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Author

Kaminsky, David

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Those of us who see ourselves as being part of the world of folk music also have to understand that the world of folk music was originally established on nationalistic foundations. I mean it's like a house built of asbestos and fiber cement tiles. It's really pleasant in the kitchen and it's very nice, lots of people, and it's very open, but still the underlying structures are from the beginning of the twentieth century, when there was a lot of national romanticism.

—Sara Parkman (Jacobson Båth, 2011)¹

Race and space together form a deadly discourse.

—Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin (1993, 714) [73/74]

Swedish National Folk Musician Britt-Marie Swing leads a procession of fiddlers from the church to the folklife park, where they will initiate Delsbo's annual folk musicians' gathering.² With a blue sky above, green fields all around, and lightly forested hills in the background, she lifts her bow high in the air, tick-tocking the beat of the walking tune to keep the long march of fiddlers behind her in time. She and the Swedish flag-bearers to her left and right wear traditional Delsbo folk costumes. Along the roadside, spectators watch and take pictures as the parade moves past.

One of these idyllic snapshots lingers on the website of *National Today*, the weekly periodical of Sweden's anti-immigrant National Democrat Party. The accompanying article is about folk dance, "a source of joy and togetherness" (Alhem 2009).³ News-in-brief headlines flank the text: "The True Finns are on the March in Finland." "Non-Nordic People Are More Likely to Suffer from Vitamin D Deficiency in Sweden." "One in Ten Germans Wants a Führer."⁴

When Britt-Marie Swing presses tort charges against the paper, they respond by re-publishing the photograph, again at the top of page, this time with her image circled in red. The accompanying article quotes editor-in-chief Vávra Suk's response:

We will not be taking down any such pictures. If you are public in that way you will just have to deal with having your photo in a newspaper. . . . If she thinks it looks like a Hitler salute, that's what it is to her. Everyone sees what they want to see. In that case she should bring charges against herself for hate speech. (*Nationell Idag* 2010)

An additional photo is included as an insert—the same image of Swing with her right arm raised straight up and out to conduct her procession, cropped and blown up for good measure. The caption reads, "Hitler salute?"

Until recently, and for the better part of a century, the organized extreme Right in Sweden has shown only a fleeting interest in folk music. The Swedish folk music subculture is constituted of people from across the political spectrum, but on the whole it remains colored by the Swedish folk revival of the 1970s, which—like its American counterpart—was part of a broader leftist movement. Where Vietnam-era American revivalists could find their musical roots in the labor struggles of the 1930s, however, their Swedish contemporaries had no such tradition to draw upon; their pre-World War II folk music master [74/75] narrative had been

penned by conservative nationalists (Ling 1980, 27–33). Moreover, when the leftists of the 1970s Swedish revival adapted those narratives to their own ends, they did little to change the genre's pre-industrial core repertoire. As a result, the underlying terms of usage remained within a nineteenth-century tradition of romantic nationalism, according to which Swedish folk music was a grounded heritage sprung from a homogeneous and ancient national folk identity. As a child of nationalist ideology, Swedish folk music retains its family resemblances, and now in the second decade of the twenty-first century the nationalist Right has returned to reclaim it. In this article I mean to chart the underlying terms and historical antecedents of the custody battle that has ensued.⁵

The debate is one in which I, as an ethnographer and practitioner of Swedish folk music and dance, find myself both invested and implicated. The people among whom I do my research find a good deal of joy in embedding themselves in the story of a deeply rooted tradition. At the same time, they are often acutely aware of the reactionary political purposes to which that story has been put, both historically and in the present (Kaminsky 2012, 2–5). They share this dilemma with the disciplines of ethnomusicology and folklore, which likewise draw currency from the narrative of authenticity while claiming political distance from it.

My contention in this article is that neither scholars nor practitioners of folk music can effectively counter the anti-immigrant narratives of right-wing nationalists without publicly rejecting the popular mythology of 'ethnic' musics grounded in prehistoric locations of cultural purity. A central motive in my writing here is to make a case for the ethical responsibility of ethnomusicologists and folklorists to actively challenge that mythology. I am not objecting to the notion that certain groups of people have distinctive cultures that have formed over time in dialogue with their environments. The problem arises when we attach special value to cultural products as a function of their having gone through that process, thereby causing the inverse processes of migration and cultural mixing to become threatening and undesirable.

My argument should not be unfamiliar. Recent ethnographic scholarship that directly addresses notions of nation and ethnicity has typically argued for the deconstruction—or at least the radical revision—of those concepts in favor of an anthropology of transition and hybridity (e.g., Appadurai 1991; Bronner 2005; Clifford 1997; [75/76] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988; Stokes 1994). Yet the primary narratives we have given the outside world via our published recordings and world music survey courses have often done too little to disabuse the layperson's preconceived notions about the place-specific ancientness-value of Ewe drumming, Nordic fiddling, or Navajo chant.⁶ At one point, this discourse of grounded authenticity was our ticket into the academy, a source of currency for our musical, cultural, and scholarly interests. As direct beneficiaries of the same mythology that today informs extreme-right anti-immigrant politics, then, we as ethnomusicologists and folklorists are faced with a choice: either challenge that mythology directly, or resign ourselves to remaining its indirect exponents.

