

Swedishness as an Obstacle in Cross-Cultural Interaction

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For a long time now, discussions about immigrants' difficulties in adapting to Swedish life have centered around the immigrants' cultures. Their customs and values make it difficult for them to fit into a Swedish environment. It is at least as important, however, to discuss the Swedish (host country's) culture. This paper presents various characteristics of the Swedish culture – customs, values, attitudes, etc. – difficult for non-Swedes to understand and accept. This paper, which is part of a larger research project on the Swedish mentality, was written for a governmental committee investigating discrimination against immigrants in Sweden.

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For a long time now, discussions about immigrants' difficulties in adapting to Swedish life have centered around the immigrants' cultures. Their customs and values make it difficult for them to fit into a Swedish environment. Swedish discrimination against immigrants has partially been explained in the same way; immigrants' strange behavior, language and appearance are the objects of Swedes' condescension, annoyance, insulting remarks, etc. Consequently, the remedy for Swedish prejudice against immigrants has been thought to be the need for more information about immigrants' backgrounds and cultures. The assumption is that knowledge makes for understanding.

It is at least as important, however, to discuss the Swedish culture (com Hannerz 1983). Immigrants' difficulties in adapting are also a result of the Swedish culture. Swedish customs and values are difficult to adjust to for a great many immigrants. The Swedish culture can be experienced as both disgusting and absurd by immigrants. Many simply maintain that Swedes don't have any "culture". Swedes are spiritually empty is one of the stereotypes expressed in the Discrimination Investigation

("Vittnesmålsstudien" (Bergman & Swedin 1982)).

A Swedish culture – does one exist?

Is there a specifically Swedish culture? Well, by now the realization that this is the case is more widely understood. However, there still exists an unexpressed attitude among Swedes that it is immigrants who are tied to their culture and that immigrants' behavior is dictated by beliefs and traditions which are more or less irrational. They don't eat pork and the men forbid their wives to go out alone... Swedes, in contrast, are considered "modern". They belong to the "modern, urbanized, industrial society" and therefore possess no special culture other than the celebration of old holiday traditions such as Midsummer, for sentimental reasons. Especially modern, if you will, are our values such as democracy, equality, rationalism and the love of peace. We believe that all countries can or should eventually come around to accepting the values we hold.

Such a perspective is ethnocentric. The Swedish mentality and way of life are just as culturally-bound as any other peoples'. The

fact that we call them "modern" doesn't make them less culturally-bound. Labels are also a part of culture. In describing Swedish culture, it should also be pointed out that Swedes call their culture "modern". The interpretation of and the importance placed in Sweden on concepts such as democracy, equality, rationalism and peace are also Swedish.

Paul Britten Austin in a book on Swedishness (1967) sees this very reluctance among Swedes to view themselves as having any specific culture as being a characteristic of Swedish culture. History shows that for many years Swedes lacked any real opportunities for comparisons with other cultures. Germans in Stockholm and Visby during the middle ages and Walloon smiths working in forgeries during the 1600s were possibly the first to make Swedes reflect on what was typically Swedish. But in modern times, the population has been exceptionally homogeneous, right up until the large immigrations of workers beginning in the 1960s.

Foreigners' observations assist in capturing the distinctive features of the Swedish culture. Even professional cultural researchers can, to a greater or lesser extent, be blind to their own culture. For several years now, a project about immigrants' encounters with the Swedish culture has been carried out at the Institute of Ethnology (Weibust 1981: 7). The course entitled *Culture Variations*, held every semester and led by Annik Sjögren and Knut Weibust, discusses crosscultural encounters, particularly between immigrants from southern Europe and Swedes.

In a current research project investigating the Swedish mentality, interviews with immigrants and foreign authors' descriptions of Sweden make up the basic research material (Daun 1983). Despite the differences in cultural backgrounds, it is remarkable how similar the descriptions of Swedish culture are, even if Turks and Americans, for example, emphasize different aspects.

Which aspects of Swedishness do immigrants find (to a greater or lesser extent) difficult to accept when mixing with Swedes? I will mention some which I have come across so far.

Separating the private from the public

The linguist Jens Allwood is one of those who have pointed out the Swedish cultural characteristic of drawing a sharp line between life at work and private life (Allwood 1981). What this means is that Swedes find it completely natural not to socialize privately with colleagues, even if they have worked together for years. This doesn't conflict with the fact that many Swedes actually count those with whom they work as among their closest friends. What is uniquely Swedish is that a good friendship at work in no way necessarily leads to private socializing.

Generally, this surprises many foreigners. It also leads to the unfortunate consequence that immigrants find it difficult to make Swedish friends. Usually they have not been childhood chums or friends from school-days with Swedes. For most immigrants, their only place of contact with Swedes is at work.

Recently I met a woman from Uruguay who, after receiving an academic education in Sweden, had built up a well-established career. She had also developed friendly contacts with her colleagues, but she also stated how her suggestions about meeting socially outside of work had been negatively received. The Swedes appeared to have a nearly instinctive aversion to the idea of meeting privately. Only after one of them changed workplaces was there a change in attitude. After that they met strictly privately.

In this case, it was not the immigrant woman's background which presented an obstacle. She spoke perfect Swedish with almost no accent, and did not look particularly "foreign". Her colleagues were also well-educated. It is true that in some cases an indifferent or negative attitude towards foreigners is behind an aversion to socializing. There is much evidence to that effect, but such was not the case here. Even Swedes can – to the surprise of many foreign observers – work side by side for years without ever having been to each others' homes.

