A Short Cultural History of Poland

A Story of an Extraordinary People
Editorial

Poland

We devote this issue to one of Europe’s most dynamic nations, which also happens to be our host country for the next SIETAR Europa Congress. Polish history dates back more than a thousand years and has been marked by invasions and foreign occupation. But overcoming hardship is almost a national religion and the Poles have learned to take their fate into their own hands. They are a people who never give up, no matter how dire the circumstances. (p. 5-6)

We also delve into Polish identity in an interview with Anna Lubecka, professor of Cross-cultural Communication at Jagiellonian University. She offers a passionate view of what it means to be a Pole and why the new post-Communist generation wants not only to discover the world, but also to help shape it (p. 2-4).

In order to experience this extraordinary country first-hand, the SIETAR Europa board has chosen Krakow, the seat of Polish culture, for September’s Congress. A UNESCO World Heritage site and often called “the new Prague”, the city is home to almost a quarter of Poland’s museums, several famous theaters, one of the world’s oldest and most distinguished universities and two Nobel Prize-winning writers!

Krakow enchants and inspires. It provides a showcase of Polish architecture, including one of the best-preserved medieval city centers in Europe, as well as Renaissance arcades, Baroque spires and myriad cafés. To learn more about keynote speakers and Congress registration, please see pages 18 and 19. It promises to be a fascinating event.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief
Anna Lubecka talks about Polish Identity

An interview with one of Poland’s leading intercultural thinkers

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Central- and Eastern-European countries dropped communist ideology and switched to Western values, hoping for quick wealth and a sort of American Dream. But as the years went by and economic reality set in, a significant shift occurred; the former East Block rediscovered national identities. Poland is no exception.

For centuries, Polish culture celebrated personal freedom and national independence—a romantic mix of honor and patriotism which provided solace during Poland’s often tragic history. From partitioning in the 18th century to the trauma of World War II and 45 years of virtual occupation by the Soviets, these values thrived. Today they’re competing an inter-connected planet. Poles are asking themselves how to remain true to themselves while keeping up with global change.

Anna Lubecka spends a lot of time wondering about this and she is, in many ways, the perfect Pole for the job—a patriotic anti-communist who’s open to other cultures. A professor at Jagiellonina University in Krakow, she speaks 5 languages and has a PhD in social linguistics as well as habilitation in cross-cultural pragmatics. She’s also becoming well known for her work in cross-cultural communication as it affects national identity.

As SIETAR Europa will be holding its next Congress in Krakow, I interviewed her about Polish identity.

How multicultural is Poland?

Historically, Poland was the definition of multicultural. Before the Russian empire and the rise of Prussia, Poland experienced a long period of prosperity from the 14th to the 18th century with its peak — the golden age in the 16th century. A republic of two nations, known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, it was a huge territory with well over 20 ethnic groups or nationalities.

After 1945, Poland’s borders shifted more to the West and it largely lost its traditional multi-ethnic character. The communist system was imposed and, although officially promoting the different ethnic groups, it was very much against unique cultures. These were seen as competing value-systems, nothing more and the Polish culture was to be national in its form but ideologically correct as far as its content was concerned.

Because the borders after World War II were radically altered, the population became one of the most ethnically homogeneous in the world. About 2-3% are non-Poles, including Germans, Jews, Roma, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. We even have a small group of Polish Tatars, who were invited to come in the 14th century. Today, they live in the eastern part of Poland.
Anna Lubecka
— continued

How do Polish youth view multiculturalism?
Big changes happened in 1989 when the communist regime came to an end. Suddenly Poles, especially the young ones, began travelling abroad, meeting other people. All this face-to-face contact has led to more openness. Multicultural encounters are seen as very positive and explains why my students are so interested in social and ethnic differences.

Polish people have become much more self-confident since 1989. We've always said that Poland suffered from a “double complex”: we felt a sense of superiority toward the countries east of Poland and, to them, we were seen as a Western country. But we had an inferiority complex towards the West. Today the complexes give way to self-recognition and the geopolitical situation of Poland is treated as its asset and its strength.

Now we see ourselves more as a partner, not as someone who has to listen to what the West tells us. This self-empowerment is absolutely necessary in intercultural encounters.

So I suppose institutions in Poland have changed in terms of openness to the world?
Yes. There have been a lot of official initiatives for personal, face-to-face contact and they change attitudes in turn. For example, nearly every school has an exchange program with a school abroad and every Polish city has got its international twin. Cultural exchanges have become a reality for most Poles.

When the Berlin Wall fell, Poland was isolated, a no-man’s-land. We went from to the other extreme—a passionate desire to discover the world and open ourselves to it.

