

"I'm Old and I'm Proud!"

Dance, Music, and the Formation of Cultural Identity among Pensioners in Sweden.

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Introduction

A standard rhetorical phrase in political and academic discourse in contemporary Sweden goes: "Once Sweden was a very homogenous country, now it has become multicultural." It is commonly understood that this transformation of Swedish society is a result of massive immigration during the last three decades. Without doubt, Sweden is a society with growing social and cultural diversity.

'Multicultural Sweden', however, is not inhabited by Swedes and immigrants only, but also by many other types of "cultures" based on class, religion, age, gender, interests etc.

This article addresses the organisation of this growing social and cultural diversity in Sweden and the expressive forms through which it is publicly dramatised. To be more exact, the article deals with the role of dance and music in the formation of a new and powerful social and cultural category in Sweden: the retired or the 'pensioners'. I argue that the expressive forms which pensioners use to create a sense of togetherness and to become recognised as a cultural category in Swedish society, are basically the same as those which many ethnic groups have been using for a long time for the same purposes. By claiming "we are different, we have our own culture", and by using the same kinds of typified music, dance, folk costume, food, etc., as ethnic groups do to display their differences publicly, the pensioners become a sort of ethnic group. I refer to this as a process of ethnification. As a result, pensioners become more visible in society, strengthen their social and cultural identity, and increase their status and power at some levels in Swedish society. But at the same time they may also find themselves marginalized and demoted to a secondary level in the society as a whole, a level where most immigrants and other types of 'foreigners' in Swedish society are to be found.

The article centers around what is peculiar and particular about the pensioners in Sweden as a collective, but also what they might have in common with other groups. After a brief look at the formation of the elderly as a social and cultural

category in Swedish society, I will discuss some of the results from a current research programme on the culture of ageing in Sweden, which concern dance and music among pensioners. Thereafter I go on to compare these results with those from a previous study on dance and music among Yugoslavs in Stockholm. Lastly, I discuss some possible explanations to these similarities and the implications they may have for theorising about cultural complexity and the organisation of social and cultural diversity.

Theoretical considerations

My interest in music and dance among pensioners is an extension of earlier studies on the role of music and dance in the formation of cultural identity among immigrants in Sweden.¹ I base my work on an understanding of music and dance as expressive systems that contain their own objectives, at the same time as they are means for communication and socialisation. Essential to this line of thinking is the idea that music and dance are multivalent, or polysemic, symbolic systems which communicate messages effectively through many simultaneous and interacting channels. The meanings that are invested can interact to form simple and powerful messages, yet they can also be different, counteracting or contrasting, and still exert an equally powerful effect. As symbolic systems, music and dance also give their users a capacity to create meaning, and to shape a sense of community. By dancing and making music together, people can experience a strong feeling of identity and fellowship, without ever needing to be confronted with the question of whether they have anything else in common beyond these experiences.

This capacity to store, communicate and create multivalent messages is an important answer to why dancing and music-making has become so important in the culture-building of immigrants in Sweden. And as I will try to show it is no less important when it comes to the pensioners.

"Ethnification"

A concept that needs some further clarifications is 'ethnification'. My theoretical point of departure here is that "we are those we see reflected in the eyes of others" (Lange & Westin 1981), that is, socio-cultural groupings are results of contrastive

¹ Cf Ronström 1989, 1990a, b, 1991, 1992a, b, 1993, 1994.

categorizational processes bound to specific social, political, and historical contexts. Theoretically the categories resulting from such processes may be innumerable, as many as there are differences between people. In practice, however, people tend to group differences together into large clusters, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class etc, which are legitimized by reference to psychological, historical or religious ideas. Groups or communities may claim that they belong together by nature, culture or history, but in essence they nevertheless are symbolically constructed (Cohen 1985).

The categories on which groups are based are hierarchically organised. Some categories are considered more relevant, important, true or essential than others. Ethnicity and class are two competing ideologies that may be used for categorizing and classifying the same kind of phenomena, but in different and incompatible ways (Aronson 1976). In Sweden the main trend for many years has been to explain social and cultural differences with reference to class divisions. Today the same differences are often explained by reference to ethnicity. As a result, groups that formerly were understood as class-based, now to a growing extent are seen as in some way or another "ethnic". A standard definition of ethnic group in Sweden is a group with a common natural ('blood') and cultural heritage ('tradition'), and with a common language. Coupled to this simple definition are ideas about rights and obligations, which during the last thirty years have been built into Sweden's legislative system, for example in the three main goals for immigrant policy, which are freedom of choice, equality and co-operation.

My argument is that 'ethnicity', as commonly defined in Swedish society, has become a dominating form for explaining a large number of existing socio-cultural differences. When fighting for their rights to be different, also other than "true ethnic groups" become more or less forced to adhere to this form and present themselves as separate sovereign cultures *in terms of ethnic groups*.

Consider the elderly in this light. Obviously the elderly is not what we normally would call an ethnic group.² As social gerontologists have convincingly shown, it is even difficult to talk about the elderly as a group at all. Chronological age is simply not the common denominator we often hold it be. People are born different

² Early discussions of the elderly as a minority or sub-culture are Rose 1965 and Streib 1965. On ethnicity and aging, see for example Gelfand & Barresi (eds.) 1987, Driedger & Chappell 1987, Markides & Mindel 1987, Stanford & Torres-Gil 1992, Blakemore & Boneham 1994.

and in the course of life they develop these differences differently. Consequently the diversity among the elderly is bigger than among any other age-group.

But at the same time it is obvious that pensioners in a growing number of contexts present themselves as if they were a group with common interests. As a result, they become regarded more and more as a group with common culture by others. Furthermore, because some of the expressive forms which pensioners use to increase their visibility are very similar to the forms used by ethnic groups, they have in a sense become 'ethnized', irrespective of whether they are a "true" ethnic group or not.

There is yet another reason for using 'ethnification' in this context. Applying theoretical concepts and lines of reasoning developed in the field of ethnic studies to explain phenomena in the field of social and cultural gerontology is a strategic analytical method that, at its best, may throw new light on both fields of study. Thus, from this point of view it is not important whether or not senior citizens *are* an ethnic group, but that for analytical reasons, I have chosen to treat senior citizens *as if they were* an ethnic group.