As I lack sufficient data, I am unable to comment on whether or not and to what extent

this cultural characteristic exists in the other Nordic countries. I was struck, however, by the words of a Finn who was interviewed by one of my students:

"Foreigners are, of course, also often suspicious of Swedes. If they don't know that Sweden has been isolated for such a long time, then you often hear foreigners say, "Swedes are so incredibly strange, they're so cold and all, they only think of themselves. They just run home from work, lock their door, and don't open it until the next day", you hear that a lot" (Stigsgård-Blomster 1983: 39).

Jean Phillips-Martinsson in her book *Swedes As Others See Them* (1981) points out that this tendency to draw a distinct line between work-life and the other parts of their lives is a handicap for Swedish businessmen in their dealings with foreign customers. Swedes often restrict themselves completely to negotiating about business, but are close-mouthed when it comes to discussing themselves. They don't start business discussions as so many others do, by making "small talk", that is, chatting about their families, hobbies and so on. To many Swedes, this seems irrelevant, like wasted time and lack of discipline while working. In many other countries, however, this type of friendly interaction is seen as necessary for building up solid business contacts. Only when a person has first made a good impression as a human being can they then be relied on in business.

This feature of our culture does not, of course, mean that Swedes *are* cold and reserved, as they are often portrayed by others. On the contrary, foreigners sometimes talk about the unusually close friendships they have made with Swedes – what faithful friendships they have built up here. I once met an American professor of sociology whose family, during a sabbatical year in Sweden, had made friends with a Swedish dentist's family who happened to be their neighbors. They had never had such close friends in the US, he said.

Such closeness is, however, seldom achieved by immigrants in Sweden. An American guest-lecturer is of interest to many well-educated Swedes, whereas a Greek working in a car fac-

tory doesn't inspire the same interest among Swedes with whom he comes in contact, particularly not his workmates – not enough to invite him home.

The Swedish culture is interpreted differently, though, when the immigrant's own cultural background has the same, but even stronger characteristics which other nationalities view as typically Swedish. A Finn, well-adapted to Swedish life, was interviewed by Billy Ehn in his book, written together with Karl-Olov Arnstberg *Det osynliga arvet* (1980) and he pointed out that there was "something special" about socializing with Finns.

"It's strange for me to say this, because Finns are really much more inhibited than Swedes. But I think that if you make friends with a Finn and get to know each other really well, then that person is a truer friend than what a Swede would be" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 205).

Lack of emotions/Emotionally distant

One reason that Swedes seem cold in many foreigners' eyes is that they keep their feelings to themselves. It could be said that they express their feelings in other ways, for example faithfulness to their close friends. Even in that case they reveal the division between private and public. At home and possibly in front of his most intimate friends, a Swede can cry and argue in a loud voice, without inhibition. In a public place, such behavior would be unthinkable, a scandal or to say the least startling, depending on the context and the person's age, sex and position in society. Least self-discipline is expected of young women of low social status; most self-discipline is expected of older men in high social positions.

As immigrants generally never get near a Swede's private life, immigrants only experience – as they see it – a lack of emotion. Swedes gesticulate less than others, seldom change their facial expressions, and keep their voices low. Slowness of speech, punctuated by many silent pauses, reinforces the impression that Swedes' emotional lives are "low key". The expression "lagom är bäst" (not too much, not too little – just right) which foreigners quickly

learn, can certainly be interpreted as a code-word for this behavioral pattern.

The fact that uninhibited emotional expression is taboo in Swedish culture can be witnessed in maternity hospitals. While in labor, many Swedish women groan as little as possible and, in many cases afterwards, ask if they yelled much. If they find out that they didn't, it is seen as positive. A midwife interviewed on TV (5/10 1982) stated among other things: "A midwife is asked a lot – Did I scream much and so on – did I make a fool of myself? An that's because it's so taboo to express strong feelings and childbirth is a situation where really – the natural thing to do is to express your strong feelings."

Another aspect of this cultural feature is that emotional arguments are ranked lowly when used in public debates. The fact that a person just really dislikes something such as free abortion, is hardly ever considered a legitimate argument. Only objective arguments are considered valid. For example, what facts could be used in an argument against free abortion: medical, psychological, population-planning, etc.? A debater who shows too much emotional involvement in an argument has lost, especially if his activities are political. A Swedish politician is supposed to keep cool and, without acting rashly, weigh the facts against each other.

This bias towards rational behavior can be experienced by foreigners as a repulsive emotional iciness.

In the eyes of Swedes, being temperamental is a special characteristic. Swedes nearly never refer to other Swedes as temperamental – no one is ever that "temperamental". From the Swedish perspective, it is not a question of degree of emotional expression, rather a specific distinction between either being or not being temperamental.

A Yugoslav who had lived in Sweden approximately 15 years, described to Billy Ehn how "controlled" you have to be in Sweden.

"There is a Norwegian girl at work. And even though Norway and Sweden are similar, she feels a very long way from home. She told me she had a terrible time keeping control of her

temper, but that she had to do so here. And I've had the same experience. I've had a really hard time keeping in my feelings. They're not temperamental like the Norwegians, but they are open. I show my feelings when I am sad and when I am happy. It's easy for me to laugh and say, "Wow, we're having such a great time today!" But you can't say something like that in the employees' room. One time I was really happy and full of energy at work. I don't exactly remember what I said, but one of my workmates wondered what was wrong with me, if I was sick or something. Sick!? I was just *happy*. Since that day, I've become more careful" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 146).

A Lapp student related similar experiences to me about when she started living in Umeå. She felt she had to adopt another manner of behavior, not be so quick and eager, in order to fit in with the other Swedish students. A Yugoslavian man interviewed by Billy Ehn discussed the question of emotions and expressing emotions both in the matter of raising a child and in relation to workmates. "Sometimes I react before thinking. I can fly off the handle in a second and not have time to think before my hand flies to my child's bottom." Raising his child was complicated by the fact that his wife was Swedish. At home in Yugoslavia, he would have spanked his child more often, he thought. His workmates' reactions at work made him try to control his behavior.

