

Red, White, Yellow, and Bluegrass: Music, Trauma, and *Amerika* in the Swedish Imagination

Claire M. Anderson

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2024

Reading Committee:

Patricia Shehan Campbell, Chair

Christina Sunardi

Shannon Dudley

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Music

©Copyright 2024

Claire M. Anderson

University of Washington

Abstract

Red, White, Yellow, and Bluegrass: Music, Trauma, and *Amerika* in the Swedish Imagination

Claire M. Anderson

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Patricia Shehan Campbell

Ethnomusicology

This dissertation explores the overlapping bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden. Tethered by shared musical histories as well as musicians and enthusiasts who regularly cross genre boundaries, these scenes boast events, festivals, and jams where Swedish imaginings of *Amerika* come to life in the form of music, costumes, and general rules of prosocial engagement. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and rules of comportment differ inside the bounds of these music scenes as compared both to similar scenes in the US or other non-musical Swedish spaces. Simultaneously, detail-oriented anachronisms present a nostalgic representation of *Amerika* that bolster Swedish ties to American history and iconography in everything from “singing cowboys” to “rebel flags.” I argue that the *Amerika* that exists in the Swedish imagination broadly, and in these music scenes specifically, is rooted in the trauma of mass migration from Sweden to North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ideas of *Amerika* grew in the Swedish imagination as a way to fill in the gaps left by the devastating effects of mass migration on the separation of families. This familial trauma was widespread and is regularly encapsulated in a description of Sweden as the *lillebror* (“little brother”) of the United States, a reference that maintains a sense of familial ties across the Swedish American borderlands.

With the application of polyvagal theory, and an understanding of how connections between the body and the brain impact the physical sensations of emotions as well as an individual's interpretations of external cues of safety and danger, I argue that trauma suffered by our ancestors can influence which communities we chose to join or music scenes in which we chose to participate. From the perspective of polyvagal theory, it becomes clear that there are physiological reasons why music is soothing, why we might choose one music scene over another, and why playing music with others who like that same music is invigorating. Through the lens of trauma studies, this dissertation explores the collective impact of trauma across a community as well as trauma's impact on the body of the individual. I show how many individual traumatic events across communities within a single country came to shape Sweden's national imagination. I also demonstrate the process through which ideas of *Amerika* have been passed down through generations, distilled through family stories and media depictions of the past, and created two conflicting, yet harmoniously coexisting stories that have come to shape bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden. Drawing on scholarship in neuroscience, psychiatry, and music therapy, this dissertation outlines how collective music making can engage the body's social engagement system and have a calming effect on a nervous system that has been activated or dysregulated by trauma. Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes are used as an example of how intergenerational trauma can be a part of what unconsciously binds a music community together and how that trauma can evolve over generations of storytelling. The transfer of unconscious narratives, reconstructions, and intentional silences shape traumatic memories into nostalgic yearning for a past that never, quite, was.

DEDICATION



Kristina and Lars
Linghult (SE)



Anna and August
Hermanstorp (SE)



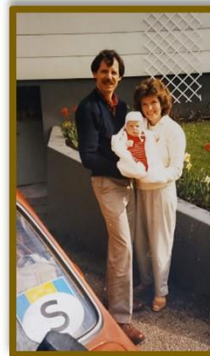
Justina and Edvard
Västra Torsås, (SE)
and Alta, Iowa (USA)



Dorothy and Herbert
Alta, Iowa (USA)



Anna and Hjalmar
Linghult/Hermanstorp (SE)
and Alta, Iowa (USA)



Mary and Robert
Healdsburg, CA (USA)

To those who sacrificed and
lost in the hope that I might,
someday, gain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the American-Scandinavian Foundation for their support of my fieldwork and Lund University for hosting me during my time in Sweden. I would also like to thank the Florence McCord Scholarship Trust for their many years of support across both my graduate and undergraduate education in music.

I extend my deepest, heartfelt gratitude to the many, many people inside these music scenes who welcomed me to their events, festivals, jam sessions, and even into their homes. The countless conversations, both on and off the record, and the effort spent helping me to understand the complexities of these scenes and their history was all such a gift. Thank you so much for your time and interest.

Thank you to my family for your unending support and encouragement: To my parents for keeping these stories alive and my brother for being a great travel buddy. Thank you to my ancestors who saved papers, letters, and photos, and who shared the memories that helped us recreate their life stories. And thank you to my “cousins,” the Myrhages, who reestablished and maintained our transatlantic connections. Thank you to Carl-David who reconnected us. And an extra special thank you to Staffan and Linnea, who opened their home up to me during my time in Sweden. None of this would have been possible without your warm welcome and generosity, and I look forward to carrying our family connections forward for any generations to come.

Throughout the many ups and downs of this process, I have leaned hard on some very dear friends. Thank you to my fieldwork buddy, Saniya, for your moral support and camaraderie. Thank you to Jim, Caitlin, and Justin for the many, many evenings of board games and raucous conversations. To my Mutiny! bandmates both current and former—Justin, Michael, Julia, Michael, Julia, and Bekky—for keeping the music going and my nervous system in check.

Thank you to Kerry for your input, to Kandace for your guidance, Fiona for getting me started down this path, and Jen for your encouragement in the home stretch. There are many other kindred spirits who have helped me along the way; I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

To the many teachers, professors, and educators of all kinds who got me to this place, I could not have achieved this without your guidance. I send my everlasting thanks to those I knew before my college days: Rosa Duran-Vazquez and Jean Heglund, who taught me how to write; Randy Masselink, Valerie White, and Peaches Davenport, who taught me how to make music a part of my life; and to Jamie Poore, Pat Sabo, and Ron Weitzel, who taught me how to learn. Thank you to Wheaton College's ethnomusicologists, Matthew Allen and Julie Searles, who brought ethnomusicology and the beautiful opportunities it opens up into my life and to my botany professor, Scott Shumway, who taught me that there is nothing more satisfying than challenging yourself to learn outside your comfort zone. And to the late Professor Jeremiah Murphy, your words of wisdom still hang above my desk reminding me "Not to worry, the process of creating art is a challenge" and the value of "being exposed to the complexities incumbent on the issues you care about. Take them in stride, as you learn to navigate the issues and perspectives. You will do it." I only wish I could call to tell you myself that I couldn't have done this without you.

I would also like to extend my many thanks to those who were instrumental in my time at the University of Washington. Thank you to my reading committee, Christina Sunardi and Shannon Dudley, for your invaluable feedback and support over the years. Thank you to Odai Johnson for serving as my GSR and to Christine Ingebritsen for assisting with my exams and preparation for my fieldwork. Thank you to my fellow ethnomusicology graduate students, the many folks who came and went through that TA office and filled regular days with big ideas. I

don't quite have the words to express my full gratitude to my chair and advisor, Patricia Shehan Campbell. You spent countless hours with me, week after week, year after year. Your steadfast encouragement and enthusiasm has been a vital, driving force for so many who came through the UW. I am so grateful for your unending patience, support, and understanding that this project needed to simmer in order to get it right. I am deeply inspired by the ways in which you support and connect to your students and simultaneously connect your students to each other. You were very much the heart of UW for me.

Most importantly, I need to thank my husband, Michael. From the very beginning, you've been my ballast, my stability in both smooth seas and choppy waters. You've supported both my sensible plans and crazy ideas, sometimes even trusting me to know the difference. You pushed me to reach higher, think bigger, and helped juggle many balls that would not otherwise have stayed in the air. You read and copyedited papers, listened to and streamlined presentations. You were a short order cook, last minute chauffeur, attentive appointment secretary, and best friend in every moment. We spent both months on opposite sides of the world and years sequestered together during a pandemic, and our bond just grew that much stronger. Thank you for being both boatswain and first mate.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	III
DEDICATION.....	V
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	VI
CONTENTS	IX
PREFACE: A SWEDISH-AMERICAN STUMBLES INTO SWEDEN’S “AMERIKA” ..	1
Nääsville Bluegrass Music Festival, 2013.....	1
1. AN INTRODUCTION TO SWEDEN’S AMERIKA.....	7
The Swedish Imagination	11
Americanization, <i>Amerika</i> , and the “group culture” of collective trauma.....	14
From ABBA to Zydeco: Sweden’s Many Music Scenes	16
How ABBA’s runaway success led to the support of hobby musicians in Sweden	18
Music as a hobby in Sweden.....	20
Methods: The Performative Ethnography of a Vulnerable Observer	23
Positioning my heritage	27
Positioning my scholarship: The Swedish American Borderlands.....	29
A <i>Vulnerable Observer</i> and one person’s history of old time in Sweden.....	31
Roadmap.....	35
Outro	38
2. THREE ERAS OF OLD TIME AND BLUEGRASS IN SWEDEN.....	39
Searching for “A Little Cabin Home” in Sweden’s <i>Amerika</i>	40
Overlapping history of bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden... 45	45
The first era: The beginnings of old time and bluegrass in Sweden, late 1950s-1977.....	46

The “jungle telegraph” that forever changed old time and bluegrass in Sweden, 1977-early 2000s.....	48
The second era: From local to national, early 2000s-present	52
The third era: “Happy Wednesday” jams	56
Visualizing Sweden’s overlapping bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes ..	58
3. THE HERITAGE ‘OVER THERE’	67
Heritage from Halmstad to Healdsburg	71
The Collective Trauma of Migration in the Swedish American Borderlands	75
Don’t you want to go ‘over there?’	82
4. TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND <i>AMERIKA</i> IN THE SWEDISH IMAGINATION	87
Caution.....	87
Trauma Part I: Activation, the individual, and memory	88
Nervous system activation: Trauma and the individual.....	90
Nervous system activation: The trauma response.....	95
Trauma and memory	100
Trauma Part II: Intergenerational Trauma and <i>Amerika</i> in the Swedish Imagination.....	104
Intergenerational trauma	105
The Anders(s)ons	108
Postmemory and the Swedish emigrants’ narrative.....	112
Performing <i>Amerika</i> and Sweden’s Wild West: Småland’s High Chapparal.....	118
The evolution of <i>Amerika</i>	123
5. JAMMING BY THE MIDNIGHT SUN: MUSIC AND THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM.....	128
Vagal nerve pathways and the Social Engagement System	134
Music and the social engagement system.....	138
Jams and the social engagement system	145
Ok, but why <i>this</i> music?	155
<i>Jantelagen</i> : Jante’s Law and the Swedish imagination	158

6. 'REBEL' FLAGS AND THE <i>AMERIKAN</i> SPIRIT AT KILLHULTS COUNTRYFESTIVALEN	168
Two paths intertwined: All roads lead to Killhult	170
From Linghult to Linghult and back, again and again	170
From Hishult, with two stopovers in New York	175
<i>Amerika</i> in the Swedish Country Music Scene	180
The Confederate battle flag in Killhult and Charlottesville	182
Design and early history	186
Trauma and the myth of the Lost Cause	190
<i>Sydstatsflaggan</i> and the Swedish "rebel" spirit	196
7. "AH! WE OUT-AMERICA THE AMERICANS!": NOSTALGIA AND SWEDEN'S <i>AMERIKA</i>	203
Nostalgia for before or beyond	205
Authenticity in bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes	210
Conclusions	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY	221

PREFACE: A SWEDISH-AMERICAN STUMBLES INTO SWEDEN'S "AMERIKA"

NÄÄSVILLE BLUEGRASS MUSIC FESTIVAL, 2013

“Where ARE we?!” my father asked through a muffled, but hearty, chuckle. He grinned, unable to contain his joy and wonder, as we settled into our seats by the open windows inside the round, wooden dancing hall. Across the slowly arriving early-afternoon crowd, I noted many markers of Americana: cowboy hats and boots, American flags, gingham shirts and dresses, a Harley Davidson T-shirt. On stage, the string band—who played guitar, fiddle, mandolin, banjo, and sang together around one central mic—was framed by red-white-and-blue bunting and a four-by-six-foot photo of Bill Monroe. Before the band launched into the Stanley Brothers classic “Mountain Dew,” the guitar player counted off with a spirited “*E’-två, -tre, -fyra!*”

My dad chuckled again and repeated his question—this time quietly, but with emphasis: “WHERE the *hell ARE* we?” as a small string of Swedish flags fluttered in the rafters above our heads. The look in his eyes—one I knew well from a lifetime as his sidekick in everything from hiking around cows in the Alps to scoping for the perfect find at antique fairs much closer to home—meant we’d officially *found* something. Something special. Something that spoke to his spirit in a way that was wholly unexpected, and utterly delightful.

On that day in 2013, we had started our morning about an hour’s drive south in the Swedish seaside city of Halmstad. Over breakfast my dad had given our hosts, Carin and Bosse, a small token of appreciation for their hospitality in the form of a CD of American bluegrass music. We’d picked up the CD, along with some T-shirts and other memorabilia, at a country/folk music festival in Northern California a few weekends before. At the time, we

thought this assortment to be an offering of something “quintessentially American,” special tokens from our home and community that you wouldn’t often find outside the States and therefore perfectly suited as hostess gifts for our summer trip to Sweden. But, as our first surprise of the day, Bosse told us he was a big fan of bluegrass and even played bluegrass on his mandolin. My dad and I were supposed to drive about five hours northeast, almost the entire width of the country, to Järna by suppertime that day. But after seeing our gift, Bosse insisted we had to make a stop along the way, just a little off our planned route, in the small rural town of Ätran.

You see, it just so happened that this sunny, warm morning was the second Saturday of July. That meant that it was, serendipitously, the day of the annual Nääsville Bluegrass Music Festival. According to Carin and Bosse, as bluegrass fans, we absolutely couldn’t miss this opportunity to hear some real Swedish bluegrass music. We were hesitant, unsure if we really had enough time to make a stop, but our hosts insisted we could make our final destination in time if we left Halmstad a little early, and that even a couple of hours at the festival would be well worth the journey off the beaten path. I’ll forever be grateful that we took their advice (even if I did accidentally leave my headphones behind in our rush out the door).

To get to Nääsville, we got off of the main highway and drove for many miles along roads lined with red barns and old farmhouses. The idyllic countryside, typical scenes on these roads in Southern Sweden, was exactly the kind of thing that my father looks for when we go on these pilgrimages: a glimpse at the farmland his grandparents left behind. Finally, after one last bend, the road suddenly found a small collection of buildings that resembled a town. As we turned to the sign that said “Bluegrass,” it felt like we were on another continent. American and Confederate flags adorned camping vans which, though smaller than the regular behemoths seen

at American music festivals, lined the road to the festival in a very familiar fashion. Attendees had obviously come from miles around to be here for this special annual event. As we parked our rental car, we could see and hear folks plucking at their banjos as they sat outside in small camping chairs, cowboy hats shielding their eyes from the bright midday sunshine.

Nääsville was a relatively small festival, at least by American standards. We had no trouble buying tickets at the small, wooden ticket booth just outside the only gate. The *Öpen Scen* (open mic) had started at noon, and it was close to 1pm. We paid our 100kr, about \$10 at the time, and walked through the gate into a large grassy area. To our left there was a popup tent with a sign that read “jam session” next to a vendor selling bluegrass and country albums—nothing but rows and rows of vinyl and CDs underneath tattered side-by-side American and Confederate flags—and a concession stand selling burgers and hot dogs. Folks were out enjoying the weather, setting up camping chairs by the edge of a nearby lake. But we continued past these inviting distractions, and towards the music coming from the round, wooden, yellow building off to our right and through the door clearly marked “bluegrass.”

As we made our way inside, we could hear familiar sounds coming from the stage: the lyrics of the Carter Family and Bob Dylan, all sung in English, drifted out the windows. Every once in a while, though, a soft “j” or accidental “å” would sneak its way into the sound and expose a Swedish twang to the music. We arrived relatively early in the day in the grand scheme of the festival—on later trips I would come to know that the event didn’t really get into the swing of things until the late afternoon/early evening—and when we walked in there were only about forty people in a room that could maybe seat a couple hundred. Most were sitting at tables around the perimeter of the circular space, chatting between acts on the open stage. There were people of all ages, including children who sat playing on the ground, some in bathing suits

presumably waiting for a chance to swim in the pool across the parking lot or the nearby pond. Even though it was still early in the day, two women got the dancing started as soon as the first official act took the stage, one of them wearing a dress patterned on the stars and stripes of the American flag.

The stage was decorated with black cloth walls and star-spangled bunting hanging over the performers. On one side of the stage, printed on the black cloth background, was a giant, four-by-six-foot picture of the father of bluegrass music, Bill Monroe. The other side of the stage was decorated with a setup resembling a cozy front porch, complete with a rocking chair, cowboy hat, lantern, wagon wheel, moonshine keg, big thick book, a bull's skull and horns, box of "explosives," a washboard, and a flour sack. The room was a big circular space, a covered wooden building with small purple and white flower details on the light-yellow painted walls, a string of small Swedish flags hung from the rafters, and huge openings where windows would otherwise be. A breeze flowed through the crowd, making the weather perfectly lovely. This was by far the most pleasant bluegrass festival experience I'd ever had, with easy parking, inexpensive tickets, mild temperatures, and calm audience members who were engrossed in the music coming from the stage.

We settled ourselves into one of the tables along the perimeter of the room. My eyes scanned the space while we listened to the last open mic participants sing the Carter Family classic "Gold Watch and Chain." Everything about that moment for me was familiar, and yet simultaneously so unexpected and out of place. We came to Sweden looking for some "authentic Swedish experience," but this space and these people had catapulted us back to the States—to the land of the free and the home of every pioneer's American dream. And then I saw it.

I looked up at my father, whose eyes were round and bright with both joy and disbelief, and said, “There is a noose hanging in one of the doorways between the spokes that support the room. Casually, just hanging there.” He glanced behind him to where I had gestured, looked back at me, and laughed uneasily, and with a hint of confusion and disbelief peeking through his perplexed smile. This time it was my turn to ask the question, my turn to say the three words that seemed to sum up our collective feeling of wonder and disorientation: “Where ARE WE?”

The clothing, camping, food, and songs that surrounded us evoked vivid memories of festivals and events back home in California. But, every once in a while, something as simple as a singer using a soft “y” sound where native English speakers would have used a “j,” or as glaring as the small noose hanging from the rafters—which I later learned was originally a part of a silly installation that hung rubber chickens around the hamburger kiosk, but somewhere along the line the rubber chickens had been misplaced—reminded me that I was thousands of miles away from the States. And yet, I felt so at ease as I listened to this familiar music in such an unfamiliar setting, in some ways even more so than I have ever felt at festivals in the US. Though my ethnomusicological wheels were turning in my mind, trying to make sense of what the signs and symbols around me could come to mean in this context, I also felt like my father did: strangely at home in the cognitive dissonance that surrounded us. On the one hand, my sense of exclusive American ownership over these expressions of “Americana” was being challenged, but on the other, I sensed a direct pathway that led to the other side of Swedish-America.

For months, I couldn’t get that sensation, that feeling of simultaneous wonder and ease that I felt that day at Nääsville, out of my head. By the end of the next year of my MA program, I had decided I couldn’t ignore what was pulling me towards Sweden. I switched my area of focus from the Caribbean to Scandinavia and started trying to answer the questions that kept nagging at

me: What was this music—these bluegrass, old time, and country music styles so often thought of as quintessentially American back in the States—doing in Sweden? And what was it about this Swedish bluegrass festival that made me, an American but relative bluegrass/old time/country music outsider, feel so at home?

1. AN INTRODUCTION TO SWEDEN'S *AMERIKA*

I remember the word America as far back as the time when I could understand words...our family always spoke about America as a paradise, *ett sagans land, på svenska*. We pronounced the name in Swedish as *mer rika*, more rich. In America, everyone was rich. Rich and free and happy! (Moberg 2008, 64)

—Author Vilhelm Moberg, to the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society in Chicago, 1966

This dissertation explores the bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden and how these vibrant and overlapping communities of musicians and enthusiasts enact a particularly Swedish idea of “*Amerika*.” The Swedish spelling *Amerika* is used here for two reasons. First, as a way to distinguish between Sweden’s *Amerika* and the United States of America (also written here as “US,” “the States,” or as being “American”), which plays a major role in the story told throughout these pages. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the syllables “*mer rika*,” as author Vilhelm Moberg points out at the top of this chapter, actually sound like the words “more rich” in Swedish. This double meaning—perhaps serendipitous, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, or maybe a little of both—gets to the heart of *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination, as the land of the happy, the free, and the rich.

Throughout this analysis, I aim to show that the specifically *Amerikan* components of these spaces provide a sense of belonging to those who choose to participate in Swedish bluegrass, old time, and/or country music events. What I encountered immediately on my first trip to Nääs ville was how the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and rules of comportment differ inside the bounds of these scenes as compared both to similar scenes in the US or other non-musical Swedish spaces. These markers help to both reinforce the boundaries of these scenes as well as provide an outlet for expression that is outside of everyday life in Sweden. Though they developed in parallel to their American counterparts, Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country

music spaces maintain a particularly Swedish interpretation of these scenes' customs and norms. While technological changes—everything from easier travel to streaming music and social media—has made it possible for Swedish musicians and enthusiasts to maintain direct contact with the happenings of similar scenes in the States, distance, relative isolation, and history made it possible for *Amerika* to shine as a part of Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music spaces.

Historically in Sweden, *Amerika* has been both a literal and figurative place of escape. In the intergenerational narrative created in the aftermath of mass migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Amerika* was a literal destination. Over a million farmers, laborers, and family members sought relief from poverty and even religious hegemony when they packed everything they owned and left for the New World in search of a better life. By the later twentieth century, *Amerika* became a figure of metaphorical contention inside of Sweden. Icons of the US became symbols of protest when anti-Vietnam War activists in Sweden burned the American flag, while counter-protesters defiantly flew Confederate flags as a show of rebellion against Swedish urban intellectual ideals. During my fieldwork, I often heard Sweden described as the US's *lillebror* ("little brother") in reference to what they saw as a close relationship between the two countries. In the words of one Swedish bluegrass and country music fan:

In a way, I think that Sweden has always been like America's little brother. Or the fifty third state, or what you should call it. Because we've always been very Americanized here. Always. And that is really funny that you are researching about it, because there is this bond. . . . I mean, America was the *The Thing*. Everything new came from there. . . . America was like a big brother. Everything new, everything great came from there.

(Country and bluegrass fan, Grenna Bluegrassfestival campgrounds, 2017)

This sense of a familial bond built on strong real and imagined connections between Sweden and the United States has traversed multiple generations and is rooted in the traumatic separations of

families and stress to communities who were impacted by mass migration from Sweden to North America. As that same country music fan continued:

I personally think it's because of the big emigration. I mean, everybody, if you walk around here, they have their: "Ah, well, I have an old—my grandfather's uncle went there, and so." . . . Everybody. It was a lot of people emigrated. Some came back, but a lot of people. It was back in the end of I think it was 1880 something there, there was this, um, mis-growth of the crops in Sweden. So, the people were starving. And then they went there. There were huge ships that were just taking people over. And everybody went through Ellis Island.

As I told you, my ancestors went there, and probably yours too. They emigrated there. I think that could be a part of that bond. . . . Sadly, I have no contact with them.

(Country and bluegrass fan, Grenna Bluegrassfestival campgrounds, 2017)

This project makes use of extensive ethnographic data collected during my fourteen months of fieldwork in Sweden between 2016 and 2018, including interviews, participant-observation at music events and festivals, fieldnotes, photos, videos, and even some archival research. I use examples from Swedish literature and media, as well as illustrative tales from my own family's documents and stories, to tell the larger tale of how these music scenes came to be in the context of real and imagined heritage ties that bind the Swedish American borderlands. My goal is to explore the intergenerational impact of the traumatic and widespread separation of families and how the residual effects of that trauma continue to manifest as a component of the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. I approach this ethnography from the perspective of a vulnerable observer—one whose own history is deeply embedded in these pages—as a way to openly explore how that perspective shifted my interpretations of these scenes, as well as to provide some firsthand account of the evidence of the impact of trauma at both the familial and cultural levels and the processes through which that trauma has been transferred and transformed from one generation to the next from both sides of Swedish America.

I argue that the *Amerika* that exists in the Swedish imagination broadly, and in these music scenes specifically, is rooted in the trauma of mass migration from Sweden to North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Trauma, as I will explore at length in chapter four, impacts memory and changes the way we tell stories. On an individual level, trauma can create gaps in our memories that we then fill with narrative language that form the stories that soothe us or explain what happened during those gaps. In families, we can see evidence of intergenerational trauma in the ways that these stories are shared across generations. These narratives are codified in the ways we share our histories with those around us, in what we pledge to remember and pass on, and even in the understood silences around what we swear to forget. Trauma, however, can also ripple through a community or society as a whole. When many members of a group experience the same trauma, our shared narrative is created both by the individual and the collective as we negotiate what we agree to remember or overlook. And it was this process that produced Sweden's *Amerika*.

Examining *Amerika* through the lens of trauma studies allows us to see the agency involved in the picking and choosing of which American components are worthy of including in these Swedish music scenes. By examining intergenerational trauma as a process of transmission, we begin to see how these music scenes do not exist as an outgrowth of any "Americanization" of Sweden or of the power dynamics traditionally implied when American cultural products take root in non-American spaces. Instead, much like devotees of country music in Norway (Solli 2006) and rockabilly in Finland (Gibson 2020), the bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden invoke markers of Sweden's *Amerika* to reinforce boundaries of belonging to these Swedish scenes. These markers serve to both reinforce their "Swedishness" as members of the *Swedish* bluegrass/old time/country music communities while

simultaneously rebelling against the norms of more “mainstream” Swedish customs by engaging with “American music” and establishing rules of comportment that align with ideals of *Amerika* within these local scenes. This is the process through which *Amerika* has been passed from generation to generation as a sense of ownership over the type of iconography of Americana and the American Wild West/Frontier that is well represented in bluegrass, old time, and country musics. The sights, sounds, tastes, and social norms that are on display at Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music events create a distinctive atmosphere that takes attendees away from day-to-day life in Sweden and transports them to an *Amerika* that grew from the stories told that helped make sense of the traumatic separation of families during and after Sweden’s early eras of mass migration.

THE SWEDISH IMAGINATION

I draw the phrase “Swedish imagination” from scholarship in the realm of nationalism. Benedict Anderson proposed that at its core, a “nation” is a type of “imagined community” of otherwise unconnected people who share a deep comradeship based on their collective understanding of the community’s finite boundaries. The nation exists in the imagination in the way that the members believe themselves part of it. Even in the smallest nation, members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them,” and yet in the mind of each individual “lives the image of their communion,” an understanding that they are bound by the invisible concept of a shared nation (Anderson 1984, 6). The boundaries of an imagined community are delineated “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” and how that imagination is shared among members (Anderson 1984, 6). The boundaries of an imagined community might be reinforced by something like a common vernacular language or perhaps particular “invented traditions”—defined as “a set of practices,

normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature”—like laws, cultural practices, folk traditions, or even music (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). What truly binds people together, though, is the shared understanding of what qualifies to the collective as being within the finite boundaries of their shared community.

In Sweden, what qualifies as valid markers of Sweden’s national identity and culture have been hotly contested as a part of recent shifts in the balance of political power (Teitelbaum 2017). Initially, I approached this project not through the lens of trauma studies but with a mind towards race, identity, and the implications of spaces centered on American whiteness in the context of rapidly shifting demographics in Sweden at the height of what, at the time, was deemed a “refugee crisis” across Europe. To simplify a complex subject that is far beyond the scope of this dissertation, the mid-2010s brought a wave of migrants and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Northern Africa at rates far beyond anything that had been seen in Europe since the end of World War II. Sweden had maintained its image as a “global beacon of tolerance” in light of anti-immigration reforms throughout Europe in the later third of the twentieth century. By the time of my first fieldwork trip in 2013, Sweden had already received “more refugees per capita than any other country in Europe” (Teitelbaum 2017, 2). This brought with it a dramatic shift in demographics—at the time of my fieldwork I often heard discussions of how between ten and twenty percent of the modern Swedish population had been born outside of Sweden. What it means to “be Swedish” in the Swedish imagination, then, was a source of tense debate. My perspective as an American researcher meant I was already primed to see these tensions as built around issues of race. When it came to my interviews, however, my questions about race and identity were met with resistance. Not only were these concepts that people weren’t interested in talking about—at least in the way my American perceptions on the subject

hoped they would—but it was a direction that was largely seen as irrelevant. To the participants in these Swedish-*Amerikan* music scenes, belonging had nothing to do with race and everything to do with the music.

These political tensions in Sweden come from a common process in which the national imagination can also become, as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues, a place of “negotiation between sites of agency (‘individuals’) and globally defined fields of possibility” (Appadurai 1990, 5). In a globalized world, much of what is imported into a national culture from the outside is “indigenized” through a process of selective cultivation, eventually becoming a part of the new host culture (Appadurai 1990, 5). Sweden as a modern nation has had a tendency towards this process of cultural adaptation, leading Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (2002) to label Sweden as a “creolized space.” In Hannerz’s view, Sweden’s national imagination has emerged, and continues to adapt, based on a hidden curriculum of everyday interactions between people who are constantly navigating within, and negotiating between, influences from urban, rural, local, and multicultural ideals, while simultaneously engaging “in a free and reciprocal flow of meaning” between themselves and those around them (Hannerz 2002, 155). As a part of upholding and representing Sweden’s national identity, Hannerz argues, the state “draws some of its legitimacy from its guardianship of a shared heritage” that, historically, was partially cultivated and maintained by state media (Hannerz 2002, 157). In addition to being at the center of current political tensions, this same process is echoed in the ways in which Swedish imaginings of *Amerika* grew, in part, from Swedish media. Similarly to the ways in which art has been used by the descendants of holocaust survivors to make sense of their family’s trauma (Hirsch 2012), depictions of *Amerika* took the form of novels, movies, and even imported American TV programs about the emigrant experience in the “Wild West.” These media

depictions reinforced and retold traumatic stories in a culturally palatable way, aligning shared history with the needs of those who stayed behind and creating a foundation from which a cultural understanding of the emigration period was formed in the Swedish imagination. This is where we can start to see the collective impact of intergenerational trauma on the Swedish imagination.

Americanization, *Amerika*, and the “group culture” of collective trauma

When found in a creolized space, American cultural products are often skeptically assumed to be the result of Americanization’s brute force. Depicted as the evil twin of “hybridization”—a process connoting agency and cosmopolitanism (Solli 2006, 8)—“Americanization” is understood as a mono-directional cultural, political, and economic flow that rushes out of the United States (O’Dell 1997, 22), leaving a sense of homogeneity and imperialism in its wake. However, the presence of American cultural products does not automatically imply Americanization. Ethnomusicologist Kristin Solli observed a similar embracing of American cultural products inside the country music scene in Norway. Though Norway’s scene cannot be completely divorced from the globalized force of the United States’s military and economic powers, Solli argues that “Americanization” does not have to be understood as the inevitable wiping out of a local culture (Solli 2006, 8). In fact, she argues that country music’s position as a truly global phenomenon—not just an American genre—provides transnational connections that reinforce national boundaries. When members of the Norwegian (or Swedish or Zimbabwean) country music scenes selectively appropriate markers of “Americanness” to reinforce their connection to their local country music scene, they are in fact drawing lines that bolster and articulate their national identities. The collective agency involved in establishing the “sound” of the local scene, the attire that marks “belonging,” or even the

music that is worth dancing to, all reinforce the finite boundaries around the local scene. More importantly, it establishes what sets the local scene apart from its transnational counterparts. In Norway, country music performances underscore the “non-European” elements of Norwegian national identity by celebrating an agrarian and rural Norway, which is set in opposition to other more urban centered nations in the rest of Europe (Solli 2006, 11). In Sweden, I argue that similar music scenes assert a concentrated version of an imagined mutual—and perhaps even biologically intertwined—history with the United States.

Ethnologist Tom O’Dell, in his work with *raggare*—a Swedish subculture that embodies an *Amerikan* rockabilly aesthetic in everything from clothes, to cars, to slick and stylish hairdos—has argued that “images of America have been repeatedly delineated on paper; they have been told and retold: and become in the process the collective property of a shared memory which is itself not static, but ever shifting and under development” (O’Dell 1997, 47). Individuals and families told stories privately to assuage the grief over departed loved ones. Those stories combined with myriad media products, from books to movies to classroom lessons (see chapter four), to make sense of the collective loss. Nationally, this created “an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up” (Erikson 1995, 185) around the idea of *Amerika*. It is in this way that Sweden’s *Amerika* is steeped in a sense of agency. This “ever shifting and under development” perception of the United States is a component of the process through which trauma is passed from one generation to the next, becoming the “collective property” of the national imagination, and even what Kai Erikson (1995) calls “a group culture.” The *Amerika* I saw in action as a part of Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes—and that seeped into almost every conversation I had in Sweden about my country of origin—is the result of a community making

sense of its shared trauma. The selective inclusion of imported American imagery to Swedish cultural spaces has resulted in what Appadurai (1990) might call an “indigenized” interpretation of the United States. The *Amerika* that exists in the Swedish imagination is a result of a cultivated understanding of a shared past that emerged from widespread trauma, passed from generation to generation, and codified in the form of stories and as cultural adaptations of survival. This uniquely Swedish version of *Amerika*, as I explore throughout this dissertation, was reinforced by media depictions of the emigrant experience in the “Wild West” from the perspective of those left behind.

