

Zeitschrift: Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde = Archives suisses des traditions populaires

Herausgeber: Empirische Kulturwissenschaft Schweiz

Band: 87 (1991)

Heft: 1-2

Artikel: Plotting Boundaries and Planting Roots : gardening in a Multi-Ethnic Swedish Town

Autor: Klein, Barbro

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-117767>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 01.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Plotting Boundaries and Planting Roots: Gardening in a Multi-Ethnic Swedish Town*

by *Barbro Klein*

During the past twenty-five years immigrants from 160 nations have transformed Sweden from an ethnically relatively homogeneous nation into an intensely multi-ethnic one. By the late 1980s one million persons, out of a population of eight and a half million, were immigrants or the children of immigrants (Svanberg & Runblom 1988). This is the background for the project *Blandsverige* («Ethnic Diversity in Sweden») of which this study is a part. The purpose of this project is not to study the culture and adjustment of discrete immigrant groups but, rather, to examine ethnic diversity as a social and cultural phenomenon. The central issue is how the many groups and cultures interact in different social settings and arenas of Swedish life.¹

In this paper I describe one setting in which the new ethnic complexity is apparent in activities and forms: municipal gardening lots in a multi-ethnic town outside of Stockholm. On these lots Swedes, Chinese, Turks, and representatives of many other national, religious, ethnic, or linguistic groups dig in the soil, grow plants, and build fences side by side. How are ethnic relationships shaped in this kind of setting? Which gardening traditions and aesthetic ideals cross ethnic boundaries? Does the enterprise of working together in close physical proximity create a sense of unity, common purpose, and sharing across the entire territory? Ultimately (although not in this paper) I would like to tie the situation in the garden lots to more encompassing issues in contemporary multi-ethnic Swedish life. Are the garden lots to be regarded as a «laboratory» (cf. Anderson 1972: 188) or «microcosm» in which larger structures and ideals are encapsulated? How does the organization of diversity in the garden lots compare to its organization in the other social settings examined in the *Blandsverige* project?

The fieldwork on which this paper is based began in the fall of 1988, when I started visiting the garden lots on different week-days and at different times on the day. These visits still go on and during them I have taken many photographs and spoken informally with many gardeners. I have also tape-recorded a few long interviews and have got to know some of the Swedish, Finnish, and Syrian gardeners quite well. Therefore, their points of view are more fully represented than those of gar-

* Lecture given at the IVth Congress SIEF 1990, Bergen (Norway).

deners of other backgrounds. The fieldwork will continue throughout the growing season of 1990; I expect to conduct more interviews, in particular with Chinese and Muslim Turkish gardeners.²

Two scholarly perspectives are important to this paper. One is the thinking of Fredrik Barth. Particularly relevant is his point that «the critical focus of investigation... becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural content that it encloses» (Barth 1969: 15). This influential statement is basic to the entire *Blandsverige* project whose focus is placed on the negotiations concerning cultural boundaries in which people of diverse backgrounds engage when they interact with one another. However, to focus on boundaries does not mean ignoring the «cultural content» that they enclose, and in this paper a great deal of this content is taken into account. Nevertheless, the critical emphasis is on boundaries. Indeed, in the context of the garden lots the word «boundary» has a particularly complex range of symbolic meanings (cf. Cohen 1985). Barth's statement gives a special resonance to the many layers of concrete fences and invisible demarcations criss-crossing the garden territory.

Another scholarly perspective of importance to this paper is furnished by those American folklife scholars who examine the way traditional forms and artefacts interplay with mass culture. In their work vernacular craftsmanship and aesthetic ideas are studied as ways to establish individual, regional or ethnic distinctiveness in the midst of mass culture and advanced technology (Bronner 1986). In this investigation I look for the ways in which people modify or transform a planned urban milieu. I am interested in «vernacular imprints» on the given environment (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988).

