

Abstracts

Muslims - a minority in Europe

By Birgitte Schetelern Johansen and Dorthe Høvids Possing

Nation states have long been dominant factors on which both political measures and many fields in academic work in political science have been based. To a great extent, this has determined the scope for the understanding of group relations, and formation of and strategies linked with identity in a Western European context. This is also the case when studying Islam and Muslims in Western Europe. Using a minority/theoretical system of concepts as a starting point, the author of this article analyses a number of Muslim reactions to the debate on the prohibition of headscarves in France which all – in one way or another – challenged the national argumentation of the French government. These reactions show that other circumstances are often considered to be more important than the national, such as membership in a Muslim fellowship involving persons situated in widely differing geographical contexts, and which thus transcend the borders of the nation state and enter into what may be termed a transnational space. But the reactions also show that being a Muslim for many individuals involves a relationship not only to other people, but also to God – a relationship which opens what may be termed a transcendental context. By means of such reactions, Muslims assume a power of self-definition and of defining their own position relative to the nation states. The author therefore postulates that by using a one-sided focus on the national context as a framework for relations between people, one runs a risk of overlooking other important dimensions for the creation of identity among Muslims. One can, for example, consider whether Muslims who have a transnational orientation as members of a global and transcendent fellowship can at all be seen to have a minority status in a Western European context.

The socio-economic relevance of transnational ethnic relations in the border area between Indonesia and Malaysia

By Michael Eilenberg

This article is a presentation of how identity and local life strategies and praxis among the Iban people of western Kalimantan over the years have been adapted to and formed by the

continuously changing circumstances of the international border region between Indonesia and Malaysia. The main argument is that life in this kind of border region creates common interests between the people who live there. This allows for an identification of some predominant border-region characteristics which differentiate the border regions and its inhabitants from the main national culture. The author seeks to indicate how the existence of the international border between Indonesia and Malaysia contributes to diverse cross-border praxes which can be seen as important economical and social strategies among the Iban people, as well as being interesting examples of how transnational identities are created.

Life of a wanderer

By Katja Hyry

This article deals with the lifehistorical tradition of Karelian refugees. The refugees have crossed two borders: the first from Dvina Karelia to Finland in 1920s and the second from Finland to Sweden in 1948.

The refugees began their first flight after the unsuccessful Karelian uprising in the early 1920s. Approximately 11.500 Karelians crossed the border and fled to Finland in 1921-1922. Most of them ended up in the industrial cities of the north. During the WWII, many of them sent their children to Sweden as so called war children. After the War, the Ingrians in Finland were repatriated to the Soviet Union in accordance with terms of the Peace Treaty. Faced with this situation, thousands of them fled to Sweden. In addition, thousands of Karelians also crossed the western border of Finland in fear of similar repatriation.

The present study is based on research material collected in Dvina Karelia, Finland and Sweden in 1989-1995. The lifehistorical interviews were collected by the author. Karelian refugees have constituted minority populations in Russia, in Finland and also in Sweden. The lifehistorical tradition of these refugees may therefore be their only kind of history – as told from the minority's own point of view. For these refugees, memories – and remembering them – are very important. They are the means by which they can travel back home. They are also the means by which they belong to the new society. The fact of remembering aids in creating one's new identity in a new situation, as a Karelian in Finland and in Sweden.

Japanese cuisine in Europe: From “Japanese for the Japanese” to “Creolisation”

By Lee Milligan

The aim of the following paper is to investigate how Japanese cuisine has become diffused within Europe, and to analyse the apparent changing role of Japanese nationals in this process. Research, undertaken in the spring and summer of 2005, was concentrated around restaurants and takeaways in three European cities: Aarhus in Denmark, Liverpool in Great Britain, and Athens in Greece. The main research area was that of diffusion and of how Japanese cuisine became a part of European culinary life in the cases studied. The main stages on this process were: the capturing of a niche in the local market; resultant indirect-Japanisation from other

