

Jenkins, Richard. 2012. *Being Danish: Paradoxes of Identity in Everyday Life*. 2nd edition. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press. 361 pages. ISBN: 978-87-635-3841-1.

Richard Jenkins' *Being Danish* is an engaging and well-written ethnographic study of modern Danish identity. The fact that the book so quickly warranted a second edition (after its original publication in 2010) speaks to the salience of the subject as well as the book's excellent treatment of it. Jenkins uses a social constructivist perspective to examine topics ranging from childcare and education to the flag and the monarchy and emphasizes throughout the ways that "ethnic identification is inherently paradoxical" (18). His aim is to help people understand how "being Danish is something people 'do'" (3), and he does this with a keen eye for the apparently subtle but nonetheless salient differences that make up the subtitle's "paradoxes"—despite frequent claims in the public sphere of Denmark's homogeneity.

Jenkins completed the fieldwork for the book as a solo researcher in Skive in Jutland in 1996 and 1998 and supplements this with archival research and follow-up visits to Denmark in 2008 and 2009. The intervening years were very eventful ones in terms of public discussions of Danish identity, and Jenkins both addresses these discussions and argues that the basis for them was already visible in the earlier years. He begins the book with a review of relevant terms and questions from social anthropology in a way that can helpfully orient readers who may not be familiar with the field. He explains his pragmatic choice of the town of Skive—with a population 20,000 at the time, it was "manageable for a solo ethnographer" (23)—and indoctrinates the reader into his daily routine and manner of work. Subsequent chapters give the reader a strong sense of the community, and Jenkins makes a strong case that, though some may be surprised to see so little of Copenhagen in this book, it is precisely the ordinariness of Skive that helps make it so well-suited for the task of serving as the basis for a study of Danish identity. Staying with Skive, he identifies and thoroughly investigates the kinds of issues that Danes generally seem to recognize as being crucial to Danish identity, including: the Danish language, socialization through institutions such as daycares and public schools, "the everyday social democracy of interpersonal communication" and support in general for the state social democracy (291), the tradition of collective singing [*fællessang*], the prominent use of the Danish flag, and—admittedly varying—degrees of connection to the Lutheran Church and the Royal Family.

One limitation that I found particularly puzzling was his refusal to register with national authorities and get a CPR [*Det Centrale Personregister*] number, which would have given him more personal, direct experience with Danish state services and the accompanying bureaucracy. This choice was never fully explained. It

would have, in particular, allowed him to enroll in Danish language classes, which could also have been a source of interesting material on the way such classes and textbooks address issues of national identity. Jenkins nonetheless managed to acquire quite good Danish language skills, and this small point of criticism mainly serves to suggest a promising area for future research.

Jenkins himself identified some of the other limitations of this book that also stood out to me: namely that he has a dearth of perspectives from the working class and none at all from immigrants or those with immigrant background. The latter choice is intentional on his part, as he chose to limit his scope to specifically white “ethnic Danes.” Prime Minister Helle Thorning Schmidt said in response to the recent shootings in Copenhagen that “Vi står skulder ved skulder. Muslimer, jøder og kristne, mennesker af forskellig politisk overbevisning. Vi står sammen som danskere” [We stand side by side. Muslims, Jews, Christians, people with different political perspectives. We stand side by side as Danes] (Ritzau February 16, 2015). Jenkins does not, and cannot, investigate this expanded notion of Danishness in depth; ultimately, this lacuna highlights an area of scholarship that will become increasingly important in coming years.

Jenkins does acknowledge this gap and closes the book with an excellent chapter on “Being Danish in the Twenty-First Century,” which in the new edition includes a postscript dated November 2011. He presents some critical considerations in the form of four different scenarios for the future of Danish identity that proved rather controversial in Denmark, but which are thought provoking and could serve as excellent material for a class discussion.

The other strengths of this book are numerous, and there is only space to address a few of them here. Jenkins’ observations of personal interactions are particularly spot-on. In this context it is also worth mentioning that Jenkins permits a good deal of humour into the text. Several times during the course of reading the book, I found myself chuckling aloud in recognition of amusing cultural encounters, such as the “mild competitiveness over who will be the first to say ‘*Tak for sidst*,’” for example (42).

Another especially strong aspect of the book that I would be remiss not to mention are the two photo essays: one on a May Day celebration and one on the various uses of *Dannebrog*, the Danish flag. The second of these is a particularly well-done demonstration of the many contexts in which Danes use their flag, which is something that regularly surprises foreign visitors but strikes Danes as completely natural.

In sum, this book is highly recommended. Jenkins’ style and the book’s substance combine to make it a very important contribution to the field that will appeal to a wide audience. *Being Danish* provides a tremendous wealth of material

for further discussion and study both for those well acquainted with Denmark and those who are curious about the country.

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REFERENCE

Ritzau. 16 February 2015. "Statsministeren Mindes: Vi Står Skulder Ved Skulder." Accessed 15 April 2015. *Politiken*. http://politiken.dk/indland/fokus_danmark/fokus_terror/ECE2549491/statsministeren-mindes-vi-staar-skulder-ved-skulder/.