The town

The garden lots are located in one of the towns south of Stockholm which were hastily constructed to meet the housing shortage during the 60s and the 70s and thereupon became the home of immigrants. Today about 4000 of the 6000 inhabitants represent at least forty different nations. Also many Swedes are immigrants in the sense that they come from the country-side. The largest nationality group is Turkish and almost 1/3 of the town-dwellers come from that country. The Turks represent a number of ethnic, religious or linguistic groups. A large contingent of Christian Syrians comes from the Midyat region. Another large group comes from Kulu in Anatolia and is Muslim.

Like many other Swedish towns and villages, this one is located near a lake in the midst of fields and forests. Architecturally it looks like other Swedish towns constructed in the early 70s. A visitor from abroad may not realize that to many Swedes there is little status connected to living here. There is no visible urban decay and the grey apartment buildings appear well maintained. The store signs outside the shopping center do not at all indicate that many stores are owned by immigrants from the Middle East. Rather, the signs are in Swedish and many of them are blue and yellow like the Swedish flag. Casual visitors might think that they are in the midst of Swedishness incarnate. With a few exceptions (among them a sign announcing a Turkish Association), specific ethnic distinctiveness is not publicly displayed in this town. The built environment gives little indication of the actual ethnic diversity. Indeed, by comparison to many American urban neighbourhoods, there is little visible vernacular folk imprint on the environment – ethnic or otherwise.

The Garden Lots

In this light the garden lots are interesting. On them diversity is more openly expressed in material forms. The lots are situated on an open field between apartment buildings, the elevated subway and a row of private homes. They constitute an ambiguous territory between the public and the private and during the warm months a complex social and material life can be viewed by anyone who cares to do so.

Municipal garden lots are an institution in North European towns and cities; they were started in the late 19th century in order to give urban workers an opportunity to supplement their diet with fresh produce (Ek 1990, Fägerborg 1988, Tolstrup 1987). In Sweden in the 1980s many people wish to rent such lots; the reasons include an interest in organic gardening and the high food prices. There are many different kinds of lots. On some of them little houses are allowed (*kolonilotter*), on others only sheds, greenhouses or tool chests may be constructed (*odlarlotter*). But whether there are houses or not, gardeners take care to create esthetically unified territorial profiles. Unity and order characterize many of these territories which often have a solidly Swedish profile: flags and nostalgic symbols of the agrarian past abound (Bergquist 120–135, cf. Nohl 1985).

All the lots studied in this paper have been cultivated since 1978. Only sheds and greenhouses are allowed, fences may be not taller than one meter, and no trees may grow on the lots. Each lot is about 100 m²

and is rented from the town; the fee is \$35 for an entire year. The lots are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis and during 1989 the waiting-list was long. Approximately 30 of the cultivators are Swedes and 30 are Finnish-born. Around 20 came from the Middle East. Among them are Muslims from Turkey and Christian Syrians from Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. 10 gardeners are ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. There is also one Albanian, one Russian, two Danes, one Bulgarian, and two Chileans among the growers. But there is not a single African among them.

All the gardeners live nearby and all of them belong to the growers' association: membership is mandatory. The president of the association is a retired Swedish skilled worker. He heads an executive board which is elected by members of the association. In 1989 all the members of the board were Swedes and Finns. In cooperation with the municipal government, the board makes decisions regarding fences, clean-up, composting, and many other issues. During the winter the association runs courses on such subjects as organic gardening. In other words, rules and regulations established by a democratic decision process are as plentiful here as in other facets of life in Sweden. The garden lots hardly constitute an unregulated free-zone and it is interesting to take note of the kinds of individual or ethnic variations and traditions which can be expressed within or despite the regulations.

