

Silences, Cultural Historical Museums, and Jewish Life in Sweden

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The silences surrounding Jews and Jewish culture within the Swedish folklife sphere and within the historiography of Swedish folklife studies are examined in this paper. Emphasis is placed on one national institution, the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. The sleep at issue, then, is the undergrowth of embarrassed, taken-for-granted or hostile silences concerning ethnic/religious difference that could be found more or less throughout the 20th century, not only among the majority of the population but also among experts in the study of culture. It is argued that the silences and the lack of clear stances at a national cultural institution contributed to legitimizing xenophobia in the past and might well continue to do so among people who are lost, violently inclined, looking for scape-goats, and waiting to strike when the time is right.

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The extensive immigration into Sweden during the last few decades has affected all societal and cultural sectors, not least the aging cultural historical museums and other institutions devoted to the study, preservation and presentation of vernacular traditions. Not only were these institutions planned as the bastions of national consciousness, they also came to serve a country that, for a long time, regarded itself as extraordinarily homogeneous, religiously, linguistically, and culturally. The pressure on the museums increased during the middle of the 1990s, when the government enjoined all public institutions to take into consideration, in all their activities, that Sweden is “multi-cultural”. The emphasis on cultural diversity contributed to a renewed interest (both within the cultural historical sector and elsewhere) in the minorities who have a long history in Sweden – in spite of the country’s perceived homogeneity. The changing demography has now brought about a re-discovery, or even re-invention, of Saami, Roma, Finns, Travelers and Jews as ethnic groups both by members of the groups themselves and by outsiders.

This paper concerns one of the historical

minorities, Jews, and their role within the cultural historical museums and other components of the Swedish “folklife sphere”.¹ In focus is the largest of the cultural historical museums, the Nordic Museum, and its open-air extension Skansen in Stockholm, founded in 1873 and 1891 respectively. Using the case of rabbi Gottlieb Klein and his son, folklorist and museum teacher Ernst Klein, I wish to examine different aspects of the silences surrounding Jews and Jewish culture at this national museum and within the folklife sphere in general². The silences represent, I argue, many problems and contradictions. On the one hand, it is hardly surprising that the social discourses within a nation-state such as Sweden was in the first half of the 20th century would emphasize a public sphere of an ethnically pure – but culturally varied – Swedishness. On the other hand, it is troubling that folklife scholars, ethnologists, and other experts in cultural study would have been as unreflective of the constitution of that Swedishness as they were and, to some extent, have continued to be.

To some Swedes my task would seem absurd; to them it is self-evident that Jewish culture

could (or should) have no place in a museum concerned with Swedish folk culture. To others the topic is puzzling: they take it for granted that Jews are “just like everybody else”. To others still, in particular to young ethnologists, the task is uncomfortable: they detect essentialism in it. A few have also asked if it would make any difference at all to Jewish-Swedish history or to the understanding of the Swedish folklife sphere, if we were to identify a Jewish presence in the cultural historical museums. But regardless of the reasons they cite, the result is silence about Jews and Jewish culture in the Swedish folklife sphere, i.e. the very sphere that has continuously professed that its object of interest is cultural variation in Sweden.

The “sleep” at issue in this paper is then differently constituted from what the title of the symposium at first would seem to point to. As the discussion in the conference on “Sleepers, Moles, and Martyrs” confirmed, the term sleeper is exceedingly elastic and laden with a variety of metaphoric and mythic overtones. On one end of a scale, there are various “weak” meanings and uses of the term, such as its use in the antiquarian book trade where it refers to items that have not been of interest to anyone for decades and then suddenly are in demand and, therefore, move quickly. On the other end of the scale, is the “strong” sense of the term as used after September 11, i.e. to connote secret agents from another world who, although seemingly integrated in the culture in which they live, in a silent rage commit acts of unimaginable horror when the time is set for them to reveal their true nature. This paper might seem to have little to do with either of these extremes. It is not the potential agency of a seemingly assimilated minority that concerns me, but rather the discursive undergrowth or murkiness within the majority culture, a murkiness that is hidden but close to the surface. The everyday suspicions and prejudices, the seemingly taken-for-granted silences concerning people who may or may not be regarded as different Others or as possible inner enemies constitute this murkiness. I am assuming, however, that there are potential connections between such simmering everyday suspicions and the violent acts of sleepers in the strong sense. These suspicions and silences do

not emerge out of thin air, but are deeply rooted in history. And in the case at issue here, the Holocaust and its long pre-history inevitably echo (Karlsson & Zander 2003), as they echo in the acts committed by Mohammed Atta and the others on September 11, 2001.