"If I'm insulted at work, I get so mad, I swear and tell people to go to hell. Then they look at me so strangely, the Swedes... I've kept myself from bursting out and making a bigger thing of something, as I would have done in Yugoslavia, if someone behaved stupidly towards me. There I would have hit the idiot on the jaw, in Yugoslavia I wouldn't have to think as carefully as I do here. Here you hold yourself back" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 60).

What I have termed emotional distance is difficult to define. In the minds of many immigrants, Swedes are "cold", as if they lack emotions. "I don't think Swedes feel very much", said the Yugoslav, when interviewed at an-

other time. At present, I know too little about this matter of degree of feeling to comment, other than to say that Swedes certainly do experience strong emotional reactions in many situations, Swedes are struck, for example, by feelings of rage or joy, but because of cultural conventions, they express these feelings less explicitly, in another manner. It appears to be taboo in many situations, outside of the family, to openly discuss how happy you are or what a great time you are having with others, for example your colleagues, as the Yugoslavian woman above who said: "Wow, we're having such a great time today!"

Immigrants who go against norms and express happiness, naturally don't experience any terrible opposition, but they are reminded of their position as foreigners and can feel insecure. Such reminders can also reinforce their dislike of these features of the Swedish culture. It is more difficult when it comes to expressing aggressive emotions, as they are often directed at other individuals. These individuals, moreover, are in most cases, Swedes. An immigrant's psycho-socially inferior position is good cause for him to "bite his tongue" instead of venting his anger.

Swedish norms concerning emotional expression are reinforced by the tendency to avoid all conflict (except within the family). This means that Swedes steer clear of sensitive topics of conversation. "Don't talk politics", goes the saying. It can lead to arguments (to becoming "osams" with the other person), and a situation in which people are "osams" (in disagreement) is considered by probably most Swedes to be difficult to take. A common solution is to break off the conversation, stop speaking to each other. To feel that he can manage a relationship so that he doesn't experience discomfort and uncertainty, a Swede wants to be "sams" (in agreement) with those he meets. When he converses with a stranger and when making new acquaintances, a Swede looks for consensus, tries to agree with the views and values held by the other person.

According to Jean Phillips-Martinsson, this easily creates the impression for immigrants, that Swedes never have dissenting views, that they possibly never think for themselves, but

just agree. She believes this is also the reason why Swedes are under the impression that they are kinder to one another than other nationalities are (ibid: 112). Her assertion that Swedes are inclined to take it personally if others dare to criticize their views in front of others, is probably widely applicable to Swedes. It logically follows that what an immigrant then incorrectly interprets as indifference is actually a Swede's way of being considerate. As a Swede takes it for granted that foreigners feel and react the same way he does, he prefers to keep his dissenting views to himself in order to avoid the risk of hurting a stranger's feelings.

The dominant Swedish value-system considers it adult to avoid conflicts, and thereby show respect to others. This attitude explains why Swedes think that many immigrants are "unruly". The loud voices characteristic of immigrants compared with Swedes are felt by many Swedes to be "unruly". This is because loud voices among Swedes are most often used in connection with fights, quarrels, conflicts. Swedes basically only yell at each other when they are fighting, not when they are actively engaged in a discussion. Consequently, Swedes to a great extent value silence, quiet, unobtrusive voices and a calm tone in social situations.

In an ethnological study about Swedish attitudes towards immigrants, one quote reveals a prejudice against Assyrians: "They have a bad reputation because they fight and are rowdy... they are noisy and unruly..." (Öhlund 1982: 27). It was said about Italians: "Italians, y'know, they have that hot temperament and fight and are stubborn, or whatever you want to call it" (ibid: 15). The author comments:

"Nearly all of the interviewees more or less divide up immigrants into those who are trouble-makers and those who are conscientious. One interviewee does this very categorically. She is highly critical of immigrants whom she classifies as "bothersome" (ibid: 42). "They are always shrieking and shouting. They can sit down on opposite sides of the subway car and sit there and yell at each other without being at all considerate." (ibid: 43).

Two further quotes from the same study illustrate Swedes' positive attitude towards silence:

"Then there was so much noise and conflict, because they come, y'know, with their language and their ways and they yell, are loud. The Swedes are a very quiet people, you see.

I think there's something in the fact that immigrants make such a racket and are seen on the streets and squares, walking along with their big family so that there's such a racket. Then people don't like them. We're not used to it. You notice that y'know yourself, when they come piling into the subway, like that. You don't get pissed off, but it's like 'God, what a pain, can't they just keep quiet', like that y'know" (Öhlund 1982: 43).

This matter of drawing a line between the private and public in the Swedish culture, discussed earlier, is also involved in the Swedish aversion to speaking loudly and lively in, for example, the subway. Swedes in general feel that you shouldn't air your private conversations in public places. In public places, only public employees should speak loudly, such as the train conductor or subway driver speaking via loud-speakers, a lecturer (not the audience) in a lecture hall, or a nurse in a doctor's waiting room. Most Swedes' lack of experience in speaking loudly in public places helps to explain why an audience so unwillingly says anything in the discussion period following a lecture. Swedish students are afraid of expressing themselves in front of their friends, but not, however, in a private conversation with the teacher. This isn't just a question of their uncertainty about a subject and fear of making a fool of themselves, but probably also an uneasiness about mixing the private with the public.