Both the 'ethnification' of pensioners, and the insights derived from looking at them from an "ethnic" standpoint, raises important questions about the ontological and philosophical foundations of ethnic theory. Until recently, a main current in the flood of ethnic studies in Sweden, as in many other countries, has treated ethnic groups as bounded cultural objects. Interaction between such bounded objects has been considered "not the normal thing", and has therefor needed to be especially accounted for.³ Taking recent theories of cultural complexity as my vantage point, I argue that theories of culture and ethnicity that imply bounded objects or closed 'worlds' must be seriously questioned.

This discussion in turn leads to another extremely timely question: namely the roles and responsibilities of ethnomusicologists, ethnologists, anthropologists etc. in constructing and legitimizing the idea that the world is constituted of more or less separate entities, all with their own cultures, whether we wish to call them groups, subcultures, villages, regions, nations or the like. In the light of recent

³ Margaret Kartomi's article on the way ethnomusicologists perceive the results of interaction between 'cultures' is instructive (Kartomi 1981, cf Ronström 1992a).

political trends in the world, it seems to me that we more than ever need to develop methods and concepts that allows us to study the diversity as such, without a priori reducing it to any given conceptual category. This, however, is easier said than done. As has been pointed out by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "one of the major dilemmas in dealing with "the organisation of diversity" is finding a language that does not predetermine what can and cannot be said" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992:52).⁴

A note on terminology.

In Swedish, as in many other European countries, 'old' has somewhat negative connotations and is therefore often avoided. A common term in academic and social welfare circles is *äldre* ('elderly'), while in everyday language the most widely spread term is *pensionär* (pensioner). This is a rather neutral term, used by younger people as well as by the aged themselves.⁵ During the last decades the pensioners' organisations have successfully launched *senior* and *veteran* as their "ethnonyms", and in media "*grå pantrar*" ("grey panthers") is also sometimes used.⁶ In the following I will use 'the elderly' (and in some cases 'senior citizens') for all old people, and reserve 'pensioner' for those who have chosen to take part in the organized activities of the pensioners' organisations.

Social categories becoming cultural

Due to economical and political changes in the mid 60s, in only a few years the number of people immigrating to Sweden raised dramatically, from between 20.000 and 30.000 yearly to around 50.000 in 1965 and almost 80.000 in 1970. While earlier people from other countries moving to Sweden had been treated either as "*utlänningar*", (foreigners, lit "out-landers") or "Swedes"⁷, in the mid 60s a new social category was established: "*invandrare*", the immigrants. Over the years, the immigrants' cultures have been cast in a number of highly elaborated generic forms, in which strongly typified and stylised derivations of the immigrants' traditional music, dance, dress and food are displayed. By means of

⁴ What seems important is to replace metaphors of social and cultural diversity like 'mosaic', 'fruit salad', 'stir fry' etc., with a whole new set of processual and positional words and concepts (cf Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992). One possibility that seems fruitful is to follow Ruth Finnegan along her 'pathways' (Finnegan 1989), another is to follow Immanuel Wallerstein and the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz in their explorations of concepts like centers, margins and peripheries (Hannerz 1992 a, b).

⁵ 'Pansjing' and 'pansjo' are diminutive forms used by many younger people, especially in the Stockholm area.

⁶ As so many other metaphorical expressions of this kind, "grey panther" has been imported to Sweden from the USA.

⁷ Up to the last decades, the 'ethnic diversity' discourse and the almost automatic categorizing of people as belonging to different ethnic groups that seem to have been the rule in many countries, has not been very important in Sweden.

such forms, which emphasize the body, ears, eyes, nose and tongue, rather than the intellect, the immigrant groups have successfully foregrounded themselves as culturally different from each other and from the Swedes.⁸

Later on during the 1970s, other groups and categories also started to claim "We are not the same as you, we are different, we have our own culture." One example is the radical feminists. Earlier they had been fighting for equality, on the grounds that although biologically different, men and women were to be considered socially the same.⁹ Inspired by feminists and the black movement in the US, many of them now began to fight for the right to be women, with a female culture, fundamentally different from men, both biologically and socially.¹⁰ During this period a whole new repertoire of female expressive forms were created and disseminated, such as songs, literature, theatre, etc.¹¹

In the 1980's this process of "culturalization" also affected many other social groups and categories, as for example the blind and the deaf. Earlier they, through their organisations, had been fighting to get out of their institutions, to become integrated and assimilated into mainstream society. Now they started to change their goals, from integration "because we are the same as everybody else", to separation "because we are different". Inspired by what has become known as "the new ethnicity" or "roots" movement in the USA, the deaf and the blind tried to turn stigma into pride, to use their disabilities as a unifying force to gain power and raise their status (cf Sellerberg 1993). They too started to elaborate a repertoire of expressive forms that could be considered their own, in order to display their specific cultural identity publicly.¹²

Now, in the 1990's, it seems to be the senior citizens' turn. The elderly is the fastest growing social category in Sweden. In 1950 there were 700.000 persons

⁸ There is a large literature on immigrants in Sweden. Until recently, the greater part of the authors seem to have taken the existence of an 'original' or 'authentic' ethnic culture for granted, a culture which the immigrants are supposed to have brought more or less intact with them to Sweden. Few have considered the role of the majority, the Swedish society, in the formation of the immigrants cultures, and the interplay between the majority and the minorities, among them are Björklund 1981, Ehn 1975, Hammarlund 1990, 1993, Lundberg 1994, Ronström 1992a, Schierup & Ålund 1981.

⁹ As many ethnologists have pointed out, sameness and equality are often equated in Scandinavian culture (cf Gullestad 1985, 1986, 1991, Ronström & Runfors & Wahlström 1993.)

¹⁰ This development is described in detail by the sociologist Christine Roman (1991)

¹¹ Examples are long-play records, poetry, comics, womens magazines and periodicals, song books, womens choirs etc.

¹² An good example here is a choir consisting only of blind that has participated in festivals in Sweden and abroad.

over 65 years old. Today there are about 1.5 million, or 18% of the population. It is estimated that the numbers will grow to about 1.8 million (22%) around the year 2040. The same trends apply to almost all countries in the first and second world, as well as to almost all in the third world.¹³

As the elderly have become more numerous, they have also become more important. Although most senior citizens are not very politically active, the organisations of the pensioners have become influential pressure groups. Already today the senior citizens constitute more than a fifth of the Swedish electorate, and concurrently with their growing voting power, politicians have become more attentive to the demands of their organisations.

