



COPENHAGEN EDITION

Civil service scandal risked lives of Eritrean asylum seekers

Isolation is deadly and NGOs are trying new ways to reach out

How an Østerbro district is adapting to climate change



Lonely kids and old parents

Procreation is losing the battle to career ambitions and educational pressures

THE MURMUR

A YEAR AGO, The Murmur was just an idea. Since then we have released eight issues and interviewed whistleblowers and gun runners, MMA fighters and Barack Obama impersonators. We've tackled queer theory, foreign fighters and the police suppression of protest. We've heard how sport can heal war wounds and talked to Danes alienated by the immigration system.

Our efforts have been rewarded with incredible support and feedback, as well as a 1.1 million kroner grant from the government to help us develop a sustainable business model. We all know that democracy requires news and media, but we would all rather get it for free. So if it weren't for our amazing advertisers, The Murmur would never have been possible. We'd like to graciously thank them for their support.

There is no doubt in our mind that there is a need for our publication in the Danish media landscape. As the new year begins, we will take this opportunity to reaffirm our mission.

The Murmur uses the English language as a platform to discuss the most the most important issues facing the Danish society. We want to talk to the cultural figures with the most disruptive ideas, and the thinkers who define and challenge the Danish identity. We are future orientated and concerned with understanding how the policies of today shape the Denmark of tomorrow. We want to

exist at the intersection of the local and the global and investigate both how Denmark is reacting to international trends and pressures, as well as ask which Danish ideas are having an impact on thinking around the world.

Our reporting will almost always take Denmark as a starting point. Despite being a tiny little country with just under six million people, it's developed an international reputation and secured enormous wealth despite its high taxation and generous welfare. Of course it isn't perfect and it certainly isn't deserving of its reputation as the greenest and happiest country in the world. We hope our reporting will lend a more nuanced view on this unique nation.

Regardless of your reasons for being in Denmark, people who share a system belong to the same conversation. We think it is important that this conversation is had in English. Not only does it allow the conversation to extend beyond Denmark's borders and be reached by the 430 million people who use English as their first language – let alone the millions who have it as their second language – it also provides an outlet for the many Danes who already use English in their work, study or private life.

Thank you for picking us up, following us on Facebook and sharing our stories. If you have any thoughts or ideas, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

THE MURMUR

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"Loneliness permeates all of society: our social activities, our youth, our prisons, our elderly – it eats away at people. We must learn to keep our eyes open to people who are lonely and engage them"

JESPER
BERTHELSEN,
RED CROSS IN
DENMARK

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CONTRIBUTORS



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Nereya Otieno A writer and creator with a background in cognitive science, musicology and communication, Nereya likes to discuss all three while eating sandwiches. She wrote our research column this month.



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Polly Phillips A freelance journalist, who cut her teeth in soap opera and women's magazines, before moving onto the newsdesk at the Daily Express. She wrote our cover story about Denmark's dangerously low fertility rate.



Khara Lewin Before moving to Denmark, Khara was a News Assistant at CNN, where she covered regional and breaking news. She is now studying at the IT University of Copenhagen and wrote the story about climate resilience in Skt Kjelds Kvarter.



Lesley-Ann Brown A Caribbean American freelance writer living in Copenhagen, Lesley-Ann studied writing at The New School, NYC. She wrote about the challenges of having a deaf son.



Thomas Fleurquin Co-founder of The Copenhagen Post newspaper and founder of the Distortion Festival. He writes a monthly column.



Ayşe Dudu Tepe A radio host on Radio24Syv, Ayşe wrote a short story about her daughter. (Photo: Stine Heilman)



Steffen Stubager An award-winning journalist and photographer with a base in Rio de Janeiro, Steffen has written for Jyllands-Posten newspaper since 2009. He provided the photographs for the Captured section.



Tanqeed In Urdu, Tanqeed means critique. It is a quarterly e-zine that publishes long form journalism and essays that analyze contemporary Pakistan and South Asia. We carried their statement that responds to events and debates in Pakistan following the Peshawar attack.

THE MURMUR ONLINE



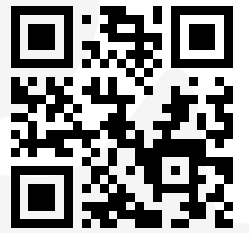
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MONTH IN REVIEW

BUSINESS LEADER
Denmark is the number one country in the world for business, according to the annual Forbes ranking. The country ranked especially well in the categories personal freedom, technology and low corruption. Other factors that helped Denmark's excellent showing was its flexible labour market and its high score on the Global Entrepreneurs Index.



Peter Stanners

Dual citizenship passes in parliament
A broad majority in parliament passed a law that will make dual citizenship legal in Denmark from next September. Only Dansk Folkepartie and De Konservative voted against the change, along with a single MP from Venstre. The new law will affect both Danes living abroad and foreigners living in Denmark. Minister of Justice Karen Hækkerup of the Social Democrats celebrated the change and said that it will have a big impact on the lives of many.
"Many people now choose to live in different countries, but they still maintain a strong bond with their country of origin. We should not force people to choose between affiliations," she said in a press release.
Until now, Danish law did not permit Danes to take a second citizenship without first relinquishing their Danish citizenship. Foreigners wanting to become Danes were also forced to give up their original citizenship to become Danish.

ESCAPEE CAUGHT HAVING A PARTY
He has been called 'the escape king' in the press and this holiday season, convicted criminal Brian Bo Larsen more than lived up to his title. On December 13, he escaped prison for the 22nd time and went on a festive bender that included auto theft, hookers and hallucinogens. He was finally caught after he crashed his stolen car into a fence.

Elias Thorsson

POLICE LIED ABOUT ASKING ETHNICITY QUESTION
33-year-old Daniel died on the street outside Amagerbro metro station in October. It took police 45 minutes to arrive at the scene after receiving the first phone call. Now they are under fire for not taking the incident seriously because Daniel was a Greenlander.
Police at first denied that they asked the caller whether Daniel was Danish or a Greenlander. However, a recording of the call released by Politiken newspaper proves that it was the second question they asked.
When first faced with the allegations, the police tried to pass the buck, with police inspector Peter Dahl claiming that it was definitely the caller who had mentioned the man's ethnicity.

Jump in fireworks-related injuries on NYE
Think safety glasses on New Year's Eve are unnecessary? This year saw a hike in fireworks-related injuries with a reported 328 in total – around 100 more than in each of the past five years. Three people were killed and 34 were seriously injured.



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Politicians reported over terror comments

Sam Mansour, known as the "Bookseller from Brønshøj" was sentenced to four years imprisonment for inciting terrorism. This is the fourth time that Mansour has been convicted on similar charges, but the court chose not to revoke the Danish passport that he received in 1988. Mansour has been living in Denmark since 1983.

The decision prompted several politicians to take to social media to vent their anger at the ruling. The case wasn't quite complete, however, as Mansour had two weeks to decide whether to appeal. Mansour's attorney subsequently reported the MPs in question – Pia Kjærsgaard (right), Martin Henriksen and Peter Skaarup of Dansk Folkeparti, as well as Inger Støjberg of Venstre – for tampering with the case and hindering his client from getting a fair trial. Chief Justice Torben Goldin has publicly sided with Mansour's attorney and chastised the politicians for interference.



Wikimedia Commons

DRAFTED INTO PRISON
Rene Ehmsen Frandsen, 31, has been sentenced to 14 days in prison for refusing to serve his military service. Frandsen was called up when he was 18, but was allowed to complete his education first. He went on to train as a teacher and, after turning 25 without reporting to the barracks, started to receive fines. He now works in a small school and has decided that a two week prison sentence is less disruptive for his pupils than making them spend four months with a substitute teacher.



flickr / Vince Alongi

MP WANTS LARGER FINGERPRINT DATABASE
Justice spokesperson for the Conservatives, Brian Mikkelsen, wants the police to have access to the fingerprints of every single Dane.

Since 2012, every Dane that has applied for a passport has had to have their fingerprints taken; it is this database that Mikkelsen wants to give the police access to. His counterpart in the Danish People's Party, Peter Skaarup, thinks the idea is marvellous. His party even wants to go a step further, however, and store DNA samples of all residents for the police.

The ruling Socialdemokraterne are less keen. "It's not right that innocent people are drawn into investigations because they happened to be somewhere at a particular time," legal spokesperson Trine Bramsen told DR.

Running out of able bodies
New numbers from Boston Consulting Group show that the labour market will be short of 430,000 workers in the year 2030 if immigration isn't drastically increased. The report Nordic Agenda argues that the Danish economy is facing a crisis unless the ratio between the working age population and those that need providing for, such as the elderly, changes soon. The situation is similar across Scandinavia, with the region requiring an additional two million labourers to sustain its economy.



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NEWSMAKER

WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

Rasmus Jarlov, member of De Konservative in Copenhagen City Council, makes a misguided attempt at explaining the personal and career challenges women face

FROM THE moment boys first realise that girls aren't actually that yucky, but rather mysteriously intriguing and maybe a bit scary, they struggle to understand the opposite sex. Despite the availability of hundreds of self help books, pick up artists and Mel Gibson, many men find the opposite sex an absolute mystery.

But men, help is at hand! A member of Copenhagen City Council for the Conservatives has found the answer – women want power and money.

"The career woman is hard to impress. In general they want a man they can look up to and those are hard for the career woman to find," wrote Rasmus Jarlov on Facebook about the difficulties career women face in finding a mate. After all, he added, "Men just want a woman who is sweet, kind and smart and therefore are as likely to select a teacher or nurse as a top manager."

His post linked to a recent study that found women in leadership positions were more likely to be single than men in corresponding positions.

Later in the week he posted a follow up to hammer home the point, this time with a link to an article asserting that women are more interested in the earning potential of their partner than men are.

"Like it or not, on average, women are more interested in the status and wealth of men than men are of women. Sorry."

Sadly for Jarlov, the study proved no such thing. Instead, the study showed that women were more interested in men who earned their own money than



Rasmus Jarlov being interviewed at a demonstration he organised this summer in support of the Jewish community.

in men who had inherited their wealth.

Despite his oversight, single men could rejoice in the streets. Not only did they now know what women want, Jarlov had narrowed their options from all women to sweet and kind women working in the public sector. Hooking up couldn't get any easier!

Women, however, didn't take Jarlov's generalisations well. Prominent career women including Anne Thygsen, Gitte Seeberg and Stine Bosse took to social media to express their disagreement with Jarlov and his old school ideas.

But not just women took offence to Jarlov's sweeping statements. Television host Esben Bjerre Hansen tweeted: "If it is fine with you, could you not talk

on behalf of ALL men? But great to see your party express some real conservatism."

The backlash hurt Jarlov, who felt unfairly harassed.

"I have now fought against punks, Islamists and feminists, and I have to say that the latter are clearly the most fanatical of them all," he wrote in a Facebook post.

Jarlov is not the only man who has bravely dared to tell the truth where others have remained silent. Recently, the youth wing of Liberal Alliance cited a study on Google that showed women liked to be dominated in bed. The conclusion they drew was that women therefore wanted to earn less money than men. Duh.

The Murmur celebrates individuals like Jarlov who are brave enough to speak the truth. Thanks

to Jarlov, we now know that women aren't just interested in love like in the movies. We are toying with the idea of starting a collection to help financially impeded men improve their chances with the ladies.

Mirth at Jarlov's expense aside, he has actually had a pretty tough year. His father died, his tour bus was written off in an arson attack, he was assaulted and he foiled two attempts to break into his home. He sounds optimistic, however, writing on Facebook that, "hopefully 2015 will be fantastic".