As is so often the case, many features of a culture work together to form a pattern. The appreciation of silence is also connected with an attitude towards the quality of language, its content and function. Swedish culture looks down on people who talk without seeming to care about whether what they say is of any importance, on people who are unconcerned about the consequences of what they are saying and who could care less about how what

they say is interpreted. Here it is interesting to cite an example from the French culture for contrast. The concept of "kallprata" (talking about nothing in particular) lacks an equivalent in French, but expresses the Swedes' critical attitude towards talking for talking's sake.

According to Annik Sjögren, teacher of ethnology at Stockholm University, and French by birth, spoken words are "light weight" in the French culture. Words disappear – they go with the wind – to use her own imagery. That's why you don't have to think about what you're saying; you don't have to be on guard, careful about what you say. The further south you go in France, the more language is seen as a vital part of socializing. The consequences of what you say are not very important, because afterwards you're not held to what you have said. Language is extremely important in conversational situations. Words and views are to be played with, and a person can express opinions which he doesn't really hold, just to liven the conversation. Talking is considered a pleasure in the French culture, not in the Swedish.

In French there is no expression equivalent to the Swedish "tyst och fin" (nice and quiet) to describe a person. It's not considered a compliment to be quiet. When in France, as in Sweden, a child is told to keep quiet, it's not so that the child will become a quiet person, and not so that the child learn to take a quieter conversational tone. The reason is that the child is interfering in the adults' pleasure, according to Sjögren. "You're bothering us. If you want to talk, go somewhere else" is why, in France, the children are asked to be quieter. In Sweden you can describe a child as a "nice, quiet little boy". In France this combination is unthinkable.

As language is an important instrument for expressing emotions between people, silence can sometimes be interpreted as a lack of feeling, or as a lack of strong feeling. There are, of course, various types of silence, which are considered positive, for example, lovers' non-verbal contact and mutually understood silence. But when silence and close-mouthed behavior fit into a pattern of – as interpreted by non-Swedes – social avoidance, then this quietness is viewed negatively.

A study of quiet behavior is currently being made by Astrid Stedje, language researcher at the German Institute at Stockholm University. The aim is to discover norms about quiet behavior by decoding expression in the language concerning silence; that is, to research norms about silence in both Sweden and Germany. Cultural connections between the two countries throughout history and similarities due to cultural inheritance, make it difficult to find great differences between the two cultures. What Stedje has found is that Germans make less silent pauses. Germans also make shorter pauses. The discomfort which Germans feel towards silence is expressed in the number of adjectives used to express this discomfort. It seems that Germans want to fill up silence with words, whereas Swedes are more generous with their silent pauses.

In contrast to Sweden, where so many are raised to feel it is wrong to interrupt someone speaking, it is part of the German tradition for people to talk simultaneously. It is acceptable to both interrupt someone and to fill in for them with what you think that an other person is going to say, both in order to show that you are following the conversation, and in order to fill in the silent pauses. Neither is it considered impolite, as it is in Sweden, to raise your voice and speak louder than someone who has the floor, in order to gain the floor.

Naturally there are many talkative individuals in Sweden, too. Most Swedes could probably point out talkative individuals in their own circle of friends. What is of interest here, as elsewhere in examining the Swedish culture, is what is considered typical or average, especially when compared with immigrants' backgrounds. What is typical among Swedes is the appreciation of quietness which is reflected in, for example, the expression "to be a good listener" as a description of a person who seldom speaks.

The theory among immigrants that Swedes lack feelings is reinforced by other features. The strongly held attitude in the Swedish culture and society in favor of objective argument actually means that emotional and thereby even artistic phenomena are lowly ranked. This appreciation of the objective means that

Swedes particularly admire rational conduct. Rational behavior is equated with maturity or adulthood, in contrast to childish behavior which is ruled by emotions. Emotional discipline has long been viewed as a sign of true humanity and civilization. This attitude has developed above all among the bourgeoisie and from that class-perspective, both children and the working classes are seen to be closer to nature and farther from culture (Frykman & Löfgren 1979). But appreciation of objectively based as opposed to emotionally based judgments appears to be widespread. Naturally, though, it dominates behavior in Swedish public life, in politics and the bureaucratic system. In the public sphere this rational orientation takes on the form of a planning philosophy. The concept and ambition of directing and organizing in order to guarantee people happy lives is, of course, an old one and can be found in other countries, for example, England, but the planning philosophy appears to be particularly vital in Sweden and is perhaps also more positively accepted than in countries with socialist (not to be confused with social-democratic) governments. It is significant that Sweden is often classified by Americans as socialist (com Kramer 1980: 87) because of, among other reasons, the political system which regulates to a highly detailed level, and aims at planning and organizing the citizens' lives and behavior (com Anton 1975: 21). According to the American sociologist David Popenoe, who has had many years of experience researching Swedish society, there is no other country in the Western world where public planners possess as much authority as in Sweden (Popenoe 1984).

A Swedish "government" or "committee" avoid expressing opinions which are not based on fact, writes the American political scientist Thomas Anton, who has done research on planning in Sweden (1975: 21). This attitude probably makes Swedish politicians particularly goal-oriented, which Anton also notes: "Repeatedly, these politicians demonstrated their ability to respond to new challenges and to make things happen" (ibid: 95).

The so-called art of social engineering, seen from an international perspective, has devel-

oped in Sweden to an unusually effective means of planning in many areas – everything from mandatory use of halflighting to regulations about the smallest dimensions approved for hat-racks. Some of these examples can appear intentionally ironic. There is, in fact, criticism in Sweden directed against this “not allowed” mentality. What’s interesting about that mentality is, however, that despite it, there is nevertheless a consensus in Sweden about the desirability of social planning and subsequently, it has actually been possible to carry out such ideas politically, without any resistance. “Swedish metropolitan areas today are the closest in the Western world to fulfilling the planner’s goals of order, efficiency, beauty, and social justice”, writes Popenoe (1984). The book title *Suede, la reforme permanente* (1977) reflects an image of Sweden as a country oriented towards constant change through planning. Some outside observers have described this aspect of Swedish society as positive, as does for example, Popenoe in his book *The suburban environment. Sweden and the United States* (1977). Others see Sweden as a frightening example, for example Huntford in the book *The new totalitarians* (1971).