The elderly have also become increasingly economically important, in two respects. While on the one hand the so called "young-old" (up to around 75) are better off than ever before, thus constituting a new growing market to explore, on the other hand the care of the "old-old" (over 75)¹⁴ has become the largest single expenditure in Sweden's national budget. The total cost of pensioners' care now exceeds that of education or defence. Along with, or maybe as a result of this growing political and economical importance, the elderly have become more visible in Swedish society.

Stereotypes about the elderly

The many stereotypes about the elderly fall into two main groups. On the one hand there are the positive stereotypes depicting old age as something of a promise, the aged as active, healthy and strong, an undeveloped resource. In close connection to this is the development of an expressive repertoire, including music, dances, songs, folk costumes etc., signalling vitality and health, two of the most important keywords in the discourse about the aged. This expressive repertoire symbolises and enhances feelings of communality among the senior citizens, and communicates this cultural identity to others.

¹³ Aging populations. The social policy implications. OECD, Paris 1988, Tout 1990.

¹⁴ "Young-old" and "old-old" are common concepts in gerontological literature. They suggest a subdivision of the elderly in two parts only. It is likely however that the number of subdivisions are much larger, and that age is not the most relevant base for such subdivisions (cf Fry 1988). A more important and relevant subdivision of the aged in Sweden today is that between the "sick and poor" and the "healthy and wealthy".

The negative stereotypes on the other hand describe old age as more of a threat. To the individual the threat is ageing as a process that inevitably leads to the negation of basic values in society, such as youth, rationality, efficiency, and activity. Ageing means becoming increasingly dependent, sick, malfunctioning, maybe even developing Alzheimer's disease or dementia and ending up deprived, isolated and depressed in an old-age home. To society as a whole the threat is that the frail elderly are so many and that they are becoming more numerous every year. Eventually their welfare costs may even become larger than the nation perceives it can afford.

As has been remarked by many, both the negative and the positive stereotypes could be regarded as reflections of the fears and anxieties of the young and middle-aged, which result in a patronising contempt towards the elderly, or in a likewise patronising advocacy of them as a resource (Coleman & Bond 1990).

These flip-sided stereotypes have their theoretical counterparts in the disengagement theory "which emphasises the phasing out of old people from certain roles in order that society can continue to function", and the activity theory "which emphasizes the need to keep old people active in order to integrate them into society, again so that society can continue to function." (Bond, Briggs & Coleman 1990:30).

Such double discourses, the one advocative and the other disparaging, both equally patronising, can be found not only in reference to the elderly, but also to immigrants and other kinds of "strangers" in society (Ronström 1993).

To summarise, one could say that what has happened in Sweden during the last 40 to 50 years is a continuous splintering of social and cultural categories. In the past in Sweden the common understanding seems to have been that people were primordially the same and therefore should be treated equally, with the same rights and obligations applying to everybody. Today, more often than not, people claim the right to be primordially different in some way or another. To be sure, there are still many contexts where sameness is underlined, but in a growing number of contexts a new ideology for categorisation has come to compete with the old. Therefore, the struggle for equality in many instances has changed from a struggle for sameness to a struggle for the right to be recognised and treated as different (Aronson 1976, cf Ronström 1993, 1994).

To a large extent this struggle for recognition of difference has taken place in the cultural arena. Culture has become a central ideological battlefield (Wallerstein 1990, cf Schierup 1991). Politics and economics are of course still of great importance, but as is well known in all market economies, a prerequisite for successful political and economical struggle is visibility and audibility. In the case of the pensioners in Sweden, as with ethnic groups, this is achieved through a limited set of expressive forms, such as music, dance, food, clothes etc. (c.f. Klein 1988), forms that are at the same time goals in their own right and means to reach other goals.¹⁵

Organizations and organized activities among the pensioners.

In Sweden a public old age pension system was introduced in 1914. The growing number of pensioners, insufficiently low pensions and dramatically raised living costs led to the foundation of the first associations for the pensioners in 1938. In 1939 a national organisation was formed, which in 1942 split into two rivalling parts.¹⁶ Since then other smaller national organisations have been founded. Together they represent somewhere between 600.000 and 700.000 (about 30 %) of the retired.¹⁷

During the early years these organisations dealt primarily with political and social issues, such as pensions, medical care and social security. Concurrently with the expansion of the welfare system these issues have become less acute.¹⁸ During the last decades the organisations have instead become more and more occupied with cultural and leisure activities. The pensioners meet to chat over a cup of coffee, to play pool or cards, to make shorter excursions as well as longer journeys, or to

¹⁵ The growing importance of expressive forms among the elderly is notable not only in Sweden. In an American study by Louis Harris et al. from 1981, the participation of the elderly in cultural activities is compared between 1975 and 1980. The result shows a growing participation by older Americans in artistic activities, both as audience and as participants. "This growth is reflected in favorable attitudes towards the arts. (...) Among the most important creative activities were photography increasing from 10% to 31%), choral singing (up from 6% to 19%) folk or ethnic dancing (up from 3% to 13%), and playing musical instruments (from 10% to 19%) (Moody 1982: 4).

¹⁶ The new rival organisation, PRO, developed closer ties to the labour movement and the Social Democrat party, while the older one, SPF, developed ties to the liberal and the center parties.

¹⁷ Information from the Swedish Institute, fact sheet number January 1992 (FS 8 I Ohfe).

¹⁸ The first paragraph of the statutes for the first National Organisation for the Retired stated that the goals was to strive for raised pensions and to secure the maintenance of the disabled and the aged.

attend courses in a large variety of subjects. Along with this development the number of women in the organisations has risen.¹⁹

In only a few years dancing has become one of the most popular activities, attracting a large number of participants. Nobody knows how many take part in the dance events, but it could be estimated that at least some hundred thousand attend them regularly. The dance events take two different forms. One is the social dance event, sometimes jokingly called "pensionärsdisco" or "russindisco" (Eng. "Raisin disco"), the other is the organised rehearsal of a type of folkloristic dances, especially adapted to the pensioners, the so called *senior dances*.

The social dancing.