Public Recognition and Diffuse Silences

Since the late 18th century, Jews have been granted permission to live in Sweden without demands to convert to the Lutheran State Church. In the 19th century, a small and eventually well integrated group of Jewish families became important in such fields as publishing, banking, and the sciences. Indeed, a number of Sweden’s foremost scholars and intellectuals were and are Jewish. But also Jews of other backgrounds arrived in different immigration waves, not least during the late nineteenth century when poor East European Jews fled from pogroms.³ Even so, the number of Jews remained small. In the 1930s there were perhaps 7 000 Jews in Sweden and today around 20 000 people in the country call themselves Jews. Many scholars have remarked that the virulence of Swedish anti-Semitic attacks against well-known and well-integrated Jews during the first decades of the twentieth century stand in no reasonable proportion to the modest number of Jews actually living in the country (see, for example, Andersson 2000, Hedling 1999).

Also during the last few years, contradictions and ambiguities have continued to dominate. On the one hand, Jews and Jewish culture have been more visible and received more official recognition than perhaps ever before. A Jewish museum and a Jewish theater were recently founded in Stockholm, and books on Jewish humor and other aspects of (American-)Jewish culture have circulated widely among young Swedes, in part as a result of the popularity of American films and television sit-coms. Furthermore, the Swedish government has recently established a civil service department devoted to information in schools about the Holocaust and related issues and it has allocated substantial funding to the scholarly study of genocides. In 2000, it also sponsored a high level

conference on the subject.⁴ Also, the Nordic Museum contributed to the measures designed to inform people about World War II by initiating a project in which the reminiscences of Jewish war victims residing in Sweden were collected and published (Johansson 2000).

However, parallel to this recent flurry of activities linked to the echoes of the Holocaust, silence reigns at the Nordic Museum and elsewhere within the folklife sphere concerning Jews and Jewish culture. Indeed, one could easily get the impression that there have never been any Jews nor any Jewish culture in Sweden. With a few small exceptions, ethnologists, folklorists and anthropologists have written next to nothing about Jewish life and everyday Jewish culture in Sweden. No questionnaires have ever been sent out from the Nordic Museum archives or other folklife archives concerning Jewish culture in Sweden, although questionnaires have been distributed concerning other historical minorities, in particular the Saami, Sweden's celebrated exotic others. No Jewish festivals or rituals have ever been described in any of the many books that folklife scholars have regularly published concerning the annual cycle and life cycle customs of peasants and contemporary Swedes (just as little as the festival calendars of other minorities and immigrant groups have been described in these books). Actually, historians, linguists and sociologists have conducted more research on the everyday culture of Jews than have the presumed specialists on the topic, i.e. the ethnologists, folklorists, museum scholars and anthropologists. One might say that within the Swedish folklife sphere Jews are more interesting "as dead victims" than as people with a living culture and religiosity.⁵

Museum Builder Hazelius and Rabbi Klein

The Nordic Museum, founded by Artur Hazelius 1873, is the foremost among the cultural historical museums established in Sweden at the end of the nineteenth century to represent both regional peasant cultures and urban upper class cultures. One would assume that Jews and Jewish culture would have been entirely

absent from this effort to create a symbolic rallying point for the Swedish nation and all historiography about the museum would seem to confirm that assumption. However, careful investigation renders other insights. One is that eminent Jews were active in the work to gather together and preserve the Swedish cultural heritage. Carl Robert Lamm, for instance, was a member of the executive board of the Swedish Homecraft Association, but like other Jews in similar positions, he participated as a learned professional, not as a Jew.