FROM ABBA TO ZYDECO: SWEDEN’S MANY MUSIC SCENES

Music is supposed to be fun, otherwise we wouldn’t do it. As soon as it becomes a job, it is not really fun anymore. So, I don’t want old time to become an occupation. That would be a bad thing. Because then you have to treat it with all of the stuff that comes with work. [groan] Nah. I want to just play and keep playing.

(Erling Bronsberg, old time musician, banjo)

Establishing what truly qualified as my “field” was a process of trial and error. I had seen with my own eyes that there was a community of people who enjoyed bluegrass music in Sweden, enough musicians to fill a stage and enough fans to fill the chairs for at least one day-and-a-half-long annual festival that had been going on for fifteen years. And I knew there were more.

As my dad and I reluctantly departed Nääs ville on that first visit back in 2013, we stopped to watch a band warming up opposite the jam tent. The matching stickers on the open cases at their feet indicated that this quartet—playing bass, guitar, banjo, and mandolin—of bearded, flannel-wearing twenty-somethings were the SamJack Boys, who would take the stage in an hour or so. But we had a five-hour drive ahead of us and had to hit the road. I was desperate

for this experience not to end, and my heart ached for the sound of home that was coming from this warmup session: the intertwined polyphony of interlocking strings, the strumming and plucking patterns that highlighted and supported raspy, yet clear, tight harmony singing. I awkwardly approached between tunes—smiling and playing up my “gentle but overly friendly American” act in the hopes that they wouldn’t be too frustrated by my interruption—to ask if they had an album I could buy.

While they fumbled around looking for a copy of *Let Me Rest*—a six-song, twenty-one-minute-long EP that would become the official soundtrack to the hours and hours of Swedish road tripping my dad and I did over the following weeks—they seemed surprised that I would want a CD at all. To me, this is what you did when you wanted to support a band, especially the type of group you’d see at a small festival like Nääsville. Of course, I’d come up in the American winner-take-all capitalist system of fan support that ranks the best-of-the-best (or decides who can continue to be a musician) by how well you can sell trinkets and swag. I’d made this same kind of approach dozens of times before back in the States. Sometimes it was a useful excuse to strike up a conversation with the musicians, but much more frequently I’d buy a T-Shirt or a CD or a sticker when I liked what they did on stage because, back home, this was just how you showed appreciation. Now I look back on that moment with a bit of a cringe at how American I must have looked to these guys. The more events I attended, the clearer it became that Swedish music fans are much less swag-focused than Americans. Instead, there was always a sense of quiet appreciation of the music as a part of the common good, and no sense that the only way to close the gap between fan and performer was with a monetary contribution.

Looking back, my interaction with the SamJack Boys was significant for two reasons. First, because that awkward approach was my excuse to ask about other events like Nääsville in

Sweden. The SamJack Boys were the first to tell me about the dozens of similar festivals and events every year, mostly in the summer months, each one attracting a sizeable community of fans and musicians who attended from all over the country. This got me wondering how a country known for its pop, metal, and electronica scenes could also support smaller niche communities of musicians and fans. Second, it led me to wonder why merchandise is less important in Swedish scenes than in American ones—especially if there are so many different scenes that seem to flourish. Both of these inquiries can be, at least partially, answered with a short history of Swedish policies that support non-commercial arts.

How ABBA’s runaway success led to the support of hobby musicians in Sweden

For decades, Swedish performers and producers have dominated the international pop music markets. Some of the biggest acts in the US—from Britney Spears to Taylor Swift, The Backstreet Boys to The Weeknd, and a lot more in between—have topped the charts with songs written and/or produced by Stockholm-based Max Martin and his high-powered team of hugely productive and successful songwriters and producers. On the whole, as geographer Ola Johansson argues, Sweden has managed to play a major role in the global music marketplace—way beyond what might be expected from its small size—because Swedish musicians are willing to adapt to global market trends in style, genre, and even language, as has been demonstrated by Max Martin and his successful protégés (Johansson 2010). This adaptability, Johansson suggests, comes in large part from government supported music education, including municipal music schools. When it comes to Sweden’s dominance in the global pop music market, Max Martin himself credits this public music education for his success (Johansson 2010, 139). The same mechanisms and tendency towards adaptability has also made Sweden home to countless “sidestream musics, sometimes of an underground character” that are geared towards smaller,

niche groups of fans (Björnberg and Bossius 2017, 7). All of this combined demonstrates that Sweden is a great place for music and musicians, due in large part to government support, available leisure time, and the unanticipated success of ABBA.

In an effort to counteract the dominance of commercial interests, public funding has often been directed to support cultural services in Sweden. This longstanding support for music and musicians as a part of Sweden's socialist ideals was put to the test when ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974 and Sweden suddenly found itself at the top of the pop music world. Much of the backlash to ABBA's success in the music and political worlds grew from Swedish society's "strong egalitarian tendencies," and history of vocal opposition to wealth disparity (Broman 2005, 46). ABBA's economic success after Eurovision spurred conversations around preserving the non-commercial elements of Swedish music scenes, including legislation passed in 1974 which aimed to "counteract the negative effects of commercialism in the area of culture,' and that 'it is especially important for society to offer alternatives to the private cultural supply which is pursued with an aim of pure speculation'" (Björnberg and Bossius 2017, 6). To put it simply, the "bottom line" was an agreement that "the government should provide funding for non-commercial art forms" (Broman 2005, 47). This gained unanimous support from the Parliament, given that "formulations in the bill were vague enough to allow for both culturally conservative interpretations (commercial culture as being connected with an inevitable lowering of artistic standards) and more radical ones (commercial culture as a pacifying force preventing social change)" (Björnberg and Bossius 2017, 6). This public support, and the very public

backlash to ABBA’s economic success, has created space for many, many niche collectives of musicians whose primary goal is to play and spend leisure time rather than to make a profit.¹

Long before ABBA hit the international stage, music was supported in Swedish public spaces in the form of local *Folkets Parker* (people’s parks) and *Folkets Hus* (people’s buildings), designated community spaces for live performances and dancing. These places—like Sjövikens Festplats, the location of the Nääsville Bluegrass festival—already existed all over the country by the early twentieth century. According to musicologist Olle Edström, up until the 1940s “almost every small village or town had an open-air dance floor or dancing hall, and most cities had a modest or grand FH building, which . . . reflected the idea of a common *folkhem* (people’s home), a socialist term denoting the political ambition to create an inclusive Swedish middle way” and served as vital social and political gathering spaces for working class people (Edström 2017, 15). Together, these layers of public support created an atmosphere that allowed for many niche genres to flourish, and a space somewhere between “professional” and “amateur” where Swedish hobby musicians could thrive.

Music as a hobby in Sweden

In the States, generally, a “professional” musician—whether a struggling artist or a superstar—is someone who makes a living off of music. Adults whose music does not generate income are just “amateur” musicians. The term “amateur,” however, is a designation that is often assumed to apply to the “privileged, educated strata of society who most readily access the arts” and have the “available time and resources to make choices about musical leisure” (Pitts 2019, 120). In Sweden though, neither leisure time nor musical training are particularly privileged

¹ Interesting note, Björn Ulvaeus—a “B” in ABBA—first found success as a member of an old time-style folk group called the Hootenanny Singers.

commodities. Historically, Sweden has provided strong public support for “live scenes, rehearsal space, studios and public music education” (Johansson 2010, 140). In addition, one of the major benefits to living in Sweden, by US standards, is the vast amount of annual leave (twenty-five days annually, including a month off over the summer) and the clear delineations between work and non-work life, which are well protected by law. Many people I met used leisure time to engage in formal hobby groups that brought together people with shared interests in gardening, bird watching, sailing, even fundraising for international aid projects. And, of course, music. There are obviously professional musicians in Sweden. There are even some in the smaller scenes who are paid for their music—usually enough to cover the cost of attending a festival or event. Part of what helps these smaller scenes thrive, however, is the huge number of what I came to think of as “hobby musicians”—that is, musicians who chose to use their leisure time for musical engagement.

Hobby musicians were the regular attendees at monthly jam sessions, and the festival organizers. They were the virtuosic headliners, as well as the timid first timers. The mixture of ages, technical ability, and niche interests present at any one event, were both a function of the small size of the scene(s), and a function of a political history of Sweden’s support for non-commercial music generally. This is also why I describe Swedish fans’ appreciation as seeming to support these music events as a part of the “common good,” as the opportunities for learning, playing, and experiencing music are, to an extent, not just for a lucky few, but available to everyone. Available leisure time, historically consistent public support, and funding directed towards non-commercial music endeavors, has made Sweden a great place for music, and means it is possible to be a musician without needing to design and sell t-shirts. Recording an album, as old time banjo player Erling Bronsberg explained, becomes more about credibility than success.

Having an album is about demonstrating that you are talented, hardworking, and have been together long enough to make something that lasts. It becomes more like a musical business card, helping to drum up more opportunities to play. Even the opportunities to play come with a minimal expectation of financial gain, particularly in the old time and bluegrass scene(s) where jamming is the preferred activity. Erling continued:

I have a hard time seeing music as a performance. I see it more of a way of having fun and communicating with other people. I enjoy stage performing, but on some philosophical level, I don't want it to be performing. I think it is one part of the commercialization of music. I think that it is wrong in its essence. Music is a form of communication, not a one-way street. On the other side, I like performing, but I don't think it should be that way, I don't think that's the way music has been created. But performing helps fund the jam!

(Erling Bronsberg, old time musician, Six String Yada, banjo)

That isn't to say that folks don't also love to perform. As Erling's fellow old time player—and sometimes bandmate—Peter Frövik put it:

I'm very happy that Torsåker called up and said, 'Do you want to play?' It is so nice to still be around and be wanted. We're not pushing on this anymore, and it is still fun. We play maybe twenty gigs a year, but we have families, jobs. It is great to still be around the music. It's fun!

(Peter Frövik, old time musician, Rockridge Brothers, guitar)

Performance, especially an invitation to a festival, really becomes an excuse to go into the scene and be around the music. This has the effect of breaking down the barriers between the “performers” and the “players,” making it possible for everyone to jam together. Which is one of the biggest draws to Sweden's bluegrass and old time scene(s).

For all of these reasons, from the public support of noncommercial musics, the availability of public performance spaces, to the broad availability of free time, the swath of Sweden's music scenes is wide and endlessly varied. Sweden is a paradise for metal heads, boasts a strong tradition of choral singing, and is a haven for regional folk musicians, zydeco

enthusiasts, and campy pirate bands alike. This dissertation will focus on one small corner of Sweden's myriad music scenes, which has flourished in part because of the systems that exist in Sweden to support music, the arts, and hobbies in general.

METHODS: THE PERFORMATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF A VULNERABLE OBSERVER

My method was ethnographic. My approach was based on connection making and storytelling. In the field, my goal was to be where the music was being made and talk to as many people as I could find who were making it. I wanted to hear their version of the stories, their personal histories, and what brought them into these scenes. Though not all of the sixty-eight on-the-record interviews I conducted are directly quoted in this document, each and every on- and off-the-record conversation I had with members of the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes shaped the narrative of this dissertation.

Through experience I'd learned that a surefire way to make a room full of bluegrass pickers super uncomfortable is to show up to a jam in a semi-private space—say, in the basement of a music store in Seattle—hoping to just sit back and “watch.” In order to access these spaces, I needed to learn to play along. To highlight the importance of participation in the scene in this ethnography, I looked to ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong's examples of “performative ethnography”:

I am writing from what I know. . . . From learning taiko and spending a lot of time with other taiko players. I try to do justice to an unruly group of loosely connected people who love what they're doing and agree on some things but not on a lot of other things. The resulting narrative will be neither tidy nor uniform but it will be vivid and richly textured, and it will engage with urgent issues that shape American culture generally. . . . I want to try to convey the vibrancy in the critical effects of taiko on its particularities, and to reflect on my own process of telling testimony and cultural critique. These two things are inextricably linked in performative ethnography. I can't tell you about taiko in Southern California without telling you about how and why I'm telling you about it, and I can't reflect on ethnography without doing it. (Wong 2008, 77-78)

According to Wong, a “performative ethnography” centers ethnomusicological approaches to performance analysis in ethnographic writing by showing the reader the particularities of a community through the lens of fieldwork moments and connecting the experience of those moments to the interpretation of the scene, the music, and the people who make and enjoy said music. Each chapter here is threaded with the details of specific moments or experiences that shifted or underscored my own perception of these Swedish scenes. Tales as varied as spending the days of the deadly 2017 Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally surrounded by Confederate flags at a Swedish country music festival in Halland, to a humorous play about Swedish emigrants settling into their new American homestead at a wild west theme park in Småland, to deep conversations about the true meaning of “appropriation” over American pancakes in Gothenburg. In exploring these moments, I emphasize the role that these American musics play in the formation of these tight-knit communities and how these scenes function in the context of the intergenerational trauma of mass emigration.

While I draw on Wong’s idea of “performative ethnography,” I do so with the understanding of “performative” in its broadest interpretations. During my fieldwork, I was perhaps better categorized not as a “performer,” but as a “player.” I was a participant-observer who was not exactly on the sidelines, but not on stage either. And that was a position I shared with many within the scene, who came to festivals and events for the fun of “playing” together, for the jams and camaraderie. I could also say “For the fun of jamming together.” But I am choosing the verb “play” as a way to deliberately point to its double meaning as both a verb that indicates to “make or perform” when combined with “music,” and a verb that means to “engage in, enjoy, or compete” if combined with “game.” Much of what happened while jamming often felt like a game. Sometimes a cooperative one, where the goal was to come together to make

music. Other times it was a competitive one, where the bar to entry included a quiz (“Who do you listen to?” “Do you know the lyrics?” “Who wrote that one?” “Are you going to take a break/solo?”) where your answers might determine how welcoming the circle was to you.

Musically, I was an outsider in these scenes. Though I had spent a chunk of my adulthood listening to American roots music as a fan, I did not grow up intentionally listening to bluegrass, old time, or country music. My academic interest developed long before I ever picked up a guitar and learned a little about how to participate in these scenes. Therefore, my technical knowledge—technique, repertoire, tone, and much more—was malleable, easily sculpted by those I got to know and play with in Sweden. The “emotional and intellectual baggage” I carried (Behar 1996, 8), however, proved impossible to ignore. I initially embarked on this project with the goal of not letting my heritage muddle my understanding of the “real” Sweden. This forced me to attempt to tease apart the finite differences in imagery and identities enmeshed in both extremes of the Swedish American Borderlands (see chapters three and four). Rather than forging a path towards objective, dispassionate (and likely disingenuous) prose, I chose to change tack and approach this topic from the perspective of what anthropologist Ruth Behar calls a *vulnerable observer*.

Behar’s observations center around the idea that “nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them” (Behar 1996, 5). To her, anthropology—a discipline built around the practice of “observing other humans in order to write about them”—is “the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing” available to us, but historically it has struggled due to a tendency towards the objective rather than vulnerable writing. Analysis in ethnographic writing is skewed by “the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a

particular time and place” (Behar 1996, 5). Ethnography is itself an act deeply enmeshed in our personal relationships and draws from the experience we gain by exchanging personal capital including, often, friendship. It requires empathy, trust, curiosity, and the ability to listen not just to what is being said, but to fill in the gaps around what is left unsaid. Writing vulnerably lies within the author’s ability to write in a way that exposes an “understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied” (Behar 1996, 13). The vulnerable observer, then, is tasked with sifting through the elements of the self and filtering out the irrelevant noise, because vulnerability “doesn’t mean that anything personal goes” (Behar 1996, 14).

Writing vulnerably takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of the complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly. . . . The worst that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author has made herself or himself vulnerable, the stakes are higher: a boring self-revelation, one that fails to move the reader, is more than embarrassing; It is humiliating. To assert [one’s identity in the context of their work] is only interesting if one is able to draw a deeper connection between one’s personal experience and this subject under study. (Behar 1996, 13)

The vulnerable observer must take the reader somewhere that cannot otherwise be reached, the vulnerability must be “essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake,” and create a connection that bridges the intellectual and the personal to expose and explore serious social issues (Behar 1996, 14). In this project, vulnerability has become an indispensable tool. It has allowed me to construct narratives that put faces to otherwise impersonal historical archetypes, explain in detail an embodied trauma response, and be truthful about how my personal connection to this topic shapes my analysis of these music scenes. I can only hope that the revelations shared in this text are as productive for the reader as they were for this author.

From the very beginning, this project forced introspection. After that day at Nääsville in 2013, my first impression of this music community came mixed with the exciting and confusing injection of symbols of American whiteness—and even white supremacy with the Confederate flags, and the noose in particular—that dramatically colored my initial approach to this community as a dissertation topic. My American researcher eyes saw violent symbols of racial identity as decoration, and my mind couldn't separate those symbols from their sinister roots. But those symbols were also at odds with the rose-colored glasses through which I, as a Swedish American, was raised to see Sweden. Glasses that filtered out the negative, and left a view of a progressive, egalitarian country, where these symbols couldn't possibly be used for malice; tinted both by American media depictions of Sweden (Ghanoui 2021) and the sieve of intergenerational family storytelling. But I also entered into this project with a sense of delight and joy, ecstatic for this opportunity to spend years of my life studying a genre of music that I genuinely loved, in the context of a nation I had been raised to understand as a part of my personal identity.

Positioning my heritage

My identity as a Swedish-American provided me with a somewhat unexpected amount of privilege and access during my fieldwork. My national identity, my Americanness, carried with it some level of assumed authenticity when I entered into these spaces that featured musics that drew directly from American musical traditions. Though I never saw any newcomer be directly excluded from these spaces, I saw others (non-Americans) who were received with much more trepidation than my arrival generated. But that level of acceptance came with expectations, including that I had brought with me new tunes to share, ones that were (hopefully) outside of the Swedish bluegrass canon. The few other Americans (broadly defined, as this also includes

some who hailed from Canada) who I saw participate in these spaces, either as a regular participant in a jam session or one-time attendees at festivals, were treated in much the same way. It was also consistent that if there was more than one of us present at any event, the locals (the Swedes) would make an effort to point the outsiders (the foreigners/Americans) out to one another with the hope that we would find camaraderie in our shared identity and backgrounds.

Once, very early on in my fieldwork, I was asked by a newcomer to the Gothenburg bluegrass jam if I was the group's "token American." *Oof*. This was only my second or third time at that particular jam, and I cringed a bit at the thought of being elevated to that level of recognition so early in my time there. And besides, I wouldn't have garnered any status for my own guitar picking, singing, or embodied knowledge had I been playing in the States. I had not grown up playing bluegrass. I was still a relative beginner, having picked up guitar only about a year before, specifically for the purpose of conducting fieldwork and engaging in the act of participant-observation that is so vital to ethnographic work in music. Through the process of my graduate studies, I had become well versed in the academic conversations and literature that followed the genre—a process that creates what, to me, felt like a parallel body of knowledge to those who learned by doing. Before graduate school I had been a regular at bluegrass/Americana/roots-based music events back home in Northern California for several years, but my participation as a concertgoer gave me insights into a local scene that is vastly different from the more "traditional" bluegrass scene that was largely emulated by the communities I worked with in Sweden. I learned that the hard way when my answer to the regular question of "Who do you listen to?" was met with blank stares and a response of "Try someone we've heard of." Most of what I now know about the practice of bluegrass—that is, the mechanics and etiquette of jams and related spaces as well as the canon of songs and musicians

who I regard as “core” to the genre—I learned on the ground in Sweden. I did not possess the type of insider-knowledge that was ascribed to me in these spaces based solely on my country of origin, though I am sure I benefited nonetheless.

My heritage, being able to claim a connection to the land my great-grandparents came from, also helped open doors. Sometimes I introduced myself to someone as an American researcher to blank stares, only to have their eyes light up when they saw my last name on my business card. “Ah! You’re Swedish!” was a response I heard more than once, mostly at country music events. Even though the pronunciation had long since shifted from the Swedish “AHnd’er-sSOHN” to the Americanized “ANNeder-s’n,” and the spelling changed to only one “s,” my name functioned as a beacon of my Swedishness. This would often lead to questioning about where EXACTLY my people came from. I gained clout by being able to name the towns and, in one case, even gained trust by being able to name one of my living relatives who turned out to be a shared acquaintance. Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to note where my American perspective shifted how I interpreted particular fieldwork experiences. A much larger focus, and the source of most of the vulnerability shared by this vulnerable observer, however, is on how my fieldwork forced deep introspection relating to my Swedish heritage and the ways, I now realize, that intergenerational trauma has shaped my identity.

Positioning my scholarship: The Swedish American Borderlands

In the summer of 2016, my first official fieldwork trip was meticulously planned around the dates of a summer language program in Uppsala and a list of bluegrass festivals. But in a true demonstration of the tightknit nature of the modern Swedish American community, at the last minute my brother made a connection that shaped the entirety of my fieldwork and this dissertation. At a cocktail party in San Francisco, he met Swedish scholar of American Studies at

both Augustana College in Illinois and Uppsala University in Sweden, Dag Blanck. After an email introduction, Dag invited me to attend the first official Swedish American Borderlands conference, which—it just so happened—took place in Uppsala days before I was set to start my language program. Though I was just a fly on the wall for the event’s formal activities, the ideas shared at that event gave me a new framework through which to understand relations between Sweden and the United States.

Hosted by Dag Blanck and Adam Hjorthén at Uppsala University, the event brought together senior scholars in Scandinavian Studies whose interests spanned the vibrant bi-directional gray area of real and imagined connections between Sweden and the United States. Blanck and Hjorthén proposed a borderlands framework, borrowed from American Studies and the cultural and economic convergences that span the US-Mexico border, “as a fruitful model in the study of other forms of transatlantic contacts” like Sweden and the United States (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021, 1). A borderlands approach provided a mechanism to modernize scholarship in the world of Swedish-American relations, pulling the focus from emigration and into a new, broader direction. The Swedish American Borderlands, then, was not based on geographic proximity but on the longstanding transatlantic exchange of ideas, real and imagined relationships between people, and an embrace of the interconnectedness of the two nations.

For me, as a scholar who had only just started to tease apart the confusing overlap and contradictions between Swedish America and Sweden’s *Amerika*, these ideas could not have come at a better time. This approach does not necessitate the separation between which influence is “Swedish” and which is “American” inside the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. Instead, the borderlands framework acknowledges the ever-evolving layers of overlap and exchange that synchronously shaped scenes on both sides of the Atlantic.

Recognizing the bi-directional flow of people, music, videos, recordings, and more provided a pathway to understanding the authenticity in these scenes. A borderlands framework does not lock the scholar into implied monodirectional flow of influence within the framework of Americanization and instead encourages the exploration of the shared space—in some cases physical and in others intangible—that spans the cultural and interdisciplinary approach to understanding this imagined boundary (Blanck and Hjorthen 2021). The lack of a physical border between the two nations encourages black-and-white thinking when evaluating what is “American” or what is “Swedish,” but conceptualizing the border as a historical, cultural, political, and economic space of real and imagined connections between Sweden and the United States allowed me to tease apart the many shades of red, white, blue, and yellow that color the gray area of their many overlaps.

A *VULNERABLE OBSERVER* AND ONE PERSON’S HISTORY OF OLD TIME IN SWEDEN

This willingness to be vulnerable, to open the analytical to the influence of emotion, began during my fieldwork. Early on, my interviews developed a rhythm. I would open by introducing myself, my project, and ask for permission to record our conversation. As we got used to my phone being out on the table, listening to us speak, I would tell the story of my first experience at Nääsville. How that one day changed everything for me and brought Swedish bluegrass music into my life. The story was a tool that allowed me to simultaneously: be very clear about my own emotional connection to this music, both because of its “Americanness” and because of my “Swedish” history; and to reiterate that my purpose was not to make any kind of comparison between the Swedish and American scenes, rather to appreciate the Swedish scene for the gem that it is. The story of that day has been a valuable entry point to productive conversations, and that is why I chose it (in its extended form) to open this document.

Beyond my Nääsville story and a few standard questions I would use to get the conversation rolling or restarted (if need be), my main goal was to allow the interviewee to guide the conversation. No two interviews were ever the same. Everything from their connection to the music, our relation to each other, and the location of our conversation impacted its content. Sometimes I'd only just met the person I would be speaking to for the first time when they opened the door to their home, and we would introduce ourselves as they welcomed me inside and offered me the customary cup of coffee. Other times I had spent months developing a friendship with someone before we finally had the chance to steal away for an hour and talk in a hotel room while the indoor festival went on without us four stories below. More frequently, we would meet, as I did with Håkan Berg, in a mutually agreed upon coffee shop. And it was with Håkan, a jovial mandolin/guitar/ukulele player I'd met in Gothenburg, that I first really understood what role my own willingness to be vulnerable played in the interview process.

Håkan and I had known each other for months, playing together at old time jams in Gothenburg and at festivals all over Sweden. When Michael and I had arrived at the campground in Grenna that summer, he was the first to greet us and invite us to come jam with him.² When we said not quite yet, we need to pitch our tent, he laughed and said he'd pull up a chair, crack open a beer, and watch. He always had a big smile, and a deep knowledge of old time music.

When we met in Lund for our interview, I had in my head that Håkan knew what we were there to talk about. He had heard me explain myself many times before. I honestly worried that talking about the whole thing all over again would bore him. So, I skipped it.

² My husband Michael was in Sweden for about five months of my fieldwork and participated both as a musician and as a valuable research assistant on many weekend-long trips to events and festivals.

Much to my initial surprise, our interview started awkwardly. My wonderful, boisterous friend was fumbling, and I was very nervous, stumbling and tripping over my own questions. Both of us (though mostly me) nervously laughing to fill any silences, creating forced signs of safety to appease our collectively confused social engagement systems (see chapter five). After a few minutes, he got up to get his freshly warmed pastries from the counter.

As he stepped away, I took a deep breath. A slow, controlled exhale calmed the butterflies in my chest. I needed to regroup. The words *What is wrong, girl? Get it together!* looped in my head. I resolved to start over. In order for this conversation to go where I needed it to, I had to go back to Nääs ville.

Håkan returned, handing me a freshly warmed, raspberry filled pastry that I didn't know he'd gotten for me. I was touched—also a bit excited because Swedes really knows their pastries.

“Let me tell you why I'm in Sweden. . . .” I launched into the tale. How I was here with my dad visiting family, how I couldn't believe this music was in Sweden on that first visit. I tried a couple different avenues until I said, “That festival really changed everything for me. I changed everything around because I wanted to come back and learn how it is that this music that we think of as so tied to place in the States, how it is translated to Sweden, becoming something that people spend their lives being interested in.”

Spend their lives being interested in. That's when his eyes lit up. Håkan took hold of these words. My sense of wonder triggered his sense of wonder.

“Yes!” he said, “I've actually spent my life on this. So that's very true!”

He went on to tell me about how this music was all over the world in the 1960s, how Pete Seeger, Tom Paley, and Izzy Young all came to Uppsala or Stockholm and each fanned the flame of the music in Sweden in their own ways. How the community of old time musicians

grew in Stockholm, then spread out to Sweden more generally. And how, these days, there are still people coming to old time music because they start by listening to Americana bands that they like, and then start looking for the roots of that music, working backwards in time until they land on old time tunes, the true “root” of it all.

In his youth, Håkan told me, he was thrown out of his music lessons when he was trying to learn to play mandolin. “You can’t sing! You can’t play!” his teachers told him. But he had heard Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. They sounded different. Their music wasn’t “pretty” like Swedish music, but it was great music to Håkan.

“If Woody Guthrie could sing and play the guitar, I can do that too,” he told himself. Their music led him to old time, and country blues, and more. His path following many Swedes before him who, when they discovered that “Swedish” didn’t quite fit, tried *Amerikan* on for size (see chapter three).

“Sometimes I’m ashamed that I do not know Swedish folk music,” he told me. “When I am abroad, they say ‘play something Swedish!’ I can’t. So, I must be a part of a bigger thing. Some parts in Sweden, and some parts in Denmark, and some parts in Britain, something in America. I am a global old time player. . . . As I get into the music, I get into America. . . . I know American history through the music. Slightly. And I can relate to American things better, I think, than other Swedes can. Because of the music.”

For us to get to this place—where we could talk about our shared love of the music, but also disappointments, inspirations, and pride—in a seventy-five-minute interview, took a willingness to be vulnerable on both sides. And it is with respect for the vulnerability shared with me that I’ve chosen to write this dissertation as a vulnerable observer.

ROADMAP

This dissertation features three intersecting themes: music, trauma, and *Amerika*. Woven throughout these chapters, these themes shift back and forth between leading role and background character in the tale of the overlapping bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden. As this is an ethnomusicological text, I begin with a focus on the music communities at the center of these scenes. Chapter two explores the history of Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes as informed by the oral histories I collected during my fieldwork. Specifically, I address the trajectory of bluegrass and old time across three eras of participation, demarcated by fundamental shifts in how musicians learned to play and how they found others to play with. This chapter also attempts to explain the overlapping nature of these scenes across the country, and the different contexts in which genre distinctions were, or perhaps were not, important. In chapter three, I build on the history of these music communities and go beyond the bounds of these scenes to look at how ideas of heritage tie *Amerika* and Sweden together in the Swedish imagination. Together, these two chapters set up how these music scenes relate to broader conceptions of *Amerika* throughout history in Sweden, and lead into the discussions of trauma that follow.

Chapters four and five bring us deep into the language of trauma, activation, dysregulation, memory, and the search for calming cues of safety. In chapter four, I follow the history and application of trauma studies along two distinct paths: the narrative and the neurological. Traumatic memories have been shown to exist and behave differently from the “life narrative” we refer to as memory. This is a subject that has piqued the interest of scholars since the days of the predecessors and compatriots of Sigmund Freud in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, this focus on memory shifted to how the narrative gaps created by trauma are backfilled and reimagined in art and literature, and even the ways that those gaps

influence the collective understanding of historical details. More recently, neuroscientists began to explore the evidence of an embodied trauma response and the mind-body connection that causes the sensations of emotions. These anatomical realities illuminate the easily overlooked, yet very real, impact that trauma has on the human body. With these building blocks in place, the second part of chapter four turns to intergenerational trauma and the ways in which these traumatic responses can be passed from parent to child, and even throughout a community of impacted individuals.

Chapter four takes on the challenge of explaining what trauma does to the body, so that chapter five can address how music might help. The body regularly uses its social engagement system in its never-ending search for biobehavioral cues of safety. Those cues of safety can help to calm a nervous system that has been activated or dysregulated by trauma. Music, it turns out, can trigger the benefits of the body's social engagement system by essentially simulating cues of safety. Especially as it relates to the treatment of trauma, it appears that there is much exploration yet to be done in the role that music can play in the calming of an activated nervous system. I hope, however, that this contribution to the literature can begin a conversation around the benefits of jam sessions—or perhaps other related forms of musical engagement—as a potentially beneficial activity for those with dysregulated or activated nervous systems.

Chapters six and seven focus again on the music communities at the center of this study. In chapter six, I dive into my experiences at the Killhults Countryfestival. On one particular evening, I faced not only my own ancestral pain and my past that might have been, but also conflicting indexical signs that triggered biobehavioral cues of danger in my already activated nervous system. Through the experiences I had that night at Killhults, this chapter dissects the iconography of a Swedish country festival with a focus on the conflicting meanings of the

Confederate battle flag in Sweden and the United States, and ideas about what draws participants to the *Amerika* that is regularly on display in these spaces. Finally, chapter seven explores the path that trauma can take through (re)created memories, unconscious narratives, and implied silences across generations and transform into a nostalgia for a past that lay before and/or beyond the original trauma. I also address the idea of authenticity within these Swedish scenes, and the fact that some performers even “out-America the Americans” in their quest for authentic presentations of nostalgic country music in Sweden.

My goal with this project was to understand that feeling I had of being simultaneously at home, and yet completely out of place, whenever I stepped into one of the Swedish bluegrass, old time, or country music spaces. This quest led me to question the ways in which the trauma of our past, and even of our ancestors, influences our experience of the present, and how the body responds and recovers from that trauma in the context of the choices we make on a daily basis. I cover some of these topics in detail because it appears that the neuroscience is just beginning to reach literature in the humanities and has perhaps not yet been fully translated into the language of ethnomusicology. In this era, “trauma” has become a buzzword, and has gone largely overused and underdefined; but trauma can actually be a fascinating lens through which to understand our collective histories. The process I explore in these pages—of how the pain inflicted upon our ancestors can permeate generations and flow from past to present—is not specific to Sweden or to Swedish bluegrass, old time, or country music scenes. Instead, I hope this can serve as a case study for how a trauma studies lens can be applied to other contexts, especially in why trauma might be a different avenue through which to answer the question “why *this* music?”

OUTRO

My role as a “vulnerable observer” in this project ramped up dramatically after landing on trauma as a theoretical lens through which to frame this ethnography, even more so after discovering the documents that emphasized the connections to my own family history. The fascinating thing about trauma is that, once you know what to look for, you can see the evidence of trauma everywhere. My mother always told me that after she went to medical school and learned how to “see” symptoms of illness, it was forever after impossible not to see illness everywhere she looked. That is what this project has felt like to me, and that is also part of why this project took me time to complete. It exposed some of my own trauma relating to the family stories I will tell, but also in mine and my family’s responses to traumatic events—from physical injury, to wildfires, to deaths, to political movements, to the all-encompassing experience of the COVID pandemic—over the past few years. It took me time to heal. It took time for me to see these connections. Much like Deborah Wong when she wrote “I feel taiko players reading this as I write” in her chapter on performative ethnography (Wong 2008, 77), I feel the eyes of Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country musicians and fans on this as I type. To them I say, thank you for being patient, and I hope this lives up to expectations.