The social dance events are very popular among the pensioners. For example, in Visby, a small town on the island of Gotland with approximately 25.000 inhabitants, there are two to four dance events every week, each attended by from 25 to 200 people. In April 1993, in Katrineholm, another small town in mid-Sweden, over 100 orchestras participated in what was publicised as "the world's largest non-stop dance". Enthusiastic elderly dancers were bussed in from all over Sweden to this spectacular 100 hour dance event, which eventually will be listed in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Most of these events are club-internal affairs, but there are also public events, open to everybody for an entrance fee. In Stockholm, on an ordinary Friday afternoon in January 1994 as many as six public dance events were advertised in Stockholm's leading newspaper. A modest guess is that at least as many closed dance events were arranged in the Stockholm area that same afternoon.

Most of the social dance events take place on weekdays, normally beginning at one or two o'clock in the afternoon and finishing at about five, just in time to be able to get back home for the evening TV programs. Except for a short coffee break in the middle of the afternoon, the participants hardly do anything but dance. Both men and women take part, but most often there are more women than men.

¹⁹ As we shall see later on, the number of women have been raising simultaneously with the dissemination of senior dance and other new leisure activities. Either the orientation towards more leisure oriented activities is a consequence of the growing number of women, or the raised number of women is a consequence of the new orientation activities, or both.

The participants dress up in a rather relaxed but formal manner. The men's shirts are buttoned up and many of them wear ties, but the jackets are most often thrown over a chair and the ties are loosened. The women wear dark skirts and fancy colourful blouses, very seldom suits or long gowns. The message seems to be something like "we do take this seriously, but we are here to have fun!"

The music repertoire consists of three different types of tunes. One type is comprised of popular Swedish dance music, selections from the "Top-Sweden" list.²⁰ Another is well-known standards of the 1930's and 40's, Swedish, American, English, and German. The third and smallest type is Swedish "gammeldans" ("old-time dance music"), waltzes, hambos, polkas and schottises. Many tunes are performed slower than usual and often the musicians choose to play fewer verses than they would have done in other kinds of dance performances.

The most popular dances are slow foxtrot, one-step and waltz, but one can also find versions of tango, and "bugg", a Swedish variation of "swing".²¹ One or two hambos, polkas and schottises are obligatory, but not more, since most participants consider these to be too physically demanding.

In some places the dance events are organised as "democratic dancing", which means that both men and women are free to ask partners to dance. In other places every other dance is "damernas" ("the ladies"), at which the ladies only may ask the gentlemen for dances. An obligatory and popular part of the programmes is "damernas tjuv" ("ladies cut-in"), in which the women are free to "steal" the partners from other women in the middle of a dance or in between the two melodies that normally comprise "one dance".

Some clubs have to do with cassette recordings, but there are also many that regularly hire musicians specialised in dance music for the elderly. Some of these musicians are themselves pensioners, but even younger musicians are now discovering this growing market. The musicians I have interviewed say that the pensioners are a very demanding audience, in some respects even more demanding

²⁰ This hit list, called "Svensktoppen", containing only songs sung in Swedish, by Swedish artists, is presented every weekend by Sveriges Radio.

²¹ Rock & roll, Lindy hop and Jitterbug are other branches of the same tree.

than other kinds of audiences. They are keen on repertoire, tempo and volume, and they hardly allow even a ten second pause between the tunes. Indeed, there are many informal rules for the musicians to follow, concerning what to play, when and how, as well as rules for their audiences, concerning what to wear, where to sit, whom to ask for a dance and when, etc. While some of these rules of interaction are basically the same as at any dance restaurant, others are specific to this kind of event. These rules, in turn, seem to be about the same all over Sweden, which gives empirical ground for talking about a emerging "senior dance culture".

Today's pensioners are the first generation of elderly in Sweden to practice dancing regularly. Traditionally, in most parts of Sweden dancing was for the young and unmarried, old people did not dance. At weddings the shoes were "danced off the feet" of the brides by their best friends, and from then on dancing was not considered a proper or descent activity for adults. Although the number of people that have continued to dance up to their middle-age has been constantly increasing during this century, especially among the higher classes in the cities, dancing among the elderly became widespread only during the last decade. This means that there are no models to follow, concerning repertoire, style, or "proper" behaviour. The models are taken over from younger people, which can explain why many still hold dancing practiced by old people to be shameful or indecent, even among the participants themselves.

This general pattern of dancing as belonging to the young is confirmed by the pensioners I have interviewed. Most of them danced when they were young, but very few continued after getting married. Thirty or forty years later, after their retirement, they again took up dancing. One could easily think that they would prefer dancing to the music of the days when they were young. And certainly at all social dance events there are a number of tunes from the 1930s and 40s. But the most popular repertoire is Swedish dance music of the from the 1970s, 80s and 90s. This is a repertoire many of them indeed have been listening to for a long time, but that they have learnt to dance to only in recent years.

The Senior Dances.

The other form of dance event among pensioners is the organised rehearsal of a type of "folk dances" called *senior dances*. The originator of this genre seems to be Ilse Tutt, a former physical education teacher from Koblenz, Germany. In 1971 she started to teach folk dances that she herself had adapted for senior citizens,

beginning on a small scale among friends, but soon moving her activities to a nearby "Volkshochschule" (Adult Education School). Her ideas and methods immediately met with response. "Seniorentanz" rapidly spread all over Germany. Already in 1974 a section for "Seniorentanz" was founded in the German National Association for Dance.²² In 1983 the new movement had around 500,000 active members and 600 specially trained dance leaders. Since then the numbers have risen considerably. The senior dances rapidly spread to other countries, such as Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Denmark, and Italy.

The genre was introduced to Sweden in 1978 by Christina Lundahl, a dance teacher from southern Sweden. She stumbled over a brochure produced by the German "Verband Seniorentanz" and from this organisation she received her first dance notations and instructions. After translating the material into Swedish, she began teaching a course arranged by the local branch of PRO, one of the pensioners' organisations. From Christina Lundahl the dances spread to colleges in Malmö and Uppsala, and from them further to other parts of the country. The national organisation for amateur gymnastics²³ soon took up the dances and helped to spread them all over Sweden, as did many associations for folk and "old-time dances" (Sw. *gammaldansföreningar*). The simultaneous dissemination of the dances through four different existing networks - the dance teachers', the pensioners', the gymnastics' and the folk dancers' - for which the dances fulfilled different functions and needs helps to explain the immediate success of the genre.