This has led to a generational split. At my university, we have some very good older professors and they all speak Russian, some German, but hardly any English. Students today all speak English. They’re global citizens and want to participate in—and benefit from—what’s happening in the world.

Since 1989, language schools have mushroomed, not only for English, but also French, Italian, Spanish, German. We’ve also changed our attitudes toward education. Not so long ago, languages were considered an intellectual adventure, an idealistic approach. Now they’re an investment, we’ve become pragmatic.

We want to learn languages both to get better jobs and discover the world. Polish students feel at home in Europe. I have students who’ll do internships in Rome and Edinburgh. Many benefit from the Socrate-Erasmus exchange...
programme. You may think this is normal but for us it's almost a revolution compared with just 20 years ago.

We belong to the world and want to have a say in how it's going. And this is perhaps where I come in. I continually remind my students that if you don't have the cultural component, you can't become a good communicator across cultures.

Where is Polish culture today?
To understand Polish culture, we need to look at three parts. The first is the deepest layer, which are our national core values, such as patriotism, honor, romanticism, idealism, national independence. Second, you have what I call a post-culture, symbolized by Communism and Russian domination. It has been rejected but will always be part of our past.

The third element is the culture of adaptation. We've always been interested in the West and the values of freedom, independence, human rights. These were idealized dimensions which weren't accessible, or the access was very limited, and this was especially true under communism. The West also stands for economic satisfaction, economic security.

How would you describe yourself in this context?
My story is the story of many Polish families. I was born in a home that was strongly patriotic. Both sides of the family were active in the underground during World War II and took part in Polish uprisings.

My parents were very open to other cultures but couldn't travel — they weren't on the right side politically. They also shared with me their pre-war experience of Polish multiculturalism — they had friends of all ethnic backgrounds. I was raised without any prejudice toward anyone.

And they made sure I'd be well educated. My father was a kind of visionary; he knew the Communists wouldn't be in Poland forever. My parents gave me lessons in alternative Polish and world history as well as foreign languages. English lessons at age 7, followed by French and German. Then, inspired by them I studied Italian and Spanish.

Above all, they educated me to be not only Polish but part of the world. Give the best you can to the world and learn from what the world can give to you. This was my parents' philosophy and it's become my own.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt

Anna Lubecka
An interview with one of Poland's leading interculturalists

A Short Cultural History of Poland
Towards a model for intercultural integration

A Non-Conventional Look at the German “Export Machine”

“Us and Them” Dividing Society: Canada turns right

Book reviews
Meet the SIETAR Krakow congress committees
Events, workshops, congresses
To understand Poland, you must understand Roman Polanski’s films. Watch his first internationally acclaimed work *Knife in the Water*. It’s about hope, despair, jealously and rage. Some years later Polanski directed the widely successful film, *Rosemary’s Baby*, a horror-thriller of a young housewife who is impregnated by the devil. Shortly after the release of the film, reality overtook fiction — his pregnant wife Sharon Tate was murdered by the satanic follower Charles Manson. In 2002, he attained the peak of his fame with the Academy award winning *The Pianist*, the experiences of a Polish Jewish musician during WWII. It was reminiscent of Polanski and his family. While he escaped the concentration camps, his family did not, eventually perishing.

What Polanski has lived through and expressed in his films can be extrapolated to Poland’s history and culture. Talk to any Pole and they will tell you their history is about betrayal, vulnerability, courage, pride and idealism. In the opening weeks of WWII, the Poles used horse cavalry against German Panzers. It was a pursuit in futility, but nevertheless an act of human bravery, and denoted Polish magnificence in their resistance. A great symbolic meaning as if it were a work of art.

This ability to retain their humanity in the face of disaster is exactly what provides the ingredients to make it a rich and original culture. Polish artists and intellectuals, such as Nicolas Copernicus, Marie Curie, Pope John II, Frederic Chopin, Ignacy Paderewski, Joseph Conrad, Arthur Rubenstein and Adam Mickiewicz achieved fame through their interpretation of the Polish experience. The themes were avant-gardism, perceptiveness and resistance to injustice.