The garden territory is kidney-shaped, fenced-in and criss-crossed by walking paths which are open to all. Gardeners do not object to outsiders walking on the main paths. But no visitor ever enters a lot without an invitation, although it would be simple to jump across a fence. At the main entrance lies a small building which was built jointly by the members of the association and holds a toilet and some tools. A most striking – if not immediately visible – feature on the territory is that some thirty lots on the side facing the subway are cultivated by North Europeans, predominantly Swedes and Finns. There is no Chinese or Middle Eastern gardener on the subway side. On the opposite side of the territory, the ethnic mixture is considerable. But also here we find a tendency toward ethnic neighbourhood clustering. Toward the main road there is a predominance of Muslim Turkish lots, on the side toward the private homes, many of the gardeners are Chinese.

All the gardeners I have spoken to are conscious of the ethnic clusterings on the lots and interpret them in a variety of ways. A young Syrian gardener once pointed to the subway-side of the territory and said: «On this side there are only Swedes. It's the older part.» Despite the fact that the entire territory was established in 1978, he interprets the spatial seg-

regation in terms of time. To him, Swedes are on their home turf and therefore it is natural that they form the «old town» while the remainder of the territory is being shaped by new colonizers. I will return to the question of how the ethnic clustering/segregation is formed. But first I wish to describe three basic ethnic types or designs which are recognized by European and Middle Eastern gardeners: the «Swedish/Finnish», the «Middle Eastern», and the «Chinese» types.

The Swedish/Finnish Type

Despite considerable variation, all the Swedish and Finnish lots have certain features in common. A variety of flowers are grown on most of them, sometimes in abundance. Apart from flowers, the most popular crops are strawberries and potatoes. Most Swedish and Finnish gardeners construct a central walking-path which is sometimes filled with gravel. However, few of them construct separate flower or vegetable beds with the help of wooden boards. Swedish and Finnish lots often have sturdy picket fences. Indeed, the concern with boundary making is intense among the Swedes and the Finns. Often rows of flowers or painted rocks serve as extra layers of fencing. Painted tires used as planters sometimes mark the corners of lots. Another typically Nordic feature is a veranda with a table and benches often placed far back on the lot. Swedes and Finns have a special name for these often extremely sturdy structures which may be decorated with flowerboxes on the inside as well as on the outside: they are called *kalasverandor* («party verandas»). Many of the Nordic lots also have a home-built smoker (*rök*) used for smoking fish. In several cases relatives or close friends cultivate neighbouring lots.

Two special categories of Scandinavian gardeners can be singled out. One consists of a handful of experts who like to experiment. They are enthusiasts who are interested in organic gardening and experiment with a variety of vegetables and with different methods of seeding and composting. They are concerned with preventing the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and often share their expertise with other Scandinavian gardeners. Another special category are the *bricoleurs* who not only garden but also like to do carpentry and play with shapes and artefacts. There are five or six of them and their lots are the most visible ones on the territory. Without exception they are old men who devote an enormous amount of time to their gardens. It is in this group that creative vernacular imprints on the environment are most noticeable.

While each *bricoleur* has a profile of his own, all of them have a great deal in common. They all like to recycle objects and to allude to traditional forms. Their inventiveness and creativity is combined with a perfectionistic sense of order (cf. Bergquist 1990: 112–135). One of them uses a sewing machine stand to support a table-top. In Spring 1989 he playfully put up a traffic sign to alert passers-by of the immense digging that was going on. Doing so he joined many other people in the contemporary urbanized world in which parodical, recycled traffic signs appear to be a common folk form (cf. Klein 1990). His girl-friend gardens a lot just a few steps up the path and he has painted her tool chest with pretty flowers, lovingly alluding to Swedish peasant tradition. Yet, his playfulness is coupled with a great sense of order. The gravel path on his lot is absolutely straight and his fence and other details are all carefully painted a soft aqua color. Every detail on this lot as well as on those of the other *bricoleurs* indicate the importance of personal control of rented space.

