



Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology

37:1-2 2007

Museum Tusulanum Press

Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology

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- For prices and subscription details please see www.mtp.dk
- Subscription address Museum Tusulanum Press
University of Copenhagen
Njalsgade 126
DK-2300 Copenhagen S
Phone +45 35 32 91 09 Fax +45 35 32 91 13
E-mail order@mtp.dk Internet www.mtp.dk
- Bank IBAN: DK10 5202 0001 5151 08
BIC: AMBKDKKK

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In

Ethnologia Europaea
Journal of European Ethnology
Volume 37:1–2

2008

Museum Tusulanum Press
University of Copenhagen

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Copyright © 2008 Museum Tusulanum Press

ISBN 978 87 635 0991 6

ISSN 1604 3030

IN

Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology 37: 1-2

E-journal

Copyright © 2008 Museum Tusulanum Press

ISBN 978 87 635 0981 7

ISSN 1604 3030

Unaltered version in pdf-format of:

Copyright © 2007 Ethnologia Europaea, Copenhagen

Printed in Sweden by Grahns Tryckeri AB, Lund 2007

Cover and layout Pernille Sys Hansen

Cover photos Pernille Sys Hansen and Robert Lau

Photos Susanne Ewert, page 6

Richard Wilk, pages 16, 34, 44, 50, 70

ISBN 978 87 635 0885 8

ISSN 0425 4597

This journal is published with the support of the Nordic board
for periodicals in the humanities and social sciences.

Museum Tusulanum Press

University of Copenhagen

Njalsgade 126

DK-2300 Copenhagen S

www.mtp.dk

WAKING UP IN TWO NATIONS

Anne-Marie Palm

For a split second in the morning I don't know where I am – in my Danish home in Copenhagen or in my Swedish home in small town Lund. The discomfort must come from not knowing who I am going to be when I wake up. The (immigrant) wife in Sweden at home with a bicultural family, or the native professional, streetwise in the capital, at home in the country where I was born.

All of my married life I have had two homes, only recently a change set in. My first association to that is the lifeworld of a sailor, a home where you work, and a home with your family. To some people, and I am one of those, that is appealing. I have enjoyed having my own flat in Copenhagen, decorated to my taste, space uncluttered by others, always clean and orderly, as it was also my workplace.

Before I moved to Sweden, my partner and I lived in separate countries for almost five years. He did most of the commuting, but finally we decided to live together in Lund and get married. In Sweden I worked as a psychotherapist, but I missed working in my own language with Danish clients, and so in 1986 I opened a private clinic for the treatment of eating disorders with colleagues in Copenhagen. I got a flat in Denmark both for work and overnight stays and was back to living in two homes in two nations. I generally spent three days a week living in Copenhagen and then returned to Lund and my family. In the early years it was a tiresome commute. There was no bridge across the sound separating the two countries until 2000. Taking the ferry meant experiencing a journey, where commuters like me, tired after working in Copenhagen, shared the space with Swedes

returning in high spirits after partying in Denmark. To me, however, it was worth it – the commute, the two homes, the tiredness.

What is characteristic of a sailor's life? I imagine that he has two, and both exist within brackets. One he lives in doing his job in the company of colleagues, an individual in a collective without intimate bonds or emotional commitments to his surroundings apart from being part of the work team and the sociability that goes with that. His family is where he has emotional and intimate bonds, but he comes only to leave again. Arriving and leaving is part of the deal, his commitment is always part time. Generally this is seen as a male project and I have often felt that my need for withdrawal and solitude might be seen by others as "unwomanly", conflicting with my gender role. But perhaps many women also have this need for separation and privacy. Personally, I find it hard to have authentic contact without this possibility of withdrawal. If it is lacking, I get bored or boring.

Moving into my husband's Swedish house was not easy. It was his house, which he had bought years earlier with his former wife. I had chosen him, not the house. For a long time, I did not like the house. First I introduced the idea of new wallpaper, my husband was sceptical, but agreed to experiment with one wall. The kitchen was too small, the ceiling too low. I felt I had too little space for myself. In the end we redecorated it completely. But still, was I ready to not have a home of my own? It would take many years, only recently I stopped working in Copenhagen and sold my flat there. Now that this

second home has been dissolved, I can reflect on the meaning it had in my life. The fact that it was there, available as a personal space or an escape, was important to me. I think it is a question of personality, perhaps also of familial habits. My partner grew up as the older brother of younger sisters, I grew up as an only child.

Giving up the Copenhagen flat was, in retrospect, made possible by the emergence of a new second home. Seven years ago my husband and I had the possibility to build a house in the countryside together. For the first time we had the chance of creating a shared home, starting from scratch. This time I knew exactly how I wanted this new house to be, with spaces for both privacy and collective activities for all of the family. I was able to stand my ground, it became the house we both love best. Without that summer house I don't think I could have given up my Copenhagen flat.