Taken from another perspective, Poland’s culture and history can be understood geopolitically. Look at where Poland is and you will find it on the North European Plain, whose borders are not defined by any significant geographical boundaries. The Slavic tribes settled there over 2,000 years ago and took its name from one of these tribes, the Polane (the people of the plain). Because of the lack defensible frontiers, it was a constant victim of its aggressive neighbors. In 1569 following the adage ‘unity in diversity’, the Poles united their forces with the Lithuanians, creating the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was the largest and one of the most populous countries in 16th- and 17th-century Europe that included Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus and a large part of Russia, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

In this period, Poland flourished culturally and economically and became an important European center for the development of modern social and political ideas. During the Counter-Reformation, the country was known for near-unparalleled religious tolerance, peacefully coexisting with Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant and Muslim communities. It also saw its historic mission of defending

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**Nicolas Copernicus, one of Poland’s most famous figures**
Catholicism and the Christian West against the non-believers from the East. Polish armies were pivotal in breaking the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683.

With time however, the alliance weakened politically and economically and by 1795, Poland was split up by its powerful neighbors: Russia to its east, Prussia to its west and Austria to its south. Poland was no more the master of its fate or of its soul.

In 1918, Poland reemerged as an independent state, but it proved short-lived. Its open borders did little to stop the Germans and Russians when they joined forces to crush and split up Poland again in 1939. Over 6 million Poles, including almost the entire Polish Jewish population were killed during WW II. In 1945, Soviet troops pushed out the Germans and Poland’s borders were redrawn, moving the country 300 km to the west and by that losing its multi-ethnic character.

The Poles thought they would be a free state. But Soviet domination and the tyranny of Communist ideology were the next tragic events. Those 45 years of subjugation didn’t diminish their stoicism and patriotism. Cardinal, Karol Józef Wojtyła from Krakow became Pope in 1978, foreboding the end of communism in Poland. And an electrician from Danzig, Lech Walesa, organized the Solidarity labor union to protest against the Russian overlords. The government finally yielded to the people’s will and Solidarity was legalized in 1989. It was the turning point for political freedom and a transition to a market economy. One year later, the country elected Lech Walesa as President.

This passionate spirit to fight against tyranny, bordering often on fanaticism, is the key to understanding this proud and sensitive people. And being the most dynamic and liberty-loving of Slavs, the Poles have turned away from their Eastern neighbors and look to the European Union and the USA as their model. It's their way of escaping the experiences of misfortune, disaster and adversity.

Yet another tragedy was to befall on Poland. On April 10, 2010 Poland’s President Lech Kaczyński and many of Poland’s top political elite were killed in a plane crash on their way to the Katyn massacre anniversary commemoration. Exactly 60 years before, 22,000 Polish officers were massacred by the Soviet secret police. The country suffered another painful wound in its history.
Intercultural Cities

Towards a model for intercultural integration

The Council of Europe and the European Commission have launched an ambitious plan of developing intercultural integration within diverse cities in Europe. Research has shown, cultural differences due to migration and minorities, if left unmanaged, undermine a city's sense of community and identity. If, however, cities manage diversity in a pro-active manner, they can benefit greatly in terms of entrepreneurship and innovation. Thus, the EC and European Council undertook the project of stimulating new ideas and strategies in integrating migrants and minorities.

A pilot network of selected ‘intercultural cities’ was created, which has permitted a mutual mentoring and exchanges to take place. This learning community of cities reviews policies through “intercultural lens” as well as developing intercultural skills.

Summarizing the purpose, target groups, partnerships and actual operations of this project, the Council of Europe has put together a fascinating 124-page booklet, entitled “Intercultural Cities”. It’s highly informative with imaginative graphics, pictures and many examples of intercultural approaches in European cities that work. Here are some excerpts from this guide:

Background and rationale

Building an intercultural agenda for cities

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) program began in 2008 as a joint pilot initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. It set out to examine the impact of cultural diversity and migration from the perspective of Europe’s cities and identify strategies and policies which could help cities work with diversity as a factor of development.

Whilst being far from the only scheme considering these important matters, it is perhaps unique in its scope and approach. It spans the whole of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals; and has been as concerned with the issues of historic diversity and national minorities as with more recent migration.

The ICC was conceived as an action research and policy development program, designed to deliver the following broad objectives:

- To stimulate an inclusive debate, review and policy reformulation in pilot cities on the basis of an intercultural approach to migration, integration and social cohesion
- To encourage pilot cities to develop comprehensive intercultural strategies for the management of urban diversity
- To elaborate model intercultural strategies and strategy development and evaluation methods as an example and inspiration for other cities in Europe.
These are the 11 cities participating in the Intercultural Cities program:

- Berlin-Neukölln (Germany)
- Olso (Norway)
- Izhevsk (Russian Federation)
- Patras (Greece)
- Lublin (Poland)
- Reggio Emilia (Italy)
- Lyon (France)
- Subotica (Serbia)
- Melitopol (Ukraine)
- Tilburg (the Netherlands)
- Neuchâtel (Switzerland)

Where did the ‘Intercultural Cities’ concept originate?
The ICC program was born out of the convergence of three separate, but related developments:

**Council of Europe White Paper of intercultural dialogue**
The Council of Europe has been working on the issue of intercultural dialogue for over 30 years. The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, adopted by the 47 members states in May 2008, defines intercultural dialogue as an “...open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.”