Swedish Folk Music and the Political Left

Historians write about two kinds of early nation-states. The very first national revolutions, from which the United States and France emerged, were justified according to Enlightenment ideals of universal rights and freedoms. Elsewhere in Europe, on the other hand, the new nation-states of the nineteenth century were founded on the Romantic notion of culturally, linguistically, and racially distinct folk groups (Wilson 1989, 22–23). The constitutional monarchy of Sweden was born in 1809 in the latter category, but in the wake of the twentieth-century workers' movement

has shifted to the former. The pre-industrial folk identity that the bourgeoisie had constructed in the nineteenth century was supplanted in the twentieth by a Swedishness increasingly identified with the modern welfare state (Löfgren 1993, 53–58).

Swedish folk music as a concept had been tied to the pre-industrial romantic narrative, and over time it became marginalized as a result of that shift. In the 1930s, while Alan Lomax, Charles Seeger, and Woody Guthrie were redefining American folk music to include the songs of black people and the new music of the labor movement, the most prominent proponents of Swedish folklore were constructing their folk music as a bulwark against the degenerate tastes of the urban working class and their foreign, commercial, mechanized jazz. This is not to suggest that the American folk music movement did not have its own issues with conservatism. The continued and persistent exclusion of Latin American, Arab American, and Asian American musics from its canon are intimately connected to the presumed foreignness of those identities within the United States.⁷ But in 1930s Sweden, the [76/77] exponents of folk music never even integrated the music of the white workers' movement into the repertoire, much less the music of any racial Other. As a result, after Hitler rendered the myth of racialized Nordic folk culture distasteful, Swedish folk music came to carry a tinge of the reactionary for the populace at large.

As leaders of the left-wing American folk revival of the 1960s, Arlo Guthrie and Pete Seeger had only to build on the political legacies of their fathers. But when the impulse to integrate folk music into the countercultural movement reached Sweden in the 1970s, it presented a greater challenge.⁸ How might the Swedish Left revise the nationalist folk music narrative they had inherited to suit their own purposes? I have discerned four intersecting tactics that they put into play: *deconstruction*, *regionalism*, *redefinition*, and *multiculturalism*.

Swedish musicians and scholars first used the tactic of *deconstruction* in the late 1970s to distance themselves from the national romantic underpinnings of the folk music concept. In his article “Folk Music—A Brew,” Jan Ling argued that pure and ancient folk music was an ideological fiction, and he cited contemporary musicians who were making similar arguments through their liner notes and stylistic choices (1979, 12–13, 27–29). He also attacked the myth-making tendencies of the 1970s revival for reproducing the Nazi-influenced Swedish folk music narratives of the 1930s (32–33). Ling’s landmark article set the tone for future Swedish scholarship on the subject. Due to a tight feedback loop between scholars and practitioners, this body of deconstructionist writing also influenced the discourse in the folk music community at large (Kaminsky 2012, 21–23).

The tactic of *regionalism* exploited a feature of nineteenth-century folklore scholarship, namely, the division of Sweden into a puzzle-piece map of culturally distinct provinces (Arcadius 1997, 32–34).⁹ I have elsewhere argued that Swedish folk revivalists of the 1970s and 1980s located the conservatism of their inherited folk music concept in its connections to nationalism and sought to undermine that element by privileging regional idiosyncrasies and identifications (2011, 53–54). Practitioners thus reinterpreted the map of provinces that had once signified an additive nationalism so as to allow for a divisive regionalism. They further deployed the resulting local focus against the globalizing effect of mass-produced English-language music, both foreign and domestic. Active, locally identified, amateur music-making would provide an alternative to the US-dominated pop soundscape (Ling [77/78] 1979, 26–27). It would operate as a mode of resistance to American cultural imperialism and as a metaphor of protest against American military intervention in Vietnam.

At the same time, the revival encouraged the growth of a professional class of musicians that destabilized the epistemic foundations of a music originally positioned in opposition to

cultured art music. Thus, folk music as a concept became open to *redefinition*.¹⁰ The entry of folk music into the conservatory system allowed scholars to frame Swedish folk music not as the heritage of a specific national culture, but rather as a learnable genre with a particular set of musical signifiers (Lundberg and Ternhag 1996, 14; Ramsten 1992, 7–8). This shift thus had the potential to undermine folk music's established Herderian function of linking Swedish ethnicity to Swedish land.