But there are also other aspects to the question of Jewish participation in the early efforts to establish cultural historical museums. It turns out that not only Artur Hazelius in Stockholm but also Georg Karlin who founded the Museum of Cultural History in Lund, worked actively to acquire Jewish objects for their budding museums. Particularly interesting is the relationship between museum builder Artur Hazelius and rabbi Gottlieb Klein. Born into a poor family in Hungary, Klein became a brilliant scholar and teacher and was appointed rabbi in Stockholm in 1883 at the age of thirty-one. He was highly appreciated in Sweden and was awarded the title of professor by King Oscar II. "*Gott liebt Klein*" – God loves Klein – was one expression that circulated about him (Josephson 1998). He was Sweden's foremost representative of reform Judaism, an anti-Zionist and a friend of liberal intellectuals such as archbishop Nathan Söderblom and publicist Torgny Segerstedt, senior (E. Klein 1933a: 239).

In the 1880s, Gottlieb Klein donated to the Nordic Museum a ritual object which he had brought with him from his hometown, Humenné in Hungary (accession number 47081) and, possibly, also other objects. For a few years, Hazelius exhibited this object in the "Upper Class" department (*högreståndsavdelningen*) of the Nordic Museum, thereby signaling that he regarded Jewish culture, as it was represented by the learned rabbi, as urban and cosmopolitan. (The classification is doubtful in light of the fact that the synagogue in Klein's hometown was poor and hardly cosmopolitan). It might even have been Klein who inspired Hazelius to continue acquiring Jewish artifacts. Hazelius eventually gathered together a

collection of Judaica consisting of some 150 items, primarily in the form of ritual artifacts from the Alsace. Why Hazelius did this – and exactly why museum founder Georg Karlin in Lund collected Judaica – I do not yet know.⁶ But whatever Hazelius' motivations, it is clear that his Judaica collection eventually became enveloped in silence; the objects do not seem to have been exhibited during the twentieth century.

Jews contributed to the creation of cultural historical museums in Sweden in other ways as well. For example, Selman Neuman, an itinerant salesman from Eastern Europe, worked as a buyer for Karlin in Lund and acquired some significant objects for his museum. At the same time as Jews – intellectuals as well as itinerant salesmen – participated in the efforts of museum founders to save Swedish folk culture and at the same time as these founders gathered Jewish objects, Jews were frequently described in negative terms. Such descriptions are revealed in an exchange of letters between Artur Hazelius and journalist and folklore collector Eva Wigström. In 1879, when on a tour in the province of Skåne to buy artefacts for his museum, Hazelius complained: "In Skåne Jews have come looking for silver, and there is not a single cottage which has not been visited by twenty Jews looking for silver". And in 1885, while travelling in the district of Östra Göinge in Skåne, Wigström wrote to Hazelius: "In these districts you could still see whole rooms covered from floor to ceiling with tapestries painted in various colors, with motifs taken from the early history of the Israelites. But Jews buying up articles for foreign museums negotiated with the owners so that these hangings, probably along with many other objects of cultural historical value, have already been sent abroad" (cited after Bringéus 1992:127–128).

It is striking how, on the hand, Hazelius collected Jewish ritual objects while, on the other, he would carelessly subscribe to a common prejudice, thus singling out Jews as unscrupulous sales agents prepared to buy cheaply the finest of Swedish folk art treasures and sell them dearly in foreign lands.⁷ But regardless of whether their role is seen as praiseworthy collecting or as misappropriation, it is evident

that Jews played a considerable role in the building up of the holdings of Swedish cultural historical museums. Yet, this role is acknowledged neither in the standard histories of ethnology as a discipline nor in the histories of cultural historical museums and other areas of the folklife sphere. One might well ask if it is important to be cognizant of the role of Jews in the early phase of the folklife sphere. Is this the kind of insight that makes a difference?

One of his Race – at Skansen?

It is hardly surprising that very little was written about Jewish-Swedish culture within the folklife sphere during the 1920s and 30s and that few, if any, museum employees identified themselves as Jews (although there were some). The only exception was Ernst Klein, Gottlieb Klein's son. He must have made a great impression on his colleagues. I remember my teachers speaking about him fondly when I started studying what was called "Nordic and Comparative Folklife Research" in the late 1950s; at that time he had been dead for more than two decades. But I cannot remember anyone ever mentioning his Jewish background, and it would never have occurred to me to ask.