2. THREE ERAS OF OLD TIME AND BLUEGRASS IN SWEDEN

In 2016, the last day of June was a Thursday. I'd just finished the second week of six at an intensive language study program in Uppsala, and this was my first weekend "off" since I'd arrived in Sweden. It was time to start the fieldwork.

Classes let out a little after 4:00 pm, which gave me just under three hours to: drop my books at the dorm, double back past the school on the forty-five-minute walk to the train station, catch a commuter train to Stockholm where I'd change to the *tunnelbana* ("subway"), disembark at Aspudden, then walk the fifteen minutes or so to Vintervikens Trädgård for the fifth annual Vinterviken Country and Bluegrass Festival.

I hadn't yet figured out how to get a Swedish data plan on my American phone, so I was relying on handwritten directions that I'd copied into my fieldwork notebook the night before as I meandered through the unfamiliar city's streets. I just knew I wasn't going to make it in time—which, for this researcher always meant getting there at least fifteen minutes early.

Each second that ticked by gave me another chance to worry. After all, this was my first chance to find this music scene since that day I'd spent with my dad three years before. *What if this isn't anything like Nääsville?* I anxiously wondered. *What if I wasted all of my efforts preparing for something that was just a fluke? What if this event is nothing like I'd described in my many funding applications, foolishly composed based on a single, accidental encounter from one lucky afternoon years ago?*

Around 7:10 pm, the directions told me to veer off towards what turned out to be a wooded path that led away from the busy residential sidewalks. Suddenly it didn't feel like I was in a city anymore. By the time I reached the end of the shortcut, trees lined both sides of the asphalt and the road was as quiet as a country path. Since I was running late, I'd been

speedwalking in an effort to make up for lost time, but the sudden appearance of nature surprised me, slowed my pace, and calmed my mind. I liked the silence.

Without the pounding of anxious thoughts and rushed footsteps, I started hearing faint music drifting in the wind. As I approached the outdoor garden and venue, two amplified men's voices grew louder and I recognized an old Appalachian ballad.

“Bright morning stars are rising!” sang a baritone melody and high tenor harmony.

“Bright morning stars are rising!” the two a capella voices repeated. The sound floated on the wind, deadened slightly by the distance as it gently broke the silence that had engulfed my senses seconds before.

“Bright morning stars are rising!” I remember vividly the sensation of the stress of impostor syndrome melting away in that moment, at the sound of a familiar ballad and that high lonesome harmony. Relief washed over me. I picked up my pace, this time with an excited smile.

“Day is a’breaking, in my soul!” *I think I found it*, I thought, as I hurried on to pay my entry fee and catch the rest of the set, featuring the two-singers-one-guitar duo the Friendly Beasts and their mix of Appalachian ballads with a distinct Simon and Garfunkel like presentation.

Searching for “A Little Cabin Home” in Sweden’s *Amerika*

Music scenes in Sweden, generally, are expansive and endlessly varied. One could spend every weekend for an entire summer at music festivals—ranging from dozens to over a million attendees—and not run out of new genres of active music scenes to experience. Or one could do like I did, and spend every weekend for two entire summers following one community as it shifted in loose formation from one location to the next, all across southern Sweden. The problem at the start of my fieldwork in the summer of 2016 was understanding the boundaries

between the amorphous and seemingly genre-inclusive scene I found at Nääsville and confirmed existed at Vintervikens and the other similarly framed “American music” (americana/folk/pop/jazz) based events I found advertised among them.

Ethnography, to boil it down to its essence, “involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives” (Emerson et al. 1995, 1). Unfortunately, what I wanted to study, for most of the people I worked with anyway, wasn’t their “everyday” life. In fact, for the folks who participated in the bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden, this was their time away from their “everyday,” away from the responsibilities of home and work, and often even away from family. It was a hobby, an activity that they regularly invested time, money, and heart in, but gatherings were ephemeral. Opportunities for participation ebbed and flowed with the seasons, with frequent large public events in the summer, regular smaller regional public jams the rest of the year, and even sporadic invite-only private gatherings. Though performing did provide income for some musicians, usually enough to pay for the trip to the festival, it was a full-time gig for very few. The ephemeral nature of these scenes, as well as the deliberate disconnect from everyday life presented a challenge for me as an ethnographer, and forced me to experiment to establish the boundaries of my study. It worked in my favor that Sweden is a relatively compact country with an excellent public transportation system. In American terms, Sweden is approximately the area of California, with a population about the size of Michigan, where most people live in the southern third that is at or just below the latitude of Anchorage, Alaska. All of these factors made it relatively easy for me to show up wherever I could find music. And there was music everywhere.

The summer of 2016 was spent travelling to every bluegrass festival I could find that took place on the weekends between language classes, including Nääsville, Torsåker, and

Vintervikens. I quickly got to know the bands on the schedule and the repertoires of the performers who were making the circuit that particular season. As this was a small community, I started to recognize members of the audience, especially the ones who regularly donned special outfits or costumes for these occasions. The genre labels tied to the marketing for these events—most frequently “bluegrass” or “country music”—began to seem more like guidelines than hard and fast rules. At first, I thought I was only looking for gatherings labeled “bluegrass.” Though these events immediately had me wondering what the term “bluegrass” really meant in a Swedish context. Because at these “bluegrass” shows, I heard songs that could fall under the category of bluegrass, sure. But I also heard songs that, back home anyway, could be called old time, Americana/folk/roots, or even country music. From internet searches and Facebook events, I could see that each of these genres had their own festivals, but there was a lot of overlap in the bands featured at events marketed specifically under all three categories.

When I returned for a much longer stay starting in the spring of 2017, my first step was to cast a wider net in order to find what, if anything, made these “bluegrass” events different. If, in Sweden, “bluegrass” also meant old time and country music, what would I find at a country music, or rockabilly, or Dixieland event? Would it be the same community of participants? The same music or costumes? I expanded my search and started looking for any and every event with an “American” music theme. This approach exposed me to a lot of variation:

- A Dixieland jazz and dinosaur-themed burlesque show where my husband and I were definitely dancing the wrong kind of swing (west coast, not jitterbug like everyone else).
- A choir’s spring performance called “Canto Goes West” where the *Kören Canto*, a Gothenburg based forty-person choir sang the songs of Ennio Morricone (Italian composer for many “spaghetti western” films including *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*), Celine Dion, and several spirituals, all while dressed to the nines in chic, earth-toned costumes befitting a Hollywood version of prairie life.

- A car show and rockabilly festival where I couldn't believe my eyes as I walked from the train station in Vårgö and watched hundreds of antique American cars cruising by, all heading to the several acre parking lot where they would show off and enjoy the day of fun and games in the summer sunshine.
- Performances by American musicians at Gothenburg's Liseberg park including Emmylou Harris, Kris Kristofferson, Kyle Gass, Eve, and even Alice Cooper.
- Concerts by Swedish performers and Nashville darlings First Aid Kit (a duo of young Swedish women who have become fixtures of the Americana scene in the States) and Jill Johnson (a Swedish country music singer who had her own Swedish television show about her life in Nashville, TN).

Through this experimentation with the idea of “American music” in Sweden, I started to see the boundaries around my area of study. Even in keeping with the “American music” theme, it was easy to stumble into something that wasn't quite right, that didn't feel like Näsäville. There were people in costumes at the Dixieland show, but they were reminiscent of fashions from American nightclubs in the 1940s and 1950s. Instead of cowboy hats and American flag dresses, women were in circle skirts and men had fedoras. Both First Aid Kit and Jill Johnson, as successful Swedish performers playing American country and roots music, seemed like a great fit for this study on paper. Those concerts, however, were more commercial and reached a broader set of Swedish fans. The crowds were much more casual, things seemed no different from the streets outside the venues. Attendees and fans of First Aid Kit and Jill Johnson were definitely lacking the special quirks of stylized outfits and rules of comportment that made the Näsäville experience feel like another world.

Experimentation helped me get a feel for what might count as “inside” or “outside the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. I use the term *scene* here to describe the communities in this context specifically because the boundaries between “inside” and “outside” were blurry—sometimes interest did not mean a fully immersive experience like Näsäville. A “scene” is a space “where performers, support facilities, and fans come together to collectively create music for their own enjoyment” (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 3). This is different from the

definition of a “subculture,” which “presumes that all of a participants’ actions are governed by subcultural standards” at all times (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 3). In a “scene,” adherence to, or performance of, cultural norms in a particular circumstance can be temporary—for example, by dressing or behaving a certain way for the duration of a festival—rather than a fulltime commitment to living by rules that are different than the “shared culture from which the subculture is deviant” (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 3). This approach to the study of music communities aligns “with a late-modern context in which identities are increasingly fluid and interchangeable” and acknowledges that “most participants regularly put on and take off the scene identity” (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 3). For example, I saw lots of familiar faces from Gothenburg bluegrass and old time jams in the crowds at the Emmylou Harris and Kris Kristofferson shows, but it also seemed to me like they were there in disguise—without the T-shirts or cowboy hats I was used to seeing them wear at “insider” events. The fact that regular participants in bluegrass and old time jams attended these concerts indicated that there was overlapping interest in these opportunities for musicking. That folks came differently attired likely also indicated that these large concerts were not deemed the right place to publicly perform their identities as members of these scenes.

This same process of experimentation and elimination also illuminated some of the ways in which the local Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes were different from similar scenes in the United States. A local scene, as described by Bennet and Peterson, involves

a focused social activity that takes place in a delineated space and over a specific span of time which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene. (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 8)

The Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes distinguish themselves from other Swedish music scenes by embracing music and costumes that fit with their ideas of these originally “American” music styles. However, the relatively small size of these communities—especially when compared to similar scenes in the States—required enthusiasts of these related, but separate, genres to combine efforts in order to provide adequate opportunity for participation. In order to have enough bands to fill all the stages, and enough events to satisfy fans and performing musicians, aficionados of these styles banded together to survive.

OVERLAPPING HISTORY OF BLUEGRASS, OLD TIME, AND COUNTRY MUSIC SCENES IN SWEDEN

Sweden doesn't have the luxury to distinguish bluegrass from old time. Because the audience doesn't know what it is! If we were to play strictly old time, we just sat down and played proper old time, a song for twenty minutes, people would leave. So, you need to incorporate singing bluegrass and all of that, the performance of bluegrass into your set.

(Old time musician, banjo, Indoor Country Festival, January 2018)

Participating in niche music scenes as a musician has certain downsides, including limited opportunities to perform and a smaller—and perhaps even more casual—audience base. What I found while experimenting with the parameters of my “field” was a banding together of musicians and fans of several related genres that effectively expanded opportunities to perform, jam, and listen to bluegrass, old time, and country music. Sharing stages across genres appealed to wider audiences and made it easier to fill festival lineups with an exciting roster of talent. In the following section, I will discuss two genres that seemed almost inseparable during my fieldwork: the Swedish bluegrass and old time scenes. While bands and jam sessions almost always differentiated between the two, and players generally chose and stuck to a preferred social musical group, audiences didn't always seem to know (or care) about the difference. As

the old time banjo player in the quote above notes, this led to some creative adjustments to stage performances.

Not having the “luxury” to distinguish bluegrass from old time in Sweden led to an overlapping history of influence and development within these Swedish genres that I came to see in three distinct “eras.” Each era is defined by how musicians learned new tunes, which shifted dramatically with available technology, as well as with access to American musical culture bearers. The first era involved sporadic pockets of players around the country who used imported American records to learn tunes, and by the influence of American Tom Paley’s time in Stockholm. The second era began with the first ever bluegrass and old time festival in Sweden, which was followed with the founding of a social organization and accompanied magazine that helped connect disparate enthusiasts and share knowledge. The third era, then, came with the expansion of the internet, ease of access to new (streamed) recordings, and the many connections—including to American fiddler Rachel Eddy—that became available around the turn of the century.

The first era: The beginnings of old time and bluegrass in Sweden, late 1950s-1977

The history of when exactly the first person picked up an acoustic instrument with the intention of playing bluegrass or old time music in Sweden is a bit fuzzy. The answer to the question of “who was first?” depends on who you ask, much like in other folk traditions that developed within living memory (Dudley 2004; 2008). Some folks claim they started playing bluegrass or old time in Sweden back in 1961 or 1962, and others swear it was before that. While there may have been individual musicians or families dotted around the country who were learning how to play alongside their imported American records in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the consensus across the board seemed to be that Swedish old time and bluegrass musics

started to come together as interrelated “scenes” with the arrival of American Tom Paley in 1963.

Tom Paley was one of the founding members of the prominent second wave American folk music revival band The New Lost City Ramblers. He came to Sweden about a year after he left the group over a political dispute, which was right around the time when The New Lost City Ramblers started to gain notoriety in the US. Paley and his wife decided to move to Europe—in part because of the Vietnam War and Paley’s eligibility for the draft. They spent two years in Stockholm before eventually settling in England, where they lived until his death in 2017. While living in Stockholm, Paley held old time workshops and jam sessions, teaching tunes and technique to any and all aspiring old time musicians. He brought with him his approach to playing the music in the old style and encouraged those he played with to listen to recordings of the original old time music from the 1920s and 1930s to get a feel for how the music should really sound. He inspired many members of some of the earliest old time and bluegrass bands in Sweden, including the Steamboat Entertainers, Old Timey String Band, and the Tennessee Travelers.³

After Tom Paley departed Sweden in 1965, folks had to get a little creative to find ways to learn about the music. One popular jumping off point was Pete Seeger’s book *How to Play the 5-String Banjo* (1962). The text contained information on how to tune the banjo, basic techniques, and charts for several American folk tunes. *Kungliga Biblioteket*, the Swedish National Library in Stockholm, had a copy of the text, and virtually everyone I spoke to who

³ Old-Timey String Band (old time) and Tennessee Travelers (bluegrass) were both featured on Sweden’s first ever old time/bluegrass album, *Kountry Koral is Proud to Present: Tennessee Travelers and Old-Timey String Band*. Each band recording one side of the LP.

played bluegrass or old time in Stockholm between the 1960s and the 1980s had checked it out at one point or another. Later in the 1960s, at the height of the folk music revival in the United States, old time and American folk musicians who were travelling in Europe would make stops in Stockholm. Groups like the New Lost City Ramblers (post Tom Paley) and solo act Pete Seeger drew huge crowds in the latter half of the decade, and their performances were often recorded and sometimes broadcast on national television.

Stories and records from the American folk music revival had made their way over to Sweden and were covered by Swedish media outlets, especially radio. Many of my collaborators who started playing old time in this era described radio programs as their first exposure to old time music. One of the most influential was an hour-long radio program that aired in Gothenburg around 1968, featuring Woody Guthrie. Several of the musicians I spoke with told me stories of having recorded the program onto a reel-to-reel recorder and listening to it again and again because they found both the music and Guthrie's life story to be so compelling. They wanted to play just like Guthrie, whose vocal timbre was unlike anything they had heard in Sweden at the time. Many pickers—a term that refers to musicians who play the acoustic string instruments of bluegrass and old time music using a “pick” or small flat, usually plastic, tool for plucking the strings of the instrument—would record music off of the radio, or order albums from the US to expand their repertoire. Then they would learn the tunes by playing along to the recordings, slowly building up a collection of songs that would eventually contribute to the canon of bluegrass and old time tunes that are well known in the local Swedish scenes.

The “jungle telegraph” that forever changed old time and bluegrass in Sweden, 1977-early 2000s

After Paley's departure, there were several pockets of old time and bluegrass musicians that existed throughout Sweden. A small community had developed in Stockholm thanks to Tom

Paley, and folks got together to organize and perform at small events and jam sessions. In this era, long before the social media that I used for most of my networking forty years later, the connections that were made were largely by accident. Bo Gustafsson, banjo player and founding member of the group Country Grass, described his experience finding band mates:

So, I ordered a banjo in that local store. I told them I would like to have a Gibson Mastertone Banjo. Okay, so they have to order that one. When the banjo arrived, I opened the case, and in that case was a little note:

‘Hello, my name is Dave Clark,’ it said. ‘I’ve noticed that you have ordered this banjo. I play guitar. Here’s my telephone number.’

So, he and I started to play together. He was a singing-songwriter kind of guy, from Scotland. So, he had a Scottish accent. But we had a lot of fun.

Later on, I met a guy named Benny. I was in the music store to buy strings, and in front of me was another guy and I overheard him, and he said:

‘I would like to have strings for my guitar.’

‘What kind of strings do you want to have?’

‘I want to have Martin guitar strings.’

So I say: ‘*Do you play Martin Guitar!?*’ And we became friends.

It was three of us playing. Dave Clark, Benny on guitar, and me on banjo. And later we had a bass player later on named Arne. Us together, and we had a band!

(Bo Gustafsson, bluegrass musician, banjo)

Gustafsson wasn’t the only one to unintentionally stumble his way into a band. Another fiddle player from this era told me his first band was formed after he happened to see two other guys busking and playing old time tunes on the streets of Stockholm. In this era, it seemed, the musicians who wanted to play this music were lucky to stumble into others who shared their enthusiasm.

In 1977, this loose network of musicians started to take the shape of a true scene with the inaugural bluegrass and old time festival in Sweden, held in the central and picturesque city of

Grenna. Though the musicians play separately, both in genre-specific ensembles and in jam sessions, the old time and bluegrass communities in Sweden shared the stage and camping areas at these music events. Bo and I met for the first time in the campground at Grenna during the jamming portion of events. It was 2017, and the festival—the longest running annual bluegrass festival in Sweden—was celebrating its fortieth year. Grenna is located in the center of Sweden, making this the perfect location for musicians from the east, west, and southern coasts to come together every year. This first festival was organized by what Gustaffsson, one of the festival’s original organizers, referred to as “jungle telegraph.” Gustaffsson was not responsible for executing the event on the ground in Grenna, but he was responsible for getting people there from all over the country. He said he knew some people and called them, and they called other people they knew, and eventually they cobbled together about forty-four attendees for that first festival. Over four decades later, this annual festival is still going strong, and brings more than a thousand old time and bluegrass enthusiasts together for the third weekend of August every year. There have since been other annual festivals that have started up, but Grenna is by far the largest, not only because of its central location and the gorgeous setting on a small mountain overlooking a large lake, but also because of its history and longtime hold on that weekend in every enthusiast’s calendar.

One of the major outcomes of that very first festival was the founding of an organization dedicated to American folk music in Sweden. The loose group, which would eventually become the official *Amerikanska folkmusik forenningen* (the American Folk Music Association or AFF), was founded by the attendees at that first festival, and immediately started producing and sharing publications the size of small magazines or large newsletters on a regular basis. The first iteration of these publications was called *Bergsbladet*, or “Mountain News,” after the “mountain music”

that they all loved and the location of the festival, high atop a hill overlooking the town and adjacent lake. The publication facilitated connections between members of the organization by publishing all names, phone numbers, and addresses of those members—which in the first edition, meant the details for all forty-four people (forty-three men and one woman) who attended the inaugural Grenna festival. Eventually, the magazine would include song transcriptions, concert announcements, reviewer notes, and articles by Swedish song collectors who had traveled to the States looking for music to bring home.

In the 1970s it became popular for Swedish lovers of bluegrass and old time music to take their love of American music on the road, traveling to the United States to learn all they could as quickly as possible. They amassed some amazing stories. Magnus Norman, one of the founding fathers of Swedish old time and the fiddler from the Steamboat Entertainers, went to the States hoping for the opportunity to learn new tunes and found himself at the Old Fiddlers Convention in Galax, VA. While he was there, he learned about a fiddle competition that was happening, and he signed up for it. Though there were folks there from all over the US, Magnus was definitively an oddity being the guy from Sweden. But he amazed them all and managed to place third in the Old Time Fiddle category. On that trip, he met the famous Tommy Jarrell, who was so impressed with Magnus that he invited him to his home for several days so they could play together. Anders Shilling, a Swedish old time fiddler, traveled to a festival in Nashville where Roy Acuff noticed his horn fiddle. Acuff was so impressed with the instrument, and with the fact that Anders had come all the way from Sweden to be there that day and find some new old time tunes, that he was invited up onto the Grand Ole Opry stage to play a song in between scheduled acts.

The second era: From local to national, early 2000s-present

The first Swedish bluegrass and old time festival and the regular publishing of *Bergsbladet*, revolutionized these music scenes in Sweden. Suddenly, instead of disjointed collections of musicians in different communities across the country, those who were interested in these American folk music genres had a tether that connected them, and an appointed time and place to gather annually and meet newcomers to the scene. Thus began the next era of development in Swedish bluegrass and old time scenes, which was marked by increased connections and opportunities to jam. This middle era was also one of increased ease of access to imported American media, as well as continued streamlining of communications and connections between American and Swedish players of old time, bluegrass, and country music in both countries.

Peter Frövik, guitarist and singer in the Rockridge Brothers, came to old time music later in this era. Peter and I met for the first time on the Saturday morning of the Torsåker bluegrass festival in July of 2017. I reached out to him beforehand via Facebook, asking if he would be down to be interviewed on the basis of his status as a current member of the board of *Amerikanska Folkmusikföreningen* (American Folk Music Association) which is commonly referred to as simply AFF, an abbreviation Peter insisted would save hours from our interview. After we fumbled a bit trying to recognize each other from our messenger profile photos, we settled into some folding camp chairs in the wind and sunshine of the grassy sports field, surrounded by tents filled with festivalgoers who were just starting to get moving and picking on the second day of the festival.

When I asked him, *why this music*, he told me: “I think you have to understand, which I am sure you already do, that American folk music and country music, was big in Sweden in the early seventies.” Peter explained that the Green Wave counterculture movement of the era

pushed many of the same social issues that arose during the folk revival in the States, and encouraged the same types of musical developments that supported political movements across the Atlantic. There were Swedish bands like Country Roads, a country group active in the 1970s and early 1980s from Örebro that sang in English and performed at the Grand Old Opry, or the Hootenanny Singers, an old time/American folk music style group from the 1960s that included future ABBA star Björn Ulvaeus among its founding members. And at the same time, he explained, there was the commercial element:

We loved Johnny Cash. I think the first music I remember hearing was Johnny Cash. The album *Man in Black* that he recorded in 1970. And my dad also listened to Swedish country music, like the band Country Roads. I grew up with country music, which I understand is very strange. But it is not my fault!

Peter joked easily and gesticulated enthusiastically as he described his youth's musical journey with an air of excitement. He started by listening to Elvis and rockabilly music, but he became a punk rocker when his best friend brought some fantastic punk singles back from London when they were the ripe old age of nine. Using lamps as microphones and guitars they made in woodworking class, they played up their new punk identities. Before long, he learned that you couldn't be a fan of both *raggare* (the Swedish greaser aesthetic tied to Elvis and rockabilly music) and punk. The two subcultures clashed. "One wants to beat up the other!" as Peter put it. So, they chose punk, and he stopped listening to Elvis. Peter figured out how to get distortion in his sound by using a tape recorder alongside his acoustic guitar, they innovated and—in a very DIY/punk fashion—made do with what they had. Eventually, after a record deal they almost got fell through and music stopped being fun for them, they quit playing for a while.

In 1997 there was a big festival called Lollipop that brought Johnny Cash to Sweden. Peter and all his friends met up to listen to Cash in Stockholm. At the show they realized that they missed playing music together, so they decided to start a country band. Unfortunately, they

found that, at the time, “Nobody loves country music. It is the most unhip thing you can do!” So, they started listening again, researching other styles of country. Like many who eventually find their ways into bluegrass or old time music, he started with country, but wanted to know where it all began. First, they found the outlaw scene, but kept listening further back in time. Next was Hank Williams. Eventually they stumbled back into what he was looking for all along: old time music. “This is even better!” he thought. The perfect combination of “DIY cool” and skill for a former-Punk/country music enthusiast like himself and his friends.

In 1999, Peter saw a small ad in the newspaper for an old time country jam session. Interested, he packed up his guitar and snuck into the venue near Central Station in Stockholm, hoping just to listen. But couldn’t believe what he found: “I had never experienced anything like this,” he told me. “I had no idea. This playing together, sitting and standing all around each other, it is fantastic!” When someone saw him lurking with his guitar, they insisted he come sit up with the group and get in on the music.

“This music is fucking amazing! And nobody knows!” At this point in our conversation, he was energized, I’d venture to say almost giddy. And I was thrilled that he was as excited to tell me about all of this as I was to hear it. In that moment I was shivering in the sunshine on the grassy field. Looking back on it, I’m not sure if it was the wind, or the breakthrough of connecting in that moment (see chapter five on the social engagement system).

“These old guys, when they are in concerts, they sit down in their t-shirts and shorts, and they are geeks!” Peter explained that he was amazed to find these enthusiastic folks who were serious about what they were doing, and who wanted him to learn with them.

Peter’s group that had at one point in time been a Punk band, and at another phase in life been a country band, shifted to play old time. Quoting an old interview with bluegrass legend

Ralph Stanley, Peter said of his band The Rockridge Brothers (in a thick American twang) “I play that old time mountain music they call bluegrass!” Taking a cue from bluegrass’ more formal presentation, The Rockridge Brothers generally play in hip, coordinated suits, often with the sleeves rolled up. Peter continued:

Bluegrass is old time music, just picked up. My band, The Rockridge Brothers, what we try to do is exactly the same as Bill Monroe and Ralph Stanley. We play old time mountain music but we try to make it ‘hot.’ We are playing for an audience that isn’t dancing. They are listening. I mean, we can play for a square dance or a contra dance if we want to. Then we’ll play fiddle tunes for a couple of hours. But, on stage we will be in our suits, and we’ll try to knock them dead with old time music.

The Rockridge Brothers came up in an era of shifting technologies. The internet was becoming an indispensable tool, and MP3s were quickly replacing CDs as the music medium of choice. After recording their first album in the early 2000s, the band was stoked. They wanted to share their accomplishment with the world, so they uploaded it to an obscure music sharing site where they discovered only one other old time band from West Virginia, The Morgantown Rounders. Eager to make connections across the sea, Rockridge reached out. According to Peter, the conversation went something like this:

Rockridge: “Oh, we listened to you!”

Morgantown: “Yeah, we listened to YOU! You’re great!”

Rockridge: “*You’re* great!”

Morgantown: “I think we stole some of your songs.”

Rockridge: “Yeah, I think we stole yours, too!”

Morgantown “Great! Let’s meet.”

Rockridge: “Okay! We’re coming over!”

Just like that, a connection was made that changed the trajectory of Swedish old time music. The Rockridge Brothers arranged a six-week tour in the US, where they got to know The

Morgantown Ramblers, especially their fiddler and vocalist Rachel Eddy, who soon after relocated to Stockholm for several years, where she co-hosted a regular series of influential jam sessions that brought new life into Swedish old time.

The third era: “Happy Wednesday” jams

By the 2000s Sweden’s interlocking bluegrass and old time scenes had access to locally published scene-focused magazines, and a growing number of thematically relevant festivals were popping up. These annual festivals provided a space for intense, all-night-long jam sessions with musicians from different parts of the country. These jams were not just a chance to spend hours doing what these players love to do, but to learn new tunes and share in acquired knowledge. Though there have been regular non-festival-based jam sessions in Gothenburg, Stockholm, and other cities, those were usually much shorter—a few hours on a weekday evening rather than all night long over a summer weekend—these events were very regional, and sometimes would stop after a few years for one reason or another. The host moved to a new home that doesn’t have the space, the bar that was hosting no longer wants to provide free beer, whatever the reason, many regional jams have come and gone over the years. Of those jams that have come and gone, one of the most influential was affectionately referred to as the “Happy Wednesday” jams by those who participated.

These “Happy Wednesdays” were hosted by West Virginia native Rachel Eddy, and her then-husband Kristian Herder, banjo player for The Rockridge Brothers. When the first American culture bearer came to Sweden to teach old time music, the approach was very traditionalist. Tom Paley encouraged a rigid adherence to the ways of old time music’s origins and pushed folks to learn the proper ways by listening to early recordings. Eddy, on the other hand, encouraged folks to learn by doing—which is how she had learned growing up in West

Virginia. Her approach opened old time music up as a living tradition, one that could shift and change with time as musicians passed the kinetic knowledge of the music from one to another, across the generations. “Happy Wednesday” jams always started with Eddy teaching a new tune by playing the melody over and over until the majority of people had picked it up and could play along. Often, the tunes she introduced were not yet a part of the Swedish canon of old time music, at least until she introduced them. Folks would then continue to jam for several hours, taking turns calling the tunes, and playing together. What folks who participated in those jams said was quite remarkable about this particular string of jams was that it was the first attempt in Sweden at really bringing together the different generations of musicians. Eddy was especially welcoming of the younger players, and she encouraged those who participated to take and make this music their own.

These jams were the first opportunity for a new generation of musicians, some of whom had parents who were already active participants in the scene, to grow up playing old time music. Some of them, like prolific fiddler and vocalist Agnes Brogeby, really took to Eddy’s method of learning-by-doing. Agnes grew up as a part of this Swedish old time tradition, as the daughter of E.B. and Bert Brogeby of the Steamboat Entertainers. She didn’t become interested in playing the music herself, however, until after Eddy’s arrival. She experienced firsthand the shift in how old time functioned as a tradition in Sweden. According to Agnes:

When I learned how to play, I didn’t listen to it. It took me one and a half or two years before I started listening to old time. I had the opportunity of learning from other people and playing with them. Which the older generation didn’t have access to because they were the first ones in Sweden to play this music.

And for me, one of the reasons that I started playing old time and liked playing old time was more the community part of it. To hang out with other people, playing music together, that’s what I enjoyed most about it. Not necessarily the music itself, but more just the joy of playing the music with other people.

They've spent so many years fighting so hard to learn. It's been so much easier for me to learn the music because I've had people who've shown me how to do it. And I've had the internet, I've had apps to slow down the music, so it has been much easier for me to learn.

(Agnes Brogeby, old time musician, Six String Yada, fiddle and vocals)

These shifts in the ways in which new Swedish old time players could access recordings, and the re-introduction of old time as a living tradition in Sweden, pushed the boundaries of the music and helped more younger players find their way into the scene.

VISUALIZING SWEDEN'S OVERLAPPING BLUEGRASS, OLD TIME, AND COUNTRY MUSIC SCENES

These days, these vibrant, but comparatively small scenes continue to find success by working together on events and festivals. In order to learn about the various happenings around the country, many participants support these communities by joining organizations like AFF or Smålands Country Club, two groups that distribute regular newsletter-magazines, host events, and sponsor festivals that highlight these “American” music scenes in Sweden. According to one AFF board member, there were around 400 musicians actively playing bluegrass and old time music in Sweden in 2017. That number however, doesn't account for those who are more casual participants, those who may not join groups like AFF but still take part in festivals and events. In fact, that same year's Grenna Bluegrass Festival had at least two and a half that many people in attendance, a clear sign that there were many more people who enjoyed these spaces as fans, or more casual participants. At these larger events, folks—especially musicians, both performers and players—clumped together in groups that regularly reflected their genre preferences. Bluegrass jams were separate from old time jams, for example. And many smaller, local events—like regular jam sessions in Gothenburg and Stockholm—adhered to these genre categories.

With all of these factors in mind, and after much experimentation to understand the boundaries of my “field,” the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes started to look something like Figure 1 in my eyes:

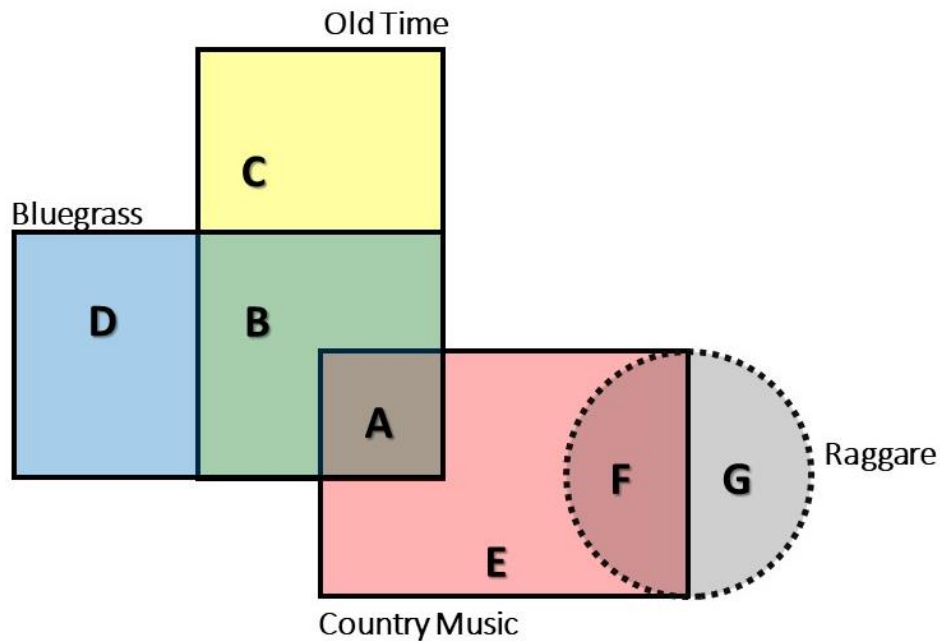


Figure 1: Author's visualization of the overlapping and intersecting bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden.