In only a few years senior dances became known all over Sweden. Already in the beginning of the 1980's pensioners from all the Nordic countries met in Stockholm to dance for and with each other. In 1986 the first course for senior dance leaders was arranged in the Adult Education School of PRO in Gysinge, north of Stockholm. During a full week the dance leaders were taught new dances and teaching methods, as well as the basics of dance history, pedagogy and old-age physiology. Since then more than 50 such courses have been arranged, attended by over 600 persons. Today there are 300-400 active dance leaders, most of them women, and most of them members of the Senior Dance Teachers Association, founded in 1989.

²² At that time "Arbeitskreis für Tanz", later renamed "Deutscher Bundesverband Tanz."

²³ In Swedish *Rikskorporationsidrottsförbundet*. Note that in Sweden, as in Germany, the initiators have a strong connection to sports and gymnastics, many of them being former physical education teachers.

The number of active participants can be estimated to somewhere between 15.000 and 20.000. There are however activists setting up new courses all over Sweden, and the numbers seem to be growing quickly. The activists meet at special national or international summer camps to learn new dances, meet old friends, make new acquaintances, and find new inspiration. The movement also produce their own small brochures and booklets, filled with enthusiastic reports from dance courses or summer camps. The enthusiasm and the visionary, even missionary, tone in which the dances are described and disseminated demonstrate that senior dance is not only a dance genre, but a whole new social movement in the making, still with wind in its sails.

The repertoire

Most of the senior dances are folk and popular dances that have been simplified and adapted to the elderly, but there are also new dances created within the senior dance circles. The German "Verband Seniorentanz" describe their repertoire as consisting of three different parts: "Einfache Mode- und Gesellschaftstanzformen; Tanzformen aus der Folklore Deutschlands, Englands, den USA und dem Balkan; Tanzspiele und Sitztänze." (Tutt 1986:20). Examples of the first type are Rumba, Cha-cha-cha, Samba, slow walzes and Viennese walzes; American Mixer, Biserka and Ciro kolo are examples of the second; "Tanzspielen" are dances like "Jägermarsch" and "Paprika-Lady"; and "Sitztänze" are dances adapted for persons confined to wheel-chairs.²⁴

The adaptation of old and the creation of new dances follow a few basic rules. Easy movements, slow tempo, change of partners, spatial organisation, are the main components. The dances are slow, also rather short, and walking steps are prevalent. All movements are carefully chosen and adapted to the elderly: there are no fast turns, leaps or jumps, nor couple dances that demand men in a leading role.

Although couple dances are few, almost all dances demand even couples or pairs. However, men are scarce at senior dance events. One reason is of course that women live longer, another is that this dance genre simply doesn't attract old men;

²⁴ Some more examples: A record released on the German label Bei Fidula (1197) include the following titles: Pata Pata, Senoirmixer (Break mixer), Tennessee mixer (Shuffle mixer) and Mimose (Samba mixer). Another record (Bei Fidula 1307) include dances of a more "exotic" type: Delos-Sirtaki, Estrella (La Bostella), Maltschiki (Casatschok), London Walk.

if they at all are interested in dancing they seem to prefer the social dance events. The solution is to have a number of women dancing the men's parts.²⁵

The Swedish repertoire is much the same, which of course is an important part of the whole idea. In theory senior dancers should be able to take part in senior dance events anywhere in Europe, without further formal training. The dances consist of a small number of well-codified dance phrases or formulae, all with their own names. By combining such formulae new dances can easily be constructed and taught. This makes the dances accessible to beginners both among the dancers and the dance teachers. The accessibility is in itself an important explanation to the rapid spread of the genre. There is however also a small number of more specifically "national" senior dances, that are considered typical for Sweden, such as *Seniorhambo*, an adaptation of a favourite Swedish folk dance.²⁶ At international senior dance camps these dances are used for national representation, as the typical folk dance of Swedish seniors.

An example from the local level shows what kind of dances are considered "the basic repertoire". At a dance event in a small village in north of Stockholm, 30 pensioners were taught their first senior dances by a retired physical education teacher: "Scottish Reel", "Austrian Walz with change of partners", "*Glada ringen*" (The Happy Circle; an adaptation of "Circassian Circle", the signature of the senior dance movement in Sweden), "Polka", "*Lysmasken*" ("The Glow Worm"), "*Seniorhambo*".

²⁵ Often these women are given blue or red ribbons to wear, as in physical exercises in school. This is a sign as good as any of the influence of the physical education teachers on this genre. The coloured fabric ribbons are used for the purpose of dividing classes in different teams. Often the colours are red and blue, thus following the same basic symbolic gender representation as in other realms of Swedish society.

²⁶ A booklet with dance instructions and a cassette recording for beginners made 1988 in Sweden contains the following items: *Seniorhambo*, *Glada ringen*, *Amerikansk promenad*, *Paprika Lady*, *Zigenarpolka*, *Italienare*, *Texasschottis*, *Tip Top Mixer*, *Jägarmarsch*, *Münchenpolka*, *Lysmasken*, *Polkapromenad*, *Smygvalsen*, *Kakbakning*, *Vet jag inte*, *Dans med färg* and others (the last four are sitting dances). Among the so called "Kolo-dances" are: *Biserka* (Jugoslavien), *Ciro*, (Jugoslavien) *Milanovo Kolo* (Jugoslavien), *Tzadik Katamar* (Israel) and *Misirlou* (Grekland-USA). The geographical references in brackets are from the original. An example of how the dances are described: *Lysmasken* ("The glow worm"): Formation: In couples facing the Dance Direction (DD) with simple handhold. Step: Walking step.

Measure:

- 1-2 4 steps forward in DD
- 3-4 4 steps from each other
- 5-6 4 steps towards each other
- 7-8 Right linked elbows 4 steps around

The events

The dance rehearsals are held once or twice a week, in the afternoon of a weekday. While the social dances are open to all members of the pensioners' organisations, the senior dances require special membership. The main activity is of course the dancing, which goes on to music from cassettes specially produced by the dance teachers. But also important is the informal chatting, coffee-drinking and socialising before, after and during the breaks, where much of the cultural-building goes on.