Ernst Klein was born in 1887 and became a man of many talents and interests. Between 1910 and 1920, he worked as a journalist, in part as a foreign correspondent in the Soviet Union and Finland. For a while he taught at *Brunnsviks folkhögskola* (Brunnsvik's "folk high school") with Karl-Erik Forsslund, one of Sweden's foremost students of local history (*hembygdsforskare*).⁸ In 1921, Klein was hired at the Nordic Museum and its open-air extension, Skansen (the two constituted one administrative unit at this time) where he remained until his death in 1937. Throughout this period he continued to be active as a journalist. A *primus motor* at the spring festivals and other public programs at Skansen, he was eventually appointed museum lecturer, a role in which he broke new pedagogical ground. He also created folklife films, not least about dance and music; he was a birthday poet and the life of a party. He published continuously and quickly (way too quickly according to his critics) on

boats, fishing gear, Saami culture, and many other topics. In 1925 he was awarded the equivalent of a master's degree (*fil.lic.*) in "Folk Memory Research" (*Folkminnesforskning*) on the basis of a book on the traditions of Swedish speakers in Estonia (1924). This book which was based on extensive field research in Estonia became highly acclaimed. It is sought after and read to this day as are some of Klein's other works, among them his innovative studies of Swedish folk dance and an often praised history of Sweden "from below" (1931–32, see also Svensson 1982).

In addition, Klein published works on Jewish culture and traditions, among them a collection of Jewish folktales with a long and learned introduction (1929). However, none of these works have become known within the Swedish folklife sphere and none of them have been reviewed in folklore or ethnology journals, although they were discussed in Jewish periodicals and occasionally also in Swedish dailies. Particularly interesting, not least as an ethnography of Eastern and Central European Jewish life, is the book *Genom sju riken* ("Through seven countries", 1933b). Here Ernst Klein describes a trip he undertook in the spring of 1933 together with his wife, Olga Boedecker and a Dr. B.; the party traveled through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany, and Sweden. The book is unsentimental, amusing and full of astute observations. But it also contains a partially shocking portrayal of life in Central Europe a few years before World War II. The main purpose of the trip was to visit Gottlieb Klein's hometown on the slopes of the Carpathians. Ernst Klein had never been there and the long awaited trip had become urgent, due to the increasingly difficult situation in countries in which Jews had come to be "regarded as less desirable immigrants and strangers" (p. 192). "Through seven countries" is full of fearful premonitions but also contains lively descriptions of life in Jewish country villages and small towns, forms of life that were soon to be extinguished. At the same time, in this book perhaps more clearly than in any other of his works, Klein communicates his simultaneous devotion to Jewish religion, culture and history and to Swedish culture and

history.

"Through seven countries" was well received in Swedish newspapers and in the Jewish-Swedish press. But not a word was said about it in print within the folklife sphere. This silence is perhaps to be expected; probably the book was regarded more as journalism than as serious academic research. Yet it seems to me that, in 1933, things must have been said or whispered in the everyday conversations and interactions at Klein's workplace, the Nordic Museum. What political discussions were held there? What did Klein say to his colleagues about his Jewish identity and to what extent did they speak about it? It could hardly have been a secret: he and his father were well known personalities. How did Ernst Klein react to the onslaught of anti-Semitic representations in films, literature, comic magazines, and oral tradition during the 1920s and 1930s (Andersson 2000, Gerner 2000, Wright 1998)? Were his wit and irony ways to handle suspicions and prejudice? Or did he speak out to his colleagues at the museum? As a journalist he wrote unequivocal protests and as such he was one of many writers – Jewish or not – who did so. The Swedish newspapers of the 1930s are full of stories and debates concerning the so-called "Jewish question" (*judefrågan*).

In any case, it is hard to imagine that silence was total within the folklife sphere. Indeed, there is evidence that Ernst Klein acted inside the walls of the Nordic Museum to further and protect Jewish culture. For example, he led an appeal to the museum's executive board requesting a transfer of its collection of Judaica, (i.e. the collection to which his father had contributed) to the Synagogue of Stockholm (*Mosaiska Församlingen*).⁹ The request was granted on December 2, 1931 and the minutes are signed by museum director Andreas Lindblom, and incoming director, Gösta Berg. In other words, the museum leadership was clearly aware of Klein's background and interest in this matter.