The transformation from cultural artifact to stylistic genre has also brought Swedish folk music into the realm of *multiculturalism*. As soon as it became a genre with identifiable musical signifiers, Swedish folk music could be fused with other such genres, a process abetted by several historical factors. The revival of the 1970s came suddenly, and established tradition bearers were scarce; thus, almost everyone who became involved was new to Swedish folk music (Ramsten 1992, 136; Kaminsky 2012, 33). Of the first musicians who were equipped to play it professionally, almost all had backgrounds in other genres. Then, too, many had to perform in a range of styles in order to make ends meet, and fusing folk music with rock, jazz, and various international traditions was a useful way to broaden its appeal. Thus, by the time 'world music' became a commercial genre category in 1987, Swedish folk music had already been subject to various kinds of fusion for a quarter century.¹¹

Swedish Immigration Policy: Seeds of the Debate

Professional musicians and music educators who promoted expressive hybrids were further bolstered by the 1975 official government initiative to transform Sweden into a multicultural nation. That unanimous multi-party decision was the culmination of a gradual opening of borders over the previous thirty years, and of a slow shift in political discourse surrounding immigration during that time. Historian Lars-Erik Hansen argues that anti-Nazi sentiment following the Nuremberg trials, combined with collective guilt at having turned away German-Jewish refugees before and during the war, created public pressure [78/79] in Sweden for the immigration reform that opened the nation's door to asylum-seekers after the war's end (2001, 208–16). In stark contrast to the prewar two-pronged immigration policy of exclusion and assimilation, the stated goals of the 1975 initiative were to transform Sweden into a multicultural, multilingual nation according to the principles of equality, freedom, and cooperation.¹² No one would be forced to assimilate who did not choose to do so, and the ideal immigrants would be those who maintained their own cultural identities while learning to function fully in Swedish society. The 1975 decision was an outgrowth of already established policies, perhaps the most radical of which was immigrant school children's right to *hemspråkslära*, extra classes in which they could study their mother tongues. Researchers in the 1960s had determined that children who were given command of their parents' languages would also have an easier time learning Swedish (Widgren 1980, 59–60). *Hemspråkslära* typified Swedish immigration policy of the 1970s and subsequent decades; immigrants were meant to integrate without needing to assimilate. The new multicultural order would be an amalgam of Swedish society and immigrant cultural traditions.

Immigrant societal structures and Swedish cultural traditions, conversely, were more marginal to the scenario. Swedish postwar identity was firmly associated with the modern welfare state, a supremely successful forward-looking society that had little to learn from either its recent immigrants or its own pre-industrial past. Economist Mauricio Rojas puts it as a problem of disrespect for the potential of immigrant society:

The process has not been built upon dialogue, but on a sad and counterproductive monologue that monotonously preaches their own [native Swedish] superiority. And the responsibility of the others—these primitive beings who originate in the traditional part of the world—to learn to live in a new way. Integration policy has been patronizing and assimilationist, and has never proceeded from the notion that it's about people who can make a real creative contribution and be equal partners in a process of mutual enrichment. (1996, 260)

Public policy after 1975 was geared entirely toward helping immigrants adapt to their new lives as social Swedes and cultural foreigners. No effort was made to teach the native, presumably postcultural Swedes how to live alongside their new neighbors.¹³ The Swedish government recognized this problem in 1997, when politicians decided to shift their focus [79/80] from immigration to integration, targeting the entire population instead of immigrants alone. However, a 2004 study commissioned by the government determined that so-called integration policies still effectively target immigrants only (Lindström, Mahmood, and Hollén 2004, 7).

The overall result of this disparity has been that segregation, workplace discrimination, and unemployment have become major and mutually reinforcing problems faced by immigrants in Sweden. Many immigrants have wound up ghettoized in the suburban cookie-cutter apartments of Sweden's 1965–75 Million-home Development Program (Miljonprogrammet). Workplace anti-discrimination laws did not enter the books until 1992, and since then enforcement has been spotty. Kjell Öberg, former director of the Swedish Board of Immigration and Naturalization, remarks on a study that investigated general workplace attitudes toward immigrants:

The most negative were company human resource departments. These representatives of employers have since that time [of the anti-discrimination law's passage in 1992] been if anything more unwilling. They engage actively in conduct whose consequences are clearly illegal. Many of the young people who are thus shut out of the labor market are likely the children of immigrants who, in the '60s and '70s, came to our aid when we were clamoring for a workforce. I guess that's one way to show your gratitude. (1996, 74)

Despite these difficulties, however, public discourse on immigration was generally positive and uncontentious until the economic downturn of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Swedin 1988). At this point, the recession brought welfare and employment issues to the forefront of popular consciousness. In 1989 the Social Democratic government placed serious limitations on new immigration to Sweden as a whole. In the 1991 elections, 6.7 percent of the national vote went to the extreme-right, anti-immigrant New Democracy Party, though the center-right bloc that won the plurality actually eased the two-year-old limitations on immigration. In 1994 the left-wing bloc regained control, and since that time immigration policy has been increasingly restrictive to the point that some have accused the Social Democrats of fulfilling the campaign promises of the now-defunct New Democracy Party (Arnstberg 2008, 63).