An interesting feature of the senior movement is a new repertoire of communal "senior folk songs", praising the life of senior citizens which are sung at festivals and gatherings. The largest part of these songs are based on well-known Swedish folk songs. Another part consists of beloved songs in a nostalgic mode from "the old days". One of them, a schlager favourite of the Forties called "Ljuvliga ungdom" ("Sweet youth") has even become a kind of anthem of the largest senior organisation. This new communal song repertoire can be seen as part of the pensioners' organisations striving after accentuation of the differences to other age categories.

During rehearsals the dancers wear ordinary clothes, but during performances they dress up in the senior dancers own "folk costume", a type of costume that was invented and disseminated in the late 1980s and already exists in many regional variants. The colours follow the general gender stereotypes: the women wear long white, light red or blue skirts, often with folkloristic flower applications or batik designs; the men wear white, black or blue trousers, a shirt and a tie, as do the women who impersonate men.

There are some points to underline in connection to the costumes. First, it is obvious that the senior costumes are modelled on folk costumes. Since senior dances are modelled upon folk dances, and since folk costume is an integral part of the genre of folk dancing, it seems a natural step for senior dancers to wear their own folk costumes. Secondly, the models are treated rather freely, in a way resembling the use of folk models in square dance circles. There is a rather large variation, but this variation is based on an unmistakable uniformity. Thirdly, the costumes function as a kind of uniform, which make the participants anonymous and replaceable and reinforces the communal and ritual aspects of the dancing. By appearing in folklike costumes the pensioners come to resemble a folk or an ethnic

group, thereby they can become looked upon and treated as "a folk" also when it comes to other things than clothes.

The similarities of senior dances to square dances is of course no coincidence. In both genre participation and communality is stressed. It is also possible to trace influences from the Swedish physical education movement, the German "Wandervögelen", and other movements of the same kind. Also among these we find the use of uniform costumes, the explicit use of physical exercise to foster "a sound soul in a sound body", the emphasis on forms that symbolise group solidarity, and a discourse centring around keywords such as strength, vitality, health, physical and mental training.

Dance as therapy

In a leaflet produced by the Swedish Senior Dance Teachers Association, the dances are described as "international dances of different types, among them, folk dances, block dances, couple dances, ecclesiastical dances, meditative dances and sitting dances." As expressed further on in the same leaflet, the senior dances are created to be the retiree's "own age-adapted dance discipline", without "specific male or female parts, fast turns and high leaps; to music attractive to elderly people; with change of partners as a important part of most dances; suited also to disabled persons, for example in wheelchairs, mentally disabled and others."

From this leaflet alone it is clear that a basic principle underlying the whole undertaking is physical and mental *therapy or preventative health care*. The dances are understood to "stimulate the feeling for life, promote social interaction, overcome isolation, give joy, stimulate heart, blood circulation, increase dexterity, memory, concentration and thinking."

Much of the same kind can be found also in the German books and leaflets produced by the Bundesverband Seniorentanz. At the individual level the dances are understood to promote "Kraft, Schnelligkeit, Ausdauer, Flexibilität, Koordination (...) Anregung des Herz- und Kreislaufsystems; Verbesserung der Blutzirkulation; Schulung der Atemtätigkeit; Verbesserung der Beweglichkeit der grossen und kleinen Gelenke und Kräftigung der Muskulatur; Schulung der Geschicklichkeit und Reaktionsfähigkeit." (Seniorentanz 1986:10-14). At the collective level the dances are understood to promote group feeling, vitality and communal joy. Especially the constant change of partners is explicitly understood

to induce feelings of communality. That the two most important objectives are to make the dances physically feasible for the elderly, and to create and maintain group feeling, I suggest, is closely related to the negative stereotypes that describe the aged as physically and mentally at risk and socially isolated.

The Yugoslavs

The pensioners in Sweden form a social category that is in the midst of becoming cultural. While in the past growing old meant "getting one's pension", today many attend courses in order to become "pensioners". This process of creating a culture of one's own is central to many groups and categories in modern Swedish society: youth groups, women, handicapped, ethnic groups etc. An illustrative case of culture-building is the Yugoslav community in Stockholm, which was functioning from the mid 1960's to 1989, when war broke out in former Yugoslavia.²⁷

The bulk of the Yugoslavs in Stockholm immigrated between 1965 and 1973, most of them from Serbia and Croatia.²⁸ Although some were related, most of had no contact with each other prior to the immigration. they spoke different languages and dialects, and brought with them different cultural traditions. Within a few years they established their own Yugoslav organisations and institutions and through them a rather tightly knit community soon was formed. About half of the around 12.000 people of "Yugoslav origin" that lived in Stockholm in the mid 1980s participated actively in the events of the Yugoslav associations, while most of the other half chose to have little or nothing to do with the clubs of their former compatriots.²⁹ The motor in this process of ethnic formation was music and dance. Every week the Yugoslavs met to sing and dance together. As with the pensioners they had two contexts: on the one hand the *zabave*, the social dance events, and on the other *folklor*, the rehearsals of the folklore groups.

The Yugoslavs brought their repertoires of music and dance with them from Yugoslavia. But in Sweden they adapted them to Swedish society and through the continuous interaction between the "here and now" of the present life in Sweden and the "there and then" in Yugoslavia, a new Swedish-Yugoslav expressive culture was created. While the contents of this new culture, the "how and what",

²⁷ After 1989 all the old all-Yugoslav institutions were closed or replaced by ethnically pure clubs and institutions: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Slovenian and Albanian.

²⁸ This paragraph is based on Ronström 1992b. See also Magnusson 1986.

²⁹ It is the former group I am concerned with here. In analogy with my use of 'pensioner', I call this group "the Yugoslavs", while the latter is called simply "people from Yugoslavia".

was controlled by the Yugoslavs, it was the Swedish society that exerted the controlling power over the overall forms, structures and frames of interpretation, the "when, where and why". This is an example of a general process that has been termed "altercasting": it is the majority, the "us", that has the power to cast the forms which the minorities, the "them" or "alter", are forced to adhere to.³⁰ The Yugoslav case is here but one example, almost all other immigrant groups have developed similar, if not identical, expressive forms for displaying their ethnic peculiarities (Ronström 1994).

Comparison.

At first sight the music and dance of the pensioners and of the Yugoslavs may seem very different. And of course, this is exactly what we are supposed to see. What is underlined is the typical³¹, the special, the different. Obviously, there are a lot of differences to be seen! But on another and in this case perhaps more important level, there are also many important similarities.