The boxes in Figure 1 represent the overlapping bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes as well as the occasional overlap with the related but separate *raggare* subculture that embraced a rockabilly aesthetic, though with more emphasis on classic cars than music (O'Dell 1997), in Sweden. These scenes included networks of musicians, fans, and organizers, who were connected via social groups, magazines/publications, and Facebook communities, and who gathered at both local events and translocal festivals.

The green area labeled “B” in Figure 1 is the overlap in which I spent most of my fieldwork time, and is the space that best represents the musicians and fans at that first Nääs ville

festival. Due to the size of the scenes and their origins in Sweden, festivals and events that advertised as “bluegrass” also invariably included old time bands and musicians. Many musicians could switch between the two—stylistically and canonically—but everyone had their preference as to which genre was the right “fit” for them musically and socially. This box also included much of the work of AFF, and often some pops of musical color that might liven the sonic texture, including Cajun, blues, or other Americana/roots music that were given prime space at sponsored events. At “B” style events, there were always cliques of musicians who gathered to jam specifically as “old time”—yellow section labeled “C”—or “bluegrass”—blue section labeled “D”—players. When it came to performances, sometimes bands could be easily placed in a genre category before you even heard a note. Old time groups generally dressed more casually, wearing blue jeans and t-shirts on stage. Bluegrass performers, on the other hand, often wore coordinated outfits reminiscent of Bill Monroe’s aesthetic in the 1940s and 1950s, which read from the audience as much more formal. Otherwise, besides costuming and repertoire, the two genres differed in their overall approach when it came to jam sessions. While old time jams generally focused on a repeated heterophonic instrumental melody, bluegrass jams were far more centered on songs with sung lyrics and harmony that allowed for the regular interjection of instrumental solos. This isn’t to say that bluegrass jams didn’t play instrumentals or that old time jams didn’t have any singing, but the approach to playing those types of songs in a jam setting was completely different. Bluegrass and old time players would also gather independently at smaller regional events, sometimes even traveling together in genre specific groups to festivals in Denmark or the United States.

When The Rockridge Brothers first traveled to the United States, they found a warm, but confusing, reception. After performing in one small town in West Virginia, Peter told me:

There were lots of older people that came to this venue. And we played old time music. Afterwards, this old lady came up to us—she must have been in her nineties or something, and she said:

‘Hi boys! That was the best darn bluegrass I heard in years!’

And I was like, ‘Ok, I thought we played old time? But . . . okay! If you say so!’ (Peter Frövik, old time musician, The Rockridge Brothers, guitar)

In my mind, their experience mirrored my initial response to Swedish old time bands.

Sometimes, they did sound a little “bluegrassy,” and I could understand why audiences on both sides of the Atlantic would have trouble teasing apart the genres. However, the longer I looked, and the more I talked to folks about the differences, the clearer these distinctions became.

Perhaps some of the broad strokes of these two interrelated genres in Sweden are best explained in the words of the musicians themselves:

On old time

We have a sort of “anything goes” attitude in the younger generation. It must be acoustic instruments. Must be banjo and fiddle, those are needed. After that, it is up for grabs. Accordion, harmonica, percussion, and washboard are maybe okay. But not actual drums. Spoons and washboards are pushing the limits. It doesn’t matter where the songs come from. Doesn’t have to be clawhammer. Finger picking is okay. There has to be a four beat. Well, maybe three, but it is more fun to play in four.

(Old time musician, banjo)

There is something about the old time that is more “tickly.” It makes me feel like I’m more—because it is unrefined somehow. It is very raw and dirty and honest. It is not about the pretty package that bluegrass can bring you with the super-neat harmonies and stuff. I adore that too, I love it, but I like that *raw* stuff. And there’s no mandolin, no chuck chuck . . . somehow, I like that. But for now I’m back in the bluegrass because of the harmonies, and the singing. I’m fluctuating.

(Bluegrass and old time musician, mandolin and bass)

It makes me appreciate the music more if everybody is involved. You said earlier that I am at the top of the food chain in the old time community, so the cliché that with power also comes great responsibility, blah blah blah. But I also feel that that attitude is needed in the old time community, just to get everybody involved. If you don’t have an instrument grab one. Start playing. Doesn’t matter if you can’t. Just play it. It’s not that hard. Learn as you go. And I feel that that is needed. And whenever I notice someone

who is not contributing to that type of mentality, like I said, the people who act like they have the biggest dicks in the room, I'm quite ready to shut that down in jams that 'm in.

(Old time musician, banjo and guitar)

On bluegrass

It should hurt to sing bluegrass music. It shouldn't be comfortable. I always loved that kind of voice.

(Bluegrass and country musician, guitar and vocals)

It is pure, it is clean, what you hear is what you got, you can't fake it, and I love the emotions involved. The primitive sort of emotions. . . . It is very primitive, mountain style music that you are just kind of born with. I'm not born with it. But I try to imitate it sort of, that feeling.

Like this [gestures to the musicians jamming beside us] they do it because they love it. They don't do that because they want to get famous or to be in a TV show, or to compete with that Bieber guy or something, know what I'm saying?

(Bluegrass musician, banjo)

I think that our mixture of bluegrass and old time, for bluegrass it is a bit more showy. It is about fast solos and cool playing/tight harmonies. Old time is more friendly. That's how I see it. It tends to loosen up people, a bit.

(Bluegrass and old time musician, guitar and banjo)

Most bluegrass tunes are usually three chords, sometimes four, five, but you don't have to be extremely skilled to start to play bluegrass. You can still sort of jam along. You don't have to take breaks if you don't want to, but is also a kind of music which is fun to listen to. So, it is very accessible. It is not very complex on a basic level. But you can still evolve as a musician in that genre.

You can evolve technically as well, you can play extremely technically, or extremely fast if you want to. And you can also evolve, playing with different feels in the music or different styles. It is easy to get started, and you can grow as a musician for a long time. And it is also very special to play with others and to have to listen to people who are there now on songs that you haven't really rehearsed.

(Bluegrass musician, guitar)

When it came time to jam, that was when one's chosen genre category would send players to opposite circles. While old time jams were somewhat fluid, with chosen tunes lasting

twenty minutes or more while many instrumentalists shared the repeated melody, bluegrass jams were more regimented. In my experience of these spaces, old time jams elevated those with knowledge. The floor was usually open for anyone to call a tune, but those who were confident with more tunes were relied upon to fill any gaps. At bluegrass jams (which will be discussed at length in chapter five) the reliance was on those who knew lyrics and were willing to sing, since the singing is what provides respite from the many solos as the chance to shine is passed around the circle.

The spaces where I came to expect to hear the largest variety in genres across all performances were events marketed as “Country Music” festivals, represented in Figure 1 with the red box and labeled as “A,” “E,” and “F.” At the center of this overlap—represented by box “A,” were festivals that hosted all three genres, but were usually marketed under the broadest genre category of “country music” to attract a variety of fans. Generally, Swedish country events had a nostalgic/vintage feel. The bands that got the biggest response were ones that fell, in US terms, somewhere in between the loud and rhythm-forward honkytonk style of Hank Williams and Ernst Tubb, in outfits that reminded me of the sleek and colorful stylings of country-politan performers like Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton in the 1960s, though with fewer sequins. The music generally aligned with the category of honkytonk, which originally developed in the post-WWII United States. Meant to resonate with the young, working-class Americans of that era who were looking for accessible entertainment in a time of mass migration from rural areas to urban centers. Honkytonk is generally loud, rhythmic dance music, with lyrics that focus on romantic relationships and the heartaches of the men and women who would have frequented the loud, smoky, honkytonk bars in that era (Starr and Waterman 2014, Fox 2004, Neal 2013).

Country festivals in Sweden would have a couple old time and/or bluegrass bands on the lineup, providing a nice break in texture. These genre crossovers, I came to learn, made sense in large part because of the overlap in performers. Some of the more active stage performers in these scenes could be found playing both the acoustic styles of either old time or bluegrass (and sometimes both), then picking up their electric guitars to play with a honkytonk band. A great example of this would be the groups Spinning Jennies (bluegrass, sung in Swedish) and the Green Line Travelers (honkytonk, sung in English) both of which feature an overlapping cast of musicians and David Ritschards as their front man. Section “A” of Figure 1 would also include publications from AFF, including *Rootnotes*, and its predecessor *Bergsbladet* that spanned multiple genres, as well as *Kountry Koral*, which focused on country music but included many references to old time and bluegrass musicians, events, and record releases.

Here is where we reach a particularly blurred boundary in this fieldwork diagram: the two halves of the circle labeled “F” and “G.” These represent what is known as *raggare* in Sweden, or what we might call rockabilly in the States. Invariably, festivals with a “country music” label in Sweden would also feature bands that combined a hillbilly edge with the rock n’ roll style of Elvis Presley or Johnny Cash, as represented by the area labeled “F.” Stylistically, rockabilly aligns well with the vintage country music that was regularly on display at Swedish country music events. Both genres grew from the same roots of early recordings of blues and hillbilly musics in the United States. Rockabilly emerged in the 1950s as a genre of white rock n’ roll that existed, as early recordings of Elvis did, in the space between what were marketed as rhythm and blues, and country western recordings (Garofalo and Waksman 2017, 75). I saw plenty of retro rockabilly at country events in Sweden, but events specifically marketed as *raggare* weren’t just about the music. *Raggare* in Sweden is perhaps better described as a “subculture” than a “scene,”

as this was an identity category that, by some, is carried into everyday life. This wasn't just music and outfits, but also car clubs, merchandise, and, sometimes, politics (O'Dell 1997). *Raggare* is rooted directly as an identity that exists in opposition to the dominant culture in Sweden. It began as a kind of counterprotest by a subset of Sweden's rural population that were opposed to vocal and politically powerful urban intellectuals beginning in the 1960s (O'Dell 1997, also see chapter six in this dissertation). There was less direct crossover of musicians from the Nääsville adjacent scenes to specifically *raggare* events. While bluegrass, old time, and country bands were regularly found listed on the lineup for festivals marketed towards rockabilly fans and vice versa, in both my interviews and experience in the field *raggare* were generally framed as a separate community from the other three. All of this is to say that while I could not ignore the presence and influence of *raggare* at relevant events during my fieldwork, this dissertation does not go into detail about the music and preferences specifically relating to the *raggare* subculture.

I recognize that on paper these overlapping Swedish music scenes might sound chaotic. In practice, though, the connections feel almost instinctive. The blurred boundaries between enthusiasts of these separate genres were logical and easily traversed by musicians and fans alike, and in fact the relatively small sizes of the related scenes both necessitated and encouraged regular crossovers. Bands willing to perform at events that were not specifically geared towards their preferred genre still found crowds who were excited to hear them play. Event organizers were able to fill annual festival lineups with both trusted and new names that kept fans coming back year after year. Experimenting with the bounds of different "American music" scenes in Sweden solidified in my mind that musicians and enthusiasts in the bluegrass, old time, and

country music scenes in Sweden made the conscious choice to be a part of a community of like-minded music lovers, and that these interrelated scenes were indeed something special.

These scenes exist in a way that maintains both real and imagined connections to the scenes of origin in the United States. The real connections came in the form of both Americans who came to Sweden to play these musics, and Swedes who went to the States to connect with other musicians. It also grew from virtual connections made in dedicated online spaces and recordings, new and old, of this music across generations. It is the imagined connection that will be the focus of the majority of this document. These scenes are unique in the imagined version of *Amerika* that is regularly enacted in these spaces. As I will begin to explore in the following chapter, the *Amerika* on display at Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music events is unique to these spaces in Sweden. It is a version of *Amerika* that I argue can be traced back to intergenerational trauma that grew from the disruption of families during the decades of mass migration from Sweden to North America in the early nineteenth and late twentieth centuries.

3. THE HERITAGE 'OVER THERE'

I remember the first time I heard Albin's voice. It was 2016, and a very damp Saturday at the Torsåker Bluegrass Festival. The relentless drizzle had just started to give way to patchy blue skies as I perused the *fika* options at the vendor tables for a pick-me-up, overwhelmed and overstimulated by all of the new, exciting, and important things I'd already seen by late afternoon on this early-fieldwork daytrip. It was Albin's booming bass vocals, and the three-part harmony in Six String Yada's rendition of "Way over Yonder in the Minor Key," that snapped my attention back from pastries to music.⁴

Suddenly, I was home. And not just back in the States, but back among the dusty tents and redwood trees of the Kate Wolf Festival in Laytonville, CA, listening to the up-and-coming set of local Northern California performers like the Blushin' Roulettes or Elephant Revival.

This wasn't the soft, saccharine sound of Kingston Trio-type revivalist performers, or the tinny, nasal, tightly stacked harmonies of Bill Monroe enthusiasts. They sang in a morose, almost punk-like timbre, with voices harmonized across the octaves that separated bass, tenor, and alto. With two fiddles, clawhammer banjo, twelve-string guitar, and at times concertina, bass, and harmonica, their instrumental sound was complex and rhythmically textured. With driving tempos these musicians sped, intentionally, in tight formation through familiar standards and original tunes, shifting seamlessly between polyphonic vocal harmonies and heterophonic instrumental melodies. The cumulative effect was that of being both comfortable and familiar, as well as tantalizingly out of the ordinary—for my ears, a winning combination.

⁴ I later learned that Albin was not a regular performer with Six String Yada. That day's performance was a mix of members from Six String Yada and the Friendly Neighbourhood Stringband, two separate groups with overlapping members and repertoire. It was common to see groups join forces to fill in gaps at festival performances.

Albin Ekman was the source of many of my initial entry points to the Swedish bluegrass and old time scenes. I found the fiddler/vocalist hanging out in front of the merchandise table that day after his performance and struck up a conversation about his music, my project, and the black and white “AE↔AE” trucker hat he was wearing (a reference to the fiddle cross tuning, in the style of the well-known Australian rock band AC/DC’s logo). Albin opened many doors for me by making introductions, clueing me in to online groups and resources for bluegrass and old time in Sweden, giving me a heads up about some lesser-known events, and even getting into the spirit of the season by making a treacle tart for a Thanksgiving themed jam session (turkey dinner with all the fixings included!) that I hosted at my home in Gothenburg. Our conversations over the years, both on and off the record, guided me towards much of what eventually became the content of this dissertation.

In August of the summer when we first met, Albin and I sat and talked for hours in a somewhat quiet back corner of a bar that I would later come to know as a hangout spot for old time musicians in Gothenburg, especially in the hours after their monthly jam that was held in a tiny café a few doors down. Our conversation meandered between my stiff-yet-official prepared questions and the free ranging topics of two people becoming friends: from how the polls showed little chance for Trump in the upcoming 2016 US presidential election; to tales from his time living in the States as a teenager; to my curiosity around why one of his bands, the Friendly Neighbourhood Stringband, chose the British spelling for their name (answer: he’d never really thought about it before). Eventually, we turned to what would become my favorite question across all of my interviews: “Why *this* music?” According to Albin:

Personally, when it just comes to the tunes, at the end, we’re all just making noise. It’s sounds. It’s nice sounds, which is the important bit. But I’ve gotten really fascinated with the stories behind the tunes. I know for sure that if someone has, like, a story behind a tune that really touches me, I’ll remember

the tune better, and I'll play the tune better, and like, even if the tune is like "eh" to begin with, I'll listen to it with new ears. . . .

The tunes, they say so much. For some reason, I feel really connected to a lot of the history there, and I think a lot about how a lot of the people over there, they could be my relatives. My line of heritage is like, I'm descended from the people who didn't have to leave, right? That whole history, like, really resonates with me. . . .

The Swedish folk music, I love the stories and stuff, but for some reason I've been really taken by the whole American music thing, and I identify in some way with that whole heritage element, I suppose. It feels relevant to me. You know the tune "Sixteen Tons?"⁵ Even though I'm not at all from a working-class family, **I'm like, 'Yeah. This is me. Feels like me.' It is not at all, by any means. But it just really resonates with me for some reason.** And I'm just really taken with that part of the music. I found the music because I liked the noise, ya know? But I've stayed with the music because of the stories.

Across many interviews and conversations, variations on the idea of heritage were tossed around rather casually. Sometimes it was familial, perhaps biological, or maybe just cultural, but references to that connection between Sweden and the United States were so common—the foundation of any conversation about the US in Sweden—that I almost didn't notice. Like the air we breathe, it was ever present, fundamental, and easily overlooked. I was initially so focused on not letting my Swedish American identity "get in the way" of my "impartial" data collection, that "heritage" was off-limits for me. That was, until Dr. Barbara Lundquist introduced me to some emerging scholarship in trauma studies as we chatted over dinner at a department party in Seattle many months after the end of my fieldwork. Trauma studies is an interdisciplinary field of work that examines the impact of trauma on people, culture, and community. Familiarizing myself with trauma's impact on memory, the body, arts, and even across generations opened a new vantage point to the Swedish American Borderlands, and *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination. It

⁵ A 1940s era Merle Travis song with lyrics about the lives of coal miners that became popular in folk circles during the American folk music revival of the mid-20th century: "I load sixteen tons, and what do you get?/Another day older and deeper in debt."

was almost like the gray area between Sweden and the United States was suddenly in technicolor. In this chapter, I explore the source of that initial trauma and examples of how that trauma has shaped Sweden and these music scenes.

Again and again during my fieldwork, I watched Albin and his cohort—which that first day included Erling Bronsberg, Agnus Brogeby, and Simon Nyberg, among others, but in the broader sense included a wide range of young musicians from around the country that often played together at public events—demonstrate a mastery of this old time, bluegrass, or country “noise,” to use Albin’s terminology. I argue that their mastery, however, came not just from the instrumental technique or execution, but from deep intergenerational ties that connect the Swedish imagination to the stories found in these tunes. This connection, I argue, has created a uniquely Swedish *Amerika* which emanates from the intergenerational trauma that struck families and communities fractured by mass migration. The stories told in bluegrass, old time, and country songs were shared with audiences from festival stages, translated at jam sessions, and explained in detail in interviews. Sometimes the story was about the lyrics, or searching for Swedish translations for words that were unique to Appalachian vernacular English (“holler/hollow,” meaning the valley between small mountains, was a recurring example). Other times we learned how a song came to be a part of a musician’s repertoire—passed from musician to musician as treasured knowledge. Often the stories contained a quiz on who wrote or performed the song first, or a short history lesson about how the topic fit into the tale of the United States or the Wild West. Almost always, these stories were received with an air of understanding, as if any new thread of information was immediately at home in the tapestry that is *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination.

Like Albin, many folks I talked to offered some version of how this music “feels like me,” or that this music is something you are “just kind of born with.” These statements were usually followed with an “it is not at all, by any means”, or “*I’m* not born with it,” or another self-conscious afterthought that tempered claims of ownership over the American musics with which they identified. Recurring references to authentic connections—be they real or imagined, biological or cultural—to the music and its roots came across as simultaneously intuitive and self-conscious. In this chapter, I explore how these opposing perspectives came to coexist in these scenes that thrive in the context of the Swedish American Borderlands, and how the heritage element that Albin describes is rooted in the collective trauma of migration that grew into the *Amerika* I saw regularly on display during my fieldwork.

HERITAGE FROM HALMSTAD TO HEALDSBURG

Sweden and the United States share a long history of overlap and interactions, a bidirectional flow of people, ideas, and cultural products that goes back more than two centuries. Between 1825 and 1930, around 1.3 million people—approximately one quarter of the population of Sweden at the time—emigrated from the southern farmlands of Sweden for a promise of a better life in America (Anderson and Blanck 2011). About a quarter of those who left for the United States returned home after making enough money to restart with a new life in Sweden, bringing back with them tales of the New World and the Wild West. But the vast majority of these emigrants never came home again. In Sweden that loss is still deeply felt, and makes its way into everyday conversation. Many of the folks I worked with and interviewed during my fieldwork talked about having “relatives in America” when discussing their love of American music, but long-gone great-aunts and -uncles were a frequent topic whenever I met new people in Sweden, both inside and outside the music communities I studied.

To a handful of people in Sweden, it just so happens that I am one of those “relatives in America.” I grew up in a very Swedish American household. My father’s four grandparents were all born in Sweden and immigrated to the US between 1906 and 1912, all eventually settling in the same small town of Alta, Iowa. To hear my dad talk about his hometown, you would think that he grew up in a Swedish time capsule. Alta was made up of many who, in the early 1900s, had gathered what little they had and left the only home they’d ever known for the promise of a better life in the States. My father’s childhood community was one that revolved around farming, with elders who still sometimes spoke Swedish in the fields; and the local Swedish Lutheran church, where my grandparents and great-grandparents were married in ceremonies with a Swedish-speaking pastor, and where my father and his siblings were all christened and confirmed.

Through several serendipitous encounters and the work of diligent family genealogists, my father has managed to maintain contact with the descendants of those who stayed in Sweden from three of the four branches of his family that left for the States. Because of these connections I’ve been to Sweden many times in my life, the first when I was only three months old. When we went on these pilgrimages, beyond visiting with relatives—which now include dozens of second and third cousins—my father was in search of what he thought of as the true authentic Swedish experience. We spent many days driving through the countryside, stopping in churchyards to visit grave sites, in farmlands where we think, just maybe, the pile of bricks is the remnants of where the home that belonged to our ancestors once stood, and enjoying preserved historical sites that glorify the days before mass emigration. Each stop was an attempt to understand what hardships led each of his grandparents to decide to leave for the New World, and to heal from a sense of loss that has been passed from his grandparents to his parents, to him, and to me. It was

on one of those trips, when we were searching for our imagined idea of an authentic Sweden, that I stumbled into this dissertation topic by ending up at the Nääsville Bluegrass Music Festival.

We had spent the days before Nääsville staying with family. Halmstad was just a few miles away from the small farming community of Linghult, the ancestral home of my father's-father's-mother (*min farfars mor* or my great-grandmother) Anna, who emigrated to the States in 1912, alone and unmarried at the age of twenty-one. We spent our days there much as we usually did on these trips, visiting with family, enjoying ice creams in the Swedish summer sunshine, and making the trek out to see whether the old farmhouse—which had stayed in the family for generations until it was sold off without warning by one of Anna's nephews in the 1990s—in Linghult was still standing.

A couple of nights before our day at Nääsville, our hosts Carin (whose grandmother's sister was my great-grandmother Anna) and her husband Bosse put together a lovely dinner for us with about ten other members of Anna's family. The closest to Anna, the one who knew her from her return visit in the 1950s and stories his father told about his sister, was Anna's nephew Lars-Arne. Lars-Arne didn't speak much English, and at the time my father and I didn't speak much Swedish, but when he arrived and saw us, he was so happy! He threw out his arms and gave me this big, strong, familiar hug. I felt as if I'd had this same hug—the same joy and sentiment in the embrace of this same sturdy, angular frame, and muscles softened by age but earned through a life of hard work and farming—a thousand times before from my father or his father before him. But even more touching was the joy in his face when he looked at me and my dad. Joy that we have returned, as a kind of tether to the family he lost when Anna moved away. That night, the conversations started out about our current lives:

“How is your brother doing?”

“Where are you living these days?”

“Does my aunt have one or two granddaughters now?”

Eventually, sometime around the *kaffe* (“coffee”) course, the conversation came back around to Anna and her siblings.

First was the debate about *when* Anna left—was it 1912? 1914? Dad insisted it was 1915, but Birgitta (my dad’s second cousin, another grandniece to Anna) was certain it was earlier. After some debate, and after my father was proven wrong by his own notes on the subject, Birgitta asked the real question that perplexed the three generations sitting around the candle-lit table:

“But *why* did she leave?”

The truth was that none of us actually knew the answer. Anna Justina Larsson was a twenty-one-year-old unmarried woman when she emigrated. She was the sixth of her parents’ nine children, and yet she made the arduous journey alone as the only member of her immediate family who ever went to the States. While there had always been some vague family story that she had emigrated on invitation from a man she intended to marry, no evidence of such a person has ever materialized. She did eventually get married, but to a Swedish-born man (Hjalmar Anderson, my great-great-grandfather) she met while working on a farm southwest of the town of Alta, Iowa—and not until about three-and-a-half years after her arrival. We really don’t know why she packed up her things, spent her life’s savings on a ticket, and left her home for an unknown future.

As she asked the question *why*, Birgitta’s voice betrayed the true sense of loss we all felt as we sat together on that summer’s evening, more than one hundred years after Anna left

Linghult for the United States, and brought tears to my eyes as the table grew quiet. Three generations later, that loss of a family member to opportunities across the Atlantic was still being mourned by those left behind. For them, perhaps it brings a little closure to have us come back and be happy and healthy. Maybe even a little better off for having left the homeland to start over.

For me, and I think for my dad too, it brings a sense of belonging to return to Sweden and see the family that should have been ours. To see the land they left, and try to understand what motivated them to go, leaves me feeling simultaneously at home and out of place. And hanging over us were Birgitta's words. Words that, in my ear, echoed ones I'd heard my father repeat many times before, quoting his own mother. He had brought her on a similar pilgrimage to Sweden in 1976. As they traveled the country looking for the places where her own parents had grown up, she saw the stark contrast between these scenes and the ones she knew well after an exhausting life spent in Iowa's farmlands. As she reflected on her own difficult journey as a part of her family's first generation of Americans, and compared it to the lush, vibrant country around her, she remarked:

“Well, why did they *leave* in the *first* place?”

THE COLLECTIVE TRAUMA OF MIGRATION IN THE SWEDISH AMERICAN BORDERLANDS

More than a million people emigrated from Sweden to North America in the decades between the 1840s and 1930s. All told, this amounted to a loss of up to one-quarter of Sweden's population to the New World, “making it proportionally the largest exodus of people to the US from any single country” (Paul 2019, 186). Departures came in waves spurred by shifting motives, including Jansenites seeking religious freedom in the 1840s, followed by hunger-driven emigration in the late 1860s. Perhaps the biggest wave took place between 1880 and 1914, “an

exodus which was so troubling for Sweden that the government not only commissioned a detailed inquiry, it went so far as to found an association whose purpose was to oppose emigration” (Wallengren 2014, 8). While a bi-directional flow of people between Sweden and the United States continues to this day, perhaps even in greater real numbers than in days past (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021), my focus here is on these earlier waves of migrants. I argue the trauma of these earlier waves of migration were the source of the shared narrative, an amalgam of many stories both private and public, that shaped the version of *Amerika* regularly on display at Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music events.

Mass migration from Sweden to the United States was a boost to American capitalism that came at the expense of Swedish modern industry. While the US gained able bodied workers and manpower for westward expansion, the cultural impacts of Swedish migrants were fairly muddled within the collective chaos of the “melting pot” of the comparatively massive population of the United States in the pre-World War II era. In Sweden, however, these losses were a wound that cut deep, and spurred real and imagined cultural connections to the States that have held firm across generations. According to literature and languages scholar Ronald Paul, Swedish industry “was delayed well into the twentieth century. Even today in Sweden there is a sharp discrepancy between town and country in which the process of urbanization has left a long trail of slowly dying villages” as a result of the disappearance of workers (Paul 2019, 186).

Generations later, modern Sweden’s population is still comparatively small for a country of its land mass (Paul 2019). In US terms, Sweden is slightly larger than the state of California, with about one-quarter of the population. The incredible impact of Swedish emigration over the generations can be—to an extent—visualized using US Census numbers. In the year 2000, four million Americans self-identified as “Swedish” in the decennial US Census (Brittingham and de

la Cruz 2004).⁶ While self-identification is obviously not a perfect metric of the population of Americans with Swedish descent more than a century after the emigration peak, this number gives us a ballpark with which to visualize the cross-generational impact of having almost one-quarter of the population of one nation move to another.⁷ In the States, Americans with Swedish heritage looked like little more than a rounding error, coming in at a mere 1.4 percent of the US population in 2000. Though representing more than four million people, Swedish Americans barely made the cut as number fifteen on the list of the “fifteen largest ancestries” reported to the Census, coming behind number fourteen, Scotch-Irish at 1.5 percent; number ten, American Indian at 2.8 percent; number six, Mexican at 6.5 percent; and number one, German at 15.2 percent (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2004, 3). But four million people is a phenomenal number in Swedish terms. In the year 2000, those four million self-identified Swedish Americans would have been the equivalent of forty-three percent of the Swedish population (Blanck 2017, 102). Of course, the poverty and starvation that drove emigration would likely mean that the number of descendants of impacted individuals might not have reached such soaring heights if they had stayed in Sweden. Still, this massive shift in population had a profound impact on both families and the nation as a whole.

At the family level, especially in the early decades when a cross-Atlantic voyage was a particularly treacherous undertaking with no guarantee of return, a departure to the New World

⁶ To my knowledge, this question has not been repeated since the 2000 US Census.

⁷ Self-identification of ancestry in the decennial US Census for the year 2000 required respondents to fill in a blank under the question “What is this person’s ancestry or ethnic origin?” Above a section read, “For example: Italian, Jamaican, African Am., Cambodian, Cape Verdean, Norwegian, Dominican, French Canadian, Haitian, Korean, Lebanese, Polish, Nigerian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Ukrainian, and so on” (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2004).

brought with it a heavy feeling of loss. Again, in the words of literature and languages scholar Ronald Paul:

The sense of separation and loss resulted in something of a collective trauma both among those who left and those who stayed behind. The disappearance of a whole generation of family and friends who never saw one another again felt like a premature death. (Paul 2019, 186)

Emigration was the source of many individual wounds, and that pain was compounded by other stressors relating to poverty. In the regions where emigration was most common—particularly in the southern farmlands of Småland and the surrounding areas—some communities lost close to an entire generation of people who might have otherwise worked the land, raised families, and continued on the traditions of their grandparents by supporting their own parents as they entered old age. Those who were left behind were forced to make sense of the new reality in which they found themselves.

Take, for example, the series of events—uncovered through the process of this dissertation—that hit my great-great grandmother Anna Elisabet Lundgren (*min farfars farmor*, or mother to Hjalmar, the husband of the previously discussed Anna Justina Larsson) who never left Sweden. She suffered separate wounds with the departure of her brother (Gust), followed in quick succession by her second son (Hjalmar) and then her eldest son (Artur) and third son (Daniel), all three of whom left to work with their uncle in Iowa. She subsequently suffered the unexpected and gruesome death of Artur while he was still in the States, followed by the short-lived return of Hjalmar and his re-emigration to Iowa. Hjalmar's return in 1924 came shortly after the family had been forced to sell the farm due to the theft of an entire year's crop of grain—stolen right out of the barn one night—which meant the loss of an entire year's income for the family that remained in Sweden. Through these trials, Anna was the caretaker for the long-term illnesses of both her youngest son (Knut) and her husband (August), both of whom

died not long after Artur. Anna also had three daughters, one of whom (Hildur) died before she turned six. In events that also reflected the mass exodus of men from their community in Sweden to the US, her two surviving daughters suffered tragedies that left them unwed mothers. Over a century later, my heart ached to discover these losses. Her story, however, isn't really remarkably different from others of my ancestors who stayed behind. The cascading effects of poverty and loss feel unimaginable in retrospect. Individually, throughout the country, Swedes were experiencing and processing traumatic losses in private. Anna's trauma becomes unremarkable when muddled together with losses suffered by every other individual in the community around her. But together, these individual events accumulated in drips and drabs to create a collective trauma that struck the nation as a whole.

Swedes who stayed in Sweden experienced what sociologist Kai Erikson refers to as *collective trauma*. Trauma's social dimension comes from the fact that "traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up" (Erikson 1995, 185). Collective trauma does not appear with the same shock and awe that we associate with trauma to an individual, but instead accumulates from a traumatic experience's impact on many people in a connected group. Erikson positions individual and collective trauma as "two halves of a continuous whole," and posits that in most cases people "find it much harder to recover from individual trauma when the community around them is in shreds" (Erikson 2017, 58). He continues:

Time may be the greatest of healers, but there are good reasons to suppose that its magic only works in concert with a nurturing social setting. It is harder to warm the inner world when the outer world is numb and frozen as well.
(Erikson 2017, 58)

Collective trauma can sneak up on us. Instead of the “raw immediacy” of a disaster, collective trauma “works its way slowly into the awareness of those who suffer from it” in the form of a “gradual recognition that the community no longer exists as a source of support or solace (Erikson 2017, 57-58). Erikson describes the community, in this sense, as being like a shared bank in which members have been depositing resources “only to discover that when the bank was more or less washed away, they would find it very difficult to reclaim as their own the resources they had stored there” (Erikson 2017, 59-60). The social capital invested by many like my great-great grandmother did not pay out the same, reliable dividends when your descendants had run off to the United States, leaving you alone to pick up the pieces.

