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Homes

"Where is your home?" Initially this seems like an easy question. We immediately blurt out an answer: a street, city, nation, or even a continent. But is the question that easy? Where else have you lived? Where did you grow up? How many times have you moved? Do you expect to live in the same street, city, nation or continent seven years from now? Is "Where is your home?" *really* an easy question?

This is a brief exploration of deeper, prior questions: "What is home?" and "Where could home possibly be?" The intended audience is those who somehow feel the weight, the poignancy, even the cruelty or infinity of these two questions *because we cannot answer them easily, fully, or (perhaps) honestly*. Indeed, given our auto-biography, we do not know where to start – we laugh at, or dismiss, the questions when asked, or launch into a long explanation. Every day there are more of us walking the streets, more of us feeling cultural, linguistic, and spatial up-rootedness. This evening I met a Norwegian-German woman in the laundry of my building in Copenhagen. She wishes to go to New York to study fashion – "but life is just so much more exciting there", she claimed. She has lived "here and there" and knew that that was what she would always be doing – here and there, there and here. Forever and ever? Yesterday, there was a party at a Danish student collective where I met a Russian-French photo-journalist – "what, like me you are also a *nomad*? But why do you do this to yourself?" she passionately asked after I had shared my biography with her. The way she parsed *no-m-a-d* seemed laden with pain or absurdity, or both. She is now on her way to Chechnya to collect visual spoils of war. Third, one of my most intimate friends in California is an Indian-American-Australian-Swiss multi-citizen. Yes, you try to figure that one out. He can't. He doesn't even want to, though he is one of the most sophisticated young theorists of multi-cultural studies that you are likely to meet. You undoubtedly know your fair share of characters such as these three. Perhaps you are one of us? Read on. Write to me. Call me. Help me understand.

What do we call this group of people? For lack of a better word, let us call ourselves *multi-globalists*. I am not sure that there is anything in particular that unites us as a natural group or natural kind of people, but I have by now been close to enough multi-globalists to observe a life-pattern of three sequential stages that many seem to go through: (1) initial up-rootedness, (2) subsequent enjoyment in the freedom provided by culture-spanning, and (3) a later attempt to somehow find meaning and wholeness despite the deep fractures

caused by up-rootedness and displacement. More precisely: *confusion, freedom, and yearning for completeness*. Multi-globalists *live* these stages in a particular way because of the cultural, linguistic, and spatial negotiations, transgressions, and movements that we experience. Our memory and thought of multi-globalism is direct. We are migrants, exiles, or expatriates, not just children or grandchildren or auditors of migrants or exiles or expatriates. (We are agents, authors of our stories, because the main focus here is on voluntary, educated, and benign trans-global mobility. A different analysis would be required for migration caused by force or desperation.)

In the increasingly globalized, interconnected world that our species is building, more trans-cultural shifting is expected. Absolutely and relatively more of us will pay various prices for our general condition. One price we pay is limited rights (e.g., voting, child-care, pension) in whatever country we choose to live in, unless we live there long enough. Another price is language. We may get lost in the tangle of languages (e.g., German, Norwegian, Danish, and English for our laundry friend) that we negotiate daily in the streets, at work, on the phone, or virtually on email, skype or facebook, especially if we have ended in the blissful state of no longer having a so-called mother tongue. Or, actually, of having more than one. A third price is a growing systematic fear of (never) settling down – "but the grass is always greener on the other side!", "but I never want to grow up!" Here and there indeed. Our paradoxical tension between the fear of (never) settling down and yearning for completeness never quite seems to dissolve. Fourth: systemic loneliness? Fifth: inability to commit to particular institutions or friendships/loves? ... Which other psychological prices do we pay for globalization?

In contrast, which benefits accrue from our condition? In the second (freedom) and third (yearning for completeness) stages of our multi-global lives there is much to learn, much to love. Our period of freedom can be magnificent. We have both *freedom from* and *freedom to*. As we move around, testing the waters, our position gives us the possibility of cultivating an intentional naïveté. This self-conscious innocence can fuel a disregard for some of the local cultural norms constraining conventional, adult action – we can be eccentric. (Eventually we have to accept these norms, though!) Multi-globalists also often find work and respect in non-standard fields (e.g., art, academia, NGO's). Moreover, our subsequent period of yearning for completeness can be exquisite. In some regards, we have been given, "for free", ample materials requiring integration. Indeed, some multi-globalists spend the rest of their lives attempting to come to peace with the radically fragmented world(s) into which they were hurled. This can itself be the source of symphonies, essays, art, and, more generally, intense energy for a political or social cause or even for more conventional products. The good.

A qualification on the stages. Freedom may lead to sheer abstract madness, in absolute isolation and solitude, for some of those who utterly fail to accept the local cultural constraint on their actions. Moreover, our yearning for completeness as expressed through and with friends, romantic partners, work, adopted family of various types, and children-made-flesh may also be eternally postponed, in actuality or in imagination. That

is, we may aim for completeness through our relationships of various types but find that these, strangely, never meet our expectations. (Perhaps this is a universal of the human condition?) The bad, revisited.

A thought with which to end this brief prelude of the "ontology of multi-globalized homes" is that multi-globalism provides the conditions for developing a pluralistic eye and a perspectival heart. Give a multi-globalist a human case, from everyday life: a family squabble over inheritance perhaps, or a legal situation between a company and a dissatisfied employee. The multi-globalist often has a sensibility for *empathy*. Their eye sees, and heart feels, the situation from multiple points of view. Who is right? How should we decide? Having repeatedly experienced the fallibility of any systemic point of view, the multi-globalist often encourages discussion among the different parties. We do not wish to step in, but when necessary may do so. This, of course, requires a different sensibility, perhaps one for justice. I am not sure that multi-globalism gives us much insight into that sensibility. Yet I do know that many multi-globalists have an uncanny ability to simultaneously see things from multiple points of view.

Recapitulation. Multi-globalists will never have a single, unified home. *Our homelands are imaginary or virtual; they are never (ever?) real.* (Thank you to Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands") Yet, despite our precarious condition, we have an enriching life of mobility, with temporal stages of confusion, freedom, and yearning for completeness. Could we learn to affectionately inhabit *many, partial* homes? Or could we possibly construct a *single, dispersed* home? Better yet, could we perhaps creatively build *new* types of loving, non-conventional homes, largely unimagined thus far in our species' cultural history?

Coda. Multi-globalism is delightfully infectious. Those without the experience can be bitten by the bug through story-telling, co-habitation, and vacation traveling with multi-globalists. With the relative number of multi-globalists rising, there will be even more "part-time multi-globalists". Perhaps as a society, we can therefore begin to hope for better understanding and kinder behavior between different cultural groups. Multi-globalists may usefully function as catalyzers of inter-cultural understanding, especially in local contexts with many migrants, exiles, and expatriates (e.g., Toronto, São Paulo, New Delhi or Copenhagen). What else can multi-globalism offer? Where might you like to live?

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