The Murmur wishes him the best of luck next year. We merely hope that, in the future, he read a little more thoroughly before wading into a complex and sensitive debate. If not for his own sake, then for his future female voters. **M**

Elias Thorsson

DANSK?

At Denmark's largest language school

"You must be able to read, write,
and speak Danish if you want to find a job
in your profession in Denmark. The
teachers here at IA Sprog are friendly
and helpful. I am sure that I will speak
Danish well when I am done here."

Ahmad Afridi, Pakistan

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Kicking 2015 off with a sexist advert
It takes starting a new year to remind us of our inadequacies. Gym chain Fitness World decided it would be a great time to capitalise on our lack of self-esteem, with an advert that asks us what sort of person do we want to be in the new year.
"Hey girls, what do you want to be called in 2015? A Babe? A snack? A MILF? Cheeky? Bootylicious?" purred the narrator while toned women flexed their killer bodies. Not everyone thought that getting a sexy nickname was a great ambition for 2015, however.
"Fitness World has the incredibly limited and depressing view that women are only valuable if they are hot and sexy enough to have sex with. [...] We also hope they meant women, not girls," wrote the Danish Women's Society in response. Ouch
Fitness World took the video down after a barrage of unhappy messages. @AmalieValentin took to Twitter to answer the gym chain in a more positive tone. "#fitnessworld asks what I want to be called in 2015... Smart, independent, brave, inspiring, empathetic, strong and interesting, thanks."

DRINK LOCAL, DODGE GLOBAL
A Starbucks has opened up on Rådhuspladsen. Before you think about even going in there consider this: this is a company known for tax dodging and being aggressively anti-labour rights. Its global CEO, Howard Schultz, even forced his workers to join an austerity lobby group. Just go to your local corner cafe.

Elias Thorsson

NEW MEGA NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
A decade of fundraising came to an end in December when Copenhagen's new natural history museum secured the final 550 million kroner it needs to begin construction. The new 950 million kroner complex will house the old Zoological, Geological and Botanical museums and their 14 million objects and items. It opens in 2020 and we're already counting down the days.



Natural History Museum of Denmark

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RESEARCH

LEARNING FROM VULTURES

The Technical University of Denmark (DTU), University of Copenhagen, Aarhus University, Copenhagen Zoo and the Smithsonian Institute in the US have been researching the nuances of the mighty digestive system of vultures.

Vultures rarely ingest live prey, relying instead upon carrion – dead and decomposing carcasses – for nutrition. As a result, they are in contact with deadly microbes that few other animals would survive an encounter with. Not only that, but because the feathered scavengers aren't equipped with beaks to penetrate skin, they often access carcasses via openings including the mouth, eyes, nose, ears and rectums.

A team of researchers from DTU, University of Copenhagen, Aarhus University, Copenhagen Zoo and the US-based Smithsonian Institute investigated why vultures were capable of eating food that would make most animals extremely ill. One of their main findings was that while they found 528 different types of micro-organisms on the faces of the studied birds, they only found 76 types of micro-organisms in their guts.

The researchers believe that the birds have developed an incredibly strong digestive system that eradicates the majority of these microbes. Additionally, they have probably built up a tolerance to many of the bacteria as an evolutionary adaptation. The research might be able to tell us more about how humans can combat these microorganisms, both physically and agriculturally.

21ST CENTURY CONCRETE MAN

Professor Kristian Hertz from the department of civil engineering at DTU has developed a way to produce ultra-light structures using concrete by mimicking Roman building techniques.

The method involves blend-



Hooded vulture

flickr / William Warby

ing different concretes within the same structure, first using a strong and dense concrete to create the scaffolding and frame, before filling it with a lighter concrete to stabilise it. This results in a composite concrete that is more soundproof, four times more fire resistant, and cheaper to produce than ordinary concrete.

"The advantage of the ultra-light structures is that they grant architects much more flexibility, while providing much better soundproofing than standard floors," Hertz told DTUavisen. "This means less noise disturbance between the storeys in a building. Moreover, tests have demonstrated that the new elements are able to withstand fire for four times as long as standard units."

Hertz has patented the ultra-

light structures, which are being mass-produced by his new company, Abeo, and used in new building projects including Gammel Hellerup upper secondary school, DTU Building 324, the Innovest building and the apartments on Krøyers Plads in Christianshavn.

A VITAMIN THAT IS LITERALLY MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

If the recent barrage of fireworks and New Year's fanfare left you worried about your hearing, you'll be happy to learn of a new development in treating noise-induced hearing loss.

Here's how hearing works. There are small hairs in your inner ear – an area called the coch-

There is now hope for musicians, construction workers and others frequently subjected to sonic bombardments

lea – that activate nerves, sending signals to your brain which are decoded into sound. Our hearing becomes damaged when we are exposed to sounds that are louder than what these hairs typically deal with. The louder the sound, the more damage there is to the way these hairs transmit messages to the brain. Too many loud noises can cause the hairs to almost entirely lose their ability to transmit information.

But fear no more! There is now hope for musicians, construction workers and others frequently subjected to sonic bombardments. Researchers at Weill Cornell Medical College and The Gladstone Institute have found a chemical compound, nicotinamide riboside (NR), capable of protecting the nerves that transmit signals.

After administering NR to mice both before and after being exposed to high volumes, the researchers found that NR protected against both short-term and long-term hearing loss. What's more, it worked just as successfully whether administered before or after exposure, meaning that the compound has a rehabilitative quality.

The researchers believe that NR works because it enhances a protein called sirtuin 3 (SIRT3) that is needed by the mitochondria, which power cells. Enhancing SIRT3 makes the cells more resilient. This theory is supported by the fact that SIRT3 levels decline as we age, which could explain age-related hearing loss.

Researchers postulate that STR3 and NR can hold a multitude of answers as to how our cells degenerate in the aging process. These other areas have yet to be explored, but for now, they are confident that this compound will prevent noise-induced hearing loss and can be manufactured commercially like other medicines. We'd wait for human trials to confirm NR's efficacy before you blast that heavy metal, though. **M**

Nereya Otieno

Torture knocking on Denmark's door

Victims of torture flee their tormentors in all corners of the globe. Some land on Scandinavian shores, where they walk anonymously among us. If they come forward, they are helped by rehabilitation organisations that uncover the grim reality of commonplace torture

TORTURERS aren't just war criminals, terrorists and serial killers: they're more prevalent than we can imagine and their victims walk amongst us, even in the cold Copenhagen streets.

"We have torture happening almost everywhere and its scope is incredibly vast," explains Victor Mardigal-Borloz, secretary general of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture (IRCT).

Now based in Copenhagen, the Costa Rican national has worked with human rights for decades and is also a member of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

"Torture is commonly used by police to extract confessions and expedite cases. It's also used as a tool of repression, for example in Latin America, where it is used to punish people for gender non-conformity. It's also used as means of social control. In Congo, rape is commonly committed as a means to stop women from claiming property rights. In these cases, it is individuals committing the act, but it is tacitly approved of by the state, which does nothing to intervene."

ON OUR DOORSTEP

Torture is something that most of us assume only affects those in developing nations, where civil wars still rage, governments are heavily corrupt and poverty plagues the masses. But while it is more prevalent in these nations, Amnesty International found evidence of torture in 79 countries, all of which had ratified the UN Convention Against Torture.

The IRCT is a leading organisation that helps rehabilitate

"We've treated a number of people who were kidnapped by the Taliban. For example, young children who were beaten and forced to put on suicide vests and being psychologically prepared to die, before they escaped"

RUTH LAUGE, THE DIRECTOR OF OASIS

Lesley Price



IRCT

An anonymous torture survivor

these individuals, with 144 rehabilitation centres providing holistic treatment to torture victims in 76 countries.

Asylum seekers arriving in Denmark often bring with them scars from their encounters with torturers. In Copenhagen, the Oasis rehabilitation centre has just 15 staff members tending to approximately 130 victims, mostly hailing from Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Somalia. Its sister organisation, Rehabiliteringscenter for Torturofre (RCT) in Jutland, treats many people from the Balkans, Chechnya, Syria, and the Post-Soviet Republics.

Both organisations treat the victims using a range of services and personnel, including social workers, psychologists, physical therapists and psychiatrists.

"We treat many civilians who have been victims of, or have witnessed organised violence against others, either during armed conflicts or under terror regimes, but we also treat perpetrators, as many from the Balkans were forced into

military service against their will," explains Mikkel Auning-Hansen, an RCT psychologist.

"Chechen refugees are damaged in many ways. Some were hunted, interrogated or tortured by paramilitary groups. Most of them have family members missing, hiding away from home or hunted for their political views. Some still feel that they are being hunted in Denmark."

Ruth Lauge, the Director of Oasis, says soldiers are often the perpetrators.

"We've treated a number of people who were kidnapped by the Taliban. For example, young children who were beaten and forced to put on suicide vests and being psychologically prepared to die, before they escaped," she explains, adding that many victims have been living in Denmark for years, even decades, before they seek treatment.

"Many people come from being on the run and they just want a normal and safe life, with a home, family and work – just like anyone else," Auning-Hansen says.

"Most cope for a limited time, but eventually, stress at work, problems in the family, loss of job or other unforeseen stresses tip the load and that's when people reach out for help."

A GLOBAL SOLUTION

Mardigal-Borzol is tired by the Danish immigration debate of the past 20 years. The fear of foreigners, particularly asylum seekers, is overblown he argues. Very small numbers of asylum seekers arrive in Denmark – less than five thousand last year – and only about a quarter of those who arrive are granted asylum. Lebanon, on the other hand, received two million refugees and Jordan one million.

"I'm not saying Denmark should accept flows of thousands, but societies do not change because you admit a few



Victor Mardigal-Borzol, secretary general of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture (IRCT)

thousand new people every year," Mardigal-Borzol argues, adding that European states should adopt methods to identify torture victims early in the process and prioritise them for asylum.

"Governments have been resilient to this approach because once a person is identified as a torture survivor, there is a higher likelihood that they will receive refugee status," he explains.

RCT psychologist Auning-Hansen says there are also some local issues that need to be addressed.

"Resources can be a problem, time is especially crucial to establish basic human trusts, we have to navigate in an arena with strong political views and we have service goals enforced by the regional boards of healthcare."

Lauge from Oasis agrees, adding that she is disappointed by the eight-month waiting list for victims to receive treatment. She is also focused on improving the training of healthcare professionals to speed up the diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"It gets more and more difficult to treat someone when these symptoms have gone undiagnosed. The earlier the treatment, the more well functioning they are afterwards." ■



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Eritrean lives risked in civil service scandal

After an influx of asylum seekers from Eritrea, the government publishes a report that argues they don't need automatic protection. For a government under pressure from an anti-immigration right wing, it turned out to be too good to be true

IN THE small African country Eritrea, men can expect to be forced to join the military and never leave. The simmering hostilities with Ethiopia, following their two year war between 1998 and 2000, are used as justification for the single-party government's total control over the country. There are no independent NGOs or privately owned media, while forced labour and torture are widely reported.

Of the 37,000 Eritrean asylum seekers that fled to Europe this year, 2,200 arrived in Denmark. Normally, they would be automatically granted asylum, as the Eritrean government's standard practice is to jail and torture citizens who flee the country illegally.

In November, however, the Danish government released a report, written by the Immigration Service, which argued that the situation in Eritrea had improved so much that automatic asylum would no longer be granted to Eritreans. The decision shocked the international community and human rights organisations, who swiftly condemned the government.

At the time of publication, the parliamentary ombudsman had not yet decided whether to launch an investigation. As it stands, the chief suspects are civil servants who ignored facts, misrepresented key sources and fashioned conclusions to suit the political agenda of their ministerial superiors.