The most visible *bricoleur* of all was born in Finland but has Swedish as his mother tongue. In 1988 and through early April 1989 his shed, green house, water barrels, fence, and a number of other details were painted a loud turquoise color. By late April 1989 he had repainted everything a softer olive green. When I asked him why, he shrugged his shoulders and said it was «nicer» this way. However, when I asked the president of the growers association about this change, the reply was: «We have decided that we prefer a bit darker green. The colors ought to melt into the surroundings. We thought it would be better if everybody has approximately the same color.» «We» is the executive board of the association. Here, then, is a good example of how the board sets limits on individual variation. When individual expression becomes too visible, it is discouraged and a show of muted unity is encouraged.

No aesthetic war broke out between the executive board and this *bricoleur* (cf. Bronner 1986: 70–86). His play with forms and colors continues but is more subdued than before. For example, in the summer of 1988 he jokingly hid an unobtrusive pink and violet toy mouse among the pink and violet sweet peas in such a way that the show of unity was not upset. And he continued to exercise symbolic control by such means as sturdy locks and fences. This man is a pillar among the growers and has helped several gardeners in building greenhouses. But all of these greenhouses are on lots cultivated by Swedes and Finns. He has not once crossed the North European border.

This ends the survey of the Swedish/Finnish type. Striking are the tendencies toward a nostalgizing, miniaturizing aesthetic in which re-

cycled elements are important (cf. Klein 1990, Nohl 1985). These can be found among many of the Swedes and Finns but are most pronounced among the *bricoleurs*. Striking is also the concern with fences and locks. A possible reason for this concern is a wish to mark boundaries clearly in a situation in which many people are perceived as utterly different and foreign. Whether or not this is a valid explanation is uncertain. Nevertheless, there is a striking contrast between these garden lots and some middle class neighbourhoods which are unified by ethnicity or social class and have no fences at all (cf. Bell 1989). Another characteristic of the Swedish and Finnish gardeners is that the production of food is seldom *the* major reason for gardening (cf. Carreras 1989). To many of them, including the experimenters, the act of working in the soil and the socializing on the territory are more important than the nutritional benefits. As a whole, it appears that among the Swedes and the Finns, gardening has strong links to Nordic summer cottage culture. A garden lot is as close as you can get to having a summer cottage without really having one.

The Middle Eastern Type

The Middle Easterners have created a garden world which is entirely unlike that of their Swedish neighbours. All the twenty lots cultivated by Muslim Turks and by Christian Syrians from Turkey, Syria, or Lebanon share several distinctive features. Although there are variations in lay-outs and growing methods within the Middle Eastern group, the unifying factors are more striking than the distinguishing ones. Many of the Muslims and Christians on the lots do not speak to one another. Yet, as far as gardening practice is concerned, there is more to unite them than there is to separate them.

The Middle Eastern lots are laid out in ways which differ dramatically from the lay-outs of the Scandinavian lots. They have well defined beds separated from each other by wooden boards and they have a central walking path which is often covered by wider boards. Middle Easterners seldom grow flowers. Instead, they concentrate on food and they often keep well constructed greenhouses. The most common vegetables are mint, romaine, mangold, onions, cabbages, parsley, strawberries, and different kinds of squashes and beans. On many Middle Eastern lots there is also a table big enough to accommodate the many people who often gather on summer evenings. The table is usually covered by a plastic cloth and the seating may be a plain wooden bench or some old chairs. There is no elaborate veranda of the kind that can be found

among the Swedes and Finns. The fences surrounding the Middle Eastern lots are simple and sometimes non-existent. There is no play with artifactual forms and wooden objects are never painted.

A Syrian who came to Sweden from Midyat in Turkey thirteen years ago concentrates on raising romaine lettuce and mangold for dolmas. In the fall of 1989 this man, who is retired, also cultivated a lot across the path from his own. He did so for a friend from Midyat who is unable to garden. In other words, groups of friends and relatives work together among the Syrians as well as among the Swedes and Finns.