**European Year of Intercultural Dialogue**
The ICC program was established and run within the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. It was a pluri-disciplinary approach cutting across a range of policy fields and positioning culture as a motor of social change.

**Comedia**
The original conception of the ‘Intercultural City’ (including the ideas of the ‘intercultural lens’, the ‘10 steps to an intercultural city analytical grid’ and ‘indicators of interculturalism’) was by the British think-tank Comedia.

**Good Practice from the ICC Networks**
Reggio Emilia has established intercultural laboratories in secondary schools to encourage a positive perception of diversity by young people and understanding of the mechanisms of stereotypes and prejudice.

In Tilburg, extra lessons are offered to migrant children in the weekend school every Sunday. The lessons are given in the class rooms of the Tilburg university. The program includes theatre and music, with children being able to prepare a video clip and a CD with own songs. The location (Tilburg University) is very stimulating and it raises the aspirations of students to be a student there one day.

Businesses in Neuchâtel have launched with the social services, Speranza 2000, a recruitment and training project for marginalized young people. They are trained for 12 weeks and then offered a work contract. Following the first year, all 48 young people have remained in the enterprises. Only 30% of them were Swiss nationals.

More information about Intercultural Cities can be found at: www.coe.int/interculturalcities
A few days ago, I received a telephone call from a Polish journalist, who wanted to know why it was that Germany, despite heavy economic losses in the 2008 recession, was currently experiencing a second Wirtschaftswunder. He noted that with an economy expanding by an amazing 3.6% last year, Germany was leaving the other advanced economies in the dust.

If you talk to experts, Germany’s star performance is due in large part to its “export machine”, shipping more goods per capita than any other country in the world. For over a century, it has built a reputation of making products second to none in precision, reliability and quality. And despite high wage costs and relatively expensive prices, it seems that the world can’t get enough of “Made in Germany” products.

Was it the famous Mittelstandbetriebe, the mid-size companies that made Germany such a powerful exporter, the journalist asked? That’s one way of viewing it. For example, many of Germany’s top exporters come from Baden-Württemberg, historically Germany’s poorest agricultural region. The 19th century was exceptionally severe, compelling many to tinker and invent to survive.

That environment generated people like Gottlieb Daimler, inventor of the first automobile, and Robert Bosch, creator of the electric engine. They were diligent — never doing something half-way, as well as thinkers — always trying to improve on everything in existence. Their inventions led to the founding of many successful companies, both mid-size and large, and their spirit of tinkering remains important today.

Yet, to really understand why mid-size companies generally do better in Germany than elsewhere, one has to consider the German mindset, the cognitive ways Germans organize everyday actions and thoughts.

Much of what we now call “typically German” (diligence, perfection, need for order) can be attributed to a relatively dreadful past. As any psychologist will tell you, a traumatized child often becomes a perfectionist as an adult.

Germany has suffered more than its share of horror, beginning with the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). It had the misfortune of being das Land der Mitte, the country in the middle, in a religious conflict involving Sweden, Denmark, France, Spain and Austria. Over seven million Germans died in less than two generations, 35% of the population. The psycho-social toll the Germans suffered would have a profound impact for centuries to come.

And other tragedies were to follow: the Napoleonic Wars,
the German “export machine”
— continued

Goods “Made in Germany” are in demand all over the world.

the Austro-Prussian War and, finally, two World Wars in the space of...30 years.

In the last of these, the Holocaust, brought disgrace and shame upon the German people as a whole. Given Germany’s tragic and violent past, it’s not surprising that these wars have resulted in a survival strategy based on Angst about any form of uncertainty, a need for security. Ordnung muß sein. Order must reign.

Foreigners who arrive in Germany for the first time are surprised by the national need to do everything correctly; planning is essential and almost nothing is improvised. (It’s no accident that the largest national SIETAR organization in the world is in Germany. When German companies export, they want to make sure that everything is done right, including intercultural communication.)

One need only consider that the country’s highest-rated television program for the past 40 years is, in fact, der Tagesschau, the evening news. Not surprisingly, the host speaks in a monotone and emotion is taboo. Whatever is happening in the world, things aren’t out of control.

Even simple gestures, like paying at the supermarket, are revealing. German customers normally have their money out before the cashier announces the total. Individuals subordinate their actions to the collective need to do things efficiently.