The right-wing, nationalist Sweden Democrat Party, central players in today's folk music debate, also entered the scene during this period of political upheaval. Formed in 1988 as a fringe party, the Sweden [80/81] Democrats collaborated with the White Aryan Resistance at protests in 1992, and had significant membership overlaps with that and other neo-Nazi and skinhead organizations. Their first party leader in 1990 had earlier been arrested for making anti-Semitic death threats to a public figure, and the second was an open Nazi. Efforts at legitimization began when Mikael Jansson, formerly of the mainstream Center Party, took over leadership of the Sweden Democrats in 1995. As party heads purged Nazis and criminals from their membership

rolls, they saw their poll numbers increase with each election cycle.¹⁴ In 2010 the Sweden Democrats were elected into parliament for the first time, with 5.7 percent of the national vote.

In that same election, the nearly unprecedented reelection of the center-right bloc represented a continued erosion of the social-democratic identity that has traditionally functioned in lieu of a sense of Swedish cultural pride.¹⁵ The Sweden Democrats have made political hay of this general shift to the right by invoking nostalgia, ironically, for the golden years of left-wing Social Democratic rule. According to their narrative, the government betrayed the trust of the Swedish people by sacrificing the welfare state the people worked so hard to create in favor of a well-meaning but reckless and unmandated immigration policy (Sverigedemokraterna 2010, 37–39, 52). The mainstream parties, so the argument goes, turn a blind eye to the criminality of the new immigrant population and the strain they have put on the social system, shutting down any reasonable debate on the subject by calling their opponents racists.¹⁶ Here the Sweden Democrats construct themselves as the true heirs to the pre-immigration-era Social Democrats, proposing to use the federal money that re-imposing severe immigration restrictions will save to restore the security of the welfare state (Mattsson 2009, 106–7; Sverigedemokraterna 2010, 9).

The Debate over Swedish Folk Music

The general superiority of the Swedish social system is one of two conventional metanarratives that the Sweden Democrats have drawn upon to assert their anti-immigrant agenda. The other is the intrinsic value of national folklore. Their argument is that shutting down multicultural programs will free up funds for the reinvigoration of Swedish folklife, just as new restrictions on immigration will allow a return to general prosperity. [81/82]

The Sweden Democrats wish to raise state funding significantly for those societies, organizations, institutions, and authorities whose purpose is to preserve and revive Swedish cultural heritage. . . . The Sweden Democrats believe that it is important that culture, as well as other publicly funded areas of society, have a constructive purpose and a broad popular base. For that reason we wish to completely dismantle those taxpayer-supported programs whose purpose is to support the multicultural societal order, as well as those whose primary purpose is to shock, disturb, and provoke. (Sverigedemokraterna 2010, 58)

National identity, according to this plan, will be triply strengthened by virtue of a restored welfare state, cultural re-homogenization, and the celebration of folk culture.

While mainstream politicians—especially those on the Left—tend to be quite invested in the narrative of Swedish social superiority, they typically have little at stake in the mythology of national folk traditions. Social Democrat Mona Sahlin puts it bluntly:

I don't know what Swedish culture is. . . . I think that's what makes a lot of Swedes jealous of immigrant groups. You have a culture, an identity, a history, something that binds you together. And what do we have? We have midsummer's eve and 'silly' things like that. What I'd like to put into Swedish culture, instead, are important values like democracy, tolerance, and respect for women's circumstances and rights. I wish that everyone who lives in Sweden felt that that culture belonged to all of us. (Aksakal 2002, 14)

Once again, the idea is that immigrants have cultural identities, while Swedes have an enlightened society. This position, while rarely stated so plainly, seems to underlie much

Swedish public policy, both as it pertains to immigration and as it regards folklore. It also leaves today's Sweden Democrats as the sole parliamentary proponents of increased government spending for the preservation of pre-industrial Swedish folk traditions, effectively ceding those traditions to an anti-immigrant party platform.

This puts Swedish folk musicians and dancers, many of whom have long called for the government to put an economic stake in their genre, in a tricky situation. Many have reacted negatively to the idea that anti-immigrant public policies should be conducted in their name and for their benefit. Shortly after the Sweden Democrats proposed to divert funds from multicultural programs and reinvest them in Swedish folklore, several folk culture organizations published statements condemning [82/83] the party's plans (Björkroth et al. 2010; Ohlanders et al. 2010; Thalén 2010). A new group calling itself *Folkmusiker mot främlingsfientlighet* (Folk Musicians against Xenophobia) organized demonstrations around the country, and debates were held between spokespeople for the Sweden Democrats and prominent folk musicians and culture workers. The uproar among musicians and dancers constituted a rejection of the Sweden Democrats—but it also responded to a mainstream willingness to accept the notion of folklore as a reactionary interest. Johan Ronström, of Folk Musicians against Xenophobia, argues:

People haven't dared to talk about Swedish folk culture without mixing it up with xenophobic forces, and we who are practitioners and scholars and both amateurs and professionals, in Swedish folk music and dance—we felt that “we can't identify with this.” We do this every day, and the point is to give politicians and media our arguments for being able to debate these xenophobic forces without, for example, needing to claim that Swedish folk culture doesn't exist. That would be like saying there's no Swedish language because there are a lot of loan words. (Gunnarsson 2010b)

Swedish folk enthusiasts who oppose xenophobia yet value folklore must constantly conduct this debate on two fronts.