ASYLUM BOOM

The story of the scandal is still unfolding and all the facts have yet to be compiled in a simple timeline. But from reading dozens of news articles, The Murmur understands the story like this.

During the summer, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Denmark jumped dramatically. In the first three months of 2014, only ten asylum seekers from Eritrea arrived in Denmark. In July, 514 arrived and in August another 606.

On August 13, Minister of Justice Karen Hækkerup stated in a press release that the Immigration Service was going to conduct a fact-finding mission to understand the

"The Danish report seems more like a political effort to stem migration than an honest assessment of Eritrea's human rights situation"

**LESLIE LEFKOW,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR HUMAN
RIGHTS WATCH,
AFRICA DIVISION**

Peter Stanners



Downtown Keren, Eritrea.

increase in Eritrean asylum seekers and examine whether they are really in need of blanket protection.

After sending representatives to Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Immigration Service published a report on November 25.

"Based on the updated information, the Immigration Service does not find that, in themselves, the conditions in Eritrea regarding national service and illegal emigration constitute persecution or fulfil the necessary demand for protection," the Ministry of Justice stated in a press release at the time.

To justify their claim, the Immigration Service noted that Eritreans have the option of avoiding jail upon return to the country if they sign a letter of regret and pay two percent of all their future salary to the government.

This information was provided by professor Gaim Kibreab from London South Bank University. However, after thoroughly reading the report, he asked to have his name removed.

"I am in no doubt that if [asylum seekers] are returned before they are granted Danish citizenship, they will be imprisoned," he told Politiken newspaper. "Some have been impris-

oned for five years. Some forced to perform labour. The hard conditions in prison mean they don't get enough food and water. There are poor sanitary conditions and they will be tortured to discover who helped them out of the county."

Kibreab says he only knows of a few cases of people avoiding prison by paying a fine. He also criticised the use of testimony from anonymous organisations in Eritrea. One is quoted in the report stating that the allegations of torture and imprisonment in Eritrea were blown out of proportion. But according to Kibreab, these statements cannot be trusted, as all NGOs operating in Eritrea are loyal to the government.

Kibreab was most upset by the impression that the authors only selected pieces of his testimony that suited a particular agenda.

"They have taken what they liked and used it to support their case, ignoring the other information I gave them," he told Politiken newspaper, adding, "The report is not worth the paper it is written on."

Kibreab was not alone in his criticism. In early December a second source in the report, Tamrat Kedebe

from the Inter African Group and former Ethiopian ambassador to the US, condemned the report's conclusions. So too did Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW).

"The Danish report seems more like a political effort to stem migration than an honest assessment of Eritrea's human rights situation," said deputy director for HRW's Africa Division, Leslie Lefkow, in a press release.

HRW argue that parts of the report use contradictory and speculative statements. They add that the report's anonymous sources even acknowledge that, "there is no independent access to detention centers, that the fate of people returned to Eritrea is unclear, and that government reforms of the national service conscription are rumored, but not confirmed. There is no indication that the authors of the report interviewed victims or witnesses of human rights violations in Eritrea."

DISGRUNTLED EMPLOYEES

Of all the evidence against the legitimacy of the report, the most damning is that the two individuals who went on the fact-finding missions did

not support the report's conclusions. Both had even taken sick leave from the Immigration Service prior to the report's publication.

"During and after the mission, it was my impression that my head of department was focussed not on collecting information, but rather on how the information was to be used," chief consultant Jens Weise Olsen told Politiko.

Olsen and his colleague Jan Olsen are some of the most experienced fact finders in the Immigration Service and have visited Rwanda, Burundi and Nigeria over the past 20 years. Olsen says their report on Eritrea deviated markedly from their standard methodological practice.

For example, when they were in the field, the head of department was reluctant to let them conduct interviews to fact check claims made by sources. The head of department also insisted on writing the report, which was very unusual according to Olsen, who says he

and his colleague tended to write these reports themselves.

Most importantly, he agrees with Kibreab's criticism that the report contains cherry-picked information that suits a particular outcome, namely that it will not endanger the lives of Eritrean refugees if they are sent home.

This suspicion is supported by something his head of department told him after they learned that Eritreans could just pay a fine and apologise to avoid jail, which would make it possible to reject their application for asylum and send them back to Eritrea.

"His words were, 'If the board agrees there could be a pay rise lads,'" said Olsen, referring to the Refugee Appeals Board that automatically appeals rejected asylum applications.

The circumstances surrounding the report suggest that the government, or certain officials therein, sought justification for rejecting Eritrean asylum seekers. The high number of asylum seekers in

Denmark this year has made the government vulnerable to attack from right-wing parties who have blamed policies that improved the standard of living for asylum seekers for the massive influx of refugees arriving in Denmark. 14,000 had arrived by the end of November, compared to 7,557 in all of 2013. However, similar increases have been witnessed across Europe and are more likely the result of the ongoing conflict in Syria.

The centre-left coalition is losing voters, particularly to the anti-immigration Dansk Folkeparti. This autumn, the government introduced new restrictions on Syrian asylum seekers, which was largely seen as a symbolic move to appease anxious voters.

There is no evidence, however, that the Ministry of Justice instructed the Immigration Service to provide a report with a specific conclusion. And while it was unusual that the Minister of Justice took credit for launching the fact-

"The report is not worth the paper it is written on"

PROFESSOR GAIM KIBREAB, LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY

finding missions, the Immigration Service has since explained that the missions were planned already in June and not shared with the ministry until August.

The scandal has been most damaging to the Immigration Service, which announced that, given the criticisms of the report, they will give the benefit of the doubt to Eritrean asylum seekers fleeing from forced military service. Olsen is worried that the scandal will discourage experts like Kibreab from cooperating with Danish authorities in the future – a scandal that Olsen blames on a civil service culture where providing results, whatever the cost, will push you up the career ladder.

"Civil servants are rewarded for achieving certain results that the sitting government wants. Our head of department knew that if he managed to change the practice, it would consolidate his position. It would be a big deal," Olsen said, adding that he hopes to return to work soon. **M**

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An image from Tine Enghoff's series 'Possible Relatives'.

The morbid epidemic of isolation

Tine Enghoff photographed the homes of those who passed away without anyone taking notice, drawing attention to the harm of seclusion. But it needn't be this way, and NGOs have started reaching out to the living lonely using conversation and pedal power

TEN YEARS AGO, photographer Tina Enghoff was forced to confront the sad fate that befalls far too many – dying without anyone even noticing.

"Paramedics and police officers streamed into my building one morning and started opening all the windows. My neighbour later told me that an old woman who lived next door to him had been found dead, and that she had been lying there for two months without anyone noticing.

"His apartment had started to smell horribly and first he had thought it was a busted sewage pipe, but it was her," Enghoff explains.

"You can die from loneliness"

JESPER BERTHELSEN, RED CROSS IN DENMARK

Elias Thorsson

"My first thought was, 'I have to get in there'."

DOCUMENTING THE DEAD

The incident inspired Enghoff to document the homes these people leave behind. She had previously worked with homeless people and now felt the need to draw attention to people who live and die in isolation.

"I called the social offices of Copenhagen and explained my idea to them. They ignored me for months, but I kept on calling and calling. After six months they finally gave in and I was allowed to enter the homes of people who had died alone."

She accompanied the social

services, who were tasked with clearing out the homes of the deceased, and published the work in a book and exhibition entitled *Possible Relatives*. It was critically acclaimed and successfully drew attention to a social ill few are aware of.

"I think this is something all people fear. I have done projects about domestic violence and refugees, and none of them have received the same level of attention as my work on loneliness. Not everyone can become an illegal immigrant or an abused woman, but we can all feel lonely – even those that have a family and a career."

What surprised her most was

that many weren't aged, but only in their 30s or 40s when they died alone.

"These people suffered from depression, some had substance abuse problems, but there were also individuals that made me ask myself, 'Why the hell are they alone?'"

A SOCIETAL ILL

Chronic loneliness can kill. A 2010 study of over 300,000 people by the Department of Psychology at Brigham Young University in Utah found that chronic loneliness can have the same impact as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It also showed that people who belonged to a wide social group had a 50 percent high-

er survival rate during the study period than those who did not.

These and similar findings have led health authorities around the world to classify loneliness as a health concern as grave as alcoholism and smoking.

"You can die from loneliness. People stop taking care of themselves, don't leave the house and it greatly increases their stress levels," explains Jesper Berthelsen, a senior consultant with the Red Cross in Denmark.

"Humans are social beings and being closed off from the rest of the world can lead to depression and other ills related to not taking care of oneself," he says.

According to Berthelsen, there are around 220,000 Danes aged 16 and over who often feel lonely, and the main risk groups are the youngest and the oldest. But loneliness can affect everyone.

"What surprises people the most is that many of those who feel lonely are people with families and careers. It sounds paradoxical that you can be surrounded by people but still feel alone. It seems surprising, but loneliness cannot be solved simply by increasing the quantity of relationships. Maybe people are carrying problems they don't feel that they can share with their spouse or work colleagues and that hurts them."

REACHING OUT

Berthelsen is responsible for organising over 8,000 volunteers who try to help people living with loneliness. They visit elderly people who live alone and host cafes and events where people can come and have a chat.

"Loneliness permeates all of society: our social activities, our youth, our prisons, our elderly – it eats away at people. We must learn to keep our eyes open to people who are lonely and engage them, whether that be at parental meetings or the workplace."

The main issue, however, is that feeling lonely remains a taboo in our societies because the sense of shame it elicits makes it harder for the individual to address the problem. Berthelsen provides an example of the taboo in action.

"Every Christmas, we have a programme where people can sign up to be invited over for dinner at Christmas Eve with volun-

teering families. And each year there are five times more people signing up to be hosts than people signing up to be guests. Loneliness is very hard for people to admit to. They see other people enjoying the holidays with their friends and they think, 'Why don't I have any?'"

RIDING OUT THE LONELINESS

In Denmark, it is often the role of the state or charities, such as the Red Cross, to address social ills. But individuals can easily make a difference to address loneliness, as Ole Kassow found out on a seemingly typical morning in August 2012.

"I biked past this old man sitting by himself on a bench four times over the course of a few weeks. He was always alone, so I decided to offer him a bike tour. I rented a rickshaw and asked him if he wanted to take a ride. He said yes and he was so happy that I had offered."

His simple act of kindness transformed into the organisation, Cykling Uden Alder (Biking Without Age), which takes elderly people in nursing homes out for bike rides across the country and beyond.

"After the bike ride, I went to the nursing home where the man lived and I asked if I could start taking more old people out for bike rides. They loved the idea and it kind of just expanded from there. It was never meant to become anything substantial. I just wanted to do something nice for someone else."

The project expanded to Norway in 2013, where hundreds of volunteers give rides to people who live in isolation or have limited mobility that hinders their access to the world.

"Many of the people we have taken out biking have said that it has completely changed their lives. They experience the mobility they had lost and they get to make friends along the way. They talk about how great it is to be a part of society again, and that they can go out and have a cup of coffee."

Kassow says that many elderly people feel lonely despite living in nursing homes where they are surrounded by other people. Bikes, he argues, are a great tool for helping them feel the presence of others.

"When you sit on a bike for five to ten minutes without saying anything, it is like taking a



A volunteer for Cycling Without Age takes two women for a ride in a rickshaw.

walk through the woods. You feel this closeness with people without having to talk all the time. You can be together for an hour, but just talk for five minutes. This definitely helps people with loneliness. It shows you that you are not alone. And because we always take two people together on each bike, many of our passengers have told us that they have made friends on our trips."

