

### **III. EXPERTISE**

## PRIVILEGED EXILE

How can we understand Ronny and Olov Janse's situation in the United States during and after the war? In the past few decades, much research in humanities and social science has been devoted to experiences of mobility, such as that of the immigrant, the emigrant, the traveller, the refugee, and the exile. Much of this research has been done in the United States, often portrayed as a nation built on immigration, where concepts of race, language, and ethnicity, and questions of rights and belonging are continuously debated. In this context, what constituted Olov and Ronny Janse's identity in the years during and after the war? Can we talk about them as refugees, since they fled from a situation of war, when in fact they were invited for professional reasons?

In his book *Guarding the Golden Door*, Roger Daniels discusses refugee immigration, mostly Jews from Europe, to the United States during the 1930s, framed in the complicated political situation of the United States at the time.<sup>815</sup> During the war, the US immigration system was reformed several times. For example, Japanese, German, and Italian people were declared non-citizens in 1941. This category was later expanded to include Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Romanians.<sup>816</sup> But Ronny and Olov Janse were not refugees, not in the sense of someone who had fled from a home where they could not survive if they stayed. They were willingly relocated, not violently displaced.

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815. Daniels 2004:76–78.

816. Daniels 2004:87.

Although it was a time and situation of war, Olov and Ronny Janse were invited to the United States and immediately employed at a high level of society. They were helped by being Swedish citizens, with professional skills and the valuable “booty” of artefacts they had brought, which enriched their new country and sparked the interest of many influential people who were also interested in the collection of art and artefacts from faraway lands. Of course they had to follow the rules and regulations of the new country, but they were, like many other professionals from Europe, viewed as resources and not primarily as refugees or immigrants. That does not, however, take away the feelings of loss or longing that tend to come with displacement.

Based on these factors, Olov and Ronny Janse’s situation can best be understood, we believe, as a situation of *privileged exile*. This is something different from the experiences of refugees, immigrants, or victims of violent displacement. There is one category that they might fit into and that is the “eminent refugees”, defined by Roger Daniels with a quotation from a US State Department report: “those with superior intellectual attainment, of indomitable spirit, experienced in vigorous support of liberal government and who are in danger of persecution or death at the hands of autocracy”.<sup>817</sup> Although they were not at any particular risk in their home country, they did support liberal governments and they did carry with them both experiences and skills that were sought after in the United States. Remember how Olov Janse proudly remarked in his letter to Birger Nerman that Einstein and Pelliot carried the same title as he now did, when they lectured at Harvard some years earlier.<sup>818</sup> Being perhaps the model figure for an “eminent refugee”, Albert Einstein emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1933.

The situation of privileged exile leads inevitably to questions of language, race, and ethnicity. It appears as if Ronny and Olov Janse stepped straight into academic life at Harvard University. At this time they had mostly French friends from their time in Paris and in Indochina, and the new American friends they had made in Buffalo, Manila, Honolulu, and at Harvard. Their white Caucasian race,<sup>819</sup> Olov’s Swedish ethnicity, Ron-

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817. Daniels 2004:84.

818. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 6 August 1941. Riksarkivet. Kartong 3. Korrespondens brev III 1935–1941.

819. See Jacobson 2006 for a discussion of the importance of race, ethnicity, and language in US academic discourse. See also Fishman 1989.

ny's bourgeois Russian background, their French sentiments, and broad language skills arguably helped them make American friends and create a new professional network in the United States – also because what they were *not*. Unlike the more loaded German, Italian, or Japanese ethnicities, the Swedish ethnicity had a more positive, “neutral” aura. And moreover, it seems as if Ronny's exotic “Caucasian temperament” and ex-Soviet bourgeois background gave them prestige and standing among American colleagues.<sup>820</sup> Hence it can be argued that their Caucasian race, white skin colour, Scandinavian and Russian ethnicities, and their broad language skills demonstrating adaptability, were great assets in Olov and Ronny Janse's situation of privileged exile.