Consider for example the two types of events that constitute a basis for social organisation and create a communal feeling for both Yugoslavs and pensioners. The social dance events function as a catalyst in the social chemistry. Using Bernstein's well-known terminology, social dancing could be described as a restricted code, concrete, emphasizing the "here and now". The folkloristic dance events, on the other hand, have an emblematic function, and a metonymical relation to the group. The folkloric dancing is an elaborated code, abstract, emphasizing the "there and then". It is used for formal representation of the group, to the surrounding society, as well as to the group members themselves. For the Yugoslavs the "there and then" is of course the homeland, as it exists in the memories of the immigrants. For the pensioners the homeland is Sweden, but a

³⁰ The outcome of this process is of course that every society develops its own immigrant culture profiles. These cultures in fact may tell you more about the majority than about the many different minorities. Only in Sweden are there Swedish immigrants! In Sweden a common metaphor for this new multicultural society is the mosaic. The Yugoslavs became one of the stones in this mosaic, but it was the Swedish society that cut it to the right size and that put it in its right place. Until recently, the Swedes themselves were a part of this mosaic, not as a stone among the other stones, but as the glue or cement that kept it together, and as the solid bedding that it was constructed upon.

³¹ "Typical" has two aspects. One refers to what we all have in common, the other what we have but they don't. It is the second aspect that is valid here.

Sweden of the past, a distant or even foreign country, which they can return to momentarily while dancing and listening to the old tunes.³²

For both the Yugoslavs and the pensioners the old-style folk dances are a part of the social dance event repertoire that connect the participants with the homeland of the past. For both groups another important repertoire are the tunes that connect them to their youth, the Yugoslav hit parade of the late 50s and early 60s and the ballroom dance music of the 30s and 40s respectively. But among the Yugoslavs as well as among the pensioners the largest part of the repertoire consists of much more recent dance music, music that connects the participants with the present and the modern.

There are similarities also on many other levels, from the use of folk costumes and the role of communal singing, to the form of the event and the overall frame of meaning. One example is that for both the pensioners and the people from Yugoslavia, learning the typical folk dances is an important part of becoming senior citizens and Yugoslavs respectively. The dances are instruments, vehicles for socialization into a particular culture. By participating in the rehearsals and performances of Yugoslav folk dance groups the young girls in the Yugoslav associations, most of them born and raised in Sweden, learn how to behave as Yugoslav, to look Yugoslav and how to become recognised as Yugoslav. In much the same way the elderly acquire competence to behave as pensioners through learning the senior dances.

Good folk dancers often become folk dance teachers. Folk dance teachers, being among the groups' most important expressive specialists, very often become leading persons in the associations. This is true among the Yugoslavs and many other ethnic groups in Sweden, and also among the pensioners. However, these expressive specialists are seldom the official spokesmen of the groups. While official leaders come and go, often as results of severe disputes within the groups, due to their competence, the expressive specialists often stand above or beside internal conflicts, thus creating a kind a continuity in the life of the groups.

³² "The past is a foreign country" is what many historians claim. If communities are socially constructed, then can there be no principal difference between geographically or historically grounded feelings of community.

It is also interesting to compare the answers to the question: "Why do you dance?" Among the Yugoslavs in Stockholm the answer was incessantly: "Because it is our tradition". Only when insisting on also other kinds of answers, might I find someone saying things like: "Because I like it", or "Because its fun". Above all dancing is instrumental, tradition is the legitimation for having fun.

Closely related to this is "authenticity". For the Yugoslavs, as for most ethnic groups, authenticity has to do with origins, the historic homeland. While conducting ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological fieldwork among the Yugoslavs in Stockholm, I was constantly told that those who were born in the countryside in Yugoslavia were especially worth studying. Because of their "long unbroken tradition", they were thought to be able to perform in a more authentic way than others. Thus, at the rhetoric level, village "roots" was considered to be the most important for good "authentic" dancing. In reality, dancing competence was far more important.

Among the pensioners the most common way to answer the question "Why do you dance?" was: "Because it is physical exercise!" Only after further proding would they too admit that it was also for fun. Also to the pensioners dancing is instrumental, the physical exercise being its legitimation. Here again authenticity is an important concept, and here again it, in a way, has to do with "roots". Among the pensioners it is the eldest among the old who are pointed out to me as the persons worth studying. They are the most "authentic", which, I suggest, is related to the fact that the origins of the pensioners is the land of the old, and in this land the eldest are the most authentic.³³

The Yugoslav and other immigrant organisations in Sweden are similar to the pensioners in that they strive to incorporate all kinds of activities their members take interest in under one and the same umbrella. Ethnicity and age becomes the prime base for social organisation and cultural activity. But in society at large this is normally not the case. Young and middle-aged persons in Sweden may well be

³³ This also helps to understand the differences in legitimation. Among Yugoslavs folklor is legitimized by reference to tradition, because tradition is so closely linked to the "folk", villages, roots and authenticity. Among the pensioners the senior dances are legitimized by reference to physical exercise, because physical exercise is a road to high age, and high age, if you are physically able, is among everything else, a mark of authenticity. Being "really old" (and healthy) is thus a positive value among the retired, as is being "real folk" among the Yugoslavs.

members of a dozen organisations or more, one for every interest or activity. But as pensioners, one only is supposed to take care of them all.

Explanations

These are but some of the many formal and structural similarities between the organisation of expressive activities among pensioners and Yugoslavs. How are these similarities to be explained?

First of all, there is of course always the possibility that the process I have termed 'ethnification' of the pensioners is something that goes on only in the researcher's mind, in this case a mind that for quite a period has been preoccupied with the problem of ethnicity. (After all, the premise for this article was to study pensioners as if they formed an ethnic group.) Although there probably is something to this explanation, for the sake of argument, I will at this point reject it as not good enough.

A second and perhaps more relevant explanation is that the pensioners are becoming a kind of ethnic group in Sweden, because of the importance of ethnicity in the multicultural everyday life in Sweden today. This new reality has made ethnic groups a powerful model for other groups to follow. There is a large body of literature on ethnicity to draw from here, a well established terminology and discourse which has become a kind of "normal science", to speak with Thomas Kuhn. But still, it is perfectly clear that this cannot be the whole answer.