The project has shaped Kassow's view of the world and other people, inspiring him to take a more proactive approach to interacting with others.

"I think that many people in the hustle and bustle of everyday life forget to notice the small things we can do for others. It might mean that we have to put aside our own needs a bit and see the world through the lens of 'What can I do for others?' You don't have to be super ambitious, just observant enough to notice the little things."

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

Kassow points to research that shows how people feel better about themselves after they help

"People in the hustle and bustle of everyday life forget to notice the small things we can do for others"

**OLE KASSOW,
FOUNDER OF CY-
CLING WITHOUT
AGE**

others or show them kindness. He argues that the reason people don't reach out and help strangers – which would also make themselves happier – is found in Danish culture.

"I think that we Danes might have a culture that encourages people to just think about themselves. I don't think it's meant to be mean, it's just the way things are. We are not supposed to chat with strangers on the train. It's just ingrained into us."

Kassow is optimistic, however, and believes that society could be transformed if people start thinking more about reaching out to others. In so doing, he believes that we could create a world that is more engaging for those who feel isolated and alone.

"If we become open to performing random, spontaneous and unprovoked acts of kindness, we start to surprise people around us and make them happy. And I think that once you start, you can't stop. Helping people becomes an addiction and it starts to spread." **M**



Denmark's disappearing babies

Is Denmark's legendary gender equality and free education responsible for the worrying free falling birth rate? The Murmur spoke to some parents and experts to find out why, despite extraordinary incentives, people are choosing not to have babies

"WE'RE FILLED with so much fear of a process that should be the most natural in the world," says Luise Thye-Oestergaard. "People are too stressed to have children – and it's far too expensive. If you want a decent living for your family, mothers can't afford to go part time."

This 35-year-old mother of two had her first child aged 32, a relatively normal age to start a family these days. In 2013 the average age for a first-time mother was 29, up from 24 in the 1970s.

But with a later start also comes fewer children. According to Statistics Denmark, fertility has plummeted from 1.87 to 1.67 children per woman between 2010 and 2013.

It has been decades since Denmark's had replacement level fertility and without immigration, Denmark's population would have started dropping decades ago.

Should the steady stream of new arrivals diminish, Denmark will be in trouble. An increasingly aged population will need to be supported by fewer people of working age and tough choices will have to be made – if social services aren't made more efficient, they will either need to be cut or funded through tax hikes.

I moved to Denmark with my ten-week-old baby in tow, imagining Denmark to be a parental paradise, in which generous public services helped people live balanced lives. And undoubtedly they can. In Co-

"We felt there were a lot of things that we wanted to do first – we knew that life changes when you have a child"

CHRISTIAN BUCHARDT, 42-YEAR-OLD FATHER OF TWO

Polly Phillips

penhagen, all children are guaranteed a place in day care within four kilometres of their home, at a cost of less than 4,000 kroner a month. In London, places are fewer and further between and the same service can cost 1,000 kroner per day.

And yet still the birth rate drops. After speaking to Thye-Oestergaard, I wondered whether the Danish model is actually a poisoned chalice, serving up so much freedom and stability that starting a family has become an anxiety-inducing upheaval that people are putting off or avoiding altogether.

But as I spoke to more Danes – both experts and other mothers I met when I settled my daughter into day care and took advantage of the available public services for children – a more subtle picture emerged: one in which personal expectations, structural hurdles and economic disincentives have all conspired to send Denmark's birth rate plummeting.

PERMANENT EDUCATION

42-year-old father of two Christian Buchardt and his partner had their first child when he was 33, the year after he completed his studies. He acknowledges that the reasons for delaying his family were selfish.

"I think society is trying to be younger for a lot longer these days. We felt there were a lot of things that we wanted to do first – we knew that life changes when you

have a child. It changes in a good way, but it's still a big change."

Martin Dissing, 31, agrees that the Danish desire to stay young longer has definitely played a part in him waiting to have kids.

"I only finished university two years ago and I'm enjoying life. I think people in general are more focused on their own lives than they used to be – they want to be free to do what they want, to go out and to travel.

"I do want a family and I'd probably like to have more than two children but it's very expensive in Denmark. Plus if you start later, you'll have fewer. Lots of my friends are in the same situation as me, still not quite ready to take the plunge."

Free universities and student grants make Denmark a dream to study in. But without a financial incentive to finish studies as quickly as possible, the average Dane doesn't finish their university education until they are 27 – in the UK the average age is 25.

And even when people finish their studies, many still don't feel prepared to have a child. 33-year-old Christina Margraff wants to make sure that she could take care of the child alone.

"I would love to be in a position to have a baby now, but I haven't found the right man and I'm not established enough in my career yet. Lots of my friends are waiting too – one of them is 46 and only now are

she and her partner trying. They both had long educations and work commitments and have only just managed to find the time."

Lilian Bondo, President of the Danish Association of Midwives, sympathises with Margraff's position.

"Young and newly educated women often feel that they would have to give everything up to have children. The problem is that the pressure of having a job and a career is not easily reconciled with starting a family, so we get too old before we start. And if you think at 18 you'd like to be a mother of three, but don't get started until you're 30, you may end up just being the mother of one."

A WOMAN'S JOB

Women have good reason to be concerned that having a child would impact their careers. While it is illegal for employers to ask women about their family plans, they are still subject to prying questions in a way that their male counterparts are not. According to the Danish Women's Society, one in eight Danish nurses were asked about their maternity plans during job interviews, while 13 percent of female respondents to a recent survey conducted by the Danish Society of Engineers said they were asked about their plans for having children at a job interview.

"These questions show men and



Christoffer Rosenfeldt

Luise Thye-Oestergaard at home with her husband Jesper and their children Lias and Vaia.

women do not yet have the same opportunities in work and careers. It is not fair for anyone – not for men either. If you want to make it more attractive to have children, you have to earmark maternity leave for fathers," says Lisa Holmfjords, president of the Danish Women's Society.

Danish women have made great inroads into the labour market over the last few decades. Indeed, the 79 percent of working mothers in Denmark who are able to not only drop their children off at day care, but to pick them up as well, are the envy of the international community.

But they still shoulder the burden of responsibility with newborn children and many are fearful to take time out of a career they've worked hard to establish, according to Professor Anette Borchorst of the Department of Political Science at Aalborg University.

"I only finished university two years ago and I'm enjoying life"

MARTIN DISSINGV, 31

"Women have become integrated in the labour force to a very high degree – they take longer to finish their education than men do. The length of maternity leave is very important for your career, your salary and your pension. If you have two children and take long maternity leaves, it really has an impact on your career. The labour market is still so extremely gender segregated."

Borchorst adds that as a woman's educational level increases, so too does the need for support from her partner. To ensure such support, men need to be encouraged to take more time off with newborns so that women can return more quickly to the labour market. Parents currently get 52 weeks of parental leave, of which 18 weeks are earmarked for the mother and two for the father directly after birth.

The remaining 32 weeks can be split between parents. Yet men account for only 7.4 percent percent of parental leave. To encourage men to take more time off, the government did raise the possibility of earmarking a portion exclusively for fathers (or rather, the second partner regardless of gender). Under this scheme, if the father/second partner did not utilise the earmarked time, it would be lost for both parents.

Sensing a lack of political support, the proposal was soon abandoned by the government. Such a scheme does, however, exist in Norway, where 14 weeks are earmarked as part of the so-called "father's quota". Norwegian men spend more time with their children than they did a decade ago, though only a third of fathers took the full period. While it remains a divisive is-

sue, Christian Buchardt's experience living in Norway makes him think it is a good idea.

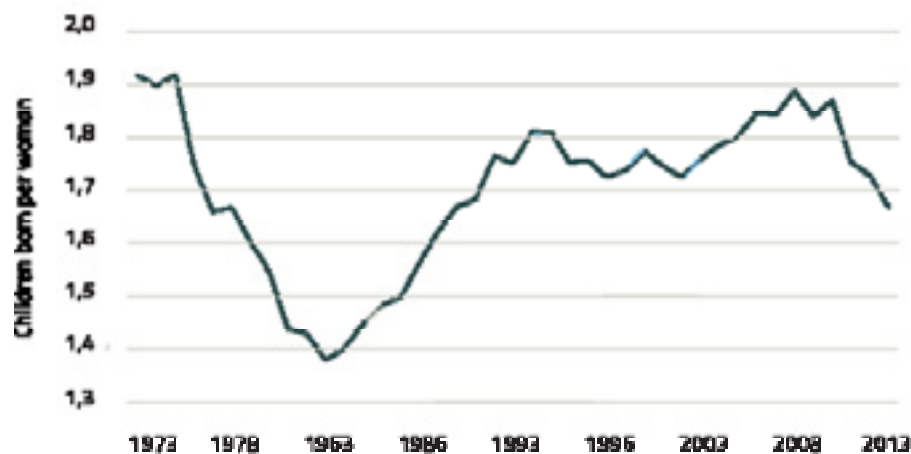
"Although I don't think that fathers should be forced to take 12 weeks, for example, we've spent a lot of time in Norway, where the increased paternity leave seems to really work. I think every man should be given that opportunity."

LATER MEANS HARDER

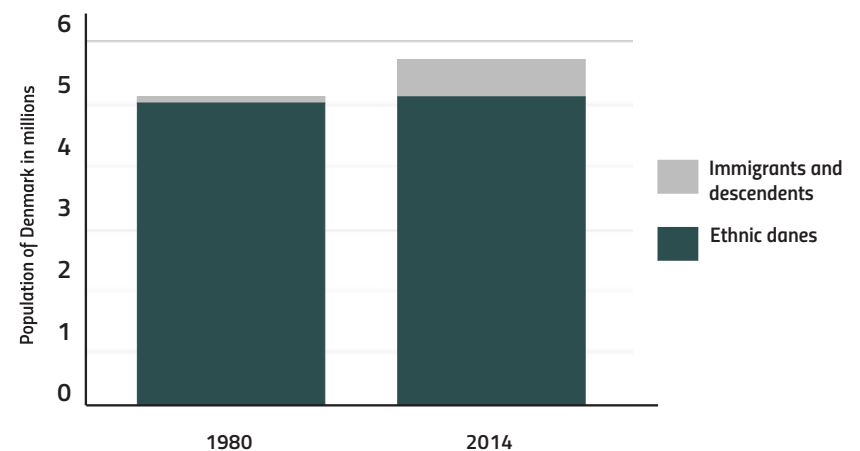
Regardless of paternity leave, people are still leaving it later to become parents. But the longer you wait, the harder it is to have children, as many are discovering.

"There's no doubt that the birth rate has been falling in the last five years and my guess is that this is mainly associated with people wanting a permanent job before they start to have children," says Professor Mette Ejrnæs of the De-

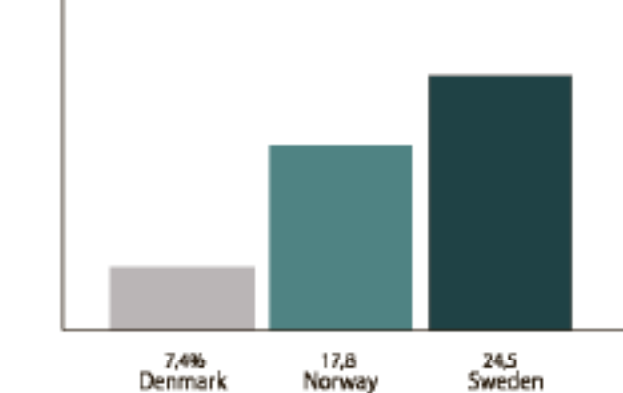
Fertility in Denmark is dropping rapidly and has not been lower since 1989.