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On the whole, we do not know much about Ronny and Olov Janse's first years in the United States. They kept no diaries and wrote few letters. The remaining fragments from the years after they arrived in Harvard in November 1940 have a glossy surface of success – after all they had made it to America, the promised land of the future. Yet, between the lines, we sense anxiety, insecurity and pain. To fill in the gaps and inform our interpretations, we shall juxtapose the few fragments we have with other experiences and analyses of exile in literature and theory from the mid-twentieth century onwards. In essence, this large and growing body of literature and theory explores exile as a situation of pain and loss, which can at the same time offer a new creative position for an artist, writer, or academic scholar.<sup>821</sup> But most of this literature and scholarship refers to exile that is the result of a one-way movement: from a stable home or point of origin, to a precarious and vulnerable exile situation in an entirely foreign land. And this is not a fair description of Ronny and Olov Janse's situation in the United States. They did not depart from one stable and secure home, and their situation in the United States was in many ways a privileged exile. Long before the war they had both chosen a travelling cosmopolitan lifestyle built on constant displacement; she in response to a life-threatening situation in Stalin's Soviet Union, and

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820. The different “waves” of Russian immigration to the United States is a complicated story discussed by Matthew Frye Jacobson in the book *Roots Too* (2006).

821. E.g. Robinson 1994; Robertson et al. 1994; Said 2000; Kim Thúy 2009; Trinh 2011.

he in aspiration to be part of a larger Francophile world built on internationalist ideals beyond the German-oriented nationalism that was growing in Sweden. They had both, for different reasons, chosen to live and work outside their native countries' borders, and knew well how to move and survive in the social and administrative spaces in-between nation states and cultural contexts. For Ronny, moreover, exile in the face of violence had long been an established way of life.

The previous chapters have demonstrated how they used their language skills and worked their social networks to manoeuvre through hardship and turn difficulty into success. Their trajectories resonate with Marc Robinson's words on the importance of choice and purpose for the experience of exile: "the restlessness of the nomad has greater purpose than the stateless. [...] The traveller moves with a surer gait and follows a looser rhythm than the tourist."<sup>822</sup> Moreover, in the context of 1940s east coast United States, the colour of their skin, their Christian religion, their Swedish citizenship and his academic titles were all factors that signalled a privileged social standing and softened the impact when they found themselves in involuntary exile. It did not, however, make them immune to sentiments shared by many people in exile. The following excerpt, from a letter to Birger Nerman in March 1945, is typical of the few letters they wrote in the years during and immediately after the war. Even though they were comfortable and aware of their privileges in the United States – "We live here in great prosperity and have had a lovely summer"<sup>823</sup> – they suffered from serial medical conditions and were consumed with longing to return "home".

We have now begun to make plans for a "home" trip (if I may say so) and expect to be able to embark on it in the autumn or in the coming winter. We are sincerely longing to see you again. We have met many sympathetic people here. Unfortunately, we do not fully tolerate the rather difficult climate here, and are often affected by diseases of some kind. Ronny has undergone another complicated operation (infection in the jaw) but is now almost fully recovered and on her feet again. We had an out-

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822. Robinson 1994:xiv.

823. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 20 September 1942. Riksarkivet. Kartong 4. Korrespondens Brev IV 1942–1946. In the Swedish original: "Vi lever här i högönsklig välmåga och har haft en härlig sommar."

standingly skilled doctor. Myself, I now and then suffer from my malaria.<sup>824</sup>

Homecoming is an issue of great concern for any cosmopolitan. Madan Sarup has defined homecoming as being “not the usual, everyday return, it is an arrival that is significant because it is after a long absence, or an arduous or heroic journey”,<sup>825</sup> In this sense, homecoming is linked to a discourse of travel in which the traveller departs from a place and returns to the same place, enriching that place and his own cosmopolitan identity with a booty of knowledge, experience, and souvenirs.<sup>826</sup> Moreover, this kind of travelling is linked to the concept of narrative, which, “as a structure of development, growth and change – the acquisition of knowledge and solution of problems – is conceived as a physical process of movement, of disruption, negotiation and return”.<sup>827</sup> We have seen how Olov and Ronny Janse in the years before the Second World War built a reputation on such enriching travels and triumphant homecomings, where they brought with them not only a booty of knowledge and experience, but also travel stories, archaeological documentation and valuable artefacts for metropolitan museum collections. When a traveller like Olov Janse departed and returned from missions sanctioned by large institutions such as national museums, it was a matter of national concern and personal pride.

In the years during and after the Second World War, homecoming became, in an inverted way, equally important for Olov and Ronny Janse’s identities. Homecoming then took the form of impossibility and longing – an inversion of the triumphant homecoming of the celebrated cosmopolitan. Speaking with Edward Said, “the pathos of exile is the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming

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824. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 3 March 1945. Riksarkivet. Kartong 4. Korrespondens Brev IV 1942–1946. In the Swedish original: “Vi börja nu att göra planer för ‘hem’-resa (om jag må säga så) och beräknar kunna anträda densamma i höst eller under kommande vinter. Vi längta uppriktigt att träffa Eder igen. Vi ha här träffat många sympatiska människor. Tyvärr tåla vi ej riktigt det rätt så prövande klimatet här, och har ofta en eller annan åkomma. Ronny har igen genomgått en besvärlig operation (infektion i käken) men är nu nästan fullt återställd och på benen igen. Vi hade en utmärkt skicklig läkare. Själv har jag då och då kännning av min malaria.”