Looking back on those years of commuting between two countries, I remember the joy of small differences in the sensuality that patterns everyday life. In Denmark, for example, my breakfast routine would be very different from that in Sweden. The day started with a walk to one of the many local bakeries in central Copenhagen, buying fresh bread and maybe a pastry. The milk had a different flavour and the rye bread was not sweet as it is in Sweden. Mornings tasted differently and the neighbourhood felt small and local, although I was in the middle of a big city. In Sweden, my husband usually took care of the cooking, in Copenhagen I could cook food he didn't like to make or I could slip down to one of the many ethnic restaurants in the neighbourhood.

The small differences also surfaced when shopping in the two cities. For me, shopping for food was much more fun in Copenhagen, the meat cuttings were familiar as were the ways in which the supermarkets were organized. There were local butchers and greengrocers to discuss my choices with or to complain about bad buys. Entering a Swedish supermarket made me feel uninspired, there was something wrong or unappetizing in the way in which the goods were laid out and presented. I remember a day in Lund when I found out that a Danish supermarket

chain had opened in town. It lifted my spirits and I went there, only to find it was thoroughly organized in a Swedish fashion with none of the Danish specialities I had hoped to find. Pinning down the difference is difficult, to me it was the lack of familiar Danish sensuality when I shopped for food in Sweden.

Kitchens as the site of food preparation stand out as another sensually as much as logically different realm in comparing my two homes. In Copenhagen, I placed all the products I needed to cook in my own cupboards according to a system of my own personal cooking logic. I knew where everything was. Back home in Sweden I got confused. Here the kitchen was my husband's territory. I could not decide what I needed to buy for a meal without going through every item on the shelves and often found out that we were out of the basic products I needed for cooking. I still cannot decipher his kitchen logic, and I presume I'm not meant to, either. Kitchen logic emerges from cooking practice, being able to reach for and find tools and ingredients at the right moment without having to verbalize it. The sense of alienation in our/his Swedish kitchen is separate from my gratitude to have a husband who likes to cook. All those evenings I came home tired from my commute it was a blessing to be served a hot meal, ready when I arrived, providing indeed a sense of coming home. The kitchen in our summerhouse is organized differently. There are labels to tell what goes where, according to my logic; what remains is an ongoing battle about the order in the cupboards.

The layout of a supermarket, the scent and taste of bread in a bakery, the order in a kitchen cabinet. These are some of the ways in which living in two nations or two homes materialized themselves, but things change. From the start of our marriage, my husband and I had planned to move to Denmark. Once the bridge had been built and the children had finished school, he would be the one to commute. However, as the years passed by, I changed and found, that my national culture had changed, too. There is no turning back in time. Today I prefer living in small scale Lund with its lush green and quiet atmosphere, everything within walking or biking

distance. Today, I prefer being a "tourist" in Copenhagen over living there.

Choosing to move has its costs. For me, the cost was never to speak Swedish perfectly and thus always to be perceived as a foreigner in the country where I now live permanently. I suspect that many exiles share a more or less secret dream of returning with family or partner to the country where they grew up. Many immigrants experience this split. Should I stay in my new country? Is it my country? Do I have a country to call my own? Today, the country where I was born, went to school and university has altered so much that I feel alienated from its politics, both domestic and foreign.

I no longer have a home in Denmark, but in Sweden I have my gardens. The first space I took on was the garden in Lund. My husband has no interest in gardening, but enjoys having one, so here was a space for me to colonize. A garden can be an ideal second space in many senses. It is an extension of the home as much as a creative realm outside of the house. Even when both parties of a couple like gardening they tend to either have control of the design in different areas of the garden or adhere to a division of labour. When you enjoy gardening you live within an ongoing creative project, where you create rooms, views, colour and textures, you plan for all seasons

and you can never be sure of the result. You interact with nature's creatures and forces, the bugs that attack your lilies, the weather that changes at will.

Gardening is my escape route into projects and reflections of my own. Dealing with the weeds in the garden, I am free to think of whatever is on my mind. I work on something useful and keep myself fit, while being left alone. In a sense, the garden works for me like another home, offering the challenge of continuous engagement and simultaneous freedom. For many years I sailed between two nations and two homes; I created my Swedish gardens, and in the oppositional processes of mobility and creative rooting, feelings of belonging or feeling at home in a nation, in a house or in a garden became interwoven.

I am both a gardener and a sailor, it seems, two roles that have helped me feel content over the years. I still have two homes, but now my second home is also in Sweden. Its garden faces the sea.

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