The problem with writing about trauma’s impact on a community as a whole is that the task involves identifying and articulating things that we instinctively know to forget (more on that later). We can suffer from the effects of trauma without even realizing it, because trauma exists in the nervous system of the body, not the conscious mind. When a traumatic experience is shared across a defined group—dozens, hundreds, millions of people—the aftermath is simply the new reality. When the tissues of social life, the fibers that bind a community together, are damaged through collective trauma, it can be as difficult for those involved to articulate the shift as it would be to explain to a fish that he’s in water. Erikson argues that describing the shift in communal linkages that have always been a “part of the natural order of things” and the loss of those secure ties can be

as hard to describe the nature of those bonds as they would the nature of the air they move around in or the gravity that keeps them anchored to the ground. It is just there, part of the atmosphere in which they live, and it is taken largely for granted. So it is difficult for people to pin down or find words for this thing that is missing in their lives. (Erikson 2017, 58)

Take, for example, the innumerable differences in life before and after the worldwide Covid pandemic. In the US, it is easy to point to changes like the sudden widespread switch to working from home or online schooling. In that moment we sensed dramatic shifts to our lives. To me, in the summer of 2023, it feels that even though the pandemic has been declared “over,” its effects linger. Things still aren’t “back to normal,” or like they were in the “before times,” or the days before Covid turned our sense of safety upside down. But I can’t quite articulate why. Perhaps my sense of time never quite recovered after endless days in isolation, and certainly the ways I interact with strangers on the street has changed in that time. The differences in “before” and “after” are really tough to articulate, but my body reacts without my conscious involvement. This is what Erikson is talking about when he describes the post-trauma world as the new “natural order of things,” because this is just what we do now.

Though perhaps easier to recognize in scholarship concerning war (Demers 2011) and genocide (Hirsch 2012), the trauma borne by communities impacted by manmade disasters (Erikson 1995; 2017), colonialism (Gobodo-Madikizela and Orange 2016), and mass migration (Tannion 2017) have also been shown to have impacts that cascade across generations. In Sweden, I argue that it is these same mechanisms that brought about this very specific idea of *Amerika* that I saw frequently, and discussed often, as a part of my fieldwork. *Amerika* grew in the Swedish imagination as a way to fill in the gaps left by the unexpected separation of families over decades of mass migration. This familial trauma was widespread, and in interviews was regularly encapsulated in a description of Sweden as the *lillebror* (“little brother”) of the United States, a reference that maintains a sense of familial ties but also—perhaps—adequately describes the kind of love-hate (but mostly love) relationship between siblings. *Amerika* is an imagined version of the United States that exists outside of these music scenes, for sure, as

evidenced in many of the media representations that are described in the following chapters. Inside the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes, however, that *Amerika* is amplified, serving as the root of rules that govern comportment, dress, and repertoire. I argue that it is this *Amerika*—reshaped and retold across generations, but born from the immeasurable trauma of the separation of families and dissolution of the social contract that existed before decades of mass migration—that musicians in these scenes connect to when they play and perform what Albin called the “noise” of bluegrass, old time, and country music in Sweden.

Don't you want to go 'over there?'

In May of 2020, the world was still settling into the Covid pandemic for the long haul. The realities of quarantine were full of unexpected consequences and creative adjustments. For musicians around the world, a major disruption came in the form of lost opportunities to play and perform as organizers of events and festivals opted to skip even outdoor gatherings in the summer months to adhere to ever shifting health guidelines. This brought about a widespread creative adaptation from in-person performances to “live” and asynchronous virtual events on a variety of streaming platforms. Bands big and small took to social media pages for the opportunity to reach their fans, and in some cases generate income, through the previously undervalued medium of livestreaming.

One sunny weekend afternoon, I was thrilled to see the Swedish band Happy Heartaches pop up as “live” on my Instagram feed. With cabin fever burning in my brain and driving me bananas, I was thrilled for the chance to do something out of the ordinary. I propped my phone up on my coffee table and settled in to listen and be reminded of the good old days when I was free to roam around between Sweden's many bluegrass and old time festivals.

Though they'd come together after my fieldwork ended, I was keeping close tabs on this group because it featured several familiar faces, including Albin on fiddle and vocals. What followed was an intimate performance. The bandmates gathered tightly together in the corner of a sunlit room. The four of them, with bass, guitar, banjo, and fiddle, were standing under a bright orange ceiling light, and atop the tangled web of black audio cables at their feet as they squeezed in around two microphones. They covered a few songs I had come to know as canon in the Swedish bluegrass and old time scene, some of which I'd heard Albin sing many times before. Watching them, even on my tiny screen, my heart ached to go back.

At the end of "Ninety-Nine Years (and One Dark Day)," I got up to get a glass of water from my kitchen—one of the few benefits of watching these events from the comfort of one's home. From the other room, I heard them start to talk about the Grenna bluegrass festival which, the previous summer, had held a songwriting contest with the prize of a trip to the US to go to the annual DelFest bluegrass and roots festival in Maryland. I'd planned to travel out and join them at the event that summer, but of course all plans had been squashed by the all-encompassing pandemic.

"So, we won the competition! But we couldn't go to the *US* because of, well, *you know*," I heard bassist Brita Björs explain from the other room.

"We were supposed to leave yesterday," continued guitarist Max Tellving, who co-wrote Happy Heartaches winning entry with Brita. "I was thinking about it the whole day. Like, right now we are supposed to be on the plane to Nashville."

"Right now we are landing, right now we are getting the car," said Brita.

"Right now we were having a fight over where to eat," interjected banjo player Alicia Jardine.

“Right now the GPS stopped working in the middle of the forest,” said Albin, as the group erupted into laughter. But the kind of laughter that’s laced with the awkwardness of disappointment and trying to make the best of a bad situation.

I turned away to refill my waterglass and couldn’t hear for a minute. Partially because I was thirsty, but mostly to break the tension of my own disappointment that had built up while watching a virtual version of what I missed out on that year. When I returned to the living room, my first thought was, *Hold up—did I hear that right?*

I waited for the chorus to come around again, and quickly scribbled the words down:

‘Cross the ocean, ‘cross the sea
‘Cross the ocean, far across the sea

Where everybody plays the banjo and the fiddle
Where the milkshakes are bigger
And the mountains meet the sky (way up high)

Oh darling, don’t you wanna go-o
Over there

Yep, I heard that right. They were singing about *Amerika*. At the time, I was just a few months in to thinking about how intergenerational trauma could have shaped Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. And here, out of the blue, was a song that perfectly encapsulated the mix of tragic and playful, almost self-consciously ironic and campy approach to the *Amerika* that is performed on stage and off in these Swedish scenes.

The more I listened, the more I could see why this entry won the Grenna bluegrass festival songwriting contest. The song is a mid-tempo duet between Brita and Max. The story in their clever banter covers many of the potential upsides of going over to the States (assuming bigger milkshakes are your thing). The verses were a delightful mishmash of *Amerikan* stereotypes and bluegrass tropes. There was talk of the “sunny side” of the mountain where they

could “build our little cabin home,” talk of “weeping willows,” hunting for squirrels, and hammers that “ring like silver” but “shines like gold,” all references to songs that feature in the Swedish bluegrass and old time canons.⁸ The lyrics were all repackaged to fit with ideas of “over there,” a phrase that can come with weighted connotations in a Swedish context. According to American ethnologist Thomas O’Dell, the idea of “over there” is a part of “an array of new cultural landscapes” that were encompassed within Swedish imaginings of *Amerika* across generations, including *löftets land* (“the promised land”) as well as *emigranternas land* (“the emigrants’ land”) (O’Dell 1997, 57). O’Dell contends that even though Canada, Australia, Denmark, and other locales were the destination of Swedish emigrants, these have been “delegated to second place” in the minds of the public (O’Dell 1997, 64). He continued:

[N]o other destination captured and still captures the imagination like America. . . . [I]t became a vessel in which some placed their hopes and dreams, and in which others saw an exaggerated fantasy world, a fraud, and an object to be mocked with sarcastic irony. Swedish emigration, in short, implied much more than the physical movement of people, it also implied the imagination and discovery of the world beyond the borders of the local parish. (O’Dell 1997, 64-65)

This quartet of extraordinary instrumentalists, whose Instagram band bio describes their Swedish bluegrass music as “all about life, death, love & labour. Sad but happy!”, captured that feeling perfectly with their contest winning song, aptly titled “Over There.” The lyrics draw directly from standard bluegrass to tell a tongue-in-cheek tale of a couple who long to go to the US to start their life together over again. Though the lyrics draw on humorous and exaggerated stereotypes of America, the bluegrass twang and melodic tone give a clear and distinct sense of longing. That plucking of the heartstrings is a tool at the root of many bluegrass songs, but this

⁸ These would include: “Keep on the sunny side”; “Little cabin home on the hill”; “Weeping willow”; and “Nine pound hammer”, among others.

tune really hammers on the trauma and heartbreak that lies at the root of the relationship between Sweden and America. In order to fully explain the story that hides behind the surface of this song, the following chapter will backtrack a bit in order to explain what I mean by “trauma”, and the process of transfer that keeps trauma activated across generations.

4. TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND *AMERIKA* IN THE SWEDISH IMAGINATION

Across this dissertation, I explore the heritage connection between Sweden and the United States and how ties rooted in “heritage” have grown into *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination. This process reflects bonds that have been broken, forged, and imagined across almost two centuries of interactions and exchanges between Americans, Swedes, and Swedish Americans on both sides of the Atlantic. To get to the deeper mechanisms at work, I will be exploring this history from the perspective of trauma studies. Before we can delve into the intergenerational components that tie Swedish American heritage to the *Amerika* on display at Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music events, I must first define how I am using the term *trauma*. In the first part of this chapter, I will provide an interdisciplinary overview of trauma studies, with a focus on trauma’s impact on the individual and the nervous system, as well as how traumatic memories are stored separately from the life narrative we commonly refer to as memory. Then, in part two, I will move into the intergenerational process of trauma transfer that can keep traumatic wounds active as a part of everyday life, and how that process of transfer can create a kind of group culture around a shared set of behaviors that reflect the collective understanding of a group’s traumatic history. Drawing from my own personal and family stories, as well as media analysis and historical data, I will discuss the ways in which trauma, and the process of an intergenerational transfer of memory, has impacted imaginings of *Amerika* both inside and outside Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes.

Caution

While I have made the active choice to avoid replicating examples that contain specific depictions of violent encounters or other graphic subjects, I do want to take a moment to recognize the potentially draining nature of the section that follows. These pages took me years

to write not just because of the distractions associated with living through the chaotic “historical moment” of the pre-, peri-, and not quite post-pandemic years, but because this literature requires breathing room. I often found myself stuck in a feedback loop where the literature would trigger traumatic memories or connections within my own experience, resulting in physical responses that I now know to be associated with the repeated activation of a dysregulated nervous system, which, over time, triggered a trauma response when I so much as held these books in my hands. Processing that trauma took time and patience. By no means do I claim that these pages are of the caliber or depth of those that inspired their writing. But in the spirit of content warnings, and a recognition that trauma arises from a culmination of personal experiences—and is therefore rather unpredictable from person to person—I would just like to suggest that the reader take care.

TRAUMA PART I: ACTIVATION, THE INDIVIDUAL, AND MEMORY

The same in both English and Swedish, the term *trauma* comes from the Greek word for “wound.” Trauma exists in both obvious and inconspicuous forms. The physical, easily observable version arrives as damage to the body, perhaps severe enough to be treated at a hospital’s “trauma center” where the highly visible nature of its inherent gore—blood, gaping holes, screams of pain, or, worse, a pale and unconscious patient—demands empathy, understanding, and urgent treatment. No less violent, and yet easily unseen or overlooked, is trauma to the mind. Just as physical trauma is a violation of the boundaries of the body—the skin, the organs—emotional trauma is a violation of the erected boundaries of the psyche. These wounds are the result of an intolerable burden, an unexpected rupture, a deep pain and/or psychological wound for which the individual was not prepared. Traumatic experiences challenge one’s sense of self and safety within the familiar world around us. The nervous system, however, learns from the traumatic experience. Afterwards, it is primed to activate the body’s

innate *fight, flight, or freeze* response in preparation for the unknown, or in response to situations that it deems dangerously similar to previous traumatic events. From the outside, a trauma response is sometimes dismissed as a mere personality quirk. Just as easily as our bodies can be torn from the outside, so too can these traumatic experiences rip apart the psyche as it violates our well-established internal boundaries between what is acceptable, and that for which we have just experienced or laid witness. So much so that it can “bleed” from one generation to the next (Hirsch 2012) and even begin to resemble a shared culture as it continues to influence our daily actions (Menakem 2017).

Trauma studies is inherently interdisciplinary. In the following sections, I draw from scholarship in psychiatry, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, literature, history, music therapy, and Scandinavian studies in order to make sense of the ways in which the study of trauma applies to the playing of bluegrass, old time, and country music in Sweden. As will be explored later in this chapter, trauma is something that the body instinctively knows to forget (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995; Menakem 2017). This is a survival mechanism tied to the body’s innate fight, flight, or freeze response—which operates beyond the reach of the conscious mind and narrative memory (Porges and Carter 2017; van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995). Trauma studies scholarship explores the ways in which traumatic experiences can run up against the limits of language, exist outside of our sense of time, fragment the psyche and sense of self, directly challenge the concept of “memory” as having objective meaning, as well as the ways in which trauma is passed from generation to generation as forms of culture (Menakem 2017; Caruth 2016; Erikson 2017). Most recently, trauma theory has also explored the involvement of the nervous system in our experience of trauma, and trauma treatments that involve vagal nerve stimulation through electrical impulses, chanting, physical movement, and even singing and

wind instrument playing, ideas that I will discuss further in the following chapter. In order to understand the process of intergenerational trauma and how trauma can shape the social world around us, we must first understand trauma's impact on the body.

This chapter delves into the process through which individual and collective trauma can morph into a shared understanding of cultural norms, practices, and adapted histories as it is passed through mechanisms of intergenerational storytelling including family lore, literature, and media depictions of the past. Before examining trauma's impact on a community as a whole, we begin with the traumatic event and its impact on the individual's body, the individual's response, and the impact that trauma has on narrative memory. The previous chapter contained a short history of Swedish emigration and its traumatic impact. In what follows, we will see how many of these individual traumatic events came to shape Sweden's national imagination, and how ideas of *Amerika* have been passed down through generations, distilled through family stories and media depictions of the past, creating two conflicting, yet harmoniously coexisting stories that have come to shape bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden.

Nervous system activation: Trauma and the individual

The study of trauma began in the realm of psychoanalysis and psychology. Though recent scholarship has made leaps and bounds towards our understanding of the mind-body relationship and the nervous system response to trauma, trauma as an idea has fascinated scholars for generations. Already by the nineteenth century, the "very foundation of modern psychiatry was laid with the study of consciousness and the disruptive impact of traumatic experiences" by researchers in Western Europe and the United States for whom the concept of memory became an obstacle to understanding the human mind (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 158).

Over a century ago, scholars began to note the peculiarities of this thing we call “memory,” and noticed that traumatic memories did not behave the same as mundane ones. Initially, French psychologist Pierre Janet posited that there were two forms of memory: the conscious and subconscious. He argued that as we go about our daily lives, we are constantly analyzing and categorizing new information that is then stored in the “central organizing apparatus in the brain,” for which Janet coined the term “subconscious” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 159). According to Janet, if our experiences are met with “appropriate action” from the body, then the mind files that information away automatically in the subconscious where it can be found and accessed as needed. Unlike memories formed in the conscious mind, we do not notice when subconscious memories are made. This is a part of “healthy psychological functioning,” which “consists of a unified memory of all psychological facets related to particular experiences: sensations, emotions, thoughts, and actions” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 159). Let’s take a look at an example of the “subconscious” mind at work in the midst of a traumatic event. Imagine this:

Scenario A

You are on a run on a country path on a cold early spring morning. The skies haven’t yet cleared from yesterday’s rain, so the path is still damp and littered with puddles. The air is cold enough that you’ve pulled your hat down over your ears and headphones.

You come to your halfway point. Before you turn around to head home, you pause to catch your breath and watch the horses mill about in the field to the west.

As you return to the path, you see a man heading towards you, looking down and holding tightly to his large dog’s leash. They are maybe twenty paces away. Your gut tells you to cross to the grass on the far-left side of the path, yielding a wide berth to the man and his dog.

Head down, you watch the dew fall from the blades of grass as your feet move to the beat of the music in your ears.

Suddenly, your head jolts up and your body stops. All you see are the dog's teeth moving towards your face, lips pulled back to reveal black and pink gums. The image hangs in your mind. You are locked in this moment.

You hear the man pull on the leash. They are behind you now. It feels as if you have been holding this position for minutes, but you can feel the muscles in your core still absorbing the forward momentum of your sudden stop from a runner's pace. The man and his dog may not even have broken their stride.

Your mind is racing. *I'm so far from the house. No one is even there! I don't know what I would do if I'd been hurt. What if he hadn't had a leash?*

You exhale, fully, and notice the tension in your shoulders as you will your legs to start moving towards home, slower than before. Winded, a little dizzy. Somehow, the forest seems darker and closer to the path.

Fear and anger rise in your chest. *Why did I just stand there?! I could have been hurt!*

The rest of the run is a blur.

Scenario A demonstrates Janet's ideas of the subconscious's involvement in daily experiences.

As you turned around and observed your surroundings, your subconscious drew upon and analyzed information collected from every previous experience running, seeing dogs, passing men on paths, etc., and reacted accordingly. All previous information gathered by the nervous system during similar past scenarios caused that "gut feeling" to put space between you and the oncoming man and dog. Faster than your conscious mind could be aware of what was going on around you, your subconscious acted by halting you in your path as a form of protection. This event was traumatic, however, because those preparations—what the nervous system had previously deemed sufficient during prior exposure to similar threats—was very nearly not enough to protect against the threat that appeared in that specific moment. This imbalance triggered the unanticipated *freeze* response, which was, thankfully, enough this time. But now the nervous system is unsure how to respond in the future, and is primed to be much more reactive given similar circumstances. That is to say, the nervous system is primed to activate and

respond based on this new information, and the new perceived level of danger posed by unknown dogs.

Almost a century and a half after Janet’s work, we have an updated way of explaining the body’s response seen during the events of Scenario A: as an innate result of the autonomic nervous system’s *fight, flight, or freeze* response to perceived danger (Porges and Carter 2017). Rather than as a function of the subconscious, modern scholarship has shown that trauma is tied to our autonomic nervous system’s reactions to the world around us (Porges and Carter 2017; Menakem 2017; Breit et al. 2018). The autonomic nervous system is the body’s information pathway that controls, among other things, primary organ function. It is made up of two subsystems—the sympathetic nervous system (controls the *fight or flight* response, can increase heart rate and respiration) and the parasympathetic nervous system (controls *freeze* and *rest* responses, can lower the heart rate and respiration)—that work in tandem to coordinate bodily functions (Porges and Carter 2017, 223). For our purposes here, we can imagine the body’s muscles and organs as being operated by a series of light switches—a muscle switched “ON” will contract and “OFF” will release. Though perhaps not a perfect facsimile, in this metaphor the sympathetic nervous system is responsible for turning things “ON,” and the parasympathetic system turns things “OFF.” Together, these same systems of nerves that control our heartbeat, breath, digestion, cause hiccups, allow us to sing, and are responsible for some of our strongest emotions, are also responsible for our innate and automatic *fight, flight, or freeze* reactions to perceived or real danger.

In Scenario A, what we see is a freeze response or what might be called “playing dead” when applied to prey in other corners of the animal kingdom. In this state, the body can lower heart rate and blood pressure, decrease respiration, constrict the pupils, tense the muscles, and in

extreme cases even cause fainting (Porges and Carter 2017, 236). This state of “defensive immobilization” is the work of the vagus nerve (Breit et al. 2018, 1). The vagus nerve got its name from the Latin word for “wander” due to its meandering path through the human body. Connecting at the medulla oblongata (the meeting point of the brain stem and spinal cord) the vagus nerve exits the skull into the neck where it connects to and controls most of the muscles in the pharynx (swallowing) and larynx (vocalizing); reaches the heart where it “provides the main parasympathetic supply” and “stimulates a reduction in the heart rate,” before extending into the digestive system where it “regulates the contraction of smooth muscles and glandular secretion” (Breit et al. 2018, 2). This vagal nerve is also responsible for the physical sensations that come with many of our strongest emotional responses. That is to say, the part of us that can control our heartbeat, digestion, cause hiccups, and regulate our breath when we’re distracted, is also responsible for the physical sensations of “love, fear, anger, dread, grief, sorrow, disgust, and hope” in the body (Menakem 2017, 5).

This is all a part of what scholars call *polyvagal theory*, which suggests that the bidirectional flow of information along the vagus nerve between the brain and the viscera—primarily the organs in the “gut”—explains how “thoughts and emotions can change our physiological state and how our physiological state influences our thoughts and emotions” (Porges and Carter 2017, 222). The majority of the vagal nerve pathways, it turns out, are used to carry information from the body to the brain (about ninety percent) rather than from the brain to the body (ten percent) (Breit et al. 2018, 2). According to polyvagal theory, the information pathways created from the gut to the brain by the wandering vagus nerve are the cause of “gut feelings,” like we saw ahead of the traumatic moment in Scenario A. That “pit in your stomach” when something goes wrong, “butterflies” when you are in love, even a “nervous tummy” ahead

of stressful events; these are all part of the “brain-gut axis” that is increasingly being recognized as the physical component of emotional response (Porges and Carter 2017; Breit et al. 2018).

These are the mechanisms through which traumatic events are carried in the body: as a part of the nervous system’s ability to react ahead of conscious thought to perceived danger. When a traumatized individual’s nervous system encounters circumstances reminiscent of past trauma, it is primed to respond as if preparing to once again endure—and this time, perhaps, avoid—further trauma. This is what’s known as the *trauma response*.

Nervous system activation: The trauma response

The wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and hearable event, but rather an event that . . . is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. (Caruth 2016, 3)

Traumatic memories . . . may return as physical sensations, horrific images or nightmares, behavioral reenactments, or a combination of these. . . . People who have learned to cope with stress by dissociation often continue to do so in response to the smallest strain. Subconscious memories thus come to control ongoing behavior. (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 164)

Trauma is the body’s protective response to an event—or a series of events—that it perceives as potentially dangerous. This perception may be accurate, inaccurate, or entirely imaginary. In the aftermath of highly stressful or traumatic situations, our [autonomic nervous systems] embed a reflexive trauma response in our bodies. This happens at lightning speed. (Menakem 2017, 7)

Here is where we begin to see that the word “trauma,” at least in American vernacular English, has become an umbrella term that stands for everything from the overwhelming event(s) itself, our response to that event(s), and the retention—and perhaps even projection—of that response across a lifetime, or even generations. The term’s colloquial usage in the United States—particularly with the present tense phrase “I have trauma” in the years leading up to and during the Covid pandemic—reflects the continued infliction of trauma’s past pain on the present

(Pandell 2022). The timelessness of trauma is also reflected in medical language. “Post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) is a clinical label that refers to individuals who experience the lasting effects of (a) traumatic experience(s). The term itself—the “post” in PTSD—specifically delineates between the traumatic event and the continued strain that is carried by the traumatized individual (Erikson 1995, 184). It is also that “post” element that I’m referring to when discussing a *trauma response*, the ways past trauma influences our present and future.

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, the “post” of a trauma response can take many forms including: repeated, intrusive memories, hallucinations, or dreams; recurring defensive behaviors; a numbing of the senses; and even an increased arousal to, or avoidance of, stimuli relating to the trauma (Caruth 1995, 4). In the previous section, we explored an example of a traumatic event—Scenario A—as well as the reaction to that event in the moment. In the following section, we will examine a component of the “post” in post-traumatic stress disorder, or how the traumatic event becomes a trauma response.

In Scenario A, the impulse to freeze, which Janet might have labeled as the work of the subconscious, perhaps can be described in modern terms as *neuroception*. Polyvagal theory describes neuroception as the nervous system’s way of processing environmental information—without conscious awareness—in order to evaluate risk (Porges and Carter 2017, 230). This includes the ability to determine the “intention” of sounds or movement from the surrounding area and if it deems the intention is not a threat, then neuroception can shut down the body’s activation (*fight or flight*) response (Porges and Carter 2017, 231). If the nervous system misjudges a situation, it likely will choose to ratchet up its response upon future relevant encounters. If functioning as expected, neuroception is how we remember (without a second thought) to, after that first time, never again grab the hot cookie sheet with bare hands. If the

initial nervous system response was insufficient—that is, if the original response did not prevent a traumatic experience, or if the response to a perceived threat did not have the intended outcome—the nervous system will learn to respond more aggressively to any similar subsequent circumstances. To illustrate this, let’s take a look at two more scenarios, which take up where Scenario A left off:

Scenario B

Months later, you are in another city walking along the waterfront. It is evening, and many people are out to enjoy the sunset.

In the distance, you see a woman whose dog is running free by her side. They are far enough away that you can’t make out the text on her t-shirt, but you can see clearly that there is no leash.

Why is it suddenly so cold? Without a coat, it doesn’t seem worth it to stay for the sunset. I better just go.

You feel the urge to move away, quickly. Your heart is pounding as you jaywalk to the other side, arms wrapped tightly around your torso.

Scenario C

It is fall now, several years later. A perfect evening for a twilight walk through the neighborhood. Turning right, you take the same route you’ve taken countless times before, your partner by your side.

The two of you chat about the day’s mundane updates. Distracted, you reflexively duck to miss a tree branch that juts out into the sidewalk.

“AAAH! AAAH! AAH!” You feel your lungs burn from screaming. Your vocal cords vibrate at a frequency not felt since your elementary school playground days.

Somehow, you realize, you ended up clutching to the hood of an SUV parked along the sidewalk. Your right foot is on the bumper, left foot dangling in the air.

Then you start to recognize barking. Close, frantic. You finally hear your own screaming.

Behind the tree on the elevated lawn, you hear a man’s voice, “He’s harmless!” and hear the clink of dog tags as he roughly grabs the unleashed collar. The dog continues to bark, his head at eye level with passersby on the sidewalk.

How did I get here? you wonder, as your partner helps you down, supporting your arm as you continue your walk. Your body shakes, heartbeat loud in your chest.

Everything feels heightened: the air colder, the street wider, the shadows somehow with more contrast. You feel the adrenaline in your veins rise and fall in quick succession. Your energy plummets.

How close did he get? You wonder to yourself. *Inches? Feet?*

You search your memory for a picture of the moment, and see a dog's teeth and pink and black gums, inches from your face in your mind's eye.

But that mouth was too wide, and bright to be from just now. Your mind flashes an image, clear as day, of the dog from the running trail years before.

Try as you might, the only thing you know about the dog from moments ago is that he was dark, and in the shadows. Your memory still flashes teeth lit by daylight.

You need to go home. At the next intersection, you turn right to head around the block. You can't go back past that yard. You've never seen a dog there before, but it will be months until you walk past again.

Scenarios B and C both show a trauma response, where the body and nervous system react as if facing traumatic events of the past due to the reminiscent circumstances of the present. Both scenarios show evidence of the involvement of the sympathetic nervous system in the aggressive activation of the instinct to *flee*, to move away from the perceived source of danger. In Scenario B, we also see evidence of the redirection of blood flow in the sensation of extremities suddenly feeling colder. Scenario B is exaggerated by the fact that the response occurred at a much greater distance to the perceived threat than events in Scenario A. Scenario C contains even more extreme reactions in the body: increased heart rate and respiration, adrenaline released into the body, and increased awareness of surroundings. Both Scenarios B and C show us what could happen when a nervous system is primed to respond with activation after a perceived failure under similar previous circumstances. Rather than the freeze response seen in Scenario A, in Scenarios B and C we see the activated urge to *flee*. The residual sense of danger after Scenario

A—the feeling of helplessness that overtook and disrupted the sense of self after the parasympathetic freeze response, as well as the unexpected escalation of the scenario compared to the initial “gut feeling” to just move to the far edge of the path—primed the nervous system to be more aware, alert, and aggressive in its response when faced with similar stimuli, even years later.

To many, these later encounters would not have merited such an intense reaction. The fact that this response was out of proportion with the level of actual threat, however, is itself evidence of trauma. According to comparative literature scholar Cathy Caruth, a traumatic experience “may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally,” as the true impact is “defined in terms of a distortion of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it” (Caruth 1995, 4). In Scenarios B and C, we see how a past encounter (Scenario A) distorted the interpretation of a later event. In Scenario B, we see an increased awareness of the proximity of the perceived danger: the dog did not have to be close to be avoided. The reaction in scenario B is perhaps made even more extreme by the fact that the dog in this story was not even in close proximity to the body in question and was deemed a threat by the nervous system merely because it was allowed to roam freely by its owner’s side. The subtle nature of Scenario B, however, leaves space for the conscious mind—which is perhaps not attuned to the full impact of Scenario A on the nervous system—to create a narrative for itself that ignores the reason behind the physical reaction to a potential threat, instead blaming the retreat on the perceived sudden change in temperature. Scenario C carries a very interesting new component: the triggering of haunting images from the past. With these images, Scenario C leaves no doubt in the conscious mind as the encounter triggers violent memories of a past traumatic encounter, both vivid and against your will. This is an example of

one of the more peculiar impacts of trauma on memory: traumatic experiences are not processed or stored as regular memory, instead taking on a timeless quality that exists outside of our conscious mind's "life narrative" (Caruth 2016; van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995; Menakem 2017).

Trauma and memory

Scenario C introduces us to one of the reasons why traumatic memory was a site of inquiry early in the history of psychiatry: trauma creates gaps, both in experience and in memory. Trauma is a piece of our lived experience that we carry with us alongside, but not within, our life narrative. According to van der Kolk and van der Hart, while "familiar and expectable experiences are automatically assimilated" without much conscious thought, "frightening or novel experiences may not easily fit into existing cognitive schemes and either may be remembered with particular vividness or may totally resist integration" into narrative memory (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 160). Information gathered by the brain during traumatic experiences is stored differently—completely separate from the life narrative we think of as conscious memory—and may "not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control" (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 160).

Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, originator of the realm of psychoanalytical theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, used the word "repression" somewhat interchangeably to describe the behavior of both traumatic memories and thoughts that are actively quashed, like the forbidden or primitive impulses of the id (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995). Later in the twentieth century, however, scholars began to recognize a distinction between the repression of an unwanted thought, and the inaccessibility of a traumatic memory

(van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 168). While *repression* implies some agency in the act of pushing a thought into the unconscious, the *dissociation* seen in the survivors of trauma involves the complete lack of integration of the traumatic event into narrative memory. This lack of integration is also not simple amnesia, Freud pointed out, as traumatic memories do have a habit of returning to the survivor—only, the survivor has little to no control over how or when the memories return, as we saw in Scenario C (Caruth 1995, 6). When these traumatic memories are later triggered, the body’s response is not the same as if it were narrative memory, instead it is experienced as if it is “purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” (Caruth 1995, 5). This process is why sociologist Jeffrey Prager (2016) calls trauma a “memory illness,” positing that due to this disconnect, though trauma may have roots in the events of the past, its symptoms manifest as if the threat is in the present. He argues that the haunting nature of a trauma response lies in this timelessness, and explains how ordinary events can trigger traumatic memories that in turn cause the physical and psychological sense that the threat is happening “now,” no matter when “now” happens to be (Prager 2016, 15). This process is generally what is meant by the colloquial term “triggered” in the United States circa the early 2020s.

Due to the divide between the conscious self and the traumatic memory, it is common for survivors of trauma to report feeling separated from their bodies in the (re)telling of a traumatic experience, as if they were looking at their memories from a distance (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 168). As if a form of protection from moments we are not prepared to experience fully, the latency of these traumatic memories implies “the inability fully to witness the event as it occurs, or the ability to witness the *event* fully only at the cost of witnessing oneself” (Caruth 1995, 7). A traumatic *event*, therefore, operates separately from the traumatic *memory*. The

“unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences” that make up the traumatic *memory* are timeless, recurring “against the will” of the survivor, and will remain outside of time and outside of their control until it can be properly processed and “integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 176). The *memory*, then, is integrated into our understanding of the traumatic *event* when we return to the memory and process it by setting it to words. At that point, instead of being haunted by traumatic *memories* of the past, the traumatic *event* is (re)created as a part of a person’s history or conscious, narrative memory (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 176). Essentially, we have to (re)create our traumatic narrative story and put it to words ourselves; it is not an automatic process.

In Scenario C, there is no certainty around what triggered the screaming, or how you ended up on the bumper of the SUV. Nor is there any information about what the barking dog looked like, or where exactly it came from. Under the extreme conditions of that moment, those details were not processed by the conscious mind in the same way as the details about leaving the house that night, or the way you chose to return home. Instead, they were replaced with the haunting memories from Scenario A. In essence, the full impact of the traumatic *event* was not integrated into the established scheme that consists of your life narrative. Admittedly, this is an extremely simplified example of how these processes work, but please allow me to pull this thread a little further because this is where things really start to get interesting in the realm of trauma studies: How would you (re)tell this story? If this really *was* your experience, how would you fill in the gaps?

Here is where I need to admit that these are, in fact, my memories, my experiences, and my trauma response. I’ve spent a good amount of time analyzing these moments in my life, and

now see clearly that when I (re)tell these stories, I fill in some of the gaps with superfluous information. When I retell Scenario A, for example, I usually say something like “One day I was running past this Hell’s Angel’s hangout, and a guy’s attack dog almost bit me in the face! I’ve never been more grateful for a thick leather leash.” While the details about the location were accurate (or, at least as accurate as the information relayed to me), I had no reason to believe that the man was attached to the Hell’s Angels, that the dog was an aggressive breed (I honestly can’t remember what it looked like, other than its teeth and gums), or that the leash was made of thick leather. I only know for sure that I am grateful there was a leash at all. Often, trauma treatment involves returning to the memory in order to complete it, sometimes by adding or changing details so that it assimilates into our understanding of the self (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995; Menakem 2017). The words I use to (re)create the story—to write a narrative around a moment of my life that was otherwise unintegrated into my life’s timeline—help me to navigate the chasm between the traumatic *event* and the haunting nature of the recurrent trauma *memory*.