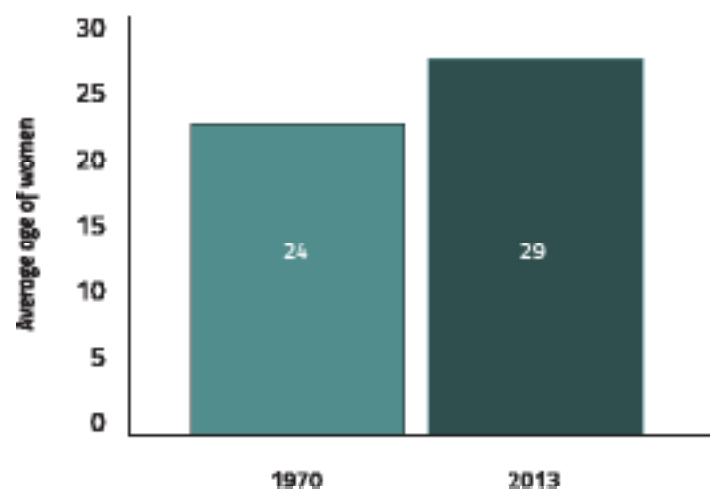
The Danish population would have flatlined since the 1980s, if it weren't for immigration.



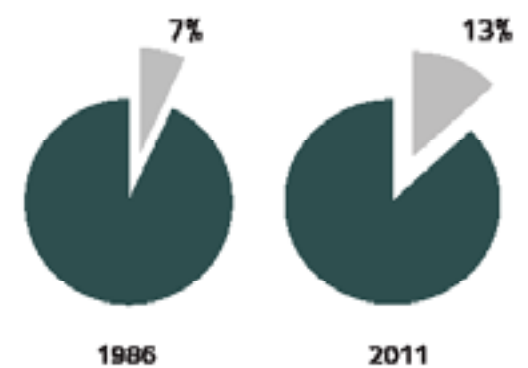
Compared to their Scandinavian neighbours, Danish men still take a very small share of parental leave with newborns.



Danish women are five years older when they have their first child now, than they were in 1970.



The share of children born to parents aged over 40 has almost doubled.



Graphics: Ivanna Rahm. Sources: Danmarks Statistik except bottom left, FTF

partment of Economics at the University of Copenhagen.

"Doctors are talking about this causing other problems because the fecundity is falling rapidly from 25, that fertility seems to be postponed. This could create problems."

Indeed, a now infamous Rigshospitalet report in 2013 declared that the low birth rate in Denmark was approaching "epidemic levels", and that "many wait too long to have children, creating greater need for fertility treatments".

"We've got a major problem because women expect to have their babies later because of work and education pressures," says Dr Svend Lindenberg, founder of the Copenhagen Fertility Center.

"Six percent of all children born in Denmark are conceived with the assistance of fertility clinics. We are treating more women for fertility is-

sues per capita than anywhere else in Europe except Iceland. Half of the women of fertile age in Copenhagen and other major cities are single. If this continues, in just three generations we will have half the Danes that we do today. I'd hardly call that family friendly."

So far, the government's efforts to encourage people to have younger families have fallen flat, reports Bondo from the Danish Association of Midwives.

"Before 2011, during the rule of the Liberal-Conservative government, we saw an increased emphasis on reducing the age of university students and speeding up their education, as well as increasing financial support for families in education. It was hoped to reduce the age that people had children, but it hasn't had this effect, perhaps because of the financial crisis," she said.

The solution, Bondo argues, is to encourage students to be parents.

"It's so natural to want to have a baby when you are young and in love and have all the strength in the world. Let students have their families early on and create living conditions so that they can. They might actually present themselves to employers as more attractive, as the early years of childrearing have been left behind."

EXTRAORDINARY INCENTIVES

Part of the problem might be that, until now, avoiding pregnancy has been the primary message of sexual education programmes. The Danish Family Planning Association now wants sexual education programmes to include discussions about the importance of family and the consequences of waiting to have children.

Busy lives can often leave little

"Six percent of all children born in Denmark are born with the assistance of fertility clinics"

DR SVEND LINDENBERG, FOUNDER OF THE COPENHAGEN FERTILITY CENTER

time for overworked parents to make baby making a priority. In 2012, several day care centres on the island of Funen made international headlines when they opted to stay open in the evenings to give parents a bit of private time so they hopefully would make some siblings for their offspring.

The travel agency SPIES was behind another headline-making stunt, when earlier this year it ran a campaign urging holidaymakers to "Do it for Denmark". Couples who could prove they conceived their child on a SPIES holiday were offered a selection of baby-related prizes, including three years' worth of diapers.

But while the stunt raised an international chuckle, the situation in Denmark is no laughing matter. Denmark, one of the best countries in the world to have children, is running out of them. **M**



CAPTURED

Journalist STEFFEN STUBAGER moved to South America last year and has travelled extensively across the continent, filing reports that frequently appear in the Danish media. These are a couple of photographs he has taken along the way.



"More than five million Colombians have been forced out of their homes and off their land during the country's ongoing civil war. Many of them end up in one of the world's largest and most dangerous slum cities: Ciudad Bolívar. They wake up every day, only hoping the day will not be their last."





"Traveling through the Amazon region of Bolivia, I met these boys on a river bank. They are all children of gold diggers hoping to find a big chunk of gold."



blood SWEAT & tears

From an acrobatic sport to a death-defying lifestyle, skateboarding has evolved dramatically over the past forty years. A new book takes a look back at skateboarding culture in Denmark – a culture that has survived commercialisation and which continues to define success by the ability to confront and overcome fear

R

ough and bloodied hands, dirty clothes and torn sneakers – my memories of being a skateboarder are visceral. From the age of 15, I wouldn't go anywhere without my board. I explored the city, looking for ledges to grind on and stairs to do tricks down.

Some days I'd head to a skatepark and wait my turn to tackle the obstacles. It was an opportunity to be among my Danish peers, though they weren't always friendly. Skateboarding was cliquey and the different groups kept to themselves. But we all knew who each other were, and when I'd eventually land a trick, I'd often get an appreciative clap. One of those clapping was Henrik Edelbo.

"Skateboarding is a struggle. It hurts and it will keep on hurting until you succeed. And when you do, you can feel invincible," he tells me in his office in Sydhavn.

Few people have done more to document skateboarding in Denmark than Edelbo, a photographer and filmmaker who recently published the book *Dansk Skateboarding* together with journalist Rasmus Folehave Hansen. The book charts the rise of skateboarding in the 1970s and 1980s, its fall from grace in the early 1990s before a revival in the late 1990s and the flood of corporate sponsorship in the 2000s.

It is a historical document, with hundreds of photographs from Edelbo's catalogue and contributors from across the country. But it also tells the larger story of how an independent subculture was built through inventiveness, bravery and competitive spirit.



"Skateboarding is self-created and not interested in profit. The book is a perfect example of that. It has taken me almost a whole year of full time work and we will probably not make any money from it. But that's how this culture works," Edelbo says.

REMEMBERING THE ROOTS

Sitting beside Edelbo in their Sydhavn office is Jacob Birch, who designed and laid out the book. A former skateboarder who moved over to graphic design and graffiti after becoming frustrated at his lack of progress, he remembers how skateboarding allowed him to develop a new identity.

"I'm a terrible skater – I used to skate a lot but I wasn't really good at it," Birch says laughing.

"When I was skating in the suburbs, we got beat up all the time. We had our own little skatepark but we were the outcasts. But when you come from a small city and you don't want to ride a scooter or play football, skateboarding is the natural thing to do. You can do it on your own, you don't have to be part of a team and you can decide when you want to go skate."



What differentiates skateboarding from other subcultures is that looking the part isn't enough. To be a member, you need to pluck up the courage and apply yourself. You need to stare down obstacles and risk broken bones and abrasions.

CORPORATE INTERESTS

Not that skateboarding is immune to trends. Fashion permeated everything in skateboarding, from wheel size to board width, styles of tricks and clothing trends – even when skateboarding was unfashionable.

"In 1993 we looked like clowns in our baggy clothes, but you had to look like that to be a respected skateboarder," says Edelbo. "We had fashion police who said we weren't cool if we didn't comply. But while people who didn't skate thought we looked like idiots, we knew that they didn't know shit. Skateboarding fashion has since become much more diverse, especially after skateboard fashion became mainstream. Skateboarding had strict rules until

the end of the 90s. The rules are looser now, also with regard to tricks – it's much less rigid."

Skateboarding has never been more mainstream and corporate than it is now. When I volunteered to build ramps for the Scandinavian Open competition at the age of 16 in 2001, I showed up at Forum exhibition centre in central Copenhagen and was given a nail gun in one hand and a joint in the other.

Back then I would risk getting fined for skating on the cycle path. Now city officials recognise that skateboarding is a cultural asset. I grew up skating in Copenhagen's biggest park, Fælledparken, where throughout the 1990s and 2000s, skaters had built an array of weather-beaten wooden ramps. Now it's northern Europe's biggest concrete park, paid for in part by shipping giant Mærsk.

Corporations such as Nike and Adidas have also broken into the scene, displacing the smaller skater-owned companies that enabled the scene to develop in the first place. But Edelbo isn't worried, for while some professional

"What separates heroes from cowards is how you deal with your fear. This can't be commercialised"

HENRIK EDELBO



skateboarders have embraced the glamour of TV-broadcast and energy-drink-sponsored competition skateboarding, many continue to explore the possibilities of the urban terrain.

"As skating became more mainstream, it spawned a grassroots counter culture. The radicals have become far more radical. They're out building their own concrete obstacles in alleyways. These kids are keeping it real and emphasising their realness so much more than 10 years ago," says Edelbo.

Not that there aren't commercially successful Danish skateboarders. Nicky Guerrero won the 1986 European Championship before moving to California to skate professionally. Rune Glifberg followed in his footsteps, becoming an elite vert professional and appearing on the legendary skateboarding game, Tony Hawk Pro Skateboarder.

There have also been tragedies. In 2009, Denmark's most promising professional street skateboarder Kristian Bomholt died in his sleep aged 29. Bomholt suffered from



a heart problem that was exacerbated by hard physical training and a partying lifestyle.

"He was the only pro Danish street skater at the time and was completely dedicated. He embodied the story of skateboarding – that it wasn't about competing with others. He was so good because of his competition with himself."

ONE POSSIBLE STORY

Bomholt was one of a handful of Danish skateboarders singled out in the book for their impact on the local scene. But Birch stresses that the book is not the final say on who and what is, and is not, important.

"This isn't *the* story – it's *a* story. Some people have disagreed about our priorities, but the book is just supposed to spark memories and provide a platform for their own storytelling."

Edelbo adds that while the book focuses on key figures and locations, it was important to cover the entire scene.

"We thought it was important not just to include the heroes, but to also have the ordinary

kids. These are the people who made the scene," Edelbo says, adding that it's important that the current generation understand how skateboarding became what it is now.

"In the beginning of the 90s, there were maybe 50 skaters in Denmark. It's so commercial now."

Often trivialised in mainstream culture, the success of skateboarding is its unique mix of creativity, athleticism and community. It's a sport without a central administration to guide its development. If it had one, it's unlikely it would have evolved from an acrobatic balance-based sport reminiscent of figure skating in the 1960s, to the modern and aggressive style that unfolds on public infrastructure around the world today.