Compare this with shopping in Strasbourg, where I live. French customers often don’t take out their wallets until they’ve packed all their food into bags. The cashier and the other customers wait patiently, denoting French respect for the individual. But when this is repeated a million times a day, you understand why France is struggling to keep up with Germany on the economic front.

This sense of planning is instilled at an early age. An
the German “export machine” — continued

“Mitmachen” (doing something together) is a strong cultural undercurrent in Germany.

American colleague who lives in Munich once told me about the time her twelve-year-old son broke his arm and had to miss a few days of school. Upon returning, he was quizzed on the Latin verbs his classmates had studied while he was gone. He said he’d been in the hospital but the teacher told him it was no excuse and failed him. The boy’s German father said, “you’ve learned a good lesson.” His American mother, on the other hand, was up in arms and went to see the teacher. She was told not to worry, her son wouldn’t fail the class, but it was made clear to her that this sort of learning experience laid the seeds for responsible behavior.

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Need for order and abhorrence of uncertainty imply efficient collective behavior. “Machen wir es richtig!” Let’s do it right! Once a decision is made or a project started, Germans subconsciously coordinate their own ideas and efforts toward group success. They know the sum is often far greater than the parts.

The German preposition mit (with) is used in countless expressions involving teamwork — mitmachen, Mitarbeiter, Mitbestimmung — and shows a spirit of togetherness which permeates all levels of society.

This cooperative spirit is also found in the often heard phrase “Wir müssen höchste Leistung bringen”, which has no real equivalent in English. Literally, it means “we must bring about the highest output or performance”, but it is often translated as “we must work very intensively”. The Autobahn, where driving at top speeds is often the norm, is a metaphor of this German collective need for high performance and passionate intensity.

These were my immediate impressions when I first began working in Germany over 30 years ago. A few years later I listened to Richard Wagner’s Tannhäuser at the Stuttgarter Opernhaus and couldn’t help but associate collective strength with the overture. It is a haunting music which seems to capture the quintessence of the German soul, a passion to be earnest and dedicated to the common good.

As Time magazine once noted, Germans are brilliant organizers and planners who like complexity and are good at integrating things, including people, into a big system. When 82 million people share that mindset, it makes for a powerful competitive advantage in the world marketplace.

This article is partially adapted from the author’s book “Understanding American and German Business Cultures”, published by Meridian World Press.
“Us and Them”

Dividing society: Canada turns right

by Dan MacLeod

George W. Bush proclaimed himself a “uniter”, then spearheaded a wildly successful Republican campaign to divide the United States along populist, religious lines. Now Stephen Harper’s Conservatives have the chance to do the same to Canada.

There are numerous cross-border connections. Canada’s more ambitious right-wingers populate Washington’s neocon lobbies, PR firms and think-tanks. And, in the age of multinationals, what I call the “ANOM” business community (America north of Mexico) is essentially identical.

For those of you who know American politics, a Harper majority is like Bush with strategist Karl Rove but without Vice President Dick Cheney. In other words, the same stirring up of anti-abortion, anti-gay, anti-socialist fervor to advance a hard-eyed, market-driven political agenda. But without the run-the-world mentality. Canadians don’t want to torture their enemies, they don’t even want enemies.

Canadians and Americans are different but the political tactics are the same. Avoidance of media, except for photo-ops, and a refusal to answer the few questions journalists do manage to ask. It is the Nixonian “adversary complex” which has both haunted and bolstered the Right for over 40 years.

In the run-up to the election, Stephen Harper’s lieutenants did Internet-checks on people attending rallies. Men in dark suits yanked citizens out of what were supposed to be public assemblies because their Facebook pages revealed things like sympathy for environmental causes.

And it’s not just reporters and average citizens whose questions annoy the Prime Minister. His government fell on March 25th after being cited for contempt of Parliament — a first in Canadian history — for refusing to provide information on a proposed crime bill.

The Conservatives have ruled for five years and minority-government status hasn’t slowed them down in terms of dogma. They dismantled the Statistics Canada information bank (used to attribute funding for natives, minorities, etc.) by making the long-form census optional. When groups across the country protested, Industry Minister Tony Clement falsely claimed it was the agency’s own idea. Chief statistician Munir Sheikh resigned in outrage but, in the West, it was seen as a victory against “big government”.