I asked this man if he had raised romaine and mangold in his home region. «Oh, no», he said, «it's too dry there.» This situation is interesting because one might think that in gardening immigrants would be eager to transplant into foreign soil the plants, smells and body movements with which they are familiar from the past. That kind of transplantation would be a way to take possession of an unfamiliar place (cf. Bergquist 1990: 154). In this case, this observation is only partially true. This man is not transplanting into the new country exactly what he cultivated in his home region. Rather he is transplanting what he would have liked to grow, had the climate and the soil permitted. In the new country he has enlarged his repertoire. But he uses only what he considers desirable within his old country repertoire; he does not turn to a crop characteristic of the new environment.

Many features on the Middle Eastern gardens surprise the Swedes. For example, Swedes emphasize with wonder that the Middle Easterners grow no potatoes. Some also complain about the verandas which they think are carelessly put together. But what surprises Swedes most of all is that the immigrants from the Middle East practically never grow flowers. «All they are interested in is *food*», is a common phrase. One Swedish woman said that she had heard about the beautiful gardens in the Near East and had wondered what had happened when the Turks and the Lebanese came to Sweden. Actually, it appears that when immigrants from the Near East do not raise flowers on the open garden territory, they continue in the new country a practice well established in their home countries, namely to distinguish between field gardens on which vegetables are raised by men and women together, and flower gardens close to the home which are the province of women. In this case, then, there seems to be a persistence of a Middle Eastern pattern. But the persistence is not complete. It seems that only the field gardens are kept going in Sweden, not the flower gardens. Few Turkish women in Swedish urban settings cultivate flowers, neither on the balconies outside their apartments nor inside them.³

There are, then, clear contrasts between the Nordic and the Middle Eastern gardeners. Gardening is important as a source of food among only a few of the Swedes and the Finns. By contrast, I have not met a single immigrant from the Middle East who does not emphasize that gardening is an important way to obtain food. Like the man from Midyat cited above, many concentrate on vegetables which are expensive or difficult to obtain in Sweden. To all of them, gardening appears to be a part of an important informal food economy which is entirely different from the Finnish and Swedish counterpart. There are, for example, no «smokers» on the Middle Eastern lots. Instead, the vegetables raised on the garden lots often become links in complex intra-ethnic trading chains which may include fish and meats from several North European sources.

The «Chinese» Type

The ten lots cultivated by ethnic Chinese from Vietnam are strikingly different from the Scandinavian and Middle Eastern lots. They are different in all respects: in lay-out, in cultivating techniques, in what is being grown. These lots also stand out, because all the work is done by women and occasionally by children. The very first persons I ever sighted on the territory in the fall of 1988 were two Chinese women working hard despite a cold and persistent drizzle.

On all the Chinese lots the plant beds form rows which are perfectly straight. On all these rows the soil is raised well above the rest of the ground. This is done in order to retain water as long as possible. I do not know exactly what the Chinese grow, since I have not interviewed any of them. The Swedish gardeners do not know either. The Swedish tend to call all the Chinese varieties *kinakål* («Chinese cabbage») and hold that the seeds are mailed directly from Hongkong. Several Swedish gardeners have noted that Chinese women water the plants from a watering can regularly three times a day. The plants must be kept moist constantly but cannot retain water for a long time.

There are many indications that the Chinese gardeners try to raise as large and as many crops as possible. They utilize every bit of soil available and aim for as many harvests during one season as they can. In October 1989 one row of Chinese vegetables could be seen outside the fence surrounding the entire garden territory. In October there was also a lot on which Chinese growers were trying for a fifth harvest. According to several Swedes, the Chinese utilize an inordinate

amount of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in order to force the soil. On a few lots the soil is now exhausted for many years to come.

Thus, to the Chinese the garden lots are places to grow food as efficiently as possible according to methods which are unknown to Swedes or Middle Easterners. The Chinese gardeners do not care at all about sturdy fences or locks. Nor are they interested in decorative play in wood or stone. They do not grow flowers and have no verandas or other places to eat. To them the garden lots are not places to socialize and relax. There is a persistent rumor that the Chinese women are raising greens and vegetables in order to sell them to Chinese restaurants in Stockholm.