The population statistician Gustav Sundbärg in his well-known book about the Swedish mentality takes up another concept which sheds light on the planning philosophy, namely the Swedes’ ability to organize:

“A highly developed ability to organize is another characteristic of the Swedes, and no doubt, to a large extent, explains the permanence and stability which Swedish society has displayed for hundreds of years” (Sundbärg 1911: 3).

Swedes are often thought to make suitable secretaries within international organizations, due to their abilities in organizing which stem from their emphasis on smoothness, reason, and the desire to mediate opposing interests in order to avoid conflicts (com Allwood 1981: 18).

Swedes’ ambitions to plan and desire to control life with the aid of science and reason, carries with it the view of their own country as “way ahead”, “modern”, “future-oriented”.

That has also been Sweden’s image abroad in the post-war period – “the Swedish model”.

This view can, of course, be found in all of the industrialized Western world’s attitude towards developing countries. The West believes that they stand for science and reason in contrast to the primitive superstitions and irrational ties to traditional values in the Third World. But in Sweden, people feel this way even when viewing other Western European countries, particularly Southern Europe. A “fiery temperament” is thought to be incompatible with good judgment. Rational ways of thinking do not include decisions made without a lot of consideration or under the influence of emotions.

If in Sweden a person wants to live according to the ideal image of his own country, then he has to let logic and rationalism guide him and put his emotions aside. A person considered a “true” Swede, as he or she has developed over the past decades, looks positively at recommendations and measures which go against so-called irrational phenomena.

Behind the eagerness for reforms (for example doing away with High School and Bachelor’s degrees and former laws about surnames) lies the goal of equality and the achievement of job-equality.

High School certificates (degrees) were a symbol of class, and the struggle for equality was combined with and was even motivated by the rational perspective: since all people are of equal value – goes the argument – then class symbols are an anachronism. Since men and women are of equal value, it is then illogical to give the man higher status through surname, is the view. The laws concerning the rights of fathers to stay home with their children have also received strong support because of this special desire to follow through with arguments to their logical conclusions.

The rational approach is also apparent in the public *debate* over the question of fathers taking leave from work. Emotionally based opinions must be presented as exclusively motivated by fact or scientific basis in order for them to be considered valid (com Anton 1975: 21). An inability to hide emotions can lead to the person in question losing face, which is equal to

losing the debate. A small dose of pathos is acceptable in public political debates as long as it doesn't take priority over rational arguments.

As implied by the above, it appears that from the Swedish perspective, many people throughout the world are irrational, more controlled by emotions, not least of all in politics. But also in the areas of sex roles, sexuality, raising children, etc., the general opinion in Sweden is that Swedes possess a special ability to look at things soberly and unsentimentally, and this is seen to be an advantage. Everyone "knows", then, that for example, men and women are "equal", which is why men as well as women should be allowed to be at home and take care of small children during paid work-time. All social rights should apply equally to both sexes. As this was not previously the case, such a reform is considered progress. This means a move in the direction of a higher state of *modernity* (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1979). Other countries, stuck in their traditional sex roles, are hindered in carrying out or even proposing such legal changes, and consequently are seen by Swedes to be less modern, and bound to a, in a sense, "primitive" culture. They are "behind" and less "developed".

This appreciation of a rational approach is no doubt behind the very liberal sexual views in Sweden within the post-war period, which is pointed out by Allwood (1981). It can be said that sexuality has been "dedramatized", emptied of its earlier cultural, emotional content. Sex has come to be seen as a pleasurable item, along the lines of other items such as tobacco and good food. How a person enjoys this pleasure – what form it comes in – is considered that person's own business, even age is considered nearly insignificant. This attitude explains the rise of pornography in its many forms, in film and printed material, etc., as well as in sex clubs offering sexual perversions. Recently the laws have become more restrictive, but this swing back is, in keeping, based not on emotional arguments, but rather on objective reasons. One reason concerns theories of development-psychology of children. Children should be kept from seeing images of women which show traditional, conservative sex roles. That is why pornographic magazines are

not permitted to have covers considered "degrading" to women. The covers could be seen by children if they are displayed in kiosks and stores.

Another reason is directly related to women's political aims to achieve equality. Women should always be given equal value and treated with the same respect as men. It is believed that this does not occur when women are presented as sexual objects and used as such in, for example, "live sex shows". We can say that political – not moral – indignation lies behind this, the women's movement's indignation. This political view allows for a certain amount of pathos, as mentioned earlier – a certain amount of emotion. But arguments are to be based around facts.

The movement towards increased sexual freedom among young people has occurred hand in hand with the official view. Since the 1960s, sexual intercourse has become all the more common at increasingly younger ages; at the same time, sex education is presented in the schools in the early grades, and very young girls are able to obtain birth control through school doctors.

I have so far been discussing emotions involved in decisionmaking. Another aspect of this theme is to consider what emotions a culture does allow and considers desirable. Swedes are often seen by foreigners as cool, emotionally cold. Those who have achieved closer relationships with Swedes constantly describe Swedes as suffering from their difficulties in expressing the strong emotions which they – like other people – do have.