In order to make their case, these debaters have typically turned to the revival's established narrative revisions of folk music: deconstruction, regionalism, redefinition, and multiculturalism. Their arguments have been undermined, however, by the limitations of those revisions. Revivalists never truly altered the core elements of 'Swedish folk music' as originally constructed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collectors. The central 'folk' repertoire continues to be regulated according to the guiding principles of pre-revival tune and song collections, which overwhelmingly avoid modern international influences.

Below I discuss each approach, describing how debaters have employed them and enumerating the problems they have faced in doing so. I have mined material from two specific debates and ensuing commentary. The first debate was broadcast on October 17, 2010 on the Swedish radio program *Folke: Världens Musik* (Folke: music of the world), hosted by Ulrika Gunnarsson. National Folk Musician Marie Stensby, spokeswoman on cultural issues for the Sweden Democrats, debated culture worker Lotta Johansson along with folk musicians Ale Möller and Pär Moberg. Follow-up discussions were also conducted on the show's website and on the same program a week later. The second debate [83/84] was broadcast on October 21 on the television show *Gomorrön Sverige* (Good morning Sweden). There, Lars Faragó, secretary for Riksförbundet för Folkmusik och Dans (the National Organization for Folk Music and Dance), debated Sweden Democrat and member of parliament Mattias Karlsson. What follows is not a chronological account of those debates, but rather an overview of their primary themes.

Deconstruction

One primary tactic people have used when debating the Sweden Democrats has been to problematize the concept of an impermeable and coherent Swedish folk music. Ale Möller argues:

All of these impulses that exist within folk music have come thanks to the massive immigration that Sweden has always had throughout the centuries. If there had been parties in those times with the attitude that's being presented here, we wouldn't have this folk music. (Gunnarsson 2010a)

The argument builds on work by revival-era scholars who challenged the nineteenth-century construction of Swedish folk music as an ancient national monolith for which change could only mean decay. These scholars have argued convincingly that boundaries of nation and genre have always been porous, and that the Swedish people have had a tradition of adapting outside impulses to their own purposes (Ling 1980, 11; 1985, 154; 1986, 1–2). This reading is clever in that it maintains the cultural currency of tradition while stealing the concept away from conservatives. However, because the reading maintains the notion of a self-contained Swedish ethnic identity and tradition—even one characterized by innovation—there is nothing to stop conservatives from reappropriating that currency. Marie Stensby replies to Ale Möller's argument, "Yes, of course it's always been influenced from outside, but we've taken what we like and want to inject, and we haven't been forced to take things we don't want" (Gunnarsson 2010a).

A more extreme version of the deconstructionist argument simply denies the validity of Swedish folk music as a category. When asked about the Sweden Democrats' campaign to fund Swedish music at the expense of 'foreign' musical traditions, musicologist Lars Lilliestam responds:

There never has been and there never will be anything that is genuinely Swedish. Because cultural things, whether it has to do with music or language or food or clothing or all of that, all of that changes over time, [84/85] and that means if you designate something as 'genuinely Swedish' you're making yourself responsible for some kind of historical fabrication. (Gunnarsson 2010b)

Few folk music insiders will take this stance, however. The Sweden Democrats have staked a claim to traditional folk culture, and the other parties in parliament have effectively ceded it to them by ignoring it or claiming its non-importance. An argument like Lilliestam's can easily be used to equate belief in Swedish folklore with right-wing extremism, effectively giving the Sweden Democrats a monopoly on the currency of the pre-industrial Swedish past.

National Folk Musician and journalist Peo Österholm thus responds to Lilliestam's arguments in an op-ed: "We never claim that Irish folk music—or Norwegian, Russian, American, etc.—are not expressions of their own countries' music culture" (2010). Indeed, the people in Sweden who claim that folklore is a fabrication typically only make that argument about Swedish traditions. Most likely this imbalance is due to their sense that they lack the license to deconstruct other people's identities. The effect, however, is to reinforce that persistent claim: foreigners have essential cultures, while native Swedes have a flexible, open society that welcomes outsiders.

Regionalism

Another way that debaters have sought to undermine the Sweden Democrats' narrative about a

coherent Swedish folk music that needs protecting from outside forces has been to point to regional and international culture areas that do not conform to national boundaries. Lars Faragó contrasts the western province of Värmland and the eastern province of Sörmland to make this point.

We have to be able to see the nuances. When we, for example, talk about Swedish folk culture, I have a hard time calling it Swedish, I think it's Nordic. I think the border between Värmland and Norway is fairly irrelevant when you look at culture. The difference between Värmland culture and Sörmland culture can be much greater than that between Värmland and Norway, or between Sörmland and maybe Finland. (Pettersson 2010)

During and after the revival, folk music insiders privileged provincial boundaries over national ones in what I have argued was an effort to [85/86] distance folk music from the stigma of nationalism. The problem with that tactic, both in the 1970s and today, is that the division of Sweden into culturally distinctive provinces is actually part of the national romantic narrative. The Sweden Democrats already favor the preservation and celebration of local traditions (Sverigedemokraterna 2010, 20).