But there are also more problematic signs that silence was not total at the museum with regards to "the Jewish question". Now living, retired employees who were present at the time (or a few years later) admit that some colleagues were quite "brown" and that many ideas were

not only whispered but also spelled out aloud. Ernst Klein's friend Karl-Erik Forsslund, director of *Brunnsviks folkhögskola*, notes that "there were those who were shocked that a Jew was hired at the Nordic Museum" (Forsslund 1937:56). Furthermore, there is indication that Ernst Klein encountered discrimination. On July 7, 1924, the head of the department of cultural history at Skansen, Nils Keyland, died. On July 24, i.e. a few days later, Gustaf Upmark, director of the Nordic Museum and Skansen 1913–1928, commented on the matter of Keyland's successor in handwriting in the margin of a typed letter to a colleague: "Keyland's death was a heavy blow and the choice of successor will be difficult. – Klein is a candidate, of course, but do you want a person of his race as head of the department of cultural history at Skansen?" Klein did not get the job. Instead, a young bachelor of arts, Sigurd Erixon (the future giant of Swedish folklife studies) was immediately appointed as temporary head of the department; a few months later the job was permanently his (*Fataburen* 1925:4). Ernst Klein was given the task of arranging "folk music, story telling .. and cultural historical events" etc. at Skansen (*Fataburen* 1926:5). I do not wish to suggest that Klein was better suited than Erixon for the more prestigious position. However, the sources justify questions regarding possible racial discrimination on the part of the museum leadership. Did Upmark, like many contemporaries of his class, regard Ernst Klein a foreign mole, an infiltrator with roots in Eastern Europe, a Bolshevik spy who ought not to be involved in the work to gather, refine and exhibit the finest products made by the Swedish folk? After all, Ernst Klein's political leanings were leftist and toward Social Democracy, whereas many people at the museum were of aristocratic or bourgeois background and "were obsessed with a fear of *les classes dangereuses*".¹⁰ Was Klein aware of Upmark's views and, if so, did he choose to ignore them?

Ernst Klein died in 1937, on April 30 (*valborgsmässoafton* or "Walpurgis Eve"), only fifty years old. Some questions about him and his position at the museum are illuminated in the handful of obituaries written by colleagues at the museum soon after his death. All the texts

are appreciative and a couple of them are long and detailed. However, with one exception, all of them are silent or use paraphrases or code words, when it comes to describing Klein's Jewish identity and his commitment to Jewish culture and religion. For example, Sigurd Erixon, the central figure in Swedish folklife studies, expresses himself with utmost care and refers to Ernst Klein's father not as head rabbi, but as "a teacher of religion and a scholar". Klein's trip to the seven countries is described as "a physically and psychologically most demanding study tour" and, at the end of the article, Erixon writes that "an idealistic seriousness always lay behind even the seemingly most high-spirited of his jokes and amusing rhymes ... Perhaps this was connected to his unshaken solidarity with that religious community to which he belonged because of birth and inclination" (Erixon 1937: 125). Erixon never uses the words "Jew" or "Jewish" and neither does another important folklife scholar, Sigfrid Svensson, who had been a close friend of Klein. In his moving obituary Svensson alludes to Klein's background on only one occasion: "The last few years of illness did not break down his courage and confidence. But even so, there was no lack of pessimism and bitterness in Ernst Klein's life ... But the reasons for that emanated from the outside. His sensitive nature intensified the persecutions of his race out in the world transforming them into a tragic experience of a personal kind" (Svensson 1938: 204).

To my knowledge, folklorist Gunnar Granberg is the only colleague at the museum to write about the importance of Judaism and Jewish culture for Ernst Klein, in both a scholarly and personal sense. Granberg, who writes at length about Klein's 1933 visit in his father's hometown, also emphasizes that it "is truly remarkable that, in the midst of all the gory nationalism and racial fanaticism, Ernst Klein was able to enter into our inherited Swedish culture to such an extent that, in the deepest sense, he became one of our own, making our culture come to life in a way which no one had managed to do before him. ... To this deep understanding of and devotion to Swedish cultural tradition Ernst Klein added his inherited loyalty to Jewish culture and religion. He ... worked as teacher of