In the case of my personal trauma resulting from the events of Scenario A, there are two things that helped ease my autonomic nervous system’s activation response to any unleashed dog. The first was the experience of Scenario C, wherein I accomplished what Menakem (2017) might call “completing the thwarted action.” The wildly disproportionate flee reaction to the shock of a barking dog was much closer to what my thinking brain had *wished* I had done in the aftermath of Scenario A, and demonstrating to myself that I was capable of more than just freezing in my tracks proved part of a powerful antidote. The other ingredient being the process of putting words to the event—both for my life narrative and this dissertation—that helped my conscious mind take control over the haunting images from the past. And it is this type of filtered interpretation, in the stories we create for ourselves after the fact, that makes trauma a fascinating

lens through which to examine cultural products like music, movies, and literature. These media objects can become shared interpretations of past trauma, and are evidence of the impacts of trauma that is experienced not just by an individual, but by a community as a whole (Caruth 2016; Erikson 1995).

TRAUMA PART II: INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND *AMERIKA* IN THE SWEDISH IMAGINATION

The mass emigration of Swedes to the Americas has been a topic of scholarship for decades, and in multiple languages (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021; O’Dell 1997; Wallengren 2014; Åsard and Agrell 2016; Gradén 2003). Statistics and facts about Swedish emigration have been so well researched that some scholars have declared migration is “no longer a dominant theme” in the realm of modern Swedish American studies as it has been thoroughly covered and is time for the field to expand (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021, 23). While I will review some of the basic history and figures, my aim with this section is to contribute to the academic conversations on the Swedish American borderlands by looking at the impact of mass migration not as the movement of people, but through the intergenerational damage that remains in the holes they left behind. My focus is on the intergenerational transfer of trauma, the carrying forward of a feeling of loss, that has shaped *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination to be a valid interpretation of the United States from afar, as well as something altogether separate from the United States in reality. Oscillating between trauma studies, ethnography and personal history, emerging scholarship on the Swedish American borderlands, as well as literature and popular culture, I argue that the trauma of mass migration, caused both by the separation of families as well as the dissolution of the social contract that existed in Sweden before emigrants began to leave for the New World, shaped and colored Swedish conceptions of the United States across generations.

Intergenerational trauma

Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of the mind and body . . . traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension. (Erikson 1995, 185)

“Trauma” is a wound. It has the power to shift perspective and change reactions. Though easiest to see in its physical form, as damage to the body, trauma can also result in intangible wounds inflicted upon the psyche or, as sociologist Kai Erikson (1995) has argued, on a community as a whole. The moment of impact, the “traumatic event” itself, is unexpected. Its force catches the body off guard, hence the wound. Afterwards, however, the body and nervous system have new information. It now knows that, given similar circumstances, it should not do *that* again. For example, after touching a glowing electric burner coil once, the body learns that red and hot mean scalding. Next time the body knows to back the hand away when it senses that heat. This is a part of the “trauma response,” and it is this same basic process used by bodies, psyches, and communities in the aftermath of traumatic events, as we learn to anticipate and avoid being wounded again.

As discussed in the previous section, trauma is something the conscious mind—as a tool for survival—instinctively knows to forget. The conscious mind cannot react as quickly as the body’s innate fight, flight, or freeze response, which is triggered unconsciously by the vagus nerve. Lessons learned from traumatic events, then, are often held in the vagus nerve, apart from the narrative memory of the conscious mind. And it is in this way that trauma’s effects hide in the crevices of our lived experiences, popping up in ways that the conscious mind does not regulate. These responses can be so well concealed that they become a part of our daily experience. It seeps into the social dimension of our lives, shifting the ways that we relate to the community around us, and even becoming a part of what we pass to our children. This is how we

arrive at “intergenerational trauma,” which is a learned response to a traumatic event(s) experienced by our ancestors before us, transferred to us by our parents and their parents before them in the ways that they unconsciously taught us to protect ourselves. In her work with the children of holocaust survivors, Marianne Hirsch describes this as the “language of the family, the language of the body” and argues that these “nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the form of symptoms” (Hirsch 2012, 34). She continues:

children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive. . . . Fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and disassociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma. (Hirsch 2012, 34)

It is through this process of transfer that a traumatized community can develop a culture around a shared trauma response, through art and media, and by collectively enforcing the behavior of individuals as a way to recover from or cope with traumatic events, past and present.

Under circumstances that involve spectacular violence, such as war (Demers 2011), genocide (Hirsch 2012; Gobodo-Madikizela and Orange 2016), and even the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster (Erikson 1995; 2017), the community-wide impact of the events is clearly recognized as “traumatic” from the outside looking in due to the violent nature of the onset. Trauma, however, can take many forms. Its arrival is not always marked as “a sudden flash of fear,” but instead is often realized after “a period of severe attenuation and erosion” (Erikson 1995, 185). Often, the pain and disruption of trauma is experienced privately by the individual, accumulating slowly in drips and drabs: by itself each instance tolerable, but with the cumulative impact of a crushing blow (Menakem 2017). When many individuals in a group

simultaneously experience this metaphorical “death by a thousand cuts,” it can start to slowly erode the tissues of a community from the inside out.

This is what I argue happened during the initial era of mass migration of Swedes to the New World, as brothers and sisters—sometimes already with wives, husbands, and children of their own—left their siblings, parents, and grandparents behind as they went in search of a chance at a better life. The loss and residual pain felt by each individual family was in many cases, if not all, traumatic for the family unit. As many families simultaneously experienced this loss in private, Sweden at the national level experienced a cumulative loss of members that bears some similarity to the devastations of war.⁹ The collective impact was a devastating blow to the tissues of “community” that was Sweden as a whole. Individually, each loss brought with it a wound in the form of grief, as heavy as an unexpected death in the family, but taking the form of uncertainty that any departing family member would return or ever be seen again (Paul 2019; Moberg 2008). Cumulatively, the many individual losses amounted to a widespread breakdown in a generations-long social contract in which, tacitly, sons and daughters were bound to reciprocate what had been provided to them as children by working as adults, and caring for their aging parents.¹⁰ This collective trauma resulted in significant shifts to Sweden’s national imagination.

In the section that follows, and at other points throughout this document, I chose to use my family’s stories for two reasons. First, these stories demonstrate the existence of those who,

⁹ Though spread out over seven decades, the 1.2 million Swedes who emigrated amounted for a sizeable change in population. For example, World War II spanned six years and resulted in a cumulative national loss of over: 560,000 people in France; 418,000 from the United States; and 9,500 in Norway (The National WWII Museum 2023).

¹⁰ As in, provide food/shelter via reserved land rights and familiar care that goes along with a perceived debt to the elders (Moberg 1991, 161).

generations later, still carry the burden of their ancestors' trauma within the Swedish American borderlands. At this point I cannot go into great detail around the traumatic retention of my extended Swedish family, but I have repeatedly experienced the binding force of our shared loss. Second, these intimate stories align with my goal as a vulnerable observer to provide clarity on how personal experiences have shifted and changed my perspectives on this topic. In retrospect, it comes as no surprise that I couldn't fully understand an example of intergenerational trauma that so fully overlapped with my own without first processing my own intergenerational trauma. I didn't know it would have this effect at the time, but the act of writing out these stories helped to integrate that trauma into my life narrative. After finding the words to represent the story that follows, I felt relief. Like taking off a loaded and well-fitted backpack after a ten-mile hike, I felt physically lighter. Almost joyful. Only then did it become possible to do the rest of the work. With that in mind, we will now turn to the idea of "postmemory" as a mechanism through which trauma is passed from one generation to the next, from the perspective of my family's tales.

The Anders(s)ons

In my childhood home there was a framed copy of an intricately hand drawn document tracing the history of my paternal family name.¹¹ The image represented the overlap and progeny emanating from two neighboring farms in Västra Götland, Sweden, and outlined my position as not much more than the dust on the bark of a twig in the context of the much larger organism that

¹¹ I must acknowledge the contributions of my Swedish relative, Carl-David, in all of the work I've done here. Carl-David, a cousin to Hjalmar, is the one who created this tree and in doing so reunited both sides of my Swedish-American family. Carl-David took it upon himself to not only research his family history but to reach out to those who had left Sweden for the States before Carl-David had been born. If not for a letter Carl-David wrote to my great-grandfather Hjalmar in the late 1960s, I likely would not have embarked on this project. Their late in life reconnection led to a decades-long process of reestablishing and nurturing bonds between our two branches of the family tree. This has continued on for almost sixty years and culminated, for me, when Carl-David's son Staffan generously, and with open arms, offered to host me for the entirety of my fieldwork stay in Sweden. I cannot thank either Staffan, his daughter Linnea, and Carl-David enough for what they have given me.

is the Anders(s)on family tree. At the base of the drawing are two stumps, one for each farm: Pjukarp on the left and Katthög on the right. From the tree stumps, new growth rises up and crosses over, creating two new and overlapping tree trunks representing the families formed when the brother and sister from one farm married the brother and sister from the other in the mid-1800s. The new trunk on the right, growing up above the stump labeled “Katthög,” grew from my great-great-great grandparents, Eva and her husband Anders—whose first name is the root of my surname. About halfway up the overlapping and intertwined tree trunks, is a limb on the right for their second son, August, which leads to a branch for August’s second son, Hjalmar, who would emigrate to the United States in 1911 in search of the life he could not get from his birth order. As the font gets smaller and smaller, eventually changing from handwritten to typed, an offshoot that leads to Hjalmar’s first son, Herbert, and a twig for his second son, Robert, and finally the place for a node denoting Robert’s unnamed eldest child: me.

I am a part of the third generation of American-born Swedes in my family. I never had direct contact with Hjalmar, who was born in Sweden and died in the US a decade before I came along, and barely any contact with his son Herbert, who was born in the US but gone before I turned two—though his sickbed features in my earliest memories. But I grew up knowing both of them, and their wives and families, through my father’s stories. I could see the farms in Sweden: iron red homes next to barns with white accents; the men hunched over in the fields in constant battle with stones that needed to be pulled from the earth to make space for crops at Katthög; even the barroom where Anders purportedly lost the deed to the family farm in a card game. These are mixed with memories of Iowa: Hjalmar’s goofy grin as he told jokes in Swedish to his three American-born sons while pushing a single-wheeled cultivator to till the muddy soil; and I see the necessity of resilience as he continues on and tends to the pigs the morning after they

trampled and killed his older brother, Karl Artur. As we move into the less distant past, the stories feel as if they take place in two locations at once, or somewhere between Iowa and Sweden: I see my Iowa-born dad's twenty-one-year-old face when his Swedish grandmother's niece asks "You don't like my potatoes?"—the only words she knew in English—when he declined her offer for thirds; I hear Herbert's voice on a trip to Sweden in his sixties as he sang the third verse of a Swedish drinking song as a solo—conjuring lyrics the locals themselves didn't remember—to a rapt audience of extended family; and I can see his wife Dorothy's face on the same trip when she poignantly asked "Well, why did they *leave* in the first place?" in response to the life she saw there compared to the life she had lived in the States.

By the time my nuclear family made a pilgrimage to Sweden in 2003, my mental images of these, essentially, family fairy tales were so strong that I felt I knew which road to turn down and could almost see the buildings that no longer rose above the grassy field where Pjukarp once stood. Even more amazingly, to me anyway, my body's physical response—a tightening in my chest, a tear in my eye—as we drove around the countryside visiting the places of my *what ifs* and "life that could have been." There was intergenerational pain in these memories, a sense of loss that permeates across our generations and underscores the things that were intentionally left unsaid and yet deliberately unforgotten: how much was lost by one generation so that the subsequent could, hopefully, gain. The true sacrifice of remembering becoming that we never felt fully at home in either place, but stuck in an imagined past that existed simultaneously in the United States and Sweden.

The scenes in my head are not literal memories. I did not have these experiences. But the vivid nature of these moments in time and the affective impact they have had on my sense of identity are an example of what feminist comparative literature scholar Marianne Hirsch calls

“postmemory.” In her work with the children of survivors of the Holocaust, herself among them, Hirsch uses the term postmemory to describe the trauma that the “generation after” picked up through exposure to stories, images, and even behaviors observed just by growing up within a family and/or community that experienced significant personal and cultural trauma. Hirsch suggests that

these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. (Hirsch 2012, 5, original emphasis)

Postmemory is a structure of the intergenerational transference of “traumatic memory and embodied experience” that extends the effects of traumatic events of the past into the next generation (Hirsch 2012, 6). Through stories and anecdotes shared from parent to child that “acquire the status of fairy tale, nightmare, and myth” a family’s transgenerational traumatic past can be “internalized without fully being understood” in its scope and magnitude (Hirsch 2012, 31). Much like the example across the earlier scenarios of dog encounters, postmemories carry the timelessness, affective force, and psychic/cognitive impacts of trauma but “(unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove” (Hirsch 2012, 6). This process of intergenerational transfer, the framing and shaping of traumatic events into an individual’s memorable scenarios, are hugely impacted by the shared belief system within a social group (Hirsch 2012, 32).

For this dissertation, I chose to include my own family’s stories in order to illustrate the process by which, according to Hirsch, “the language of the family, the language of the body: nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often

taking the form of symptoms” (Hirsch 2012, 34). I hold Hjalmar and Anna’s stories as a part of my lived experience. I did not choose to carry them with me. They were passed to me as consciously as the handwriting that I share with my father, his father, and Hjalmar before them. I include these stories here in an attempt to illustrate how the generations-wide gap is filled between those who directly experienced the significant and widespread trauma in Sweden over a century ago, and those who still live in its shadow today. The purpose of sharing my vulnerable version of events is to highlight how the residual trauma of Swedish emigrants to the United States continues to ripple behind the closed doors of at least one family home. Postmemory, however, can extend far beyond the family unit. When a community experiences a collective trauma, postmemories can be inspired by not just the stories we share, but the media we consume together across generations.

Postmemory and the Swedish emigrants’ narrative

Memories of traumatic events are haunting and resistant to integration into one’s life narrative. At the heart of trauma studies are the gaps created in the aftermath of traumatic experiences, and the ways in which those gaps in one’s life narrative are retroactively filled (Caruth 2016; van Der Kolk and van Der Hart 1995). In the aftermath of an “earth shattering experience”—like family forced by circumstances beyond their control being torn away and shipped to the other side of the world—traumatized persons might search for an external, “stable subjective perspective” from which to construct the narrative that fills those gaps (Caruth 2016, 121). Often, the language we use to fill those gaps comes from the “wound of intersecting histories” found at the junction of individual and collective experiences (Caruth 2016, 139). That is to say, we often rely on our community’s collective interpretation of events to fill the gaps left by trauma. Some of the gaps of “not-knowing”—the ones that are perhaps too painful, or too

frowned upon to articulate—are filled with silences (Frankish and Bradbury 2012). Others are filled with language that is informed by the context of our life experiences, the stories we tell ourselves and others, and that others tell us. This is why the lens of literature, movies, music, and all the other ways that people tell stories, become valuable informants in the exploration of trauma. Just as a family story can become a postmemory, a cultural tale can influence our collective history and the way we interpret the world around us. It is from this perspective that I now turn to the work of Swedish novelist Vilhelm Moberg.

The archetype of Swedish emigrants as farmers with land in Minnesota is more myth than fact. Between 1850 and 1920, “fully one-quarter of emigrants were town-dwellers,” Chicago even being considered “Sweden’s second largest city” by population in 1920 (Wallengren 2014, 8). Many, like some in my ancestry, took on work as house maids, craftsmen, or factory workers while they established themselves in their new country. And while some did manage to become farmers, many more did not. But the myth of the successful Swedish farmer remains, in large part because of Moberg’s *The Emigrants* series. Perhaps the most famous, and most enduring, depiction of the private impact of Sweden’s national trauma, *The Emigrants* is a collection of four books published in both Swedish and English over twelve years beginning in 1949.¹² The series chronicles the myriad hardships and experiences of eight characters whose lives became intertwined when they left Småland (Sweden) for Minnesota (United States) in 1850. Moberg based his books on extensive archival research, reading letters, diaries, and exploring his own family’s experience as well as the experience of many others who landed in the midwestern United States. The books have been adapted to at least three movies, and even a musical written

¹² *The Emigrants*, 1951 (*Utvandrarna*, 1949); *Unto a Good Land*, 1954 (*Invandrarna*, 1952); *The Settlers*, 1961 (*Nybyggarna*, 1956); and *The Last Letter Home*, 1961 (*Sista brevet till Sverige*, 1959).

by Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson of ABBA fame.¹³ The characters popped up in interviews I conducted, and even existed as implied proprietors at Småland's Wild West theme park, High Chaparral.

For Moberg, these stories were personal. When asked why he bothered to take on such a massive project, Moberg explained, “The reason is simple: I wanted to write about my relatives in America” (Moberg 2008, 63). In Moberg's own family, of his parents' generation only Moberg's mother and father remained in Sweden. All of both his mother's and father's siblings emigrated to North America, and that is where his aunts and uncles chose to raise his many cousins. Though only one ever returned to Sweden to visit in person, their presence was felt through letters and, perhaps more importantly, the money they sent. Relatives in America were a part of daily conversation, as all of them had returned in the form of photos that were always displayed in “the foremost place” in his childhood home, a one room cottage where he lived with his parents and his seven brothers and sisters. Counting across four generations, one of his grandmothers—who had six of seven children leave for the New World—had as many as one hundred descendants living in the United States. Of her, he said, “You can really call her a great mother of pioneers, a mother of American citizens” (Moberg 2008, 64). But this “great mother of pioneers” could not read or write, which meant she could not communicate on her own via letters to her children and grandchildren abroad, contributing to her deep-felt loss. Moberg remembered her words: “To follow your children to the station when they are leaving for America is the same as to follow them to the grave!” (Moberg 2008, 148). It is from this perspective that Moberg

¹³ The series *Utvandrarna* (1971), and *Nybyggarna* (1972); and *Utvandrarna* (2021).

composed some of the most enduring stories in Swedish literature—stories that permeate the national imagination and thoroughly shape ideas of *Amerika* in Sweden.

Moberg's work was a part of a much broader cultural response to the trauma of emigration. The substantial loss of manpower, and the desperation that loss created in Swedish "politicians and ruling elite" at the turn of the twentieth century led to some extreme responses, including the formation of the Swedish Society for Eugenics in 1909 (Wallengren 2014, 19). According to film scholar Ann-Kristin Wallengren, emigration became "a population question of crucial importance" when healthy men and women in the midst of their most productive years opted to leave Sweden for good (Wallengren 2014, 19). Some predictions showed Sweden on a path towards underpopulation, which put Sweden's push towards industrialization at grave risk (Wallengren 2014, 19). She argues that

The new Sweden which was to be built, a new industrialized country, risked losing the labor it so desperately needed. . . . I do not think one should underestimate the enormous ideological importance of Swedish emigration: it was a highly effective way of showing dissatisfaction with the country. In the first decades of the 20th century...emigration became an extraordinarily powerful response to the Swedish nation and what it could offer—an unparalleled vote of no confidence. (Wallengren 2014, 19)

In response to sentiments that the path to a better life was to be found elsewhere, the National Society Against Emigration was formed with the task of, essentially, strengthening imagined connections between Swedish people and their country (Wallengren 2014, 19). Some of their propaganda came in the form of movies that highlighted the downsides of America and the upsides of Sweden. This included an intentional shift in Swedish ideas of "home" and the importance of the nuclear family, both of which "played a highly significant role in the growth of an ideology of Swedishness and Swedish nationalism" (Wallengren 2014, 19). This included still-prevalent imagery of a "red cottage, nestled in a birch clearing out in the countryside,"

which became an emblem of the family love and picturesque Sweden that emigrants left behind (Wallengren 2014, 19)—the very thing my own family searches for when we return to visit relatives.

This was in contrast to the ways in which some propaganda negatively depicted the US, creating one of two major narratives in Sweden about Swedish Americans that filled the gaps left in the wake of traumatic losses due to migration. Early films implied that *Amerika* was a “dumping ground that should take anyone who was not wanted in Sweden” (Wallengren 2014, 34), and emigrants were unpatriotic. This pro-Sweden, anti-emigration propaganda served to proactively fill some of the gaps created by the unassimilated scraps of traumatic memories that emigration left in its wake. These narratives were created with the express purpose of preventing further loss, but they also served to provide a shared narrative around which Sweden could come together to rebuild, and gave an outlet for anger and frustration for those who perhaps felt left behind.

Even though they were regarded in this propaganda as generally poor in morals, and suffering “from some certain psychological deficiencies,” the preference was for Swedish emigrants to return home to Sweden (Wallengren 2014, 20). Some of them did, as up to one-quarter of emigrants came back from the States at one point or another. These numerous returnees gave rise to a new figure in the Swedish imagination: the Swedish American. Swedish Americans brought back with them technological know-how and advances, new ideas about society and consumption, and a generally new outlook on life with their stories from the New World (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021, 15). Though many were able to reintegrate into society—bringing along with them comparatively huge sums of money and buying up southern farmland (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021)—they were still considered Swedish American, even after they

returned. In one of my interviews, a country music fan remarked that even at the early age of five he could already tell his grandmother, who had spent time in the States during her youth but returned to raise her family, was “a little different because she has been *over there*.” *Amerika*, it seems, changed people.

The antithesis to this anti-emigration narrative, and the second major narrative around Swedish Americans in Sweden, began as solace in the aftermath of private wounds, and initially arrived in the form of *Amerikabrev* (“letters from America”). Many emigrants returned only in the form of these letters—often filled with money, photos, and Swedish language American newspaper clippings—depicting life after emigration. *Amerikabrev* were sent to friends and family that had been “left behind” and tended to emphasize how good life was in *Amerika*. These letters were received all over the country, and provided a private glimpse of the good life in *Amerika*, emphasizing for many that it was “possible to live a different life to the one in Sweden” (Wallengren 2014, 17). These reports—from sons to their mothers, or sisters to their brothers and cousins—reinforced the tangible connections between Swedes and Swedish Americans. Many—like the ones I’ve seen from my own family (see chapter six)—were perhaps weighted towards the many upsides to life in the United States. Stories were skewed towards the positive, while skimping on details of the more painful elements of life away from one’s homeland, but these letters remained a trusted source about life in *Amerika* for those who stayed behind in Sweden. These narratives existed in direct opposition to initial anti-emigration propaganda. Over time, however, public representations of Swedish Americans in the States shifted back and forth between versions of these two narratives to suit political realities in Sweden.

Performing *Amerika* and Sweden's Wild West: Småland's High Chapparal

Nestled in the heart of Småland—a region that lost half of its population to emigration to the New World between the mid-1800s and early 1900s—High Chaparral is a Wild West theme park that got its name from the 1960's American television series starring Swedish American actor Leif Erikson. Catering primarily to Swedish families with young children, the park features everything from American pancakes and a BBQ buffet, to store after store selling nothing but toy cap guns and disposable ring cap ammunition—something I saw nowhere else in Sweden. Though there are horse-drawn stagecoaches, a steam engine, and even a paddle boat, days at this theme park are built not on rides but on interactive performances. It was at this fascinating and magical place that I caught my first glimpse of what *Amerika* looks like from the other side of the looking glass.

It was a typical July day in Sweden: cold, overcast, and threatening to rain. My cousin Staffan and I arrived just before the park opened, and found a line of people forming under the large, painted sign beckoning us to “Enter the Wild West” at the gates of High Chaparral.¹⁴ Families, mostly, clustered tightly together. Everyone was bundled up in medium-weight waterproof jackets, most with cowboy hats on their heads.

We were among the first to be let through the front gates that morning, but Kate's Palace—an old saloon-styled coffee shop—was already teeming with patrons. It was a truly puzzling sight; men and women dressed in outfits befitting a Hollywood period piece sat comfortably, as if at home, drinking coffee.

¹⁴ Staffan is technically my grandfather Herbert's second cousin, making him my second cousin twice removed. But given everything he and his family has shared with me and mine, “cousin” seems fitting.

Are they employees? We wondered aloud to each other, but there were far too many of them and they appeared much too relaxed. What's more, there were children among them.

They couldn't be patrons; they weren't in line with us! They're too fancy!

As we went throughout the day, and Staffan helped me strike up conversations, we learned that they were indeed patrons, but on a whole other level from those of us there on a simple day pass. These folks were “Citizens” of the High Chapparal. These dedicated guests pay a small fee and have their costumes approved in order to get discounts and special access to this Swedish recreation of 1860s America. Many Citizens spend weeks at a time acting as living props at the park during the day, and staying at the park's campground at night. These Citizens took their roles seriously—some taking up the position as “Sheriff” in the jailhouse, others helping to lead the daily line dancing class. Their commitment and camaraderie provided an unparalleled feeling of immersion for a simple “day pass” holder like me.

At 10:20 am exactly, a backing track started blaring on the outdoor speakers, and three women dressed as frontier bordello girls in coordinated monochromatic frilled dresses—who just moments before were serving the coffee—emerged from the cafe to sing country songs with a feminist edge to the gathered crowd. Their high spirits, even higher kicks, and catchy tunes got all of us in the crowd warmed up for a full day of excitement and, for me anyway, curiosity.

Fifteen minutes and a short walk past the children's play area/miniaturized Wild West city later, and we are transported to the prairie states with a play about Sven-Erik and Ester, an emigrant couple who were just settling into their new American homestead. The story begins with Sven-Erik, who has come ahead to choose the land and begin building a home. The crowd laughed as he showed off with pride the ornately decorated outhouse and sang a polka about his grand vision for the homestead, using audience members as place markers for future trees,

bushes, and potatoes. Sven-Erik is filled with joy to be interrupted by Esther's arrival, whose journey from the boat was longer as her task was to lug the trunk filled with their worldly possessions halfway across the continent. After a joyous embrace, Esther gets the same tour the audience has just been on, but this time ending on the blue and yellow Swedish flag flying high above our heads. Sven-Erik explains that the flag is there so that as they begin to explore the untamed land around them, they will still be able to find their way back to their unfamiliar new home.

The couple then launch into a song about the journey that got them to this place. The tune is a familiar one, likely known to most of the audience as "*Vi sålde våra hemman*"—an emigrant's visa or story song—and the first few lines of text remain the same. The majority of the lyrics, however, are updated to fit the context of the play and the modern audience.

We sold our farm and left for far away
Like birds that fly away at the end of the summer
But the birds return when spring arrives
And by then we will already have left for a whole new land.

We wanted to sweeten the end of our lives
We left our homeland with only the simplest of things
Leaving Sweden, our lives there are done
Said goodbye to family and friends, and turned to a whole new page

First we traveled to England
Not sure if we were happy or sorrowful
Glad to have my partner
Don't know if we could have made it without each other

(Author's translation)

The song goes on to describe the seasickness caused by a rough journey, and has a hard stop when we arrive at New York's grand harbor. This is where the audience learns that Sven-Erik was sent ahead to build the house (which was not yet complete) and Esther stayed behind to wait for and travel with the luggage (which has not arrived with her). These hiccups provide conflict

that drives the rest of the fifteen-minute performance. Not to worry, both conflicts quickly resolve. The luggage arrived intact, though the blue chest with all of their worldly belongings is plunked down with a “crash” by the couriers Esther had hired. And, as the play’s finale, the children in the audience are invited to come up and finish building the house using reusable wooden blocks. Throughout these pratfalls and reworded Swedish folk songs, we are reminded that the untamed Wild West is not just “American” but that it also belongs to the Swedes.

It was there, standing in the rain, listening to the crowd erupt with laughter, that I had perhaps the most basic, and yet impactful, epiphany of my fieldwork:

Oh, right. They own this story just as much as I do.

I’ve never before had a thought so blatantly obvious, and yet was such a complicated answer to so many of my questions. Because while I am the descendant of those who emigrated in order to settle and farm on the American plains—just like the characters in the play before me—standing next to me was my cousin Staffan, a descendant of the brothers and sisters who stayed behind. Our stories emanate from the same place, same community, the same farm. The same blood, sweat, and tears that made it possible for my branch of the family tree to travel to and survive in the States, also fueled the growth of his branch in Sweden. We were surrounded by a packed audience of all ages who laughed and smiled along with a tale, and who already deeply understood the context of the story. There was no need to reiterate in detail the shared history that lived in this emigrants’ play. It was embedded knowledge, long codified and proliferated through familial postmemories, and reinforced by Swedish and American media alike. While they may not have descended from the pioneers themselves, Swedes come from the same stock. This real and imagined biological connection overlaps with the United States’ position in the world’s imagination. As O’Dell wrote:

We may often think of America as a nation, a country, or a place, something concretely anchored in global geography, but where in this geography would we locate the Wild West? And does the Wild West occupy the same space as the Promise Land? Or does it lie closer to the Land of Plenty? And how could we imagine it without metaphorical landscapes such as the Wild West? What becomes clear as we ponder these questions is that America is much more than a place on a map. It has become something which is etched into our imaginations; to speak of America is to speak of something alluring, something repulsive, something exotic, something strikingly similar or something which is just plain *different*. (O'Dell 1997, 46)

The life that I have lived as a Swedish American has often betrayed my family's intergenerational trauma. It is common for intergenerational trauma to highlight the ways in which that "loss of family, home, of a sense of belonging and safety in the world 'bleed' from one generation to the next" (Hirsch 2012, 34). Our internal imagery, our perceptions of the world around us, are "linked both to the particular experiences communicated by our parents, and to the way these experiences come down to us as 'emanations' in a 'chaos of emanations'" (Hirsch 2012, 34). That family life, then, "is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broader transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance" (Hirsch 2012, 35). This play, this performance of *Amerika* all around me really, was a direct enactment of the "fantasy and projection" that have served to make sense of this trauma on the Swedish side. This was the other side of the intergenerational trauma that I grew up in.

Both sides of this same trauma developed in tandem, separate but connected first by family ties—in the form of letters home—and then by widespread media representation of the United States. The gaps filled by my ancestors in the US were different than the gaps that needed to be filled in their places of departure in Sweden. While my intergenerational trauma was processed through my dad's stories and American depictions of Sweden (think the Swedish Chef of Muppets fame), my relatives in Sweden were exposed to a different picture of *Amerika*. High

Chapparal became important in my fieldwork not because it was a great place to listen to Swedish bluegrass music, but because its movie-set-like streets were an amalgamation of a specifically Swedish Wild West. The Swedish Wild West existed away from the park. It was a regular fixture at Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music events to varying degrees. High Chapparal, though, was a place where one could truly immerse themselves in a world where the rules were set by stories told by real and imagined ancestors.

The evolution of *Amerika*

In the Swedish imagination, Swedish Americans in the United States have sometimes been perceived as a nuisance or even “relics of the past” who were “out of touch with modern Sweden” as they (well, we) have held on to traditions that have long fallen from fashion in Sweden (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021, 19). Prime examples include a continued Christmastime fixation with *lutfisk*—a dried and salted cod that is cured in lye then reconstituted in water before cooking—as a staple that is a requirement in my home, as well as at many larger *Jul* (“Christmas”) dinners hosted by Lutheran churches or cultural organizations like Seattle’s Swedish Club all around the US. This perception of Swedish Americans as old fashioned is something that, as a Swedish American scholar, I have intentionally exploited when giving presentations to Swedish audiences. As a way to empathetically align my genuine interest in the peculiarities of seeing vintage American outfits on stage at Swedish country music events, I would show a photo of me in the *folkdräkt* (“folk costume”) I wore as a performer with the Swedish Singers of Seattle or, if time permitted, a video example of one of our performances. Somewhat predictably, these examples of my own Swedish American experience would be met with a combination of gasps, chuckles, and furrowed brows from Swedish audiences—which

very much mirrored my own initial reaction to the Swedish country music scene as a confusing presentation of detail-oriented anachronisms.

In other eras, the Swedish imagination viewed Swedish Americans very differently. In the years between World Wars I and II, “the eyes of official Sweden” considered Swedish Americans a “foreign asset, providing not only a historical and cultural but also a purportedly biological connection to Sweden” (Blanck and Hjorthén 2021, 19), an idea that brings me back to the many, many folks I met during my fieldwork who—upon meeting an American researcher—immediately claimed their *Amerikan* ancestry. Swedish television and movies have articulated the real and imagined connections between the United States and Sweden for generations. Some of the earliest Swedish documentaries focused on the lives of Swedish Americans and the success they found in the States—from running and winning political campaigns, to “doughty settlers, seeing a new life in a land of opportunity, and returning to Sweden with a modernizing spirit and democratic ideals” (Wallengren 2014, 9). Documentary films from the 1940s included depictions of states like Minnesota and Illinois where brave Swedish countrymen and women “through bloody struggle and peaceful diligence had converted the prairie into productive farmland” (Wallengren 2014, 38), a perspective that is integrated into the modern imagery of places like High Chaparral. A surge of Swedish television programming in the 1970s and 1980s about the lives of emigrants in America was likely spurred “at least in part because it was realized that the first generation of emigrants were dying out, and something had to be done to record their stories before it was too late” (Wallengren 2014, 42). Much of this content reinforced the idea that “emigrants still count as Swedish” and these biological and historical connections between Sweden and the United States were reinforced to new generations and their imaginings of *Amerika*, all via their television screens (Wallengren 2014, 38). In some

ways, the ever presence of these narratives beg the unanswerable question: *What if they hadn't left?*

On the family level, especially for those interested in their family history, these hypothetical “what ifs” are a surprisingly common thought exercise, and have even become the basis for a popular reality competition show produced by Swedish public broadcasting (SVT). Archival science scholar Ann-Sofie Klareld (2022) examined the “quest for roots and kinship” on display in *Allt För Sverige (AFS)*, a show in which Swedish American contestants are brought to Sweden to learn more about their Swedish heritage and compete for the grand prize: the chance of reunification with living Swedish relatives (Klareld 2022, 2). Sweden is particularly well suited for a show where the prize is essentially archival research as public records have historically been meticulously kept and accessible to the public since 1766, and interest in genealogical research sparked the creation of the Swedish Emigrant Institute in 1965 “in order to strengthen contacts with Swedish emigrants and their descendants” (Klareld 2022, 2-3).