Nor is the concept of a Nordic cultural identity particularly foreign to extreme right-wing nationalists. Mattias Karlsson responds to Faragó's argument: "Of course there's been a cultural exchange with our neighboring countries over the centuries. It's fairly natural" (Pettersson 2010). The Sweden Democrats oppose immigration and influence from "culturally distant lands," not Scandinavian ones (Sverigedemokraterna 2007).

Multiculturalism

Another argument commonly levied against the Sweden Democrats and their attempts to protect Swedish folk music from outside influence is that real folk musicians actually thrive on multicultural contact. Ale Möller makes the point:

I'm also surprised by the idea that this [international influence] is some kind of threat, which I don't understand. What are they so afraid of? Because folk music is doing just fine, it's developing, and I see all these young people who help themselves to the foreign cultures around the world both in personal meetings and from recordings and everything, that they also wind up interested in the Swedish stuff, they're even more turned on to that. There's no [conflict], I don't understand what they're so afraid of. (Gunnarsson 2010a)

This argument highlights the narrow-mindedness of the xenophobic approach to folk music quite effectively, while simultaneously turning multicultural repertoire choices into anti-racist political statements. Like the argument that genuine Swedish culture is a fabrication, however, it runs the risk of ceding a great deal of ground to the Sweden Democrats. Many Swedish folk musicians have no interest in playing music from other parts of the world. Many more have international interests that only extend to other European or Euro-American fiddle traditions, cultures that the Sweden Democrats do not consider threatening. To make the traditional music of non-whites into the key symbol of anti-racist protest is to deny Swedish folk musicians who do not also play that music access to that protest. Any Swedish folk music that is not [86/87] overtly mixed, any event that dedicates itself solely to Swedish traditional music, and any person who is only interested in playing Swedish fiddle tunes may then be read as xenophobic by racists and anti-racists alike.

The other problem with invoking multiculturalism is the argument's predication on the

existence and value of discrete cultures. Musically, this tends to manifest as an aesthetic of not taking the fusion too far. People within the Swedish folk music community tend to react most positively to fusion projects when the individual musicians are able to maintain their distinctive stylistic voices. If this distinctiveness is lost, those on both the Right and the Left will describe the musical sound as displeasingly “gray.”¹⁷

In other words, the cultural pluralism of world music fusion contains embedded within it the cultural essentialism espoused by the Sweden Democrats. As sociologist Aleksandra Ålund puts it, “[R]acist and anti-racist movements can unite in their commitment to the independence of cultures, where ‘culture’ in both camps is defined in static and essentialist terms” (1996, 10; cf. Bock and Borland 2011, 2; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988, 151–52). According to either narrative, there must be a Swedish culture and there must be immigrant cultures, and for them to bleed together is problematic. Moreover, once ‘Swedish’ is established as an ethnic identity, people who lack that identity will always in some sense be foreigners in Sweden. There is some justification, then, for the Sweden Democrats’ argument that the multicultural model is segregationist (Sverigedemokraterna 2010, 42).

Anti-immigrant pundits have used this overlap between pluralism and essentialism to their advantage in debates. In August 2011, the Swedish Archive for Folk Music and Jazz Research announced a panel discussion critiquing the extreme Right with statements to the effect that “there are powerful forces that see conflicts between immigrant cultural heritage and preservation of Swedish and Nordic traditions,” and that “theories are being spread that we in Sweden aren’t protecting our cultural heritage and that different cultures shouldn’t live together” (Svenskt visarkiv 2011). National Democrat Erik Alhem (his own pseudonym) quotes these critiques and notes their predication on paradigms shared by his own anti-immigrant party: “Note that the Swedish Archive for Folk Music and Jazz Research here seems to be drawing a sharp line between immigrants and Nordics, that immigrants with Nordic traditions somehow can’t be immigrants or in any case cannot be included in the concept of immigrant cultural heritage” (2011). [87/88]

The Sweden Democrats, likewise, have used this shared propensity for essentialism to adapt the discourse of cultural pluralism to their own ends. Upon being accused of assigning Swedes higher value than others, Marie Stensby retorts, “But I love different cultures, and I want to hear the different national, regional, and local varieties that exist, and I think it’s up to each country to champion and give economic support to its own folk music” (Gunnarsson 2010a). The multicultural approach assumes pockets of cultural purity. Whether those pockets exist on the level of the family, neighborhood, or country is simply a matter of scale. For Stensby, the grand tapestry should be the earth itself, each nation its own solid color.