825. Sarup 1994:91.

826. Stewart 1993.

827. Curtis & Pajaczkowska 1994:197.

is out of the question”.<sup>828</sup> Conceived from Said’s own experiences of exile, arriving as an elite Palestinian in the United States in 1951, his famous essay *Reflections on Exile* begins with the oft-cited sentence: “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.” Notwithstanding the many apparent differences, there are also similarities between Edward Said’s and Olov and Ronny Janse’s experiences of exile. They once belonged to a privileged class, were exiled under privileged circumstances, and later became successful American academics. Said says: “while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.”<sup>829</sup> Letters and later poetry in Olov and Ronny Janse’s archive testify to recurring illness, depression, and feelings of loss in the decades after they arrived and settled in the United States. Here is a letter from Ronny to her friend Marie-Rose Loo in Paris, written in April 1942:

Dearest Rose –

You must wonder about this involuntary delay of my reply. You will understand without doubt if I tell you that all this last month, I have filled my time with making a thousand and one steps to obtain our permanent visa. It has taken so long! But you must know something. Now, finally, it’s done! We had to make a trip to Canada to complete the long series of formalities.

Your letter has been a great comfort to me, especially in moments when I find myself caught in distress. How right you are when you say that time is the best remedy. I have already come to understand that. But I feel much better now and I even begin to have trust in the future.

What a shame that the spring is late to arrive and the sun, usually so generous in this country, does not show up, when we need it so much! [...]

I understand your grief being deprived of news of your loved

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828. Said 2000:179.

829. Said 2000:173; see also Trinh 1994:11.

ones. I hope that we will all soon come out of this cruel isolation that torments us all.<sup>830</sup>

Similar to the situation depicted by Edward Said, this private sense of sadness and loss appears to be balanced by, yet always remaining in tension with, an official image of success and achievement. Unlike many other exiled people in the United States, Ronny and Olov Janse received permanent visas, and later became US citizens.<sup>831</sup> Thanks to their previous international experience and strong networks they were offered stimulating job positions,<sup>832</sup> and they continued to nurture and enrich their social networks with interesting acquaintances and influential friends. They were drawn to people who shared their passionate anti-Nazi, pro-French sentiments and met for instance with the critical French journalist Geneviève Tabouis, who was known for her strong voice and warnings against Hitler already before the Second World War, and who spent five years in the United States during the war.<sup>833</sup> At a distance they supported Ture Nerman when he was convicted in 1939 and imprisoned one month for criticizing Hitler in his own journal *Trots Allt!.* Following Nerman's release from prison, Olov wrote him a letter: "It is pathetic to think that Berlin is now

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830. Letter from Ronny Janse to Marie-Rose Loo, 12 April 1942. NAA: Janse 2001-29. In the French original: "Bien Chère Rose- // Vous devez vous étonner de ce retard involontaire de ma réponse. Vous comprendrez sans doutes si je vous dis que tout ce dernier mois, j'ai remplis mon temps à faire mille et une démarche pour obtenir notre visa permanente. Cela a été très long! Vous devez en savoir quelque chose. Maintenant, enfin, c'est fait! Nous avons du faire un voyage au Canada pur terminer la longue série de formalités. // Votre lettre a été pour moi d'un grand réconfort, surtout dans un moment ou je me trouve dans une mauvaise impasse. Combien vous avez raison quand vous dites que le temps est le meilleur remède. Je m'en suis déjà rendue compte. Or, je me sens beaucoup mieux et je commence d'avoir même de la confiance dans l'avenir. // Quel dommage que le printemps se fait attendre et que le soleil, habituellement si généreux dans ce pays, ne se montre plus, quand on en a tant besoin! // [...] Je comprend votre chagrin d'être privée de nouvelles des vôtres. J'espère que nous sortirons tous dans un avenir prochain de cet isolement cruel qui nous tourmente tous."

