers seek political confrontations with those who set the rules of the game?"

Critical transregionality: Erden Kosova considers contemporary Turkish art's outlandish position amidst a flurry of nationalist, anti-capitalist and globalist claims; and Nancy Adajania calls for a move towards "critical transregionality".

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