Redefinition

The radical solution of stripping away all ideology from the concept of folk music and redefining it simply as a historical genre marked by specific stylistic traits may be the only real way to divorce it from the vested currency of its national-romantic roots. Unfortunately, this approach is at odds with the deconstructionist argument, here recapitulated by musicologist Lars Lilliestam:

Much of Swedish folk music or what we today see as Swedish folk music was once imported. Is waltz a Swedish music form? Many people would say it is today, but it came from outside at the beginning of the nineteenth century. And there are many examples, you could take old-time dances, mazurkas, or polskas, or whatever you want. And then jazz comes and rock comes and there are a bunch of things from outside all the time. That’s how life works somehow; we can never freeze

something and say that “in the 1950s, that was the ideal.” (Gunnarsson 2010b)

The problem is that once Swedish folk music is established as a stylistically identifiable historical genre, its essential ingredients do in fact become frozen in a historical moment. Innovations can come after that point, but they will always be regulated by some kind of pre-industrial essential core. And happily for the Sweden Democrats, all of the preindustrial elements that make up Swedish folk music come from northern Europe. Waltz and mazurka entered in the nineteenth century, and are thus ‘traditional.’ Jazz and rock entered in the twentieth century, and thus they are not. Swedish folk music can be mixed with these genres and forms, or with non-European folk musics, but the results will be seen as ‘something else’ and relegated to the category of fusion. [88/89]

Moreover, as long as Swedish folk music is called ‘Swedish,’ it can never be entirely divorced from the people or country of Sweden. Designating it a historical genre will not sever its ideological ties, nor will any other strategy. The irreducible problem is that Swedish folk music retains its function as a key symbol for a specific ethnic group and its association with a particular body of land. It cannot help but participate in the work of dividing cultures that belong to the land from those that do not.

Conclusions

The story of the Sweden Democrats and Swedish folk music is only just beginning, and little can be said at this point about where it might end. While folk music as a concept seems well suited to ultranationalist politics, the Swedish extreme Right faces a major challenge in that today’s Swedish folk musicians are by and large unsympathetic to the anti-immigrant agenda. The Sweden Democrats’ periodical *SD-kuriren* puts out regular calls for people who can play fiddle or nyckelharpa at their events, but as yet their meetings have been notably absent those sounds (Mattsson 2009, 144–47).

What can already be said is that the Sweden Democrats’ exploitation of the national folk music narrative’s intrinsic division between the essentially native and the essentially foreign should demonstrate to their opponents a political need to work actively at dismantling that narrative. While some folk music enthusiasts have begun to engage in the kind of self-examination this would entail, most seem to be focusing their attentions outward, working to establish public distance from the Sweden Democrats. Folk musician and political activist Sara Parkman has argued that this kind of scapegoating is a problem with the general discourse on race and immigration in Sweden: “It’s also extremely convenient that the Sweden Democrats have gotten into parliament—then they get to wear the ‘racist’ jackets and the rest of us become free of guilt” (2011). The xenophobia at the root of the folk music concept gets displaced onto the Sweden Democrats, as do the anti-immigrant policies of the mainstream political parties.

I am not sure that I have a clear solution for practitioners in the world of Swedish folk music and dance. Strategies that rely on multiculturalism, regionalism, and redefinition all fall short because they represent attempts to retain or reclaim currency minted by nineteenth-century [89/90] nationalists. And as I have noted, even the deconstructionist tactic of denying authenticity completely is flawed in that it abandons all the existing currency of heritage to the anti-immigrant cause.

I do believe, however, that we as scholars can do our part by cutting off our supply of legitimacy to the extreme Right. Ethnomusicologists and folklorists can stop serving the

narrative of grounded authenticity by refusing to let it continue serving ethnomusicology and folklore. We have of course begun that work, revising the stories of who we are and what we do in order to distance ourselves from our origins in the political moment of romantic nationalism. Folklorists can now study the vernacular of the everyday, without needing to ascribe value to fixity, cultural purity, or venerability.¹⁸ Ethnomusicologists now revel in acculturation, migration, and diaspora, and focus their attention on the dynamics of cultural meeting and exchange.¹⁹ But an overt rejection of our national-romantic past is not enough here. Herder himself was not a nationalist, but that did not stop the nationalist movement from rooting itself in his ideas (Bohlman 2010, 9–10). The questions we must ask ourselves are more difficult: Have we successfully challenged that impulse to ascribe value to music and folklore based on its age, its association with a particular group of people, a place? Do we disabuse our students of the notion that a person's cultural identity has more attachment to a song her ancestors sang in her homeland than to the international club beats she is dancing to right now? When our students shake their heads in sadness that that person does not know who she is, do we insist that she does? And if we answer yes to all these questions—if we have actually rejected the currency of grounded and ancient heritage that once bought our seats at the academic table—have we communicated this revolution to the world?