831. See the chapters "Darling, Dearest" and "Renée".

832. See the chapters "OSS and the State Department", "Darling, Dearest", and "Renée".

833. Letter from O. Janse to T. Nerman, 3 January 1941. Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek. Ture Nerman 3.1.24.



ruling in Sweden. Hope, however, that Ture has been well treated.”<sup>834</sup>

They kept in touch with Sweden through occasional letters to uncle Otto, Ture, Birger and Barbro Nerman. And when Birger’s twin brother Einar Nerman came to visit the United States with his wife Kajsa in the spring of 1944, they met Olov and Ronny (for the first time in ten years) at the residence of the Swedish Ambassador in Washington, DC.<sup>835</sup> But most of their social efforts were spent on enriching and strengthening their new networks of friends in and around Harvard and Washington, DC. After the summer 1942, Olov wrote glowingly to Birger Nerman about their wonderful summer with friends in New Hampshire:

For one and a half months we have been in New Hampshire together with some lovely American friends from Boston. They own the major part of a small lake with islands in it. On one of these, they have a guest cottage with three rooms, a kitchen and a veranda, which was made available to us during the summer. We have rested, swum and sunbathed in landscape reminiscent of the Stockholm archipelago with pine, fir and granite rocks. Blueberries as big as grapes grow on two-metre-tall bushes. We often used to go round the corner of the house and pick a meal.<sup>836</sup>

Their socializing depended on both cultural sensitivity and language skills. Olov Janse was an *homme de lettres*, and had based much of his earlier work on his ability and talent for translation. In addition to his native Swedish he was fluent in French and English and also had a decent knowledge of German. For him and Ronny, the dependency on a second

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834. Ibid. In the Swedish original: “Det är bedrövligt att tänka att Berlin nu regerar i Sverige. Hoppas emellertid att Ture blivit väl behandlad. [...]”

835. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 14 April 1944. Riksarkivet. Kartong 4. Korrespondens Brev IV 1942–1946.

836. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 20 September 1942. Riksarkivet. Kartong 4. Korrespondens Brev IV 1942–1946. In the Swedish original: “Har varit c:a 1 ½ månad i New Hampshire tillsammans med några förtjusande amerikanska vänner från Boston. De äger där större delen av en liten insjö med tillhörande öar. På en av dessa har de en gäststuga med tre rum, kök och veranda, som ställdes till vårt förfogande under sommaren. Vi har vilat oss rott, badat och solat oss i en natur som påminner om Stockholms skärgård med tall, gran och gråstensklippor. Blåbär, stora som vindruvor, växer på c:a 2 m höga buskar. Vi brukade ofta gå ut kring husknutarna och plocka ett mål.”

or third language was a familiar situation long before they ended up in exile in the United States. From the beginning of their married life in 1930, they spoke French or English rather than Swedish or Russian with each other. But their mastery of several languages did not necessarily take away the language side to the trauma of exile, and this may be one reason why Olov Janse chose to write his memoirs in Swedish long after he had lost hope of returning to live there.<sup>837</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, who migrated to the United States as a refugee from Vietnam in 1970, has said that writers in diaspora can experience a double exile, “away from their native land and away from their mother tongue”.<sup>838</sup> When Janse found himself in exile and lost touch with his mother tongue in his everyday life, his dependency on second languages was probably to some degree connected with sorrow and loss. But his mastery of these languages had offered, and would continue to offer him considerable privileges as a cosmopolitan academic. In a similar mode, exile can be understood as being fundamentally defined by loss, and at the same time offering a privileged creative position. Speaking with Madan Sarup: “Exile can be deadening but it can also be very creative. Exile can be an affliction but it can also be a transfiguration – it can be a resource.”<sup>839</sup> From their work in Paris and Stockholm in the 1920s and early 30s, they had both developed a capacity to translate social and cultural practices. Their capability to fit in, to understand and even master different social, cultural, and linguistic contexts, would continue to open new opportunities and allow for their seemingly smooth adaptation to changes in world politics.

In modern Western culture today, says Trinh T. Minh-ha, “[identity is a product of articulation. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and traveling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa). [It is a] politics rather than an inherited marking.”<sup>840</sup> With the constructivist approaches to identity that came with social theory of the late twentieth century, it has become possible to regard exile as a privileged perspective, offering a plurality of vision and awareness of simultaneous dimensions. And such pluralities of visions, it has been argued, have constituted the building blocks of American academia and other intellectual and creative

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837. Janse 1959.

838. Trinh 2011:12.

839. Sarup 1994:94.

840. Trinh 1994:13.

settings in the world after the Second World War.<sup>841</sup> For the remaining chapters of this book about Olov and Ronny Janse, it makes sense to keep in mind this Janus-faced nature of exile – as a privileged creative position *and* the painful experience of an insatiable hunger for belonging and recognition.<sup>842</sup>

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841. Said 2000:173, 186.

842. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, 20 September 1942. Riksarkivet. Kartong 4. Korrespondens Brev IV 1942–1946.