"Skateboarding is like a martial art: there's blood sweat and tears," Edelbo says. "But what separates heroes from cowards is how you deal with your fear. This can't be commercialised. Because being on a skateboard is a constant battle and this will never change, regardless of how much money you make." **M**

Few have done more to document the Danish skateboarding culture than Henrik Edelbo (below), whose photo catalogue provided the bulk of images in the book.

Among the stand out figures that are profiled are Kristian Bomholt (left), Rune Glibberg (right), and Laurent Gehin (previous page, bottom right, and page 25).



Peter Stanners

Dansk Skateboarding

Available in skate-shops and book stores around Copenhagen. Find it online:

streetmachine.com

DKK 299



Photographs courtesy of Henrik Edelbo.

CLOUD BURSTS TO URBAN RENEWAL

Copenhagen has already built itself a reputation as an environmentally friendly city. But with a new series of construction projects in Østerbro, sustainability organisations and locals alike are setting out to create an ecological proving ground

FROM SMALL TOWNS to sprawling cities, the threat of climate change is growing increasingly acute. Cities in low lying and coastal areas, such as Copenhagen, are on the front lines in this battle against threats waged by rising sea levels, while others contend with extreme weather events and sustained droughts. Whether it's the polar vortex, floods, or mudslides, it's not surprising that many feel at the mercy of the planet and powerless in the face of these new challenges.

One Copenhagen neighbourhood is determined to regain control and increase its resilience to climate change. In Saint Kjeld's Quarter in Copenhagen's Østerbro district, residents have been demanding action to alleviate one of its most pressing environmental threats – cloudbursts.

These huge storm systems dump massive amounts of rainwater, usually in a concentrat-

ed area over a short period of time, that in turn can overwhelm the city's sewers and ultimately lead to substantial flooding of streets, underpasses, and basements.

In August 2011, Saint Kjeld's fell prey to some of the worst flooding the city has ever seen. Pictures of Lyngbyvej, one of the major roadways leading into the neighbourhood, completely under water, made front page headlines and spurred political outcry for solutions.

Inaction in the face of these new realities was not an option. Which is why local residents started working in partnership with KlimaKvarter.dk and a number of other organisations committed to sustainability, including the architectural firm Tredje Natur (Third Nature), to find liveable solutions to this problem.

"It became clear that the area was in need of some physical renovations," says René Sommer Lindsay, project manager for KlimaKvart-

"In Saint Kjeld's, residents have been involved since the very beginning, outlining their expectations for these projects to the city"

RENÉ SOMMER LINDSAY, PROJECT MANAGER FOR KLIMAKVARTER'S SAINT KJELD'S QUARTER PROJECT

Khara Lewin

er's Saint Kjeld's Quarter Project and also a part of the The Integrated Urban Renewal (Områdeopnyelsen) project.

Saint Kjeld's is a low-lying neighbourhood with close proximity to the harbour, which is one of the main reasons for its vulnerability to cloud bursts. Fortunately, The Integrated Urban Renewal project opened offices in the neighbourhood in May 2011, just months before the 2011 cloudburst, uniquely positioning them to tackle this growing problem.

This is how KlimaKvarter.dk was born: a new type of organisation focused on the physical renewal of Østerbro as a means of building defence mechanisms against cloudbursts while simultaneously strengthening social and cultural relationships in the area.

A WORLDWIDE EXAMPLE

Thanks to the collective efforts of locals, KlimaKvarter.dk and urban planners, Saint Kjeld's is now host to a number of groundbreaking projects under the watchful eye of city officials. Copenhagen expects to invest 10 billion kroner in climate adaptation measures over the next 50 years. The city plans to use Saint Kjeld's as a bellwether testing grounds for forward-thinking solutions that, if successful, will become the model for climate adaptation in Copenhagen and around the globe.

In many ways, the residents of Saint Kjeld's are collaborating with officials and urban planners like never before, Lindsay explains.

"Usually the city will bring a concrete proposal to local residents and take their feedback into consideration. In Saint Kjeld's, residents have been involved since the very beginning, outlining their expectations for these projects to the city, not the other way around."

When the architectural firm Tredje Natur



Bryggervangen by Landskronagade, 1 on the map next page.



Saint Kjeld's Quarter in Østerbro is being adapted to cope with a wetter climate. Giant inverted umbrellas, left top, gather rainwater while different plants were planted in high and low lying areas, left bottom, based on their ability to cope with drought and flooding.



Artist renderings of Tåsinge Square, top right, and Saint Kjeld's Square, bottom right.

Map:

- 1 – Bryggervangen
- 2 – Saint Kjeld's Square
- 3 – Tåsinge Square



All illustrations and renderings: Trede Natur



won a European design contest in 2012 with its proposal for climate adaptation in the neighbourhood, Lindsay knew he had found a crucial ally.

"They were also focused on this discussion about green cities and rainwater and everything just fit into place. We use them as our advisors. Their conceptual drawings ignited the political debate."

In 2013 the project gained international notoriety when Sustainia, an organisation describing itself as "a global collaborative platform for communicating a sustainable future and for building a model and vision of that future", listed Saint Kjeld's as one of the top 100 inspiring green solutions in the world.

And the project has already inspired similar initiatives in cities including New York and Paris.

TÅSINGE SQUARE

Tåsinge Square, one of the first concepts to spring to life from the organic collaboration

"It's going to be explosive"

RENÉ SOMMER LINDSAY

between project leaders and area residents, was completed in December. The area has now been converted into a green oasis in the heart of the city.

Tåsinge Square offers a useful public greenspace that will host a number of herbs, plants, and other wildlife. Plant species were chosen based on simple yet thoughtful factors; for example, plants that can tolerate near drought-like conditions have been planted in the square's high-lying areas, while species that can absorb and handle massive amounts of rainwater have been planted in the square's low-lying areas.

But perhaps the most crucial piece of this project has nothing to do with aesthetics. Huge containers have been installed under Tåsinge Square to collect excess rainwater and hopefully prevent future flooding in the area.

Although the finished product looks sleek and modern, according to the official brochure released by the city it was built using mostly recycled and refurbished materials, includ-

ing 62 square metres of graffiti tiles reclaimed from Ørestad Blvd. Tåsinge Square also features iconic Copenhagen touches such as the overhead streetlights and classic green and black benches.

It's hard to imagine the giant collection tanks just underfoot – a vital installation masked by the cover of a warm and inviting square, with a capacity of 4,300 cubic metres of rainwater, the collection tanks span half a football pitch.

Lindsay is energised and hopeful, already setting his sights on the neighborhood's next big project, Saint Kjelds Square.

"It's going to be explosive," he says. "Whereas Tåsinge Square is more quiet and unassuming, Saint Kjeld's will stand out as a place to be emulated around the city. The greenspace in the area is currently surrounded by a traffic circle, making it impossible for residents to enjoy. The new Saint Kjeld's Square will bring nature into the limelight and make traffic patterns a secondary motivation." **M**



La Sylphide. (l-r) Kizzy Matiakis as Effy, Ulrik Birkkjær as James and Alexander Stæger as Gurn.

New Look

for Danish Ballet Classics

"The Royal Danish Ballet is synonymous with August Bournonville and, it could be argued, vice versa," wrote Frank Andersen, the Royal Danish Ballet's former artistic director. Two of the choreographer Bournonville's works and a more recent Danish ballet classic have now been re-staged – with different approaches to keeping the masterworks alive

August Bournonville's legacy lives on at the Royal Danish Ballet, whose dancers continue to be trained using the ballet master's techniques from the mid-19th century. Bournonville created around 50 pieces specifically for the ballet, of which around a dozen remain in the repertory today and have been danced here in an unbroken tradition since they were first choreographed.

These works for the stage all hold the distinctive character of Bournonville's technique and style: his way of choreographing gives many quick and small steps for the dancers and relies on their acting skills. This style is different from that of the classical Russian ballets such as

Swan Lake or *Sleeping Beauty*, which are best known for their acrobatic lifts, and gave rise to the twentieth century's neo-classical ballet tradition that is most prominently featured at the New York City Ballet today.

The primarily French romantic ballets from the nineteenth century – of which *Giselle* and *Coppélia* are still widely shown at opera houses all over the world – also look quite different from the Danish ballets. Even if Bournonville choreographed in the same century, sometimes using similar otherworldly personnel in his ballets (such as sylphs, elves, sea demons) and the same long white tutus, the lively and expressive Danish ballet style remains distinctive. This makes Denmark one of only a handful of coun-

tries with their own, unique national ballet style and tradition.

No other choreographer defined the Royal Danish Ballet like Bournonville has, but there was one who came to considerable influence in the twentieth century: Harald Lander, in particular his work *Etudes* from 1948. "For a Danish ballet dancer," wrote Nikolaj Hübbe about the piece some years ago, "Lander's *Etudes* is almost like the national anthem". *Etudes* was the piece that brought Lander international recognition and is today danced by some leading international companies. Thomas Lund, who headed staging for the production's current Copenhagen version, has in the past years also staged *Etudes* in Boston, Vien-

Franziska
Bork-Petersen

na and Paris. The Copenhagen dancers perform this piece with impressive aplomb and principal dancer J'aime Crandall is fabulously cast as the leading ballerina. While Hübbe tries to add to or bring out something new in the Bournonville ballets, Lund and his team are entirely devoted to staging the abstract *Etudes* in the most authentic way possible.

REVIEW 1: 'LA SYLPHIDE'

Two of Bournonville's most famous ballets recently premiered at the Royal Danish Ballet in new interpretations: *La Sylphide* and *A Folk Tale*. Both of these were re-staged by teams headed by the company's current artistic director, Nikolaj Hübbe.

In this latest version, *La Sylphide* gets completely new costumes and scenography. Designer Bente Lykke Møller strips down the Scottish tale and makes *La Sylphide* appear in a guise that does justice to contemporary Scandinavian minimalism, rather than using the original stuffy tartan appearance. While this creates a jolly good look, the visual aesthetics clash with the rest of the ballet, which keeps the spirit of how it has been performed for decades.

The production's potentially interesting new perspective on *La Sylphide* – that its male lead

James obsesses about the other-worldly and unobtainable Sylphide due to his suppressed homosexuality – is only suggested in the final seconds of the piece in a kiss between James and the witch Madge (played by Hübbe himself) that leaves the audience somewhat puzzled.

La Sylphide is one of the ballets that has been danced regularly at the Royal Danish Ballet since Bournonville choreographed it in 1836 and there is arguably a lot that isn't particularly 'up to date' about it. Overall, this clash makes the contemporary look come across like a decorative, rather than actually interpretative feature of the new production.

The dancing, however, is divine and the supporting roles deserve a particular mention. Kizzy Matiakis does great justice to the ethereal fairy's heavier, more folkloristic counterpart. In the role of Effy, the woman who James is supposed to marry when he instead falls in love with the Sylphide, her phenomenal stage presence makes the first act seem like it's about her wedding tragedy, rather than the two main characters' encounter. Alexander Stæger excels with charisma and splendid technique as Effy's admirer Gurn.

REVIEW 2: 'A FOLK TALE'

While *La Sylphide* appears in tones on a scale

No other choreographer defined the Royal Danish Ballet like Bournonville has.

from charcoal to mousy grey, the new production of *A Folk Tale* features primarily pastel colours and black. It premiered on the big Opera stage in 2011 and re-appeared on the Old Stage at Kongens Nytorv in December 2014. The fairytale stage design, with structures inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's paper cuttings, works well on this smaller scale, and overall the design is creative. The dancing, again, is flawless and Gregory Dean's dance out of bewitchment is particularly remarkable.