A third and related explanation is that both the pensioners and the many ethnic groups are dependant on the same underlying general processes of social categorization. They also rely on the same types of models of what groups must be like to become visible and recognised in Swedish society. To put it in somewhat more general terms we could say that all groups which strive to be recognized as different or special in modern society, must do this in the same arenas as all the other groups. Paradoxically, they must fight for their rights to be different using the same kinds of forms, genres and repertoires as the others, or else they will have to face the risk of not being recognised, perhaps even being invisible. By performing in the same arenas, with the same expressive forms, the differences between the groups are temporarily reduced. They thereby become comparable, or compatible, and more similar (cf Löfgren 1993).

Another related explanation is that groups are constructed through continuous contrastive processes. Every "us" presupposes a "them", all minorities are shaped by the contrast to their dominating majority. Pensioner as a social category is based on a combination of two criteria, age and leisure (non-work). The pensioners constitute themselves in opposition to the majority of middle-aged working population. If, as many ethnologists, anthropologists and sociologists maintain, the central values of this middle-aged working population are closely connected to work, and celebrate rationality, efficiency, etc; then it is understandable that those who don't work create and maintain a border by cultivating non-rational, emotional and sensual expressive activities.³⁴ The same argument could be applied also to ethnic groups in Sweden. As minorities they dwell in the peripheries of society, where sensuality and non-rationality can become highly valued just because they are opposites of the values that are valid in the epicentre of society.

Yet another explanation is that the senior citizens now are formulating their culture hand in hand with a growing number of academics and social workers: doctors, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, specialists in folklore, music and dance. Through the use of certain key concepts and rhetorical phrases the pensioners construct themselves, and are being constructed by others, as a bounded cultural entity, whereby their differences become enhanced and underlined, and their borders to other groups are stressed.

As I see it there is something to each of these answers. It is obvious that the pensioners as a collective, through their organisations, are now formulating themselves as a group with its own cultural identity. "I'm old and I'm proud!" is not only an ironic playing with words, but a lived reality for many pensioners in Sweden today. Like the black movement in the USA in the 1960's, they fight for economical, social and cultural recognition.

³⁴ For example, Barbara Myerhoff's notes that "We assign /the elderly/ roles that represent a limited range of stereotypes - serene, detached, disengaged, wise, and so on- all closely related to maintaining a manageable problem population, easily institutionalized and patronized. Traits that in middle life often lead to worldly success - aggressiveness, independence, individualism, competitiveness, initiative, future orientation, and the like - bring to the old people who manifest them the label of "maladjusted". (Myerhoff 1984:311). There are of course also other possible contrastive processes involved in shaping the pensioners as a group. A very clear demarcation line is often drawn against the very old, the unhealthy, isolated, etc, those who fit the negative stereotypes of the elderly. In contrast to these, the pensioners present themselves as active and healthy, which they do mainly by the use of expressive systems such as dancing.

It is also clear that the expressive forms which the pensioners use to display themselves as a culture, are modelled upon forms already used by many ethnic groups. Lastly, it is obvious that ethnomusicologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists and other inhabitants of Academia do play an important role in the construction and legitimation of "senior culture", as earlier in the construction and legitimation of "ethnic cultures".

There are certainly many ways to look at what I here have called the "ethnification" of the pensioners. A question we as ethnomusicologists must ask ourselves is why music and dance have come to play such a crucial role in this process. As I see it, part of the answer is that music and dance are affective, open-ended, multivalent emotional symbolic systems. It is possible for people to charge them with many different kinds of meaning simultaneously. Dancing and music-making are group activities with a special potential for creating feelings of communality, without the people involved having to ask whether in reality they have something more than this feeling in common. This seems to have been the case among the Yugoslavs in Stockholm. As long as they didn't have to ask themselves on what grounds their experience of belonging together was founded, they could go on thinking about themselves as "Yugoslavs". But as soon as they started to question their "Yugoslav" identity, their feelings of communality immediately disappeared. By the same token, pensioners dancing together can come to see each others as kins, although they may have little or nothing in common to start with.

A Personal Postlude

The organisation of diversity in a modern society such as Sweden is a complex phenomenon that needs to be approached from many angles. When reflecting over the problem of ethnification of the pensioners, the last of the four types of explanations raises questions which today, in light of recent political trends in Europe, are becoming more important than ever. What bothers me is that we have spent so much time and energy investigating into ethnic groups, communities, subcultures, or other such concepts which imply that it is bounded objects we are studying, that the patterns that underlay social and cultural organisation of diversity in our societies have become more or less invisible. What if ethnicity is but one of the forms that these patterns take? What if also age groups, gender groups, interest groups, etc. face the same conditions, undergo the same kind of

processes? I find it important that we begin to ask ourselves about the effects of describing and analysing the culture of groups, villages, regions, countries etc. as specific, typical, different and separate.³⁵

"We have our culture, you have yours, and ours is better and more valuable!" seems to be the cry of the day. In former Yugoslavia, the new countries of ex-Soviet Union and elsewhere, people are not only willing to die for their country, for their ethnic group, for their culture, but also to kill for it. We have so long contributed to the legitimation of this kind of thinking by our obsession of representing the objects of our studies as naturally bounded objects, all in isolation from each other, that we cannot escape our responsibility for what is now happening around the world. What we now have to do is, as I see it, to try to create a scientific discourse which allows us to describe human culture in all its complexity, which allows us to see not only what differs, but also what we have in common, a discourse that not so easily can be used as legitimation for ethnic or cultural purification.

It makes little sense blaming Vuk Karadzic or other 1900 th century Serbian folklorists for the use the Serbians in Bosnia today make of their work, or blaming Russian folklorists and ethnomusicologists for being used as weapons against non-Russians in Russia today. But we have to at least try to prevent ourselves against being used in the same way in the future. We must find ways to study and analyse not only "folk", "ethnic groups", or any other kind of exclusive "subcultures", but the whole panorama of similarities and differences between, for example, the pensioners and the Yugoslavs, the Swedes, blacks, whites, old, young, men and women etc. We must approach the question of cultural complexity in the broadest possible of perspectives, that is, a fundamentally humanistic approach.

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³⁵ As the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz has pointed out, the anthropologist returning home from a longer fieldwork period in some distant village simply has to present his results as a logically coherent cultural system, a bounded selfsufficient entity else he will risk being looked upon as a bungler or a tinker (Hannerz 1983:149 ff cf also Geertz 1973:17f).

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