In that case, the analysis should discuss the culturally accepted means of communicating, showing sympathy, joy, sorrow, pain, etc. It has been thought that alcoholism in Sweden serves the theoretically interesting function of legitimizing behavior which would otherwise be considered culturally unacceptable – that is, the type of behavior which goes directly against what I have so far described as typically Swedish – silence, seriousness, avoiding conflict and strong emotions, and oriented towards the rational. Even after an insignificant amount of alcohol, Swedes have the "right" to act boisterous and joke more than usual, to be-

come aggressive and emotional – cry and even use emotional arguments – without risking making fools of themselves.

This rational approach characteristic of Swedes (prejudice against emotionalism) has been challenged more than anything else by *counter-cultural movements*. This opposition – strong and ideologically based – has taken place within alternative political movements, which in this case can be said to include the so-called new left, “the green wave” within and outside the center party, and in so-called extra-parliamentary movements, the environmental movement and the women’s movement which has grown up during the 1970s. Much opposition has also occurred, in a general sense, among the young (the youth culture).

These groups voice an opposition to the (as they perceive it) coldly rational approach within the Swedish society, which places a low status on emotions and therefore even on poetry, art, etc. This gap was made particularly clear during the campaign before the nuclear referendum, where the “third line” tended to view the other two alternatives as voicing technocracy, while line three supporters were criticized as being a group of “dreamers and troubadours”. Within the new women’s movement, the value of emotions has been upheld in contrast to the “male” view of the world which is described as being oriented towards rationalism, organization and pragmatism. Lack of emotions is defined as “inhuman”.

Jens Allwood has, however, come up with a slightly different view of the thesis concerning Swedes’ appreciation of rationalism and lack of emotional expression. He maintains that this mainly occurs in public situations, outside of private situations.

“Outwardly in Sweden, therefore, a behavioral pattern has developed which is characterized by calm, lack of aggression and emotions, calculated behavior, compromise, rationalism, “lagom” (not too much, not too little – just right), and by not standing out more than anyone else. This behavior has been reinforced to a great extent by the last 60 years of struggle for equality. Inwardly, privately, on the other hand, a person has only himself – his con-

science and more traditional god. Here can be found emotions which are not outwardly displayed – aggression, sadness, love” (Allwood 1981: 41).

Tension in social relationships

Most Swedes are disinterested in immigrants and are not curious enough about strangers to make them desire closer contact. This they no doubt share with people throughout the world in countries where different cultures live side by side. Added to this, for Swedes there is the tension which exists in social relationships in general within the Swedish culture. It is not at all easy or relaxing for Swedes to speak with strangers, or for that matter with anyone who doesn’t belong to their closest family and circle of friends. Swedes appear to reflect more than many other nationalities on how others will react to what they are saying, about what is then suitable for them to say in each and every situation, what impression they are making on others, etc. Moreover, there is the added sense of respect for others, mentioned earlier, which makes them not want to express dissenting views. The long pauses in the Swedish manner of conversing makes it possible for them to weigh their words and also means that a listener is more secure than the one who is speaking. That is why many prefer to listen.

The emphasis on rationalism, lack of emotions, puts special demands on what should/shouldn’t be said. Swedes reflect more than those other nationalities who are able to express their opinions without any factual basis – just if what’s said is considered funny or adds to the discussion. A Swede could not afterwards forgive himself with the explanation, “that was just something I said – I didn’t mean it.” Along with rationalism goes seriousness in the Swedish culture. Naturally, Swedes joke often and happily, but underneath lies a basic quality of seriousness, which not only immigrants, but also Swedes themselves are aware of and point out. This seriousness appears in many areas and consequently has “paradigmatic power”.

Jean Phillips-Martinsson gives one example

in her book when she illustrates her visit to a Swedish tennis hall for the first time:

"If it had not been for people dressed in white scurrying after a little white ball, I should have thought I had entered a mausoleum. The pang pang of the ball cut the deathly silence like cannon shots. My British sportmanship was offended when my good shots went unremarked. "Good shot! Well done! Bad luck!" I cried. "Sssh! Sssh!" came back at me from nearby courts. They must be playing the World Championships, I thought. However, my charming partner assured me that they were just friendly matches but that everyone took them dead seriously" (Phillips-Martinsson 1981: 24).

Allwood mentions another example. When on Swedish radio, TV or in the Swedish press there is a discussion of some kind of conflict, it is nearly always described without the cynical humor which is often used in the media in other countries. "The tone is closer to naive and serious" (Allwood 1981: 43).

The American professor of sociology, Sharlene Hesse-Biber, who was a guest-researcher in Sweden in the early 1970s, described the Swedish academics with whom she came in contact as being "uptight", that is tense and afraid of making fools of themselves, and thus always seriously concerned with their own personalities. Many Swedes' relatively slow speech and numerous pauses in their speech can be explained, as suggested earlier, by the importance placed on words – the fear of saying "something rash". A Swede needs more time than, for example, a French speaker, to think out his next statement in a conversation. He thinks over his next comment and is naturally just as mentally active while waiting for his turn as the French speaker is, but the French speaker throws himself into the discussion, interrupting the others.

Swedes's desire to avoid conflicts makes conversations and contacts between people into a more serious matter among Swedes than among many other nationalities. Much greater care – guardedness – is required. You can't just "talk away". What has been written here about rationalism, seriousness and the desire to

avoid conflicts all adds up to make socializing with others, in general, a highly tense situation. Many Swedes seem to get easily tired of socializing outside of the family, which explains a lot of everyday attempts to "get out of" talking, for example by avoiding taking the elevator with a neighbor.

A Yugoslav interviewed by Billy Ehn, described the difference he saw in Swedes in this respect: Swedes are "always sort of distant" even with each other. "Even if you are good friends, there is always a kind of distance between you. You have to be so controlled. Sure, it's all right to be controlled, but here everyone is too concerned about their customs and rules. You never can let up, you have to always be on your guard" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 146).