countries, with the USA and Britain often playing a prominent role; a lack of authenticity in the Japanese cuisine produced, including a certain level of “creolisation” in the adaptation of both cuisine and décor to local tastes; a lack of knowledge among customers and employees; the use of “cultural capital” by many Japanese employees in utilising their nationality rather than relevant experience to gain employment; a seemingly bright future for the diffusion process in the three cities studied. Subsequently this has contributed further to the limited research already undertaken in the field of “Japanisation”, described by Burt Edstrom as “a process by which Japanese elements are transposed to, and assimilated by, other countries or cultures” (Edstrom, 1994: 36). One of the main areas studied was the way in which Japanese nationals have played less and less of a direct role in this diffusion over the course of time, according to the main authors on the topic. The process apparently progresses from a direct and overriding Japanese influence aimed at the Japanese population in Europe, to a notion of “creolisation” wherein “authentic Japanese cuisine” has been altered by non-Japanese individuals to meet local tastes.

Our Culture or our Cultures?

By Maria Walaszek

The paper deals with the problem of students from different European countries (and therefore different cultures) meeting while studying abroad. The author identifies two main tendencies in Europe today. One is to combine the forces of several different countries in terms of politics as well as culture (the European Union is an excellent example of this). The other is to place strong emphasis on the uniqueness of each ethnic group. This situation affects the way in which students regard each other. Immediately after leaving their native country, young people usually prefer to think of how equal they all are and how much they all have in common. Then, eventually, it appears they are not as united as they might imagine. During a half-year stay in Turku, Finland, as an exchange student, the author observed that students tended to form smaller groups and that these groups were often based on ethnic similarities. Poles met with other Poles, Czechs and Slovaks. Italians stayed with Italians and Spaniards, Germans and Austrians hung out together. Observing such behaviour, which is not an absolute rule, led to the question of ‘why’, and to attempts to discover the consequences it might have. The author conducted an informal survey among the students, mostly Polish, and became aware of some tendencies. Everyone wants to be tolerant and to meet others. When they finally meet other people, however, they do not always find common grounds for conversation. This has various reasons, mostly cultural. Even if the students share a common background in terms of history (ancient Greece and Rome, Christianity) and popular culture (bands, actors, brands) etc., there is still a lot more concealed in our national surroundings that seem to make it impossible to forget about the division between East and West. The author claims that the differences which make it hard to find a language of communication have their roots in our cultures. These same roots enable easy understanding between, for example, central-European Slavs. The author also addresses the problems to language barriers, attitudes towards others and also patriotism, and looks for the changes that the students underwent after studying abroad.

The risk society of fast food. A cultural analysis of the new McDonald's

By Marek Stefaniak

Fast-food chains such as McDonald's have lately become associated with a number of health risks, not the least in connection with the growing problems of overweight in the Western world. In Sweden this resulted in McDonald's carrying out a number of changes in their marketing and range of selection during 2004. McDonald's new concept deals with persuading their customers to begin living a more healthy life especially by getting more exercise and by eating more beneficial food. Generally speaking, our consumption and our habits have undergone an individualisation in which the individual in this case is encouraged to take control of its body and thus control even of its identity. McDonald's have also introduced food products with less fat and sugar content on their menu while continuing to sell less healthy fast food. McDonald's would like to see us balance these different types of food. This illustrates how contemporary food-stuffs are characterised by a paradoxal ideal in which we first are encouraged to eat healthy and retain control of our bodies, but also to eat less healthy and give expression to feelings with our bodies. By using an emotional rhetoric in marketing the healthy food, McDonald's attempts to give us the impression of eating healthfully and still give expression to feelings or enjoyment with a less jeopardised conscience. The health risks in fast food also involve the fact that McDonald's production line is global and thus difficult for consumers to assess. This results in a certain lack of trust in McDonald's. In order to increase our trust in McDonald's, the concern have become more candid about their production line, at the same time as they emphasise their very strict quality control. McDonald's have in addition begun cooperating with a number of national experts in order to provide us with both vital advice and the impression that a global McDonald's can communicate with us in the context of our own lives. In the final analysis, the new fast-food culture involves an increased reflexivity; partly concerning McDonald's who have changed their concept and partly concerning us consumers who are increasingly forced to consider our own life styles and to accept responsibility for them. Fast food has long been associated with rationalism due to its efficient production and consumption. Now this rationalism has become a matter of eating healthy and safely.