religion at the synagogue ... and in his written works he often took up Jewish issues” (Granberg 1937:172). Perhaps Granberg could write so openly about Klein’s commitments to both Jewish and Swedish culture, because he published this obituary in the radical review, *Studiekamraten* (“The Study Comrade”) to which both he and Klein had long been contributors. Perhaps Granberg would have held back, if he had written for a museum periodical or a folklore journal? Perhaps he, too, would have felt it inappropriate to foreground, in that kind of context, the Jewish-ness of an employee at a bastion of Swedish national culture. I can only compare these texts with the obituaries in the daily press and non-academic publications the authors of which (regardless of political color) were far more open than writers within the folklife sphere about Klein’s Jewish background and about using the word “Jew”.

Silences

The silences surrounding Jews and Jewish culture were to continue to dominate in the folklife sphere for many more decades. Indeed, there is indication that the silences grew deeper and wider in time. In the few texts that ethnologists and other scholars wrote about Ernst Klein long after his death nothing is mentioned about his studies of Jewish culture or about his Jewish background. Among these texts is museum director Gösta Berg’s long and detailed entry published 1977 in a standard biographical encyclopedia. Here Berg refers to “Through Seven Countries” as a “captivating” description of an “extended study tour” through Europe (Berg 1977: 266) but does not mention the main contents of the book. And the pattern prevails. In 1998, in a lavishly illustrated book celebrating the 125th anniversary of the Nordic museum, Klein is called “socially engaged”, “radical”, “verbally gifted”, and “the happiest among friends” (Stavenow-Hidemark 1998). But not a word is said about his studies of Jewish culture.

Why was it, in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, neither interesting nor possible to reveal that an important and popular colleague had studied Jewish culture and history (in Sweden and

elsewhere) as well as Swedish peasant culture and history and that his Jewish identity was significant for him? Had all the years of silence had the effect that the Jewish aspects of Klein’s life and scholarship had become forgotten? Or were these aspects regarded irrelevant? Or dangerous or shameful? Are we speaking about silences and secrets that all parties found best withheld for the benefit of all?

Here we return to the contradictions and ambiguities of the last few years mentioned at the outset. In one respect, Jews have become more visible and received more official recognition than perhaps ever before, both in scholarship and in public life. A great deal of this interest is connected to a governmental engagement in the moral lessons to be learned from the Holocaust. Like many other countries, Sweden – including cultural historical museums (Jönsson 1998) – is shaping its very own Holocaust profile (Young 1993). It would seem that Sweden has belatedly begun participating in that which has sometimes been called the Holocaust industry (Finkelstein 2000, Hoffman 2000).

Yet little of the interest today concerns everyday, religious, or learned culture among Jews in Sweden, in the past or at the present. In many contexts, not least within the cultural historical museums, Jews remain better known as dead victims than as people with a living culture and religiosity.¹¹ There is on the part of the Swedish majority, especially on the part of young people, little awareness that there could be anything distinctive at all about contemporary Jews in Sweden. Aren’t they the same as everybody else? I know of an instructor in ethnology at a Swedish university whose students once asked: “How do Jews celebrate Christmas?” – “I suppose they do it like everybody else”, was the answer. And I know of young Swedes who have seen Ingmar Bergman’s film *Fanny and Alexander* without understanding that a central character is Jewish; this is a character whose role is pivotal and highly ambiguous. And older people who do understand keep silent. Indeed, silence predominates all around.

We are dealing here with the kind of taken-for-granted silences that confirm stereotypes or

ignorance and, therefore, serve to make the objects of silence invisible. Silences are not innocent, they conceal. They can conceal conflicts, ambiguities, and indifference. They can conceal prejudices such as Gustaf Upmark's. They can conceal shame or fear to utilize the word "Jew" as a positive marker as was the case in the obituaries and other writings of the folklife scholars cited above. Silences can establish excluding boundaries which become so self-evident that people cannot imagine transgressing them. One can only speculate as to what would have happened if the Nordic Museum had pursued another policy than that of silence. What would have happened if Sigurd Erixon, Sigfrid Svensson and other friends and colleagues of Ernst Klein had been willing to review "Jewish folktales" or "Through seven countries" in a professional journal? What would have happened, if his friends and colleagues had thought that it would be possible to study Jewish-Swedish culture and to exhibit it? Perhaps not *that* much might have happened. But the silences of indifference, fear, shame, prejudice, and suspicion, might have had less of a chance to become constitutive markers of Sweden's hidden (folklife) sphere.