Boundaries and Negotiations, Compartmentalizations and Sharings

In order to formulate some tentative conclusions, I would like to return to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper. How are ethnic relationships shaped, when people grow plants and dig in the soil so close to one another? What gardening traditions and esthetic ideals cross ethnic boundaries? Does the enterprise of working together in close physical proximity create a sense of unity, common purpose, and sharing across the entire territory?

But before addressing these questions I would like to underline two points which are obvious but deserve further reflection. First, from the point of view of the Swedish gardeners there seems to be a graduated scale or ranking order in the interaction with other ethnic groups (cf. Lange & Westin 1981: 136–143). There is a great deal of interaction with those gardeners whose cultures are perceived as close to the Swedish one, notably with the Finns. On the other end of the scale are the Chinese whose culture is regarded as utterly foreign and whose actions often appear incomprehensible. A second, related, point is that precisely this kind of graduated scale also exists between the gardeners and myself. The closer and more comprehensible the culture of specific gardeners, the easier it was for me to speak to them and to grasp nuances in their actions. The more foreign the group, the more difficult the communication and the more uncertain my conclusions. It is no accident that I have a great deal to say about the Swedish *bricoleurs* and have relatively little to say about the gardening of the Chinese women. This state of affairs points to the special challenges in conducting ethnographic research in complex multi-ethnic settings. It is difficult to know how the issues of cultural closeness and distance will develop as I conduct more intensive fieldwork among the Chinese and Turkish gar-

deners. For now, these issues must be taken into account when evaluating my tentative answers to the questions posed above.

The answer which I would like to discuss first is the one which is closest at hand, namely that plants, growing techniques and architectural forms to a great extent have remained locked inside ethnic compartments. It is astonishing that the «types» have remained so untouched by influence from neighbours. The situation on the garden territory is a telling example of just how deeply «differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact» (Barth 1969: 10). It is surprising that none of the Swedes have learned to grow any of the Middle Eastern lettuces and greens which have become popular on Swedish tables as a result of tourist trips in the Mediterranean region. It is particularly striking that none of the Swedish experts experiment with methods utilized by Lebanese and Turkish gardening neighbours. It is also striking that it has never occurred to the growers' association to invite somebody to introduce them to Chinese vegetable gardening. Yet, one year the association sponsored a course on Japanese flower arrangements.

As already noted, what is at work on the garden territory is the formation of ethnic neighbourhood clusters and, to some extent, outright segregation. The ethnic clusters are formed because friends and relatives trade lots in order to move closer to one another. One example particularly clearly shows how the process works and how segregational aspects are involved. During the fall of 1989 a Finnish-born woman was working a lot which she had recently moved into. Earlier she had cultivated another lot in the compound. However, an elderly Finnish couple asked her to become their neighbour when this lot became vacant. They begged her to move in, because they didn't «want any Turks so close to them». Finally, she did so and the Finnish woman and the Finnish couple became neighbours. Since the fall of 1989 there has been no fence at all between their lots. However, her new neighbours on another side are Chinese. One day she was working hard along the fence separating her lot from theirs. When asked what she was doing, she explained that she was pulling up currant bushes in order to plant a row of rose bushes. She said that she did not dare to grow currants there although she would have liked to and continued: «You can't have food so close to the Chinese. They destroy it all with all their poisons.»

Because they contain many layers of meanings, this woman's activities and statements shed a special light on the way ethnic boundaries can be affirmed through plants. On the one hand, she seems to be saying that a future thorny hedge will bear witness of an unnegotiable barrier between Swedish ecological concerns and a Chinese food economy. At

the same time, it appears that ecology serves as a cover-up for fears of the utterly foreign. She couches her disdain for pesticides in ethnic terms. She could have said: «You can't have food so close to people who use so much poison.» After all, some of the Swedes also use pesticides. Yet, ethnic labeling became her primary interpretive frame, not any of the other possibilities.