The Conservatives also took control of the government’s international monitoring agency Rights and Democracy, suspending board members who criticized Israel. Ousted president Rémy Beauregard died of a heart attack in the turmoil. And criticism of Israel cost the human rights’ group Kairos all $7 million of its funding when Heritage Minister George W. Bush proclaimed himself a “uniter”, then spearheaded a wildly successful Republican campaign to divide the United States along populist, religious lines. Now Stephen Harper’s Conservatives have the chance to do the same to Canada.

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“Us and Them”
— continued

“Haven’t you heard? It’s a battle of words!” the poster-bearer cried;
“Listen, son,” said the man with the gun, “there’s room for you inside...”
--from “Us and Them” (Pink Floyd, Dark Side of the Moon, 1973)

Bev Oda anonymously vetoed it (then lied about it, leading to a second contempt of Parliament citation).

The Conservatives have slashed funding to “left-leaning” community groups, women’s organizations and pretty much anything having to do with homosexuals—when Toronto hosted the International Aids Conference, Harper made a point of not attending. They even cut millions of dollars from arts’ programs because they objected to vulgarity in the names of a film (Young People Fucking) and a band (Holy Fuck) which received grants.

And now they have a majority.

Luckily, the same Canadian restraint and politeness that Americans like to make fun of will probably win out. A sizeable portion of Canada’s bible-belt West is fiercely against abortion, for example, but they don’t usually shoot doctors. And they have guns—and don’t want to have to register them—but it’s mostly hunting rifles and shotguns, not the AK-47s and Uzis, commonly sold in the US.

A few years back there was a contest to name the country’s greatest hero and Canadians chose none other than Tommy Douglas, the father of socialized medicine. He hailed from Saskatchewan, a province of farmers, which is right next door to Alberta, Canada’s answer to Texas. Both are full of oil barons and cowboys who don’t believe in global warming or, for that matter, evolution. But there’s an inherent difference in the people.

Most Europeans don’t know—most Americans don’t know—that, in addition to being a land-grab, Texas was born in the name of slavery: they were for it. To the point of violently seceding from Mexico, a country which suddenly realized it had allowed too many American ex-pats to settle in its north. My knowledge of this as a kid in Boston was the movie The Alamo. It was a decade later when I learned those heroes had been fighting for the “freedom” to continue owning slaves.

Texas hasn’t changed that much. To quote comedy-writer Tina Fey, “They think Adam and Eve rode to school on dinosaurs.” And climate change is a socialist myth and homosexuals are Hell-bound and abortion is wrong even if the woman was raped. Per capita, Texas must be the capital-punishment capital of the world. In less than six years as governor of that state (68 months), George Bush approved 152 executions, including of mentally-retarded people.

Stephen Harper made Alberta his political base decades ago and, like Bush, was an oilman before running for office. And Alberta has it’s fair share of folks who are for the
“Us and Them” — continued

penalty too. But they say so knowing it won’t happen. Because if Alberta is “Texas North”, Canada is “Europe West”.

Most Canadians don’t look twice at an inter-racial couple and they don’t have a problem with gay marriage. And it’s hard to demonize socialists in a country where everyone sees socialized medicine as a national treasure.

Harper will spend the next few years chiselling away at that. Among other things, he will end public funding of political parties, opening the floodgates to private and corporate donations, and scrap the Canadian Firearms Registry, seen as “socialistic”. His government already tried to do both but was blocked in Parliament, something that won’t happen this time around. And, although he says he won’t challenge abortion rights in Canada, his government has blocked funding to international health organizations which include abortion as an option in the Third World.

The Conservatives campaigned on two levels this spring. The first was straight out of the American playbook: a grassroots appeal to “the regions”, meaning anyone not living near a university or a concert hall. The second, however, was a novel idea. If the Conservatives were willing to concede urban centers, they made sure to win the suburbs — and they did so by targeting the ethnic vote. (That strategy’s success may well influence American politicians in 2012).

Earlier waves of primarily Southern- and Eastern-European immigrants have rippled outward; their children and grandchildren live in communities grouped near highway exits. Many of the newer, mostly Asian arrivals live there too; they received citizenship in exchange for starting businesses. If there’s one thing they have in common, it’s the desire for an orderly society. Over the past five years, Harper’s main legislative thrust has been toward American-style justice. Canadian crime statistics are down and the U.S. system is a fiasco but he’s going to build more prisons, then lock ’em up and throw away the key.

In the end, the Conservatives won because the country escaped the 2008 financial meltdown more or less unscathed. The reason has to do with the Canadian banking system but Harper claimed the credit and warned of economic collapse with anyone else in charge. He portrays himself as a bumpkin but he’s an astute politician. He’s banking on a U.S. economic comeback, which will boost the Canadian economy over the next few years.