University of California, Merced
Merced, California, USA

Notes

1. This and all other translations from Swedish are my own, unless otherwise noted in the bibliography.
2. The title of National Folk Musician (*Riksspelman*) is a generally recognized badge of mastery for players of Swedish folk music (Kaminsky 2007, 27–28; Ramsten 1992 appendix, Article III).
3. Web and print versions of articles in *National Today* tend to have slight variations in captions, headlines, and photos; in the present work I cite the web versions where they differ from those in print. The photo I discuss here was not included in the print version of the article. [90/91]
4. These news-in-brief banners are from the day I accessed the site: October 16, 2010.
5. The idea that folk music may be used as a propaganda or political tool is certainly not new to scholarship in ethnomusicology and folklore (e.g., Bohlman 1988, xviii–xix; Buchanan 1995; Gelbart 2009, 381–82; Harker 1985, 200–10; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988, 143–44; Lund and Denisoff 1971; Reuss 1971; Roy 2010; Whisnant [1983] 2009, 183–252).
6. Some recent textbooks have attempted to address this problem, most notably Kay Kaufman Shelemay's *Soundscapes* ([2001] 2006, xvii–xix).
7. This exclusion persists in scholarship to the present day. For instance, a recent monograph on race and politics in American folk music completely fails to mention the existence of any music or people outside the black-white spectrum (Roy 2010). For a discussion of right-wing uses of Swedish folk music in the 1930s, see Ling 1979 (20–24). For discussions of the general political impulse on the part of folk music scholars to distinguish between the pure rural folk and the culturally impoverished urban masses, see Gelbart 2009 (381–82) and Harker 1985 (200–10).
8. While Jan Ling argues for an incipient Swedish folk revival already in the mid-1960s, Eva Sæther places the associated political movement in the early 1970s (Ling 1980, 40; Sæther 1994, 240–41). If any particular catalyst for politicization were to be agreed upon by historians, it would probably be Gärdesfesten, Sweden's answer to Woodstock, in 1970 and 1971 (cf. Ling 1980, 41).
9. Kerstin Arcadius has argued that the folklore-centered Swedish county museums that were established in the second half of the nineteenth century were seen both by their founders and by the national press

- as parts of a national whole (1997, 32–34).
10. For discussions of folk music’s conceptual origins as the opposite of art music, see Gelbart 2007. For a discussion of the ways in which that opposition has manifested in a Swedish folk music aesthetic of roughness and naturalism, see Kaminsky 2012 (107–28).
 11. The first recording of the revival—jazz pianist Jan Johansson’s EP *Jazz på svenska*—had been released in 1962. For a discussion of the process by which ‘world music’ became a commercial genre label, see *fRoots Magazine* 1987 and Stokes 2004 (58–59).
 12. For a discussion of the gradual shift away from the exclusion/assimilation model, see Hansen 2001 (208–24). For a detailed description of the three-pronged model of equality, freedom, and cooperation, see Aytar 2007 (17).
 13. This issue has been treated fairly extensively (and critically) in the Swedish literature on immigration and immigration policy (e.g., Arnstberg 2008, 53–54; Daun 1996, 153–56; Rojas 1996, 258–61).
 14. For more detailed information on the Sweden Democrats and their neo-Nazi connections, see Larsson and Ekman 2001 (107–8, 125–26, 142, 147, 226). For a discussion of the process by which the Sweden Democrats purged their party rolls of criminals and Nazis, see Larsson and Ekman 2001 (163–73).
 15. Since the beginning of Swedish coalition-form governments in 1917, the center-right bloc has only been reelected to power twice, in 1979 and in 2010. They also ruled for single terms in 1928–32 and in 1991–94. [91/92]
 16. The pervasiveness of the Sweden Democrats’ immigrants-as-criminals narrative has been well documented (Ekman and Poohl 2010, 182–87; Larsson and Ekman 2001, 255–61; Slätt 2004, 115–25; cf. Sverigedemokraterna 2010, 9). The argument that their political opponents shut down debate on immigration by raising the specter of racism has perhaps most clearly been expressed by the commentator Jan Milld in his book *Lagom är bäst!* (1995, 7.2–7.3; cf. Mattsson 2009, 12). Milld was not writing specifically about the Sweden Democrats, nor had he (yet) joined the party, but the book was sold and distributed by the party when it came out (Rosenlund 1996, 7).
 17. Jan Ling used the metaphor in an interview with me: “It’s like when you mix a bunch of colors without thinking: the whole thing just becomes a gray soup” (23 May 2002). Marie Stensby has complained similarly of world music that becomes a “boring gray tone-porridge” (Gunnarsson 2010a).
 18. Simon Bronner (2005) argues that Lafcadio Hearn’s research in the late nineteenth century presages this move by privileging creolization and hybridization as legitimate cultural processes. For specific critiques of the cultural purity narrative in folkloristics, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988 (142–45) and Bock and Borland 2011 (2).
 19. An exhaustive list of ethnomusicological texts that deal with cultural exchange would be beyond the scope of this or perhaps any article, but important works include Averill 2003; Harrison 1979; Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström 2003; Shelemay 2006; Slobin 1993; Ramnarine 2003; and Reyes 1999.

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David Kaminsky is Assistant Professor of Global Arts Studies at the University of California, Merced, and a National Folk Musician of Sweden (*Riksspelman*). His book *Swedish Folk Music in the Twenty-First Century: On the Nature of Tradition in a Folkless Nation* is available from Lexington Books.