While this is perhaps all one should expect from a good ballet production, *A Folk Tale's* antiquated moralistic undertones are hard to ignore: her unashamed materialism makes the noblewoman Birthe a clear misfit, just as much as her reckless eroticism; and all turns out well only when the lead couple can finally get married. There is undoubtedly a strong sense of Christianity in Bournonville's ballets, but characterising the bad girl by means of her showing a lot of bare leg can strike a contemporary audience as somewhat preposterous. **M**



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There is war, my daughter

We are lying on the sofa, covered by a blanket, each at our own end. Your legs are thrown over my body. The windows are wide open. I wait for the down-pour to start. You are falling asleep. You wiggle your fingers out of my hand. "Oh no. Maybe there will be a war between Christians and Muslims," you say to me.

You are my daughter. I pressed you into the midhusband's arms in 40 minutes. In the eight years you've been here, Denmark has been at war. "You're a Muslim but you're allowed to be here mum. You are welcome." Thank you, my daughter.

I have taught you not to imagine the worst and

paint a bleak future. And I the prophet. You gave a drawing to your father. You drew an UgaUga that lives in America, deep in the forest. It lives in a den and can make itself invisible. You are my daughter and you no longer dig out dens. And Hello Kitty is no longer your friend. Your first word was your own name. Aida.

Hi Aida, I am your mother. Your home is at war. Again. The Danish flag is the only one you have seen fly. The black flag flies in towns you have never seen. On your birthday, your father and I will wake you with a song and a flag. You will blow out the candles. Close your eyes and make a wish.

In the winter, you ran up the street and made the ice laugh with your little feet. And when it's warm we use ice to cool our drinks. IS is on everyone's lips. You crush it between your teeth and it melts in your mouth. It dribbles to your chin and I wipe down your face.

The rain falls through the windows. You have fallen asleep. Lightning strikes and thunder rumbles. When you awake, I'll have oatmeal ready for you.

There is war, my daughter.

Ayşe Dudu Tepe

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ESSAY

Listening to Kai

What my deaf son taught me about being perfect and our potential to adapt and thrive in an imperfect world

I WAS A first-time mother, far from home, when I discovered that my three-year-old son had a hearing impairment.

It was a shock because he had passed all his hearing tests and was even one of the first babies in my mothering group to say “bye bye” on cue. I thought he was not only developing by the book, but excelling too.

In retrospect, there were signs that something was amiss. When he played alone he was so deeply concentrated that he was hard to reach (“he’s just ignoring you”, people told me), he had a deep physical attachment to me (he would never just run off on his own), he hit other kids in daycare and kindergarten (anything to get a reaction he could understand) and he had started to mouth the words I was saying (apparently he was teaching himself how to lip read).

I was relieved when we received his diagnosis. The worst part was not knowing what was wrong. It also explained so much, and of all the things that could have been ‘wrong’ with my little boy, deafness was certainly not the worst. His father took the news less well. “But I wanted him to study music!” I remember he exclaimed.

We later learned that it’s quite normal for a parent to experience this depression and mourn the “perfect” child they used to have. The trick is to see that your child is still perfect, that they are the perfect expression of what they are meant to be.

Kai’s world blossomed after getting his hearing aids. It was obvious that he needed them from the moment he put them on. Having not heard for so long, he appreciated how this piece of

technology could change his life completely.

FITTING IN

But even though he took to his new technologically-improved life, I needed him to know he wasn’t alone. I made sure he was surrounded with imagery of other children with hearing aids and brought him into contact with other hearing-impaired children.

Ironically, he isn’t actually “deaf enough” to join the deaf community and we did not have the choice to send him to a special needs school for deaf children. If we had, he would have learned to sign and would now be part of – what I have experienced to be – a proud parallel society with its own culture, identity and role models. Instead we gave him hearing aids and sent him to ordinary schools where he received additional learning support.

This approach is called ‘mainstreaming’ and superficially it sounds like a good idea. If we could choose to be part of a bigger society, wouldn’t we? However, studies have shown that children like my son with moderate to heavy hearing loss tend to experience a lower quality of life than children who are more profoundly deaf. The latter go to school with each other, where they learn sign language and spend time with people who have the same issues as they do. This trend has been changing, to great debate.

AMBITIONS

Kai is now a teenager and seems to be thriving. His father’s fears were unfounded and he has already been in two bands, playing guitar in the first and drums in the second. He is even experimenting with music



Kai

production. I’ve seen him design his own t-shirts and his father told me he’s a great skier. I know he’s not too bad on a skateboard either.

He still sticks out, though. One morning, a little girl came up to us and asked me, “Do those hearing aids help him?”

She was sweet – I love it when people just come right out and ask instead of gawking at him. And I understood why she asked. I was on my way to pick Kai up from school one day, when a group of kids from the deaf school boarded at Østerport Station and sat across from me. Despite having a deaf child, and against my better judgment, I stared at them.

I stared at their hands and the speed that they signed. I stared at their hearing aids and wondered if Kai would have preferred hearing aids like the blue pair worn by one of the boys. They didn’t notice me, so wrapped up and secure in their own little world to give me notice. I wish that my son was sitting next to me so we could witness this si-

It's quite normal for a parent to experience this depression and mourn the "perfect" child they used to have

Lesley-Ann Brown

lent beauty – the incredible ability of human beings to adapt.

Then I remembered the little girl who so openly approached us the other morning. Some day, she and Kai could get on a Copenhagen train and talk, and continue their lives together with everyone else in the city. He too has adapted and, despite his limitations, is thriving.

I remember when he first learned about Einstein and he asked me what type of scientist he was.

“A physicist,” I replied.

“Well, I want to be one like him when I grow up.” I smiled, knowing that Kai didn’t necessarily want to be a physicist; he just wanted to earn people’s respect like Einstein had.

Kai may go on to learn about general relativity. He may even study music at the Royal Academy. We really don’t know what he will do. As long as the society he finds himself in is committed to accommodating everyone, the only limits he will ever experience are the limits he chooses to accept. **M**

FOREIGN

The massacre in Peshawar

This statement responds to events and debates in Pakistan following the Peshawar attack. It is written by Tanqeed (which means 'critique' in Urdu), a quarterly politics and culture e-zine that analyses contemporary Pakistan and South Asia

THE COLD-BLOODED killing of 132 innocent children and nine adults at the Army Public School in Peshawar is a dark and sad chapter in the recent history of Pakistan. We at Tanqeed condemn the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) for this despicable act, and all groups that use religion to justify their brand of violence. We condemn the absence, incompetence and dehumanising violent policies of the state. We condemn the numbness and oppressive attitude of the ruling classes. We condemn those people who allow these rulers to use the name of Islam and the ideology of Pakistan to cover up their criminal failings. We condemn those who find contentment in blaming these acts on foreign actors or non-Muslims.

When our children are sacrificed on the altars of ideology, religion, and politics, then we must acknowledge that the problem is of a fundamental nature. We need to acknowledge our faults for all the children that have become victims of violence and oppression. Somewhere, somehow, many among us started valuing human lives less than the "sacred" ideologies of the state, narrow interpretations of Islam, and the economic and personal interests of the ruling classes. The lives of our children have become cheap. Such values, such valuations, have no place in any society.

The Peshawar massacre signals the continued aggravation of a cycle of violence that has been enabled and perpetuated by several groups: by the TTP and other militant, sectarian, and jihadist groups who use instruments of violence in the name of Islam; by the Pakistani state and military, along with their imperial allies and lords, who directly support violent groups and enable oth-

er forms of economic and structural violence; by the media, religious ideologues, and the array of "experts" and "intellectuals" who promote militarized narratives that are knit around falsehoods of Jihad and who shift the blame onto the CIA, RAW, Mossad, the foreign hand, and the devil himself.

Along with militant Islamist groups, the state and military play a central role in perpetuating the reactionary attitudes and support of violence among the people. Like a two-headed monster, it supports some militant groups and ignores others, while launching military operations in Waziristan and the tribal areas with impunity and no accountability or transparency. The operations have resulted in the deaths of children, the displacement of people, and countless and unimaginable sufferings.

Along with the military, our ruling elites and imperial masters have continued a three and a half decade long war in Pashtun majority areas. Pashtun people have lost the most lives in this war. The supporters of militant Islamist groups include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, our military and politicians from Punjab and other areas of Pakistan. But instead of seeking political and pragmatic solutions at the national, regional, and international level, our government and the military have simply decided to resort to dropping bombs on the whole population in the Pashtun tribal areas.

These military operations lack transparency. Tanqeed's research shows that the mainstream media relies on military and official sources for their reporting on the operation. We know that no one is allowed to access these areas to carry out independent reporting. This means

that, instead of having evidence that may help us determine the success or failure of these operations, it is not even possible for us to form any independent opinions on the matter because of the heavy propaganda of the state. If terrorists are killed in a military operation, then why are details of their identities and the procedure for identifying them as "terrorists" not made public? And, why do we only hear about the death of "terrorists"? How is it that no ordinary lives are lost in these military operations? Our reporting has already shown the severe toll on civilian populations due to these military operations.

We fear that instead of making fundamental changes in our approach to the problem, and instead of holding the military and government accountable, the military has been given free reign, which will only increase the cycle of violence.

It must be pointed out that anti-terrorism acts have been and are being used against political activists and nationalist movements. Last year, with increased powers, the army upped military strikes in Balochistan – the situation there is deteriorating day by day. Baloch youth, children, women and the elderly have been targeted using gunship helicopters. Dead bodies, tortured and riddled with bullets, are still being found on bloody roads – and now these dead bodies have also started appearing in Sindh. These are the worst examples of state terrorism. Many political activists, union leaders, peasants and workers have been tried and sentenced by anti-terrorism courts – they are now languishing in jails across the country.

For years in this land, we have had a tradition of sacrificing our future generations for false idols

When our children are sacrificed on the altars of ideology, religion, and politics, then we must acknowledge that the problem is of a fundamental nature

and fake gods: militant Islamist groups like the Taliban massacre and bomb children in schools; sectarian groups attack and kill Shias and members of other sects; Ahmadis, Hindus, Christians and other religious groups are targeted using blasphemy laws, they are killed and burnt alive, and they are forced to convert to Islam; children are killed in air strikes by the military, in drone strikes, and in the hunger and fatigue that accompanies displacement; Baloch and Sindhi youth are tortured and killed; sectarian and ethnic violence is burning the city of Karachi; and, day by day, the number of children dying from hunger is fast increasing.

We contend that the state and the military will have to change their dual policies to resolve the issue at hand. Instead of launching large military operations, we need to target the financial and human support networks of terrorist outfits. We need to ban all groups that use violence in the name of Islam – these include the Taliban, sectarian outfits, those who target Christians, Hindus and other religious minorities. We need to target the discourse that creates sympathies and support for such groups. Instead of bombing Pashtun areas, we need to institutionalise the policy and practice of protecting peaceful political groups. Non-state actors must not be allowed to take control of our mosques and use these to promote hate speech.

But perhaps this is mere wishful thinking. When the state and the military have been part of the problem, we cannot expect them to be the solution. It is our misfortune, but in a society where violence is pervasive, events like the Peshawar massacre are neither unexpected nor unique. **M**

The editors of
Tanqeed

COLUMN

Modern Awe

All good rules are unwritten. It's just a fact of life. And goodness, like God, is best left unspoken. Simply put: Doing good is just a feeling

WRITTEN RULES are poor. If there were any philosophical human truth, we'd know it by now. Descartes revelation, the "I think therefore I am", really proves nothing. It's 2015 – 46 years after 1969, where they got the truth all wrong, which itself was 52 years later than 1917, where a new humanist truth also emerged, and the genocide of 60 to 90 million followed.