What he’s forgotten, though, is the very real difference between his own people and the Americans he seeks to imitate. Harper may divide the country but four or five years of hard-right social policy will offend the very essence of Canadians. Which is to say things like, “Come on now, let’s be fair on both sides, eh?”
Book Review

Le dérèglement du monde : Quand nos civilisations s’épuisent

by Amin Maalouf
€ 18, 314 pages
Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle 2009

Amin Maalouf has snuck up on me again!

Only after 9/11, did I read Amin Maalouf’s In the Name of Identity: Violence and the need to belong (Les Identités meurtrières, 1998), a slim volume that opened my eyes to the critical dynamics of identity politics. It helped me belatedly make some sense out of the attack on New York’s phallic financial twins, as well as the ensuing reign of fear in the USA. Not surprisingly, I wanted more of this author, and immediately delved into his The Crusades through Arab eyes (Les Croisades vues par les Arabes, 1986). This led to my becoming a fan of his novels, the most memorable of which for me are Samarkand (Samarcande, 1988) and Gardens of Light (Les Jardins de lumière, 1991).

Now, Le dérèglement du monde has been helping me better understand the current revolutionary movement in the Arab world as it is happening, given the author’s lucid recounting of the history of the collusions and betrayals that led to the deadening of popular spirit in Arab lands. Central to the book is a lengthy and intriguing analysis of the rise and fall of the hopes of Arab peoples over the last half century. The book predates Wiki-Leaks and the Tunisian uprising, but helps us find them far less surprising.

While this is a timely benefit to the reader, Maalouf’s recent book is much more global in its critique and perspectives. The dissolution of the old world order at the end of the twentieth century has left us “without a compass,” raised serious questions about the “legitimacy” of governance and power, and brought moral credibility into crisis on the head of specious victories and economic illusions. While Western civilization has invented a set of universal values, it has utterly failed to convey them in an equitable way, and humanity is paying the price for this double standard right now, with people daily uprooted from their native lands and grudgingly given asylum. Not surprising, straying from legitimacy, we have been going through a phase where peoples whose cultures are being annihilated, who are politically marginalized, could choose to despair or throw in their lot with those ready to immolate themselves in radical resistance.

Most of our problems are symptoms of the way we think, live and do business. We were only recently reminded in the news of how the bellies of millions are being tightened by market speculation in foodstuffs. Money has become disconnected from human work, production, and useful social effort. “Our stock markets are transformed into monstrous casinos where the fate of millions, rich and poor, is decided by a roll of the dice. Our most venerable financial institutions have ended up behaving like drunken hooligans.” The pockets of the poor are picked to create obscene riches in the closets of tyrants and corporations.

Maalouf argues for a values system in which the respect for...
development of culture is a primary value and our way out of the current morass. “Today, the role of culture is to furnish contemporary society with the intellectual and moral tools to survive—nothing less.” For years I have, in my professional practice, defined culture as, “the inner conversations developed by a group of people in order to enable them to survive and succeed in their environment.” The definition works for everything from a football club to a region, to a religion, to a nation. What Maalouf is pointing out, is that culture and values must also be made to work for a planet, not by colonization, leveling and standardization, but by embodying the riches of all in an ongoing negotiation of inclusion with the end of ever more humane coexistence and cohabitation. This essential task must be carried out at the moment in the face of political angling and wrangling that increasingly blames multiculturalism for our ills.

Ideologies pass, but religions persist, the author notes, and what makes them indestructible is their ability to provide a solid anchor of identity to their followers—they are a part of what we call “deep culture.” Their politicization is the result of at least an unconscious recognition on the part of those who attempt to use them for their own ends. Maalouf does an interesting comparison between the role of conservation performed by the papacy, and the absence of such an institution in Islam when it comes to managing change.

How will culture save us? Maalouf tells us that the future will be won or lost on the issues of migrants, bringing their history and their culture to new settings. As noted above, the West is not particularly well placed at the moment to realistically and creatively respond to this challenge. It would also like to think that its colonization, genocides and cultural despoliation are things of the past and let bygones be bygones. Much of the world does not and cannot treat the past in this way, particularly those peoples facing defeat, frustration and humiliation, who must rely on the past to continue believing in themselves.

Maalouf dares to assert at the close of the volume that mankind is still in its “prehistory,” and the larger question is whether it can transcend the givens of its current mentality and social constructions. While this may appear at first as the arrogance of a French intellectual, the author, a child of Beirut, is well humble in admitting where he is inexpert and where he relies on best guesses and street sense. Almost all of Amin Maalouf’s work, and especially this book, is tagged with a personal cultural imperative: “When one has lived in Lebanon, the first religion which one has is the religion of coexistence.” This book is about how far we are from practicing this faith in a world that is Lebanon writ large, and about the few glimmers of hope that could, if pursued lead us to a new human condition, life beyond our prehistory.