But not all barriers are unnegotiable. Despite the maintenance of ethnic compartments, there are instances when ideas and plants cross boundaries. One example of how ideas begin to cross ethnic boundaries was related to me by the president of the growers' association. The very first time I met him, he told me about a time when a Chinese woman had sent her Swedish-speaking son to bring some greens for him. She had also instructed her son to tell him how the greens were to be cooked. He and his wife tried the recipe and were pleased. Another example of a cross-over is furnished by a Syrian who started growing flowers the Swedish way, because his wife became so enamoured by the cosmos (*rosenskära*) which a Swedish neighbour was growing. From a distance the viewer cannot separate the cosmos on the Syrian side of the fence from that on the Swedish side. Instances such as these are perhaps examples of the kind of creative and innovative sharing resulting from multi-ethnic encounters which the official Swedish rhetoric deems desirable (cf. Ehn 1989). On the face of it, the harvesting party in early September would also appear to be an excellent example of a creative sharing. The executive board works hard to encourage all gardeners to participate and almost all of them did participate in 1989. Each gardener contributed potatoes, rutabagas, carrots or other vegetables for a gigantic mash which everybody shared.

However, these and other instances of cross-overs and symbolic sharing are not enough to counteract the impression that the act of working the soil in close proximity has promoted no real sense of sharing and joint purpose among all the growers. That sense exists only inside the ethnic groups or inside larger ethnic coalitions such as the North European one. One of the first times I visited the lots, a Danish woman told me that here «we all know each other». Yet, she had never spoken to two Syrians on the other side of the territory. To her «everybody» included only North Europeans. The muted green color suggested for all the lots stands for an indistinct all-territory unity, a sort of silent and reasonably peaceful co-existence between gardeners of diverse backgrounds. But by the same token, it is clear that the North Europeans look upon themselves as leaders in the growing enterprise. All the members of the executive board are Swedes and Finns and they fre-

quently say that they wish that the «foreigners» would vote at elections and help out on clean-up days.

But do the Swedes and the Finns really want «help»? Rather, it appears that they want to be in charge all the time, including at the harvesting party in September. In 1989 the growers' association contributed a suckling pig for this occasion. When we were discussing this pig roast, a member of the executive board said: «Well, it is a bit difficult with some of the Turks who have a special religion. They don't eat pig. Therefore, we have to buy some lamb chops for those who do not eat pig.»

Why not lamb to begin with – for everybody? Why choose a meat which will automatically shut out one group?⁴ The Swedes and the Finns say that they want unity and a sharing of responsibilities. They also accept muted expressions of ethnic or individual distinctiveness – but on their conditions. The message to the immigrants from Asia is: «You may come here, you may plant your roots in our soil, and you may even grow things your way. But we set the boundaries and we make the regulations.» In that sense, to immigrants from Turkey or Vietnam the garden lots may not be different from many other Swedish social settings in which they are asked to conform to regulations they seldom have had a part in establishing. It may be more possible to express ethnic or individual distinctiveness in the gardens than in other public areas of the town in which the gardens are situated. But even so, this expression is highly curtailed by Swedish aesthetic ideals and standards of appropriateness.

Notes

¹ B. Ehn 1989, 1990; A. Daun & B. Ehn, 1988. One of the other studies within the *Blandsverige* project examines the strategies for multi-ethnic co-existence created by teenagers (Ehn 1990). Another focuses upon the role of music and dance in framing situations as «ethnic» (Ronström 1988).

² I conducted some of the fieldwork together with Karin Becker, Stockholm University. Her photography and observations are important to my understanding of this material and I am most grateful to her. I also thank Magnus Bergquist of the Department of Ethnology in Gothenburg and Annick Sjögren of the Swedish Immigrant Institute and Museum in Botkyrka.

³ I am grateful to Susan Slyomovics, New York University, for pointing out the Middle Eastern distinctions between field gardens and kitchen gardens, and to Oscar Pripp, Stockholm University, for his observations on the gardening habits among Turkish women in Sweden (cf. Pripp 1990).