The public broadcaster SVT has the “widest range of programmes of all television companies” in Sweden (Klareld 2022, 2), and its impact contributes to Sweden’s position, as described by Hannerz (2002), as a “creolized space” due to its varied programming and accessibility across Sweden. As a part of SVT’s lineup, *AFS* highlights the ways in which media can both reflect and shape the Swedish imaginings of *Amerika*. For example, let’s look at host Anders Lundin’s opening remarks for the ninth season of *AFS* in 2019:

Now we will do it again. Unite family ties broken long, long ago, and let those who disappeared find their way home, to the farm, the gate, the place, the home, where everything once had its beginning. Relate events that affected their lives long before they were born, and seek answers to questions about what made them who they are. The ten Swedish Americans you are about to get to know have traveled a long, long way to get here, but the journey they have ahead of them is perhaps even longer and stretches back generations and

centuries in time. And for one of them, it leads all the way to a reunion where the ties once broken can be retied. (Klareld 2022, 8)

For his audience, Lundin frames the contestants' family history as the key to understanding their own life story, and *AFS* as their locksmith. According to Wallengren, this approach to Swedish ideas about heritage and connections to the United States in *Allt för Sverige* shows that “no matter how much time has passed, the American immigrant is still thought of as being at heart a Swedish emigrant, and even a Swede as long as she or he returns home and admits their love for Sweden, which will then welcome them with open arms” (Wallengren 2014, 188). Across generations, these historic connections between Sweden and the United States have been reinforced and strengthened in the Swedish imagination by media depictions that remind audiences that just because they emigrated, doesn't mean they aren't Swedish.

Questions that spur us to evaluate the actions of our ancestors—essentially a form of theoretical time travel—are a valuable component of the process of coming to terms with the changes to self-identity that often result from genealogical research (Klared 2022). As a result of this decades-long exchange of people and culture, there remains a real connection between Sweden and Swedish Americans, one that allows the imagination to wander around many “*what ifs?*” Thinking back to the beginning of the last chapter, my conversation with Albin brought up this idea of what *could have been* if members of his family had left, and I've often thought of my great-grandparents and wondered: *what if they never left?* In reality, however, these questions are two sides of the same story.

The work of anti-emigration voices and the impact of the very personal *Amerikabrev* created two conflicting narratives about *Amerika* that are reinforced and continue to exist in tandem throughout Swedish media depictions of the United States. During my fieldwork, interviewees often referred to Sweden as America's *lillebror* (“little brother”) and the analogy of

a sibling relationship is perhaps an excellent way to explain the coexistence of these narratives. On the one hand the US was the place where the “unpatriotic” escaped to when life in Sweden became “too difficult” to handle, but are now a bit “behind the times” in their approaches to daily life. On the other hand, it was understood that *Amerika* was the land of the free, where Swedes went to be successful. And in this way, the United States exists as a source of pride for Swedes, as many American successes can be attributed to its historic—and biologic—connection to Sweden. I argue that both of these storylines are the result of trauma, and serve to fill in the gaps left by both the individual and collective traumas inflicted by mass emigration in Sweden. These narratives took shape as a part of the national imagination through the shared landscape of media as it mixed with the private telling of family stories. On the one hand, propaganda was created to stop the hemorrhaging of able-bodied countrymen to the detriment of the homeland. On the other, families were not inclined to believe their own brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters were the unpatriotic ruffians described in propaganda. Instead, they touted stories of success. The deafening silence around the conflicting nature of these narratives is an inherent part of the cycle of the intergenerational transfer of memory.

5. JAMMING BY THE MIDNIGHT SUN: MUSIC AND THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

Many of my conversations in Sweden, both on and off the record, centered on a theme: “Why *this* music?” or, sometimes a variation with similar aims, including “How—out of all of the options available here in Sweden—did you end up playing bluegrass/old time/country music?” I found these more open-ended questions to be a way to get the words flowing, allowing interviewees to guide our direction a bit. While everyone’s approach was different, the common thread amongst the answers was a visceral response to the music itself. Sometimes the reaction was unexpected, and somewhat inexplicable:

It started in school, actually. I think I was seventeen, and we saw the film Bonnie and Clyde from ‘67, I think? And the soundtrack is the Foggy Mountain Boys with “Foggy Mountain Breakdown.” . . . I hadn’t heard that kind of banjo picking before.

I had heard some Irish Traditional Music, of course, from the seventies Swedish bands that could use a mandolin or a banjo, but I hadn’t heard something that sounded like *that*. That *energy*. It just, **I fell in love directly**.

I couldn’t explain it. Because I was into punk rock music and Swedish folk ballads and stuff like that. And I couldn’t explain it to myself or my friends, what made bluegrass music so strong for me. . . . I don’t think I listened to any other music for four years.

(Bluegrass and honkytonk musician, guitar and vocals)

Other times, that emotive connection was triggered by the music as a part of the social aspect that exists for members of the scene, which is intensified by the act of playing together in an unstructured group:

The first time I got to Torsåker, the whole experience of jamming was very new to me and I was almost ecstatic when I came home. . . . I realized I had not been active in a musical community where people came there just to *play* before. If you go to a choral festival, you don’t go there to sing with other

people because you don't know the same songs. But being there and jamming. . . . **That was a very, almost religious experience.**

(Peter Cedermark, bluegrass and old time musician, guitar and banjo)

Obviously, the idea that “music brings people together” is not new. Nor is the idea that unrelated people can come together both as imagined and real communities bound by a shared interest in a particular music scene. Many ethnomusicologists have written about the tangible benefits and impacts of such music communities. Thomas Turino's *Music as Social Life* discusses at length the ways that people depend on constructed social groups, like family, friends, and nations, in order to “survive emotionally and economically and to belong to something larger than ourselves” (Turino 2008, 3). The act of people coming together to make, listen to, or otherwise participate in music and music events creates a community that is not imagined, but actual, even if “sporadic, temporary, and geographically diffuse” (Turino 2008, 161). Music, he argues, can create an “unintentional interest group that forms around particular activities, a particular style complex, as well as a particular discourse” (Turino 2008, 161) and can be a shared experience that is felt deeply by participants, even if temporarily, and can be renewed in other contexts at other times (Turino 2008, 181). What I would like to add to this conversation is the idea that, sometimes, the music isn't what binds us, but instead is a symptom of our bonds.

In his work with communities that have suffered large-scale disasters in the United States, ranging from floods to nuclear meltdowns, Sociologist Kai Erikson suggests that trauma “has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies” that draws traumatized persons both away from general societal engagement, and towards groups of similarly impacted persons where “estrangement becomes the basis for commonality” (Erikson 1995, 186). The impact of a traumatic event on an individual can feel as if it has moved “to the center of one's being” and give survivors a sense that “they have been set apart and made special,” and their shared trauma

becomes “a kind of calling, a status” that draws them towards others who are similarly marked (Erikson 1995, 186). Essentially, traumatized persons sense that they are different from those who have not suffered the same trauma, so they are instead drawn towards others who exhibit similar signs of being different. What binds similarly traumatized individuals together, according to Erikson, is a “set of perspectives and rhythms and moods” that provides a sense of safety and a feeling of belonging (1995, 194). That “set of perspectives and rhythms and moods” then seeps outward from the collection of traumatized individuals, becoming a broader set of norms and rules of comportment that govern this new social group (Erikson 1995, 194). This assembly of traumatized persons can be intentional—joining a support group, for example—or an unconscious joining together of similarly attuned people—like, as I suggest with this chapter, a music scene.

Music serves a corporeal purpose. The act of musicking can be a conduit through which an individual can attune their nervous system with others who operate within the same “set of perspectives and rhythms and moods,” the connection that Erikson suggests is fundamental to the “centripetal and centrifugal” forces of the social dimensions of trauma (1995, 194, 186). The previous chapter explored in depth the body’s response to trauma, perceived threats, or other cues of danger, and in the sections that follow I will again draw upon scholarship in neuroscience, psychology, and polyvagal theory. This time, however, the purpose is to explore how the body responds to cues of safety, and why prosocial engagement has a calming effect on an activated nervous system. This is not a function specific to the music scenes included in this study, but likely could apply in varying degrees to many modes of musical engagement. Therefore, in the final section I will turn again to the question of “Why *this* music?” and address how narrative imaginings of *Amerika* within these scenes influences rules of comportment,

creating a space where cues of social engagement are anticipatory for those who share a similar history of intergenerational trauma. In effect, I am suggesting that the bond shared by many within the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes existed long before the music scene itself.

Generations removed from a traumatic event, the sense of being “different” because of intergenerational trauma is not necessarily at the front of people’s minds. I certainly don’t go around thinking about the daily choices I make in the context of the trauma suffered by my great-great-grandparents—or, at least I didn’t before I started this project. When I was in the field, the idea of “trauma” was not on my radar at all, and therefore I did not get to ask questions specifically relating to the term, and quotes from interviews don’t use the word. In hindsight, however, evidence of activation, dysregulation, and attunement seeped into conversations, almost unnoticed:

This is like therapy in a way! No, for sure. Yeah. . . . When we started talking about this, I realized that this is not a hobby. It *is* a hobby, but it is such an important part of my life to be playing music. It is very, very, very big. I wouldn’t be here, obviously, if it wasn’t.

(Bluegrass musician, bass and mandolin)

We went later on to Ransäter, the Swedish folk festival. We had friends in common, so we were camping at the same spot. But we were playing together because we were literally the only people at the whole festival who liked playing old time music. And you just, kind of, find your people.

(Old time musician, fiddler and vocals)

I’d much rather listen to [vocalist] sing and I’m sitting right next to her and I’m just listening. It is almost like I feel like I want to cry because it’s so nice. So direct and so honest and it gets to me. . . . [T]hat’s my greatest experience.

I can just sit and listen, and I have my booze and my camping chair, and that’s very nice. The energy that I get from them feeling like it is okay to sit there. It is okay to jam, or its okay to ask questions, it is okay to bring up a story or whatever, you know? That’s what I like. . . . I just enjoy being there for whatever reason, I guess.

Even if I feel like not participating, I do it anyway because then I can lean back on the role that I might fill with playing the mandolin maybe. And just *chuck, chuck, chuck* for two hours, smoking to keep the mosquitoes away.

(Bluegrass and old time musician, vocals and mandolin)

Different people, different generations, the music brings us together. And it doesn't matter if you come from Scotland, or United States, or if you're black or brown or green or anything. It doesn't matter. We're like a big family. You come like a big family. You go from tent to tent, I mean, what we do here, this weekend, grabbing a guitar and ask: "Hello! Can I join in?"

(Bluegrass fan)

I think we are longing for something, all of us. We are longing for something. We are waiting for something. Many times, it could be something abstract, but there is something. Urgent, or something.

(Country music fan)

Many of the statements that stood out to me, several years after they were first recorded when I finally was able to write this dissertation, were the ones that hinted at how this music, and the scenes that exist around said music, provide a sense of calm and belonging. A sense of attuning to others who are similarly settled by this music and the people who chose to play it. Throughout this dissertation, I've had space for only a sampling of the many conversations I was lucky to have on the record. All of them, and I do mean all of them, contained some variation on these themes, and the idea that this style of music playing provided something unique. Across the interviews quoted in this document, we've seen these examples already:

"I fell in love directly. I couldn't explain it."

"I had never experienced anything like this. I had no idea."

"I just enjoy being there, for whatever reason."

". . . you just, kind of, find your people."

"It is almost like I feel like I want to cry because it's so nice."

"That was a very, almost religious experience."

"This is like therapy in a way!"

". . . just the joy of playing the music with other people."

“I think we are longing for something, all of us.”

“The music brings us together.”

“I must be a part of a bigger thing.”

“. . . somehow they are different from the general Swedes.”

“. . . it just really resonates with me for some reason.”

I present these as asymmetrical fragments, because that is how they echoed in the back of my mind, as the statements that shaped the narrative of this dissertation. In retrospect, and with the perspective of trauma studies literature now acting as the plot, what I hear in these statements is evidence of attunement, and of the body’s social engagement system at work. Academic conversations about trauma’s impact on the nervous system and how that effects day to day life have shifted dramatically in recent years, due in large part to the work of Stephen Porges, his many collaborators, and the groundbreaking polyvagal theory. In the previous chapter, I introduced the idea that trauma impacts homeostatic processes in the body, that there are connections between the brain and the body, and it is the bidirectional flow of signals along those nerve pathways that create the physical sensations of emotions. Now, I would like to turn to the ways in which music—especially the physical and community aspects of playing music with others—can regulate, and even serve as a “brake” to stop an activated response, along the vagal nerve pathways. Previously, I explored some examples of what happens when trauma activates the nervous system and triggers a fight, flight, or freeze response in the body. In this chapter, I will dive into how prosocial methods of engagement and voluntary behaviors in the body can serve to regulate an activated nervous system—essentially retraining and calming an activated nervous system that has been dysregulated in response to trauma. Most importantly, I will discuss what this has to do with music, why jam circles can be an excellent regulator of an

individual body's trauma response, and, of course, why *this* music might have served a specific purpose for those who chose to play it in Sweden.

VAGAL NERVE PATHWAYS AND THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

In the previous chapter, I discussed the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems as ostensibly “ON” and “OFF” switches that work together to regulate homeostatic function, or in opposition to activate either the body's fight, flight, or freeze responses to a perceived threat. That description included only two states of function: one where the sympathetic and parasympathetic pathways are working in tandem to regulate bodily functions and support “health, growth, and restoration” in the body (Porges and Carter 2017, 223); and another where a defensive response is activated by a perceived threat, triggering either a fight or flight response from the sympathetic nervous system, or a freeze response from the parasympathetic nervous system. This summary aligns with how these systems operated where they first developed, in the bodies of reptiles. In mammals, however, this process includes an additional layer of complexity. During the “phylogenetic transition from ancient reptiles to mammals,” mammals maintained the reptilian vagal pathways, but evolved additional pathways that also support social engagement (Porges and Carter 2017, 222). Mammals, and therefore humans, developed a new vagal circuit of myelinated—fat covered, and therefore faster—nerves whose purpose is to “regulate the supradiaphragmatic organs (heart and lungs)” which can serve as a “brake” on the unmyelinated pathways that supports and controls the body's sense of calmness in response to social cues of safety (Porges and Carter 2017, 224). It is almost like in the transition from reptiles to mammals, the nervous system was updated from black and white (recognizing the presence or absence of a threat) to color (a high-definition rainbow of threat level options).

If we define “safe” as “a biobehavioral state determined by the nervous system, often independent of awareness and actual threat” (Porges and Carter 2017, 223), then this nervous system update has its benefits and downsides. If a lizard was sunning on a rock by a lake and suddenly a dog ran up and began sniffing around the rock, the lizard’s “flight” response would likely activate, and it would scurry away. If I were sitting on the same rock, alone and without another person in sight on a quiet sunny afternoon, I would jump out of my skin to see a dog appear out of nowhere. Though I might not immediately run away, I’m pretty sure I would be examining my exit routes and calculating which of my belongings I could stand to leave behind if the need arises, while desperately scanning for the dog’s owner. If I was sitting on the same rock having a picnic with friends enjoying a rest after a hike, I might look up and see them enthusiastically welcoming the unknown pup. Their reactions would tell me that my initial jump-scare was unnecessary, and I’d go back to enjoying the afternoon. Likely without even noticing a decision took place at all. This would be an example of my body’s social engagement system at work, assessing the threat based on signals interpreted from the faces of the people around me. Given that they stayed calm, and outwardly exhibited signs of calmness, the myelinated pathways of my vagal nerve complex likely put a “brake” on any defense response on the unmyelinated pathways.

In reptiles, simply removing a perceived threat is enough to calm an activated nervous system. In mammals, however, the additional myelinated pathways allow for social cues to either amplify or curtail a defense response, depending on social cues of safety or danger (Porges and Carter 2017, 223). The downside of this complex mammalian system is that it can be difficult to calm an activated nervous system in the absence of those social cues of safety. If an activated nervous system is one that has engaged the defensive fight, flight, or freeze response, a

dysregulated nervous system is one that remains primed to respond to a perceived threat, even in its absence—much like my general response to unknown dogs. With a dysregulated nervous system, the removal of an immediate threat does not necessarily mean relief from those defensive strategies or an assumed feeling of safety in humans and other mammals. In effect, a dysregulated nervous system is one that has not yet fully returned to a relaxed state, one that remains easily triggered by signs of danger even in their absence. To reach that state of calmness, the human nervous system requires active cues of safety to restore the body in order to “retune” an activated system and restore regular function. Importantly, once the human nervous system reaches that state of calm and safety, the defense mechanisms in the vagal pathways are much less likely to be repeatedly triggered (Porges and Carter 2017, 223). Which is to say, once a nervous system is calmed, it can better calibrate the appropriate reaction upon subsequent exposure to the original threat. This is what makes trauma therapies that focus on downregulation through cues of safety—including active engagement of “vocalizations, voluntary controlled breathing practices, movements, or postures” (Porges and Carter 2017, 228), which will be explored later in this chapter—so effective. Even outside of a therapeutic context though, dysregulation can, in effect, become regulated by the social cues that surround us.

For physiological reasons—including the hierarchy of nerve connections in the brain and the increased speed of transfer along the fat lined nerves—these newer myelinated vagal pathways can serve as a “brake” on defensive signals between the brain and the body. This means it can delay a biophysical “threat” response—by slowing an increased heart rate, for example—if it senses adequate cues of safety. This “vagal brake” allows social engagement and cues of safety to supersede a defensive response. Previously, I touched on the brain-gut axis that

ties together physical and emotional responses in the body. Additionally, to help us read social cues, mammals also have what is known as the “face-heart connection” which enables the detection of whether an individual of the same species is exhibiting signs of a “calm physiological state” and are thereby “‘safe’ to approach or in a highly mobilized and reactive physiological state” in which “engagement would be dangerous” (Porges and Carter 2017, 225). We use this same face-heart connection to exhibit our own “patterns of facial expression and vocal intonation” to signal signs of safety from ourselves to those around us, “potentially calming an agitated conspecific to enable formation of a social relationship” (Porges and Carter 2017, 225). In other words, the same myelinated pathways that allow us to interpret the facial expressions and vocal tone of other members of our species are used to externalize our own emotive expressions for others to read and interpret. This is all a part of the bidirectional flow of information within the body that is the key to the application of polyvagal theory—signals in the brain can use vagal pathways to trigger reactions in the body, and the body can cue the nervous system to cause a reaction in the brain.

At this point, I’ve gone into a lot of detail about neurological function and emotional/physical responses to signals of threat and safety, and any reasonable reader might be wondering what all of this has to do with a dissertation about music. Fair question, so here’s my point: Many of the voluntary behaviors regularly engaged in as a part of therapeutic treatments for an activated or dysregulated nervous system are inherently a part of musicking, even more so when playing music in a community or group setting. Music, in many forms, can influence the “vagal brake,” in effect putting a stop on, and thereby calming, an activated or dysregulated nervous system. With the application of polyvagal theory, we can start to see that there are physiological reasons why music is soothing, why we might choose one music scene over

another, and why playing music with others who like that same music is invigorating. As I explore these topics in the sections that follow, what will become clear is that, sometimes, the music that brings us together is a symptom of the bonds we already shared, and can fill a need that we didn't necessarily know we had.

MUSIC AND THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

In order to survive, the human body is designed to constantly interpret cues of safety and danger in our surroundings, as well as to externalize our interpretations to alert those around us. For this we use what's known as the body's "social engagement system," a complex collection of bidirectional neural mechanisms that connect the brain to everything from laryngeal and pharyngeal muscles that control vocal tone and prosody, to the muscles of the eyelids, face, middle ear, jaw, neck, heart, lungs, and the viscera (Porges and Carter 2017, 226). This has some fascinating implications in terms of how our bodies regulate social stimuli. For example, according to Porges and Carter

The neural pathway involved in raising the eyelids (the facial nerve) also tenses the stapedius muscle in the middle ear, which facilitates hearing human voice. Thus, the neural mechanisms for making eye contact are shared with those needed to listen to human voice. (Porges and Carter 2017, 227)

I include this incredible detail for two reasons. First, it is such a beautiful example of the intricacies of the human body. Our social engagement system has evolved to literally adjust the muscles in the ear to better hear the frequencies associated with human voice when we engage in an action that is an external indication of attentive social engagement. (Amazing.) Second, this is a prime example—via polyvagal theory's understanding of the bidirectional communication between brain and body—of the integration of the human voice as a cue of safety, and therefore

a calming mechanism for an activated nervous system. This is what brings me back around to music.

According to polyvagal theory, and based on the anatomy of the inner ear structure, all mammals have a set of frequencies in which “acoustic signals are optimized” for social engagement, known as “the frequency band of perceptual advantage” (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 118). Our understanding of the frequencies within that band are “optimized when individuals are in safe contexts” and “compromised during physiological states that support defense” (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 118). Basically, when we are in a state of calm, we can more accurately interpret signals within this band of frequencies. Unfortunately, in a state of defense we can find the interpretation of the same signals to be impeded due to the activation of the body’s defense mechanisms. This can be particularly problematic in traumatized individuals who may exist in a chronic state of dysregulation or defense. Stimulating the body’s social engagement system, particularly with exposure to signs of safety, can help to retune that dysregulation. Music can serve this therapeutic function. According to Porges and Rosetti,

Listening to the hyper-prosodic vocalizations that constitute melodies in both vocal and instrumental music provides an efficient mode of exercising and optimizing the functions of the social engagement system. As the system is exercised, there is improved regulation of both the muscles of the face and head involved in the communication of emotional state (i.e., facial expressions and vocal intonations) an autonomic state through vagal pathways resulting in calmer and more resilient behavior. (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 118)

We see the effects of a calming human voice in how a parent might sooth a crying baby. The “instinctive vocalizations” used by mothers and fathers to sooth a distressed infant “reflexively raise the pitch of their voice and expand their range of intonations” (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 117). These tones emphasize “positive social communication that is outside the frequencies used to convey life threat (i.e., very low frequencies) or danger (i.e., high frequencies)” that are also

mimicked in a related musical parenting tool: lullabies (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 117). Like the lullabies whose melodies largely consist of tones within this range, music can become “neural exercises” that help to retune an activated nervous system with sonic cues of safety. According to Porges and Rosetti,

Lullabies, when improvised by parents often contain elements of infant directed singing, and as such, have features that may vary depending on culture, but may include an exaggerated range of intonation, simple pitch contours, and a sensor or a predominant pitch that unambiguously reflects the vocal range of a female (even when sung by a male). (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 117)

These signs of safety, communicated via spoken and/or sung elements of vocal prosody, are an instinctive way that parents work to calm the activated nervous system of a child. It is through these exact same mechanisms that music has the ability to “functionally ‘retune’ our nervous systems’ capacity to regulate visceral organs, shift mood states, and optimize social behavior, trust, and connectedness” (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 117). What is remarkable about recent scholarship in this area is the shift from more abstract representations of “feelings” to discussions of the distinct physiological elements that tie emotional and physical sensations to states of activation, dysregulation, or calmness. Polyvagal theory has opened up a whole new world of discussions on psychological conditions and treatments that focus on “conveying cues of safety and trust to a ‘rewired’ neurobiological portal” that developed in the brain to assess signs of threat or safety from our surroundings (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 118).

Though the science behind the effects of music on the body’s social engagement system is relatively new, the function of music as a tool for emotional expression and processing is not. At the risk of invoking tired platitudes, besides the fact that music has always been a tool for social engagement, it has traditionally also functioned as outlet for emotional expression (McClary 1991; Anderson 2022; Koskoff 1989; Small 1998; Pough 2004). I can certainly point

to collections of songs that, at some specific time in my life, were the only thing that allowed me to emote the way I needed to at that moment. Songs where the lyrics, vocal tone, and expression combined to trigger a specific emotive state, and those elements functioned as social cues that my nervous system interpreted as a sign that it was okay to feel sorrow, or heartache, or joy—even if the only prosocial behavior I was engaged in at the time was listening to a pre-recorded track on my car’s CD player. The function of music as a vector for emotional processing has been utilized—and, even exploited—in popular music circles, long before we had a physiological explanation. Angela Davis (1998) argued that the lyrics sung by the women of classic blues in the early era of recorded music in the United States were revolutionary in how they communicated previously unmentionable stories to otherwise isolated individuals, effectively easing that sense of isolation with the emotive and narrative signals embedded in their recorded music. What stood out in these recordings is not just the words they sang but how these women chose to sing them. Davis argued that the singers twist and accent the words with vocal flourishes that shift their meaning, a description that gets to the heart of the social engagement system and our interpretations of the world around us. It isn’t just about the words we use, but how we say them that communicates their true meaning.

The narrative function of music has been successfully used in the treatment of traumatized individuals. In music therapy, this technique in has proven to be “a powerful component to successful treatment by helping those who have been affected by trauma to navigate from chronic states of defense to more regulated states with the capacity to self-regulate and to connect with others” (Porges and Rosetti 2018, 117). As discussed in chapter four, traumatic memories resist integration into one’s life narrative and often require a deliberate narrative construction in order to process that trauma. Music therapists have found that for

survivors of the Holocaust, this has often meant the fragmentation of life into two distinct periods: before, and after. One method that has been successful with music therapists who worked closely with survivors was to have patients curate a collection of songs that represent their life before, during, and after the events of the Holocaust. What they found was that

subsequently, the clients were able to create a cohesive continuum of events and adopt a more fluent life story. The ability to experience a cohesive emotional sequence of detached lifetimes contributed to a more coherent perception of the life story as a whole. (Bensimon 2021, 6)

Deconstructing this formal process, what these therapists did was work with clients to select songs that “brought back memories and flooded the clients emotionally” relating to specific periods in their lives, then while listening to the music led clients through exercises that promoted states of calm if the emotional response became overwhelming (Bensimon 2021, 6).

This exercise worked in two ways to restore fractured life narratives. First, the music is used to reach emotions and memories that were otherwise inaccessible. Working directly with songs that represented the fragmented pieces of the life narrative—the before, during, and after of a life story fractured by trauma—helped to create an “emotional sequence” from the “formerly fragmented lifetimes” and allowed participants to once again “perceive their life as whole” (Bensimon 2021, 6). Second, when the music selections became “emotionally overwhelming,” the therapists drew on other embodied techniques that calmed nervous system activation by way of the vagal brake, with an emphasis on calming breathing exercises. Together, these processes helped to reassemble the life narratives that had been fractured by trauma.

Intentional invocation of the vagal brake returns us to the center of polyvagal theory and the bidirectional flow of information between the body and the brain—as well as to singing and playing wind instruments. As discussed previously, the vagal nerve pathways that connect the heart to the brain also contain a vagal “brake” that can both put a stop on the body’s fight, flight,

or freeze responses, as well as acts as the body's pacemaker if it interprets the proper social cues of safety. Based on both internal and external cues from the social engagement system, the myelinated nerve pathways can adjust the influence of the sympathetic nervous system to adjust the heart rate as needed (Porges and Carter 2017, 225). It turns out that, since these mechanisms involve a bidirectional flow of information, this is a process for which we actually have a measurable amount of control—primarily, through the lungs. According to Porges and Carter

Breathing is the only autonomic function that can be easily controlled voluntarily. Thus, it is an efficient, easily accessible voluntary behavior that regulates the vagal brake by reducing and increasing the influence of the vagus on the heart. (Porges and Carter 2017, 225)

Intentionally slowed or otherwise measured breathing can communicate from the body to the nervous system that everything is, indeed, okay. This is what causes the beneficial and calming effects of activities with directed breathing practices like yoga, meditation, chanting, and even singing. Bensimon's example, then, is utilizing both music as a narrative and emotive connection between components of the life story of Holocaust survivors that are not properly integrated into their life narrative due to their traumatic circumstances, and using the calming effect of breathing exercises on the autonomic system as a way to retrain the body's response to that narrative. These methods are effective because the body can better calibrate appropriate reactions to perceived cues of danger from a state of calmness.

In chapter four I discussed how the heart rate can increase as a part of the body's defensive response. The "vagal brake" is effectively a natural pacemaker, a mechanism that can slow a heart rate that is elevated due to real or perceived cues of danger. Importantly, however, the mechanisms that work to slow an elevated heart rate are activated during exhalation (Porges and Carter 2017, 225). Inhalation can have the opposite effect, therefore what makes deep breathing exercises effective in calming an elevated heart rate, then, is the "inhalation-to-

exhalation ratio,” where the exhale is prolonged relative to the inhale (Porges and Carter 2017, 225). This is where we start to see how the vagal brake is connected to music making, particularly singing, wind instrument playing, chanting, and other breath-enabled activities that emphasize a prolonged exhale. While voluntary breath control is the most accessible autonomic function, it is not the only access point to the social engagement system. According to Porges and Carter, “Functionally, voluntary behaviors of breathing, vocalizing, and postures provide a way to regulate and exercise all of the neural circuits of the social engagement system” (Porges and Carter 2017, 229). Many, if not all, of these access points are a component of musicking. When singing, we use the larynx and pharynx to change pitch and timbre, the middle ear structures to monitor acoustic properties of the music and adjust accordingly, even engage the muscles of the face and jaw to shape tone (Porges and Carter 2017, 228). If we expand to include playing string instruments in a jam session setting similar to the ones I attended in Sweden, then we can also include elements of the “face-heart connection” in the reading of facial cues around the circle of participants, mirrored and regularly shifting posture and body language, and further engagement of the inner ear for discerning strumming patterns and chord changes. Regularly engaging in activities that exercise the social engagement system’s many components—through activities like music making—can have a profound impact on a traumatized person’s resiliency.

Again, according to Porges and Carter:

As an individual becomes more proficient in using the activated pathways as a neural exercise of autonomic regulation, the autonomic nervous system becomes more resilient. The resilience is manifested in a greater capacity to downregulate defense and support more flexible, adaptive emotional states, social behaviors, and health. (Porges and Carter 2017, 229)

With this understanding of the corporeal function of music making, I will now turn to an application of these ideas. My aim in the section that follows is to explore the subtle and

simultaneously all-encompassing nature of the social engagement system's involvement in a jam setting, while also getting a feel for my experience with Swedish old time and bluegrass jam culture.

Jams and the social engagement system

It was the last day of June 2017. That morning Michael and I had packed up our rental car at our home outside Gothenburg with everything we needed for a weekend of festival camping—a tent, sleeping bags, a cooler with food and beer, camping chairs, what turned out to be not enough warm clothing, one guitar and a mandolin—and drove northeast, almost the entire width of the country. It was mid-afternoon when we arrived in the tiny town of Torsåker, the location of the second largest annual bluegrass festival in Sweden. We followed a sign with a blue arrow and the word “Bluegrass,” and after backtracking from at least one wrong turn in the middle of town, arrived at what we thought might be the campsite. Cars were parked along the chain-link fence, and a couple dozen tents were in various stages of being set up around the perimeter of a large, grass covered sports field. We opted to pitch our tent along the base of the U-shaped camping area, right in the middle of everything. (This, we would soon learn, was a mistake as it was in direct sunlight starting very, very early in the morning and our tent quickly went from icy cold to unbearably hot.)

Friday's events were the kickoff for the weekend's festival. Though we had arrived in the afternoon, the staged performances didn't get going until later in the evening and were already done by around 10:30 pm. Almost as if the first night is more about having an excuse to show up early, get settled, and start jamming. The bands for that evening were a little more relaxed. Performances were on the inside stage only, on the second floor of an old wooden barn-like building, with seating for less than one hundred people. One of the bands for that night, Friendly

Neighbourhood Stringband, was missing half of its members who were still on their way over from Gothenburg. So, they borrowed the half of The Rockridge Brothers who had arrived in time. Of the five players on stage, half were from Friendly Neighbourhood Stringband, and half from the Rockridge Brothers (fiddler and singer Agnes Brogeby plays with both groups), and the combined “Friendly Neighborhood Brothers Rockridge Stringband” played a relaxed, yet rowdy, set of their overlapping tunes and well-worn standards. The combined effect was such that, if they hadn’t joked about the mishmash of faces, I might not have noticed anything was out of place. It was a testament to the power of the players, the tightknit nature of the scene, and the universal rules of social engagement that encouraged mixing and matching in old time music.

Even before the last staged performance (Czech band G-Runs N’ Roses) was over, people began slowly filtering out of the hall, down the wooden ramp and towards the campground, about one kilometer away. Pumped up by the excitement of the live music, it was time to start what for many is the main event at these festivals: the jamming. I hung around for the end of the last band’s set, but on my way back the faint sound of banjo picking got louder and louder in the night air as I approached the campground.

I was excited. But also nervous, and terrified.