The old silences have not disappeared. Recently, when I have given talks about Gottlieb Klein and Ernst Klein, the reactions indicate that not only are the silences still present but also that the words "Jew" and "Jewish" are tainted with negative connotations, with an aura of something unmentionable that might even be reinforced by some of the recent mass media interest in the Holocaust. At the Nordic Museum, one commentator noted that he was bothered by my presentation, since he "knew the family". What he indicated was that he was disturbed by my blunt use of the word "Jew" about Ernst Klein. To him the word has as negative a ring as it did for Erixon and Svensson. Indeed, an elderly scholar, who knew personally several of the people mentioned in this paper, emphasized that he always avoids the word "Jew" out of "politeness" and "consideration". He is also certain that his Jewish friends would want him to do exactly that. And perhaps many would. Another person who listened to my talk wrote to me saying, "I don't care whether Klein

was Jewish or not! It is not important, the main thing is that he was a good scholar and teacher!" This commentator seemed to say that we in our enlightened and "multicultural" Sweden ought to be above essentializing people by giving them ethnic labels. Indeed, several people said that ethnic identity is something private that has nothing to do with people's professional work.

All these and other, similar comments are problematic. For one thing, we cannot assume that we know what people's possible ethnic identities might mean to them in different contexts and what they might mean to those with whom they interact. It is part of our task as students of culture to be able to distinguish between all those contexts in which ethnic and other differences are immaterial and all those in which difference makes all the difference – as it did to Ernst Klein when he could no longer wait to visit with the people in his father's hometown. And to be able to make such distinctions we need knowledge, research, and open debate. This does not mean that individuals and societies do not need their secrets (see Regina Bendix, in this volume). But the opposite cannot be desirable either, i.e. that people because of their ethnic or religious background should be surrounded by frightened, shameful, xenophobic, racist, or (even) polite or considerate silences that go on for decades and conceal a murky undergrowth of ambiguous ideas, animosities and suspicions.

I am certain that this murky undergrowth under a blanket of silences which occasionally sends out messages in marginal notes or whispers in the corridors, is linked to the violent acts of sleepers. The lack of open speech and clear stances at a national institution might well help to legitimize dangerous ideas in minds so inclined. To what extent will the innuendoes and the silences justify acts of violence among people – be they neo-racists or "ordinary schoolboys" - longing for the "warmth of *Gemeinschaft*" and blaming such historical scape-goats as Jews whose everyday lives continue to be surrounded with a hush-hush attitude. It is not far-fetched to suggest, as Marianne Gullestad (2003) does, that some of the sleepers in Europe today are to be found among the young and the lost. Indeed, the

leaders guiding these young people are no longer as easy to spot as skinheads. They take care not to stand out but to appear to be integrated, well-dressed, and well-behaved young people at the same time as they move in a thicket of darkness, perhaps waiting to strike when the time is right.

Concluding Remarks

I do not think that it is immaterial to know that Jewish itinerant salesmen and Jewish intellectuals played a role in the establishment of the Swedish folklife sphere and I do not think that it is immaterial to know that ethnologist/folklorist Ernst Klein published studies of Jewish folktales. Such insights must be seen as an enrichment in a country which must now abandon seemingly self-evident silences and learn new ways to “know and respect the others version of the past” (Gillis 1994:20).¹² Not all the people in Sweden today with an “immigrant background” will be interested in exhibiting their traditions and expressions in a Swedish national museum. Perhaps very few will want to do so. But for those who wish to do it, the doors must not be closed a priori or be surrounded by embarrassed silences as the case has been for Jews. This will have to be important in a democracy that says that it is eager to protect openness and integration *and* the rights of citizens to live in accordance with their own religious beliefs and traditions.