Really, it seems quite obvious that whenever anyone falls upon a truth – whether it be the 1969 student unrest or the 1917 Bolshevik revolution – the greater the sense of conviction, the worse the result. So here comes my claim about truths: "certitude is the root of all evil".

Well, I'm not totally sure that's true. I've just had that sentence in my head for many years, without knowing where it came from. Maybe I stole it, maybe I made it up. Either way, it sticks.

I've also been thinking about the word 'awe'. There's a reason kids say awesome, 'awe' just sits there, it floats. Awe... A tiny, modest word that explains the feeling of being a tiny, modest person within a massive, unknowable universe. Nature is awe inspiring; any average person would cower at its wordless beauty.

Even atheists find the concept of the universe to be close to the idea of a God. The deist God. That there is a supernatural being looking over us might sound ridiculous, but if you replaced supernatural with "nature" or "the universe", the sentence doesn't seem so absurd. We come from the earth and die in an infinite universe; it had to exist before we did.

Which makes it seem ridiculous that written religions are taken se-



How awesome – the Majestic Sombrero Galaxy (M104), 50,000 light-years across and 28 million light years from Earth. Image by the Hubble telescope.

riously. How can anyone pretend to speak the word of God, the word of the universe? Everything that is beautiful about the spirit of religion – what "good religious people" believe in, as opposed to fanatics – is the idea of giving oneself to God, to nature, being gentle and humble and to do one's best, even though we do not know why. This is where Goodness comes from. It's not a rationalization, but rather a pure feeling. Like awe. How then, can religion have all these written rules about the word of God – the rules of the universe, the do's and don'ts of eating pork, the killing or not killing of thy neighbor. Several religions have had a hard time following that last instruction.

Religion seems absurd to atheists. But how on Earth is it not obvious to religious people that claiming to know God's will is the ultimate arrogance? If one should bow to God with respect, then speaking on his behalf is the ul-

timate arrogance. I am certain there is no God, but I bow before nature. I would never dare speak on behalf of the universe. If someone believes God is even greater than the Universe – how can one ever dare to speak on his behalf? Even though I try to respect the goodness of religion, it doesn't really do anything better than forcing its laws upon others. And that is, ultimately, the perfect recipe for evil.

The very first feature I wrote in this Murmur column was titled "How Good Are Good Intentions?". Well, whoever wrote the Bible and other babble like the Qu'ran, the Jediism, Judaism and so on probably had the best of intentions for their kin. Yet as I write these lines, the news is that the Taliban has just killed over 130 children in the name of Islam, backed by the belief they are the true children of Islam, and Zionists are still building their wall,

How can anyone pretend to speak the word of God, the word of the universe?

Thomas Fleurquin

backed by the insane claim that this is their "promised land". Yes, God promised this piece of land to the Jews, didn't you know? But how can anyone even pretend to believe this? Do they realize how this sounds? And how can we even take these kind of arguments seriously as the basis of international politics?

However arrogant, obnoxious or provocative atheists may be at times, they do not carry the great evil of claiming that their book holds the one and only truth. I try to believe in the goodness of mankind, but the fact that almost all religions are monotheistic and absolute, combined with the fact that 84 percent of the world population is religious, makes for a pretty bad state of worldwide human tolerance and the "unspoken goodness" I value. But I still believe humanity is getting better and better at awe. Real, unreligious, modern awe. **M**

COLUMN

The joys of relativistic European identities

National conservatives fear that dual citizenship will undermine the strength of the Danish national identity. How silly

WE LIVE in a great age, in the EU, where we can just jump on a plane and go where we'd like. We can even stay there and live if we like. Borders have gone from being real physical guard posts with people asking for passports, to invisible administrative demarcations.

It's incredible, especially because it has shown that cultures don't need borders to keep their unique traits. The French are very much unlike the Spanish, while Denmark and Sweden might as well be Mars and Venus. People are naturally proud of where they are from and they perpetuate the customs and rituals they were brought up with. This is how regional differences have remained.

But you can't have your frikadelle and eat it. People will naturally settle in new countries and the local populations will have to adjust to having outsiders in their midst. Outsiders like me, for I am the child of parents who left the UK in 1980 in search of a different life. Now 30, I have lived more than twice as long in Denmark as the UK.

I actually only moved to the UK when I was 18. Which was weird. My peers had a hard time understanding why a boy with a vaguely English accent had never lived there before. Some were mistrustful and suspicious that my tales of overseas living were a ruse to make myself appear interesting or different.

The immigration authorities also found it odd. I tried to get a job, but couldn't because I didn't have a national insurance number – a tax number of sorts. I was sent to the job centre, where I met with a woman who sat behind a plexiglass screen. In addition to my

British passport, she needed two more pieces of photo ID and documentation of every single flight in and out of the UK for the preceding 10 years.

I couldn't provide either, and on the third meeting we gave up trying. She realised that the security checks weren't designed with me in mind and, with her approval, I lied my way through the interview before being handed the coveted number.

SPLIT LOYALTIES

The situation left me feeling bureaucratically alienated. But then I got over it. I realised that I didn't need a state to tell me who I was or where I was from. Life's not so simple that I have to just belong to one place. It makes their life easier for them if I did, but it's simply not true, so fuck them. In fact, when dual citizenship is allowed in September, I'll get a Danish passport too. Why not? I moved here 20 years ago.

So naturally I find the following statement incredibly odd:

"Nations are an expression of a people's natural cradle, their origin [...] We have a natural loyalty toward our national origins, just as we have a loyalty toward our parents. The nation is a people's parents and we cannot see ourselves independent of the nation that created, nurtured and protected us. The nation is our extended family."

It was uttered by Berlingske newspaper columnist Søren Hviid Pedersen, an associate professor at the University of Southern Denmark, who was arguing against dual citizenship on the basis that it is impossible to be loyal to two different countries.

To people like Pedersen, the

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differences between countries still matter, somehow. While I see the borders that separate people as being formed by hundreds of years of conflict between ruling elites in their conquest for power and wealth, he sees a Europe where borders delineate different kinds of people, each with their own unique, perhaps even magical, qualities.

Why else would he think that allowing dual citizenship would create a "nihilism and relativism that is unbounded and total"?

Pedersen's national conservatism is rising again in Denmark. The members of the Dansk Folkeparti and De Konservative who voted against dual citizenship think there is something special about a passport, when there isn't. It's a bureaucratic convention needed in a time of globalisation where borders don't mean what they used to because we've learned to get along and focus on what really matters: trade, culture and advances in science and technology. Among other things.

COOPERATION OVER RIVALRY

Pedersen is right when he says the world is more relativistic without firm national identities and therefore less secure. In the past, people knew who they could trust because they were obligated to be loyal to their regent. Their loyalty was rewarded with protection.

This time is gone and so too is the need for singular national identities. We don't need the same protection and we should be under no obligation to offer anyone our support simply because they govern us.

I might be a little British and a touch Danish, but mostly I believe

in the Enlightenment, in the use of reason. I take it as a truth that all people are equal, because I can find no good arguments that they aren't. These arguments form the foundation of our modern understanding of human rights, which in turn have formed the basis for empowering people around the world.

Of course, where you come from will determine how you see the world. You will relate to people that you share things with, be it regional customs or cultural interests. But to base your entire identity on a national stereotype is both incurious and dangerous. A lack of interest in difference breeds intolerance, which creates the conflicts we see around the world.

The only time that I and my peers talk about winning is when sport is involved. It's amazing to think that countries in Europe actually used to fight each other. "Winning a war" seems weird to me, because clearly no one wins wars. But when China's middle class rises out of poverty, we all win. When the rest of the world starts to develop technology at the same pace as the West, the outcome will only benefit everyone. I really believe this.

But to make sure that it does, we need to invest in institutions and organisations that foster curiosity, trade, knowledge and understanding. We need to vote for politicians who understand the benefits of living in a globalised world and talk to people who are worried about losing their jobs to cheaper labour – we need to have the conversation that cheaper isn't always better.

Here's to a nihilistic and relativistic 2015. May it only make us more curious. **M**

Peter Stanners

WHAT'S ON • JANUARY

ALL
MONTH

ARTSY HOLLYWOOD
See two films by the Dutch artists Persijn Broersen and Margit Lukács, where they work with the theme 'Hollywood movies'.

Kunstforeningen GL STRAND
glstrand.dk
Ends Jan 25



THE NEUTRAL DANE
Georg Brandes, pictured, is one seven personal stories used to explore the anti-war and neutrality movement in Denmark during World War I.

Den Sorte Diamant
densortediamant.dk

ALL
MONTH

TV CHANNELS
Artist Susan Hiller has often been mindful of how creepy the recording of the human voice is, and has now created a video collage work of 150 TVs to illustrate that point.

Den Frie
Udstillingsbygning
Denfrie.dk



Glyptoteket

DEATH IN EGYPT
The ancient Egyptians were obsessed with death and the dead. This exhibition explores this morbid relationship.

Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek
glyptoteket.dk



Roger Wollstadt

THE FUTURE OF ART
RaMell Ross (above) is among seven very talented and young international artists in contention to win the Young Art Prize at the Extract IV exhibition in Gammel Strand.

Gl. Strand 48
glstrand.dk

ALL
MONTH

ODE TO SUBURBIA
The exhibition at the labour movement's museum tells the story of the mass exodus from the city to the suburbs after the Second World War.

Arbejdmuseet
arbejdmuseet.dk

9

NEXT BIG THING
The culmination of a national search for the next big jazz composer ends today, with the three top finalists performing together with DR's Big Band

DR Koncerthuset
dr.dk

10

METAL MINORS
The New Shit Showcase vol. II brings to the fore the best new acts in Denmark's metal scene. The event is becoming annual and is a great way to keep your finger on the pulse of the metal scene.

Pumpehuset
pumpehuset.dk

16

AN ITALIAN IN AARHUS
Italian star tenor Cristian Lanza performs the works of Guiseppe Verdi along with a band and choir. Experience the magic of La Traviata and other works.

Musikhuset Aarhus
billetlugen.dk

18

AARHUS CLASSICAL
BaroqueAros allows you to experience some of the best classical music made. From J.S. Bach's overtures to Vivaldi's melodies.

Musikhuset Aarhus
billetlugen.dk



Fryd Frydendahl

INTIMATE MØ
Singer Mø will host three intimate shows in DR's concert hall. Witness her turn down the beat and let her voice remind us why she's Denmark's hottest vocalist. But hurry, the first show is already sold out.

DR Koncerthuset
dr.dk
Jan 18, 19

22

SEXY 60S
Get a cinematic tour of Danish 60s eroticism in this sensual event hosted by Film maker Steen Schapiro and the cinema's director Jack Stevenson.

Husets Biograf
huset-kbh.dk/

Elias Thorsson

WHAT'S ON • JANUARY

23

NIPPED IN THE BUD

He was unable to perform last February as – staying true to his roots as a West Coast rapper – he was under arrest. But now Nipsey Hussle is back to try again.

Rust
rust.dk

29

TRIPPY TRIO

Head of Australian record label Room40, Lawrence English performs ambient and experimental music along with Rafal Anton Is-sisarri and John Chantier.

Jazzhouse
jazzhouse.dk



ICELAND'S BEST SON

Musician Mugison comes from the dreary West Fjords in Iceland where he started a music festival called 'I Never Went South'. He now brings his signature sound to Aarhus.

Radar, Aarhus
billetlugen.dk
Jan 30

31

PUNK AND HIGH HEELS

De Høje Hæle takes punk and gives it a common edge, with lyrics that tug at heartstrings set to a break-neck rhythm

Jazzhouse
jazzhouse.dk

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