From my own research, one interview I made with couples in a vacation home area, describes the matter of contacts between other holiday guests:

"We don't have big parties or anything, we get together with some of the neighbors for a crayfish party, but... But there are some people who have coffee at each others' places all the time, but we don't. No, it's nice to be able to relax when you get home and not have to socialize" (Daun, 1980).

Many immigrants' impression of Swedes is the one which was quoted earlier: "They just run home from work, lock their doors and don't open them until the next day" (Stigsgård-Blomster 1983: 39). The woman interviewed, a Finn, came up with a theory about why Swedes are so "isolated". At the same time, she describes – in a few words – this Swedish mentality:

"... I believe that Sweden has been isolated for such a long time, during the war and so on, so isolated that they have forgotten one another. Now they are afraid to come out ... how shall I say ... not from Sweden, but from their Swedishness. At first I thought it was rather difficult. Okay, it's relatively easy to chat with Swedes, that's true. But to get any further than just chatting ... to become friends. Like at work in the beginning, that was difficult. They

didn't want to open up right away. I didn't really understand; I thought at first "they don't like me", "it's because I come from Finland", but gradually I started understanding it all, that they're like that. That you have to come to them half way or a little more than half way" (Stigsgård-Blomster 1983: 39).

With regard to one interview with an immigrant who attempted to explain "isolation" as a result of the capitalist system, Bergman and Swedin in their book "Vittnesmål" promote the hypothesis that "isolation" is because of modern society's "feelings of alienation resulting from the urban lifestyle". This assumption is, however, contradicted by the sense of "neighborliness" which is characteristic of both the U.S. and Great Britain and which is also more alive in the other Nordic countries; this has been pointed out by the sociologist David Pope in a comparative study (1984).

The cultural consequences of modernization

Many features of the Swedish culture which immigrants have difficulty in accepting do stem from the growth of the industrial society and urbanization. Bergman and Swedin rightly point out in their book (1982) that the criticism which many immigrants aim at Sweden are in fact directed not against specifically Sweden, but against the "inhumanity" of an industrial society in general. Those immigrants see economic development as a contrast to what they label human underdevelopment. In their book, Bergman and Swedin point out that many immigrants' points of reference are derived from agrarian societies.

A Yugoslavian woman, interviewed by Billy Ehn, who has been a resident of Sweden since 1966, complained about the custom in Sweden of dividing up housework between the spouses. She had been brought up to take care of the home, children and her husband, and to let everything else take second place. "Mamma said that a man could do a lot which a woman was not allowed to do. The man is the head of the house." She added, however, that this was unfortunately no longer true in Yugoslavia – at

least in many parts of the country (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 122).

A Spaniard from Madrid, whom I interviewed, described how the earlier custom of taking care of aging parents – that is, letting them live with the younger generation – was on the way out in urban surroundings. In North America and Northern Europe, this division of the generations became common practice some time ago; but the treatment of the elderly is not something which is easy for immigrants to understand. The Yugoslavian woman interviewed above mentioned that her brother was now taking care of their elderly mother. "She has bad health, but she never needs to worry about ending up in a home for the elderly. It is the children's duty to take care of her as long as she lives" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 122). A man from Ecuador, interviewed by Karl-Olov Arnstberg in the same book, stated that he might return to Ecuador when he started getting old. He didn't want to be a retired person in Sweden. "The old people don't have a very good life here" (ibid: 113).

A third aspect of modernization is childraising. The so-called liberal ("free") childraising methods practiced in Sweden since post-war times cause many problems for some immigrants. For them, liberal methods of childraising implies a lack of instruction, that is to say, Swedish parents simply don't teach their children what they will need to know as adults. To raise children is, for these immigrants, to mold the children so that they become good members of society, who are respected for good qualities and behavior. The Yugoslavian woman quoted above also stated:

"If a child goes past an adult and spits on him, I think it's wrong. Then I would like to say to the children that it's not nice for them to do things like that, couldn't they try to stop doing that, because it doesn't look nice. My workmates, on the other hand, don't worry about such things. They say that kids are kids and that children go through stages and will get over it. Stages? Well, kids don't just get over it by themselves, I'd like to say. It's through *us* that children learn to become human beings" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 136).

Another woman from Yugoslavia said, as have so many other immigrants, that this same terrible freedom is also a part of the Swedish school system: "School, my, my, my. In my opinion, Swedish schools are bad. The children have no respect at all for their teachers ..." (op cit: 256). She continued:

"Nada goes to school and what would happen if we returned? You know, she is in the ninth grade, but I could guarantee that she couldn't even pass fifth grade in Yugoslavia. There is such a difference in the education here and there.

A school case in Yugoslavia weighs at seven kilos I'm sure, from the workbooks alone. And in the fifth grade! Here in Sweden it's empty. In Yugoslavia children have to work at home by themselves, read and write and add – until they know their subjects.

Then the Swedes wonder why I yell at my children. I have my principles and my culture and they are what I want to pass on to her. I want her to have a good life, you understand?" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 258).

Childraising and educational methods are both areas which have greatly changed in Sweden, particularly since the 1950s. In other countries – mainly Northwest Europe and North America – development has also taken place along the same lines; Sweden, however, has greatly progressed in this area and, moreover, many non-Nordic immigrants come from countries where the concepts of the so-called "modern" methods of childraising are practically non-existent.