Notes

1. Elsewhere, I have used the Habermas-inspired term “folklife sphere” to describe several intellectually and historically closely related enterprises, such as the folklife museums and the folklife archives, the academic disciplines of folkloristics, folklife research and ethnology, and the movements dedicated to “home crafts” (*hemslöjd*), local history, folk dance, and folk music. All of these have had as their object, in different ways and proportions, to study, preserve, celebrate, present, promote, redesign or sell aspects of vernacular, expressive life forms. Like many other peoples, Swedes selected some of their most cherished national symbols from the folklife sphere: the peasant costumes, the fiddle tunes, the midsummer festivities (Klein 2000).
2. This article builds on two previous studies (Klein

2002, Klein 2003). Like them, it has been written within the framework of the projekt “Folklore, Heritage Politics, and Ethnic Diversity” financed by NOS-H. I thank several friends, relatives and colleagues for their contributions to my ongoing studies of Jewish culture and the Swedish folklife sphere: Lotten Gustafsson, Cecilia Hammarlund-Larsson, Jakob Klein, Ingrid Lomfors, Hans Medelius and Christian Richette. Special thanks to Thomas Hauschild for sending me a number of texts on German-Jewish ethnology and anthropology. My deepest thanks go to Eva Eliasson, Ernst Klein’s daughter. Without her powers of memory and her artistry as a narrator, my understandings of the events I describe, would have been poor indeed. I am also grateful to her for lending me her manuscript on Gottlieb Klein (Eliasson n.d.) and other materials (Levy n.d.). I am, however, not related to the Klein family discussed in this paper.

3. The foremost historian of Jewish life in Sweden is Hugo Valentin whose main works were published in the 1920s. A compact study by Valentin was issued in 1964.
4. The immediate impetus for this and other activities was a (now partially disputed) research report according to which an astonishingly high percentage of youngsters in schools cited total ignorance of the Holocaust and the events that led up to it. A much acclaimed informational booklet (Bruchfeld and Levine 1998) has since been distributed in Swedish schools; it has also been translated into a number of languages.
5. I owe this last formulation to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (conversations, spring 1999). A handful of references to smaller texts published within the folklife sphere could be cited as the exceptions that confirm the rule (for example, Jacobowski 1967). However, Jewish culture and Jews are not at the center of attention in one single of the Swedish ethnological texts in which they play some role. Rather the authors have come to touch upon the subject more or less inadvertently (see, for example, Ek 1971). Thomas Hauschild (1997) has noted a comparable paucity of research in German *Volkskunde* and *Ethnologie* and emphasizes that Jewish culture was neglected, because it fell between disciplinary boundaries. Jews were not regarded German enough to be studied within *Volkskunde* and not exotic enough to belong to *Ethnologie* (Hauschild 1997). Nevertheless, it would still seem that Jews and Jewish culture have played a more important role in German *Volkskunde* and *Ethnologie* than in the Swedish counterparts, at least recently and during the founding stages of the disciplines. Not only was the *Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde* founded in Hamburg in 1896, Jewish topics were actually taken up in *Volkskunde* journals in Germany. Bernd Jürgen Warneken has noted that about 5% of the articles

- printed in *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* during the years 1891–1932 concerned Jewish culture and religion (Warneken 1999). Nothing comparable happened in Sweden.
6. Perhaps the collecting and exhibiting of Judaica indicate that the folklife museums (and perhaps also folklife research) in Sweden, as well as in Germany, “in seiner Institutionalisierungsphase kein völkisch-germanophiles Project darstellte” (Warneken 1999: 165).
 7. The selling of folk art abroad was (and remains) a significant problem. But Jews were (and are) not the only people involved in these activities.
 8. In the 1830s, Svend Grundtvig in Denmark began envisioning folk high schools as centers for civic education of adults. The idea took root also in Sweden where some of the folk high schools, such as Brunnsvik, came to play a significant role in the education of industrial workers.
 9. The collection is now housed at the Jewish Museum in Stockholm.
 10. Jonas Frykman used this expression in his comments to my paper at the Reinhausen conference. I wish to thank him, Marianne Gullestad, and Thomas Hauschild for their helpful and insightful comments.
 11. This does not mean that there are no exceptions whatsoever to these observations. There are a few. For example, in 1996 there was a fine exhibition on Jewish Culture in Sweden at the Museum of Cultural History (Kulturen) in Lund (Landberg 1997).
 12. Cf. Frykman’s contribution to this volume.

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