⁴ The popular Swedish practice of outdoor pig roasts is recent. It stems from the early day of European mass tourism (in the 50s and 60s) when Swedish visitors in Mallorca, Spain, were treated to gigantic pig roasts (*grisfester*).

References Cited

- Anderson Jr., E. N. 1972. On the Folk Art of Landscaping. *Western Folklore* 31: 179–188.
- Barth, Fredrik 1969. Introduction. In: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, by Fredrik Barth. Pp. 9–38. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Bell, Michael 1989. Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors. Paper presented at the American Folklore Society Meetings, Philadelphia, PA, Oct. 18–22, 1989.
- Bergquist, Magnus 1989. *Trädgårdens betydelser för folk i flerfamiljshus*. Göteborg: Chalmers Tekniska Högskola.
- Bronner, Simon 1986. *Grasping Things. Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Carrera, Louis 1989. From Labor to Leisure: Italo-American Culture and Gardening. Paper presented at the American Folklore Society Meetings, Philadelphia, PA, Oct. 18–22.
- Cohen, Anthony P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited.
- Daun, Åke & Billy Ehn (eds.) 1988. *Blandsverige – kulturskillnader och kulturmöten*. Stockholm: Carlssons Bokförlag.
- Ehn, Billy 1989. Det mångkulturella Sverige: program, tankefigur och praxis. *Norveg* 32: 117–126.
- Ehn, Billy 1990. The Organization of Diversity: Youth Experience in Multi-Ethnic Sweden. Paper presented at the Conference on «The Organization of Diversity.» Botkyrka, Sweden, June, 1990.
- Ek, Sven B. 1990. *Kolonins sista strid*. Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, Göteborgs universitet.
- Fägerborg, Eva 1988. Koloniträdgård. In: Eva Fägerborg et. al. (eds.), *Trädgård*. Pp. 25–27. Stockholm: Nordiska museet.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 1988. Ordinary People/Everyday Life: Folk Culture in New York City. In: George Gmelch & Walter P. Zenner (eds.), *Urban Life. Readings in Urban Anthropology*. Second edition. Pp. 403–411. Prospect Heights, Illinois.
- Klein, Barbro (1990). Mi casita de campo – etnicitet, storstadsliv och bricolagets estetik. In: Alf Arvidsson, et. al. (eds.), *Människor och föremål. Etnologer om materiell kultur. Festskrift till Phebe Fjällström*. Stockholm: Carlssons Bokförlag.
- Lange, Anders & Charles Westin 1981. *Etnisk diskriminering och social identitet. Forskningsöversikt och teoretisk analys*. Stockholm: Liber förlag.
- Nohl, Werner 1985. Wohnungsferne Gärten in der Stadt als Beispiel einer partizipatorischen Ästhetik. *Landschaft – Stadt* 17 (4): 177–187.
- Pripp, Oscar 1990. *Kulturbundna attityder och anpassningar till bostadsmiljön. En boendeundersökning bland turkar och kurder i Fittja*. Stockholm: Statens råd för byggnadsforskning.
- Ronström, Owe 1988. På jakt efter jugoslaverna. In: *Blandsverige. Kulturskillnader och kulturmöten*, ed by Åke Daun & Billy Ehn. Pp. 145–167. Stockholm: Carlssons Bokförlag.
- Svanberg, Ingvar & Harald Runblom (eds.) 1988. *Det mångkulturella Sverige. En handbok om etniska grupper och minoriteter*. Stockholm: Gidlunds Bokförlag.
- Tolstrup, Inger 1987. Kolonihaver – andenklassens kultur eller en anden kultur? In: *Kulturbeskrivelse og dagligt liv. Etnologiske synspunkter på nyere tids kulturhistoriske bevaringsinteresser*, ed. by Peter Dragsbo & Nina Fabricius. Pp. 60–64. København: Statens Museumsnaevn.