I would hope that Le dérèglement du monde finds its way into English, however in this review, where citations are made, translation is my own. The author cites the Prophet of Islam, “The ink of the wise is worth more than the blood of the martyr.” May this blessing fall on Amin Maalouf. Reviewed by George Simons
Meet the People behind the upcoming SIETAR Europa Congress in Krakow

Film Festival

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Pre-Conference Workshops

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SIETAR Europa Congress, 21-25 September, 2011 in Krakow, Poland

Interculturalism Ahead — Transition to a Virtual World?

Congress Highlights

Wednesday, 21 September
Pre-Congress Workshops & Welcoming Cocktail Party
9 am to 5 pm: Working Effectively in Virtual Teams, The Collaborative Internet, The Business of Doing Intercultural Business
7 pm: Newcomers and Welcoming Cocktail Party: Get to know the newcomers and network with colleagues.

Thursday - Sunday, 22 - 25 September
Presentations, Workshops, Film Festival, Evening Events, Gala Dinner and Sight-Seeing

There will be many parallel presentations of papers and interactive workshops during the three days. Some of the presentation topics are: Identifying the Global Leaders of Tomorrow - A Virtual Approach (David Trickey & Nigel Ewington), Interculturalism in a Virtual World of Multiple Absolutes (Milton Bennett), Trends in intercultural training for business - virtual worlds and more - an inside view (Rob Gibson), An Onground Course goes Virtual (Elisabeth Cassels-Brown)

In addition, we have an exciting film festival, and we plan to have a live or virtual Q & A with directors, producers or main characters of the documentaries and feature films to be shown On Thursday and Friday evenings, there’s a “wine & cheese” discussion with some experts, an “author’s book signing session”, a cultural event, music and lots of fun to meet and network.

On Saturday evening, we will have the Gala Dinner at the famous Premier Krakow Hotel, known for its top-rated cuisine. On Sunday, there’s a networking breakfast planned and a sight-seeing tour for those who wish to visit Krakow.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

Dr. Olga Kovbasyuk
"Facilitating Global Learning via Communication Technology"

Dr. Janusz Wisniewski
"When Real & Virtual Culture Meet: Opportunities and Consequences"

Benjamin Pelletier &
Dr. Slawomir Magala “Crisis in Multiculturalism in Europe: what is our role?”

Dr. Milton Bennett, Saila Poutiainen and Marion Chapsal will lead a panel discussion on “Culture, Interculturalists and Technology"

Don’t miss this exciting event! We look forward to seeing you in Krakow, September 21-25, 2011
Events, workshops, congresses

Milan, Italy
16-18 June & 20-22 October, 2011
Constructivist Foundations of Intercultural Communication: Applying the New Paradigm. Milton Bennett, worldwide known interculturalist, will hold this seminar that explores the relativist and constructivist roots of intercultural studies and examines paradigmatic confusion in applications. 15% discount for SIETAR members. More information at www.idrinstitute.org

Lille, France
18 June, 2011
Religions et Société : « Quels Rapports et Quels Droits ? » (Religion and Society: “Which relationships and which rights?” to be held in French) This one-day workshop will deal with three themes: human rights and secularism, teaching religion in France and Europe and lastly, religion and the workplace. Guy Trolliet will lead the discussions. More information at www.sietar-france.org

Bath, U.K.
20-24 June & 3-7 October, 2011
Developing Intercultural Training Skills. This is a five-day course for experienced trainers from fields such as language, communication skills and management training, who want to develop skills to design and deliver intercultural training courses, or to integrate intercultural topics into their current training courses. The facilitators are Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O’Connor. More information at www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm

Krakow, Poland
September 21-24, 2011
SIETAR Europa Congress
Interculturalism ahead: Transition to a virtual world? will be the theme of the next SIETAR Europa Congress. Come to Krakow and you will have the opportunity to discover Polish culture as you team up with experts and professionals from all over the world. It’s promising to be a big event. For more information, go to: www.sietareu.org/congress-2011

London, U.K.
25 June, 2011
The Promise of Intercultural Mediaiton In this powerful workshop you will learn and practice facing, facilitating and resolving conflicts. You will go from theory to practice, from conflict to resolution, from ethnocentricity to ethno-relativity. You will experience and receive input about the powerful tool of Mediation as a means for constructive conflict resolution. For more information, write to susanneschuler@web.de

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