A fourth area of change which is the result of social modernization, is that of sexuality. As in the areas of childraising, sex roles and the relationship to the elderly, sexual attitudes and customs have undergone change in Sweden, especially over the past few decades. Sexual "liberalization" has also taken place in other Western industrialized countries, where even homosexuality has become, to some extent, accepted. In particular, the age of first sexual experience has lowered. This has also occurred in other parts of the world, even in Catholic areas, for example in Poland (from which

many political refugees have come to Sweden). Among other immigrant nationality groups, however, this "dedramatization" of sexuality is an attack on their most basic moral views. A Yugoslavian man, interviewed by Ehn, discussed his discomfort with the idea of "freedom", even if this attitude had gained some acceptance in his own country. Whenever he was on bad terms with his Swedish wife, he thought that if he remarried it would be to a Yugoslav.

"I don't understand it, you see. My wife maybe says that she loves me and that she has a good life together with me and the children. But still she wants to go on vacation with a girlfriend. I can't understand it! If it is really love... then you want to share your happiness with each other.

This has started happening in Yugoslavia, too. There are men who let their wives go to the Adriatic coast. Maybe this matter of liberation has gone too far if it leads to so many divorces" (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 56).

In summary, childraising and education, sex roles, relationships to the elderly, and sexuality are areas which have greatly changed over the last few decades. Similar types of changes are taking place and have come far in other countries, too – mainly Northern Europe and North America.

It should be made clear, however, that this is a question of real cultural change, that is to say, changes in basic values. The fact that similar changes are taking place in, for example, the Mediterranean countries, hardly makes it easier for immigrants here in Sweden to accept them. Moral views are linked with strong emotions. Furthermore, from an international perspective, the changes which have occurred in Sweden have been extreme. It is important to understand that these changes have gone more quickly and have been supported by features in the Swedish culture, mainly the appreciation of objectivity and the critical attitude towards emotional views.

The liberal attitudes towards childraising are, for example, a result of what Orvar Löfgren calls the "scientification" of reality (1982).

"Scientification" is problematic in that it leads to, among other things, uncertainty about what is considered correct. This problem has been discussed by Billy Ehn in his book "Ska vi leka tiger?" (1983). Researchers and experts should be the guides, not the average person with his traditional beliefs – this is the result of "scientification" and is especially typical of Swedish social developments.

Sex roles have become more equal, more similar, also as a result of the driving force of objective reasoning. Women's move into the workforce, of economic necessity, combined with the Women's Movement, has made women's liberation a relatively accepted idea in Sweden, particularly in political and social planning circles. The women's liberation movement is also connected to older traditions of individual freedom as an ideal in the Western world.

Since in Sweden only the idea of rational argument is by and large accepted – emotional reactions generally not accepted – any resistance to the Women's Movement has had little effect. Men who merely "instinctively" dislike the Movement have been seen, from a public perspective, as unworthy of debate. Arguments such as the one given by a Yugoslav married to a Swede would hardly be taken seriously:

"I'm not saying that women who want more freedom are wrong, *I'm just talking about how I feel*. – My wife is great, she is OK, it's just when there are these cultural conflicts that the problems arise. Like this thing about the men helping their wives. I'm not saying that it's wrong to help in the house, but the truth is that a lot of women take advantage of that kind of help. Then everything gets turned around and the men become the housewives in the family..." (Ehn & Arnstberg 1980: 56).

As mentioned earlier, sexuality in Sweden has been discussed, to a large extent, as an intellectual question, like the matter of individual freedom – as an unquestionable right. Thus the task has been clear: to do away with all sexual restrictions, including those against intercourse before marriage, allowing sexual un-

faithfulness, pornography, birth control for children and accepting sexual play in pre-school children, masturbation among children, etc. In all of these areas, the emphasis is on rational analysis and doing away with emotional reactions, which has paved the way for changes in attitudes and customs.

Finally, when it comes to attitudes about the elderly, the pattern has been similar. Affluence in Sweden has made it possible to provide pensions and other financial aid, so that the elderly can live in special apartments and not need to rely economically on their children. The ideal of individual freedom has been valued both by the elderly themselves and by their children, but this has not, of course, prevented the fact that some elderly persons have also suffered from loneliness. The commonly held view is that the generations should live separately, be independent of each other and not "grate" on each other. When the older and younger members of a family meet, they should be in harmony, friendly with one another. Fights and conflicts should be avoided.

At the same time, respect for the elderly has decreased, possibly even disappeared. The sudden changes in society have made the elderly's life experiences irrelevant – in any case, that is the general view. The physical separation from the older generation has contributed to a social separation. The elderly are now seen as a separate category – the "retired persons" – who require special treatment. This treatment has also been "scientifically planned". Responsibility for the elderly is thus not mainly borne by the relatives, but is instead a matter of public (social) concern. The low value placed on emotional attitudes towards social planning has caused many immigrants to see Sweden as "inhuman".

In this discussion, where certain behavior and attitudes have been described as products of an industrial society as well as being reinforced by other features of the Swedish culture, it is important to understand that these cultural features are also subject to change. The emphasis on objectivity and rationalism which actually characterizes the Christian Western world, is unusually strong in the Swedish culture, but this strong emphasis on rationalism

has not always been the case. It could possibly be shown that Swedes have long been viewed as a pragmatic people, but their objective, rational approach is perhaps no older than fifty years. In that case, this approach is essentially linked to the rise of the modern welfare state, with its, among other things, social democratic reforms.

I don't intend to go into the much more difficult discussion of the historical background and explanation of these cultural features which appear to be typically Swedish, such as silence and seriousness. The task here was to show how the Swedish culture – the Swedish mentality – can create special obstacles in cross-cultural interaction, and how the Swedish culture itself presents difficulties for immigrants in adjusting to life in Sweden. It is not merely immigrants' cultural values and traditions which create difficulties.

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