When I’d initially settled on this fieldwork topic, I started trying to learn to play bluegrass, as fast as I could, from scratch. I grew up playing trumpet in the school band and had taken lots of piano lessons. In college I started playing steelpan; graduate school introduced me to even more percussion. But I’d never played a string instrument in my life. I started with a bluegrass singing class at my friendly neighborhood (yet also world-renown) acoustic music shop, Dusty Strings. The course lasted six weeks, and featured between six and nine participants (depending on the week) who were led through the basics by the amazing Jason Stewart, native

to East Tennessee and bluegrass music itself. From him I learned how to harmonize and, after the class was over, I switched to private lessons to get his help learning the fundamentals of bluegrass rhythm guitar. By the time I arrived in Sweden for my fieldwork, I'd learned enough of the basics that I felt confident I could follow along at a jam. The only hiccup being that I had never actually participated in one.

I'd gone to a bunch of jam sessions, timidly watching from a side table at the weekly sessions at Conor Byrne, a bar in the Ballard neighborhood in Seattle, trying to interpret the rules of this musical game from across the room. Or at least that's what I told myself. In retrospect, I think I was afraid I'd be rejected if I approached the circle, much like I'd been the first time I tried. Before I'd had a chance to learn to play any guitar, I attended a bluegrass jam at Dusty Strings. I had naively hoped to just be a fly on the wall, but I hadn't counted on the intimacy of the circle. The group lesson room where this jam took place, on the "music school" side of the shop, was not intended to have the same public atmosphere as a pub or bar. This semi-private space took on a more formal, yet nonjudgmental, vibe compared to more public jams. The players' aggressively uncomfortable reaction to my presence showed me that they were not there to be watched, but there to learn the flow of a jam and practice playing with others. My presence in the room as someone without an instrument in my lap violated the rules of engagement in the space, and therefore seemed to function as a cue of "danger," leaving participants wondering if I was there to judge. In hindsight I probably should have left, but at the time I was glad they reluctantly agreed to let me hang back and watch from the corner to get a glimpse of what I was in for. After my fieldwork I returned to that circle and actually found it quite welcoming, as long as I had my guitar in my lap. Really, though, it wasn't until my first bluegrass jam in Sweden

that I actually joined the circle. And it wasn't until that jam that I truly understood the importance of not just showing up, but playing.

When it came time to attend my first jam in Sweden, I was still so terrified that I didn't bring my guitar. This jam was held in a bar in downtown Gothenburg, and the Facebook invite for the event said that people were welcome to come to the bar to listen. I thought, naively, they couldn't possibly make me play if I didn't have my guitar! That way, I'd be able to get away with once again being a spectator, at least for the first time. When I arrived, the music hadn't started yet, so I took the chance to introduce myself to some of the guys who were slowly taking out instruments. I described myself as an American researcher, interested in Swedish bluegrass. They asked where my instrument was, I lied and said it hadn't arrived yet.

Before I knew it, there was a guitar in my lap. It was placed there by the organizer of the jam, Neik, who made sure I knew he needed his pick back before the end of the night. Just like at Dusty Strings in Seattle, there really wasn't room for spectators in this participatory experience at Kelly's in Gothenburg. But unlike in Seattle, these guys wouldn't take any excuses. If I wanted to be at the table, I had to participate.

I was shaking, and nervous. My hands were clammy as I gripped the neck of this unfamiliar guitar, one that was much nicer than any I'd yet owned. When the music started, I followed as best I could, and found it easier than expected. Some songs were familiar, others were not. Though even the ones I didn't (yet) know were possible to catch if I watched the hands of other guitarist as they adjusted their capo and gripped chord shapes. The social cues were simple to pick up, and even easier to follow. I worked to mimic behavior, posture, and energy at the table, trying not to stand out. As we played together—matching tempo, texture, and tone across the fluctuating group of ten to twenty guitars, banjos, mandolins, and fiddles—I noted

cues of acceptance. Either I was meeting the basic standards for participation, or this was a spectacularly nonjudgmental group of musicians. (Maybe a little of both?) As I adapted to these surroundings, settling in and taking comfort in subtle cues from those around me, I began to relax. Eventually, I got bold enough to timidly sing high harmonies behind the lead over a chorus. Some eyes turned towards me, nodding their approval, and I allowed myself to sing a little louder. The music vibrated in my chest. I remember vividly the sensation of the tension leaving my sternum as I took those deep singer's breaths in time with the music, and pulled those tight parallel harmonies out of the air. When a song went well, it wasn't signaled by applause or any recognition from the patrons occupying nearby tables. Instead, our little circle would fill with gentle smiles and a moment of pause—a quiet moment of individual contemplation, with a sensation like a sigh of relief.

I'm so glad they pushed me. That night, after some hours of playing as we were running low on what I would later come to recognize as the regular repertoire, Neik asked me if I wanted to lead a tune. I hesitated, but knew it was time to rip off the metaphorical Band-Aid. I was awkward—pretty terrible at cuing solos and knowing when to do what—but when it was all over, they didn't take away my guitar. They smiled and nodded, which was generous given my selection. “Beautiful Brown Eyes” was the first bluegrass song I'd learned on the guitar, and it was the one I was certain that, even with all my nerves, I could do by heart. At the time, I didn't yet know the Swedish history with this particular tune. In retrospect, however, it seems appropriate that the first tune I played at a Swedish bluegrass jam was an American old time tune that—in its translated and genre shifted form—became a somewhat iconic hit for dansband artists Vikingarna in the 1970s.

The jam continued, and by participating, I learned more about the subtleties of playing bluegrass with *others* than I ever could by watching from outside the circle or by practicing chords on my own. Knowing what I know now about the social engagement system I'd venture a guess that part of why I felt more comfortable participating in Sweden instead of in the States had at least a little to do with social cues that were likely lost in translation. Or maybe it was social cues learned within my Swedish American heritage spaces that equated subdued responses (by American standards) not as disdain or judgement but as a kind of familial acceptance. Even more likely, I found comfort in the well-structured social rules of the jam circle.

Bluegrass jams are circular. Whether the gathering is a tight group of friends picking outside a tent in a festival camping area, or a large collection of strangers gathered in a specific space at the appointed hour, the musicians sit close together and face one another. As participants come and go during the session, bodies shift to make or fill space, almost as if trying to keep the music contained for those involved.

There is a cycle for each song that creates a (usually loosely) clockwise momentum for the melody or energy of the tune. Once the song leader calls a tune and chooses the key, they set the pace by starting the tune and (if there are lyrics) singing a chorus and verse. The order of solos is cued with some combination of eye contact and a nod of the leader's head. The melody and its arpeggiated variations following the leader's gaze around the circle—usually along a mostly clockwise path, as if jumping from one instrument neck to the next as they protrude in relative unity to the left of each players' body—landing with those who want a solo, and skipping those who pass. As each willing instrumentalist took their turn in the spotlight, their sound was supported by the interlocking texture of picking patterns provided by the other guitars, banjos, mandolins (sometimes bass or fiddle) all filling their expected roles in the

background. If a musician didn't want their solo, they would pass with a shake of the head or a nod to the person to their left—a gentle, “no, you go”—that sometimes would skip one, two, or five players before finding a willing picker. Intermittently, the song leader—making eye contact with the next soloist to indicate “wait!” a few bars before they were set to start—would interrupt the string of soloists to sing a verse, followed by a rousing chorus featuring any and all willing harmony singers. Once the solo had passed all the way through those who wanted a chance, the leader would lift the neck of their instrument to indicate the end was near. Depending on the tune, that could mean one, or even two, more times through the chorus, or perhaps just a tag. While some details depended on the specific song, it all somehow seemed intuitive. Everyone just knew. Then, with that song finished, the chance to lead passed to the next willing person in the circle, who begins this cycle all over again.

When I arrived back at the campgrounds after that first night of performances in Torsåker, there were already three separate jams happening at different points along the U-shaped campsite. The clock was ticking away the last hour of June as we headed into the morning of the first Saturday in July, which meant that the darkness of night would never overtake dim twilight at this latitude in the Swedish countryside, about 120 miles north of Stockholm.

I grabbed my guitar and took a minute to survey my jam participation options. One group, gathered on the far side of the camping semi-circle, I recognized as being made up primarily of folks from Stockholm. Another, right across from my tent, was a collection of unknown faces that had congregated under a particularly large camping tent. The third group was crowded under a popup four-post sunshade-type cover, bursting at the seams with pickers, many of whom I recognized from bluegrass and old time jams in Gothenburg. As I approached, I could

see Albin and other members of the Friendly Neighborhood Stringband half-sitting/half-leaning on a wooden picnic table that made up the circle's center. As the night wore on, and the amateurs among us wore out, these core players were the ones who kept calling tunes and pushing us on. They were surrounded by folks who crammed in tight in messy, concentric circles around the edges—hoping to hear, participate, and protect themselves from the chilly night air.

I found a place around the outer edge, half inside/half outside the tent, right next to the bass player. Because I was still very new to the scene, many of the faces were as-of-yet unknown to me, but in hindsight the circle was full of soon-to-be dear friends. I was excited to take it all in, to watch and strum along as the rowdiness level grew and the liquor bottles slowly emptied. It was electric when one tune ended, to be immediately replaced with a new one. And there was an air of desperation with any break in the action, often when the primary singers in the center needed to rest their cords.

As it got later and later, I struggled. It was cold, my fingers ached from the air and from my general lack of stamina. The jam moved on from the generic tunes that I knew, shifting sometimes into the specific repertoire for the bands that featured the musicians at the center of our bluegrass/old time scrum. If it weren't for the bass player, I might have put my guitar down. Every time I was lost, I'm sure with a look of complete panic on my face, he caught my eye and started calling out chords, helping me find the repeating pattern that gives purpose to my rhythm guitar strumming. Every time my body externally betrayed my sense of discomfort, he effectively pulled me back in with the social cues that it was "safe" to keep playing. After a few hours I headed back to my tent by the light of the early dawn, the sun on its way back up starting around 1:30am, with my hands aching from the cold and fingertips raw from gripping my guitar strings but filled with joy after a night of music making. Amazed that the same camaraderie and

musical-cultural rules embedded in the bluegrass and old time I had started to learn in the United States had remained intact when it was transported halfway around the world alongside the music. Even with just a basic understanding of the rules, I walked away with a sense of belonging. I was happy, calm, satiated from a night of social engagement.

I'd noticed the bass player earlier that day; his tent was set up just a few yards from my own. The next day I would see him perform as a part of the Håga Valley Stringband, but other than his gentle calling out of chords to me through the dim, cold night air, we didn't talk to each other at the festival. Several months later in mid-September, I made a trip to Uppsala to see an academic presentation. I took that trip as an opportunity to attend a regular jam I'd heard about through the grapevine.

Unlike the other jams I'd participated in thus far, this one was not held in an open, public space. The Uppsala jam was held in a private home, though the invitation was regularly posted publicly in the various online circles that would be interested in such an event. Before attending the jam, I reached out to the organizer to ask if it would be okay to drop in, and if he would be interested in sitting down to talk to me about the Swedish bluegrass scene while I was in town. We were in touch over Facebook messenger, but other than that I did not know Peter Cedermark.

I showed up at his home, as we discussed, a little while before the jam. He had invited me to come early to chat and join his family for dinner. I was nervous going to the home of someone I did not know (something I found myself doing a lot in Sweden that I would have never done back home, especially given the cultural baggage—including the intergenerational weight of safety considerations long passed from mother to daughter—of being a woman in the States), but as soon as the door opened, I felt a wave of relief wash over me.

Peter was the bass player who had helped me play along with the jam at Torsåker! The nervousness and baggage I carried as an American woman instantly melted away, because even though we'd not spoken beyond shouted chord changes in the midnight dusk, my social engagement system had already read him as "safe," and I smiled with relief. His face also softened into a smile, acknowledging that he remembered me, too. Our initial contact from months before melted away the usual I-just-met-you-now-let's-talk-bluegrass awkwardness that often hovered over the first few minutes of my interviews.

Peter and I talked at length about many things, including our first jam together. To Peter, those jams are very important to the overall experience of these festivals and one of the things that sets this type of music apart from all the others. According to Peter:

If you play classical music . . . you have to rehearse, rehearse, rehearse to achieve some level of where you want to be. . . . But in a jamming situation you have adapt to the situation and to the musicians who are in the jam right now. . . . Shutting everything else out and just getting the flow. And that's what I'm trying to achieve. I always have to focus on everything at once so that sort of blocks out the troubles of the world. . . . It is not only a new style of music, it is a different way of life that I follow, and it has a lot of things going for it.

Or, as he put it in a quote used at the top of this chapter, that night at Torsåker was "a very, almost religious experience." Many discussions I had about jams, across the scenes I studied, focused on the sense of belonging that came from engaging in the activities that reached that feeling of flow that Peter described as the goal of playing together. In my experiences with these jams, they were spaces where specific, understood rules of engagement involved regular social feedback that reinforced belonging. Bluegrass and old time jams are an extensive workout for the body's social engagement system. We rely on physical cues to follow the unrehearsed flow of the session; participants have to both listen and read the room in order to participate fully. Joining a jam circle is a tacit agreement to engage in established rules specific to the musical-

cultural setting. Generally, we learn these rules by doing, and as soon as we have learned them we help to monitor and reinforce them through our active participation in the mass of music making. The tension of wondering “what comes next?” or “did I do that right?” is released with social cues of acceptance: eye contact, body language, and facial expressions, all reinforce a job well done or gently indicate that work is needed. Perhaps even more importantly, individual mistakes are washed away in the rush of the moment as the group continues on, navigating together through a tune, and there is comfort in knowing you can probably try again next time.

OK, BUT WHY *THIS* MUSIC?

Bluegrass, old time, and country music are not the only genres with practices that involve unrehearsed musical engagement. The effect of jamming on the social engagement system would be applicable to any musicking that meets the minimum requirements of community playing, and perhaps even when listening or singing along to recorded music by oneself. What matters in the remainder of this chapter, however, is what specifically draws Swedish players to these spaces, and why they chose bluegrass, old time, or country music, instead of any other type of music. To get at the answer, I bring this chapter back to Kai Erikson and the social dimensions of collective trauma. According to Erikson,

People everywhere learn who they are and where they are by taking soundings from their fellows. As if using a form of radar, they probe others in the world around them with looks and words and gestures, hoping to learn something about themselves from the signals that they get in return. But when there are no longer any reliable others out there to bounce those exploratory probes off of, people have a difficult time learning where they stand in relation to the rest of the world. (Erikson 2017, 61)

In this excerpt, Erikson is describing the work of the body’s social engagement system from the perspective of sociology. While Porges and Carter’s work is based in psychology and neuroscience and provides the detailed analysis of trauma’s effect on the body of the individual,

Erikson's decades of work focused on the community as a whole. His work suggests that individuals within a traumatized community "may find it much harder to recover from individual trauma when the community around them is in shreds" (Erikson 2017, 58). Porges and Carter note that for the individual, past trauma can lead "to biased neuroception that detects risk when there is no risk," in which case, classic social engagement behaviors can be ineffectual where "facial expressions and syntax may be misinterpreted and, instead of calming, may elicit aggression" (Porges and Carter 2017, 234). Therefore, if many individuals suffer collectively from a shared trauma, and subsequently look to one another for social cues of safety and reassurance, they may unintentionally emerge with an altered sense of what cues constitute "safe." Erikson described an encounter he had with this phenomenon on one of his early fieldwork trips to Buffalo Creek, a community that suffered extreme and violent losses of life and property to a flood caused by a storm that broke the dam that held back waste from a coal mine:

I positioned myself there on my first morning in the hollow, watching coal trucks make their way up and down the scarred road and talking a bit self-consciously to people who came in to pass the time of day. At one point a leathery old man came in to get a soft drink, and we exchanged a few words on the weather. I looked out at a gray sky and remarked (with what I hoped would sound like country shrewdness) that a storm might be coming along to clear the air. He turned away with a fierce "Haw," his face tightened in anger, and limped off to his car without another word. One did not mention storms casually on Buffalo Creek, and one certainly did not appear to welcome them (Erikson 2017, 49)

What Erikson encountered with this interaction was what Porges and Carter might call a violation of "'neural expectancy' for reciprocal interactions," which can "shift the physiological state from calmness to defensiveness" for someone with a dysregulated nervous system (Porges and Carter 2017, 232). In essence, what we have here is a clash of differently attuned nervous systems. Where Erikson was used to the rules of the world outside Buffalo Creek, where the

weather is an innocuous conversation starter, the Buffalo Creek local is a member of a community that suffered a collective trauma tied to a storm and therefore casually mentioning the weather can trigger a reflexive trauma response.

In my reading of the literature of these scholars, this is a description for a phenomenon described by Erikson two decades prior. In 1995, Erikson wrote about how in the aftermath of traumatic events, traumatized persons tend to seek others who share a particular “set of perspectives and rhythms and moods” that provide a sense of safety and belonging. He posited that the “centripetal and centrifugal tendencies” of trauma pulls traumatized persons away from those who were unaffected, and towards others that share a “set of perspectives and rhythms and moods” that reflect their shared differences—gravitating, then, towards those whose prosocial behaviors were similarly changed by trauma. In effect, Erikson was describing the tendency of traumatized persons to seek out similarly traumatized persons because they share similar cues of social engagement and rules of comportment that are anticipatory, and therefore calming to a dysregulated nervous system.

Perhaps, this joining together of traumatized persons for the beneficial side effects of prosocial engagement can extend to those impacted by intergenerational trauma. It has been demonstrated that exposure to cues of safety is critical to developmental stages in humans. A lack of adequate exposure to cues of safety in infancy can change a person’s “emotional and social profile and trajectory” (Porges and Carter 2017, 233). For an infant’s “social engagement system to function, the cues of interaction that are processed by both the visual (facial expressions, gestures) and the auditory (prosodic vocalizations) systems are critical” (Porges and Carter 2017, 233). This is perhaps an insight into the neurological basis behind Hirsch’s assertion (see chapter four) that intergenerational trauma’s “nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer

occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the form of symptoms” (Hirsch 2012, 34). If, in infancy, one’s social engagement system develops in a context where parents or guardians are themselves unable to convey cues of safety, the child might instead present cues of activation or dysregulation where “even gentle touch may trigger a neuroceptive state of danger” (Porges and Carter 2017, 233). Instead, like the man Erikson encountered in Buffalo Creek, we learn to interpret cues of safety by “taking soundings” from the dysregulated members of the community that surrounds us. This is how we arrive back at the role that imaginings of *Amerika* play in the group culture of Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. I argue that these music scenes in Sweden are places where, to varying degrees, participants are allowed and encouraged to behave in ways that are contrary to social rules in ordinary society. Specifically, they can act *Amerikan*, without having to worry about *jantelagen*.

***Jantelagen*: Jante’s Law and the Swedish imagination**

The first time I heard the word “*jantelagen*” was in an interview. I began to really pay attention to it though by the third or fourth time it was thrown in casually as a stand-in for all things Swedish that were the antithesis of *Amerikan*. John wasn’t the first to bring it up, but I really appreciated the way he approached it in our conversation, so I’m going to start with his interpretation.

For our interview, we met at a bar. It was just a couple days before the winter solstice, and what I remember most clearly about that day was that it was dark. I was not used to the kind of dark you get in Gothenburg in December, though it did make me appreciate the many low hanging lights in Swedish public spaces. In summer, a lamp hanging just above head height at a bar table seems really out of place, but in the winter having that warm, yellow light in close proximity was a cozy necessity.

As always, John brought a kind of effervescent enthusiasm to our conversation that further warmed the table. We talked on the record for three and a half hours, but the time flew by in a flurry of excitement over the topic at hand.

John was a part of the newest generation of bluegrass and old time players in Gothenburg—his first bluegrass jam was only the previous spring, and his first bluegrass festivals that summer. But he wasn't new to music. He'd been playing for most of his life and was even in a group that made it to *Melodifestivalen*, the Swedish competition that feeds into Eurovision. The breadth of his musical experience, and the fact that he was newly enmeshed in these genres, made our conversation particularly enlightening when it came to what, exactly, sets the bluegrass and old time scenes apart from other music scenes in Sweden. This time, I am actually going to provide the full text of a chunk of our conversation because I think the full context is important here:

John: Let's say we're at Kelly's and [player] is very bossy. And I like that! I actually like that because he sets the purpose. No one is waiting when he is leading the Jam. If we wait too long, he takes command, and he points out solos and stuff. I kind of enjoy that.

But that's my learning phase also, I think. Because I want to get to the point where I'm confident enough to know that yeah, I'm just gonna play this one.

Me: Do they call on you to call tunes?

John: I'm not ready for that. I don't know why. If someone asks me, I'm like: 'we could play this one...?'

But then there's this thing where I feel like: We played this last time? I don't want to bring this up again because we played this last time and people might want to play other tunes.

Me: Some songs we play every time.

John: And I'm fine with that if others bring it up! But, somehow, I don't want to do that!

And I don't know why. Because if that's all I know and I wanna play that tune, I should say: "Let's play this one! I really like this one."

I should be able to say that. I feel like there's a lot of waiting and feeling the mood.

There's this thing called "*Jantelagen*," have you heard about it? I think that's a great factor in the music at these events.

Me: How would you describe it?

John: You shouldn't think that you're good, basically. It's telling you not to believe in yourself somehow.

Me: *Really??*

John: Yeah! That's what it's about.

Me: Don't believe in yourself? *That's* what it says?

John: 'Don't come here and come here, and do your shit,' basically. **So much the opposite of the attitude in an American setting.**

In bluegrass especially you have to be pretty ballsy. You have to believe in yourself in order to participate. And it is interesting that this self-doubt/self-regulating/self-confidence? Whatever it's called. It is so much a part of things.

I think it is about some kind of fake modesty. . . . That's the general mentality of Swedish people in general. Which goes along with *Jantelagen* somehow. That's actually a big subject.

In my opinion, I don't know! I'm still feeling the mood. I don't know the basic practices in this context yet. I don't know these people. Because **somehow they are different from the general Swedes, and somehow they aren't.** I'm just figuring it out.

And I guess **I'm being some kind of a social chameleon**, in a way. But **there is a lot of room to wiggle out a bit and be extraordinary not just as a musician, but as a person.** Yeah, it is very interesting.

Across my interviews, I heard a lot of variations on this theme, but I really appreciated the way this came up when I talked to John. We'd initially been chatting about how it wasn't money or appreciation that drove his music, but simply the joy of playing. Finding this new scene, trying

these new musics, brought that joy to another level because he found a new way to engage and a place where players are allowed to be confident, allowed to shine. Though then, of course, he is careful to point out that this is only an opinion, and he is still new—bringing that Swedish modesty back to our table. What I understood him to be saying here was that, though the proverbial *jantelag* still hovers over the proceedings, these music scenes embraced an *Amerikan* approach to interactions. Something completely different from other music scenes in Sweden.

John was only one of many who brought *Jantelagen* to our conversations. It almost always came as an example of the direct oppositions that exist between Swedish and *Amerikan* cultures. In the words of another bluegrass musician:

I don't know if you know about *Jantelag*, but it is about that you shouldn't think that you are special. You should not consider yourself valuable. But in the United States, people consider that somebody who has success is congratulated. That's not the way in Sweden.

(Bluegrass musician, mandolin)

Jantelag (“Jante’s Law”) is originally a set of commandments written by Norwegian Author Aksel Sandemose and applied to the Danish protagonist in his novel *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks* from 1933 (Kaminsky 2007, 27). As an abstract concept, *Jantelag* was a regular presence in my conversations about these American music scenes, and fundamental cultural differences between Sweden and the United States. Negative conceptions of Swedish culture were generally swept under the rug of *Jantelag*, while *Amerika* was its antithesis.

Ethnomusicologist and Swedish folk music scholar David Kaminsky describes *Jantelagen* (“the Jante Law”) as an “ironic credo of elder-dominated communal living,” which “has expanded and acquired a special resonance with respect to Swedish cultural self-image” and, in its modern interpretation, resonates within the Swedish imagination “as a descriptor of a specifically Scandinavian attitude, a subtly enforced culture of moderation and humility”

(Kaminsky 2007, 27). In their original form, Jante's laws included a list of ten things "thou shalt not believe" (Kaminsky 2007, 27). Including, in summary and no particular order that "thou shalt not believe": that you are something, that you will amount to anything, or that anyone is concerned with you. "Thou" also "shalt not believe": that you are as good as we are, or that you are wiser, know more than us, or can teach us anything. Specifically, "thou shalt not fancy thyself better than we" and, importantly, "thou shalt not laugh at us" (Aksel Sandemose, 1933; as translated and quoted in Kaminsky 2007, 27). Kaminsky goes on to suggest that the "deference to expertise" found in these rules contribute to one of the "strongest internal challenge to Sweden's powerful cultural sense of egalitarianism" (Kaminsky 2007, 33). I heard evidence of these cultural guidelines every time someone stopped themselves because they were "talking too much" during an interview, and in the precision of Swedish honkytonk bands for whom experts can find no fault in their presentation (see chapter 7). Mostly, however, I heard the absence of these rules in how folks talked about *Amerika*. Returning to my conversation with the bass player, Peter, he told me that

To me personally, **there is a lot of things in the American way of thinking or way of life that appeals to me.** To me, that is something that helps me to not only play the music, but also to be interested in the culture and the history behind the music...

[While in the US] I realized that **Swedes are pretty uptight.** . . . I've heard that from people born in Sweden, raised in Sweden. . . . [In the States] there are so many more places where people can meet. Sweden has a much bigger welfare state where they sort of care, but that also means that you are taking away a lot of [public gathering] places. . . .

Over there every kid in the school, they finish at the same time. So, there are 150 parents coming at the same time to pick their kids up and they have the chance to stand and chat. I miss that. To have natural places for people to stay [and hang out].

And to me, **that is more American way more than Swedish. To talk to each other. You don't have to build deep friendships, but you just have to be open and friendly and talking to people.** Because I was brought up in a community where you don't really talk. . . . **It is not only a new style of music, it is a different way of life that I follow, and it has a lot of things going for it.**

Here, Peter is getting to the heart of how *Amerika* functions in the modern Swedish imagination, as decidedly different from the traditional Swedish way of things. It continues to hold what is, essentially, a metaphorical place of opposition to mainstream Swedish culture. Back in the 1960s, author Vilhelm Moberg described the United States the place where “everyone was rich. Rich and free and happy!” (Moberg 2008, 64). Moberg’s assessment was based in his experience as a part of the first generation left behind, growing up as a member of the only branch of his family tree to remain in Sweden. The core of his assessment remained steadfast as a part of Swedish imaginings of *Amerika* discussed half a century later during my interviews. I regularly heard modern interpretations of *Amerika* that encompassed similar ideas:

I think it is just the cool stuff. American lifestyle, freedom, bald eagles, and whatnot. But there is so much history behind that.

(Old time musician, banjo)

In America, that’s how people are. They take their space, express themselves, use their voice.

(Country musician, guitar and vocals)

If you want to succeed you can do that in the United States, you can’t do that in Sweden.

(Bluegrass musician, mandolin)

What constitutes the American Lifestyle for the 350 million people in the United States? It is not easy to say that.

But when you say driving a car, death penalty is not here, but it is still in the US. The second amendment, the right to carry a gun. The idea that you are responsible for your own life and nothing else. Those are what I consider the values, the American lifestyle.

(Bluegrass musician, mandolin)

These are fragments of the *Amerika* that exists in the imaginations of members of bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden. Some characteristics were framed as decidedly

positive (freedom of expression, affability); some were huge negatives (guns, the death penalty); and some were both (capitalism, consumerism). None of them were characteristics also ascribed to *jantelagen*. What I found in these conversations was evidence that these ideas of *Amerika* seeped into, and perhaps even dominated, interactions in components of the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. According to one musician:

I think many of those people who go to those festivals, to High Chaparral, they have a really strong feeling that they want to pretend that “Now I’m in America!”

(Bluegrass and country musician, guitar and vocals)

Yet at the same time, that idea that attendees were “in America” was tampered by the collective understanding that this was absolutely not the United States. In some cases, folks who were regularly involved in these Swedish scenes had very little interest in the United States itself:

Sometimes people ask me, have you been to an American bluegrass festival? I haven’t. There are several reasons, but I don’t think I would be able to travel to the United States without getting into conflicts with people. I don’t think that would be appreciated.

It is not a question of right or wrong, we just do things differently. Although I have met many very nice American people when I traveled as a young person, I read a lot about America, I listen to a lot of American music, but I don’t go there. **Because I don’t feel connected to the American values. But I am very interested in the fact that the American values mean so much to Swedish people.** We are so under influence of the American people.

(Bluegrass musician, mandolin)

Or, to put it another way, that the “real” United States is actually irrelevant to their enjoyment of the music scenes they have come to be a part of:

Still, the music and the things I like, I’ve never been to the States for example. I’ve never been there. Yea, I would love to go there, but um, I don’t know. I shouldn’t **like I can’t judge America because I have never been there. I haven’t lived there. I haven’t seen it.**

Ah! Of course, I’ve seen it on TV but maybe I should go there and get myself an opinion. But still, the things I like, I mean, **no matter who’s ruling or who’s president or who’s in the government in the US, it doesn’t matter because the things I like, the old cars,**

the music, some of the styles from there, it doesn't matter. I'm still gonna like bluegrass music, and I'm still gonna sing my old country songs back home. It doesn't matter, even if it is Ronald Reagan or Donald Trump, or Kennedy, or whatever.

(Bluegrass fan, *raggare*)

And yet, that *Amerikan* spirit hangs over the proceedings, as a representation of how these scenes are different than the world outside the bounds of the festival, or the jam session, or the antique car shows frequented by many *raggare* like the fan quoted above.

Sometimes, though, the imaginings of *Amerika* are much gentler, tied to images of rural life in the States drawn from the lyrics and stories in the songs players learn to play and sing. Themes of love, loss, and heartache are standard across bluegrass, old time and country music tunes, but topics also extend to death, poverty, infidelity, drinking, and murder (Fox 2004; Sweet 1996). These stories are not lost on participants in Swedish scenes. In fact, the stories were regularly discussed, dissected, and highlighted during jam sessions and on festival stages. Sometimes the spirit of these stories was also embedded in less public events like closed practice sessions. Returning to my conversation with John:

Me: Does the music have anything to do with America?

John: Yea, it is because the stories, regardless of lyrics or lack of lyrics, I feel like they come from people who wanted to tell me something or tell the world something. . . . [I]t paints a canvas every time I listen to it. Because I feel like the music is trying to tell me something. It might be movie related or whatever, because the pictures from America, most of them are from movies obviously. I spent more hours watching the American movies, haha.

And I, you know, picture the cabins in the woods, and the creeks, and the streams, and the game. Very simple stories of simple lives. And for me, it is very appealing. It feels like all you need is a hatchet and some flintstone. I enjoy that very much.

I realize that this is not all of, or even maybe is a small part of the bluegrass scene and the American folk scene, I don't really know anything. **But I relate a lot to American culture somehow, or my idea of American culture, I guess.**

Me: Tell me about that.

John: I really don't know what I mean, haha, because it is very, very narrowed down to a very romantic picture of white people playing string instruments. I guess. And drinking moonshine. Very narrow.

It kind of appeals and relates to my mental picture **of a very romantic part of America**. I guess, or the environment. Or the simple ideas of life. I'm not sure what I'm telling you is my true opinion here, because I just realized half of this just came into my head right now. **I'm feeling something and I'm not entirely sure how to put it into words, but I think I'm touching some essence here which is interesting to me.**

I can tell you, at least, that **there is a mental picture of this when we're playing together**. We're actually out in the woods basically, because [player] lives in an old barn in [town]. And when we play there, and we put the hats [baseball caps] on, and the squared shirts, flannels? And blue jeans.

Me: Just when you're practicing?! [My voice in this moment betrayed my immediate response of shock and delight at John's description.]

John: Yea. We might wear the T-shirts some days! I feel like one of those guys putting videos up on YouTube in the "true" environment when we do it.

They might be in an old house or a cabin or an old porch in the woods. There's a mental picture there that I have, yeah. That's the appeal, somehow. . . . [I]t's not always like that. I don't want to trick you into believing—

Me: Do you feel like you're stepping into a different space? [I interrupted him here.]

John: Yea, somehow. **It certainly is a very sacred moment somehow.**

Because, you know, once we book a play date it's something I look forward to very much. We might dust out some old songs, we might learn a new one, I might teach him one, he might teach me one, try some harmonies, different key.

Yeah. It's nice. It is fun. It *IS* fun.

In his description, John brings us to the ultimate point of this chapter: this music is fun.

Participants in the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes find that there is joy, community, and fun to be had here. There is a sense of belonging that comes from exercising the body's social engagement system in an environment that operates differently than in other places. These scenes' open embrace of the curated elements of *Amerika* that have been adopted

as the fundamental components of these scenes, elements that separate the “inside” from what happens “outside” these spaces, fulfills a need not met in other contexts. In first approaching the corporeal elements of music and the social engagement system, as well as the broader impacts of collective trauma on shared norms and culture, I have attempted to show that engaging in these specific music scenes might not just be about a sonic or genre preference. Instead, these spaces are manifestations of intergenerational remnants of the trauma of the separation of families during times of mass emigration from Sweden to the New World, and the version of *Amerika* that grew to take the place of those who left. Generations later *Amerika* continues to be the place you go, even if metaphorically, if you “don’t fit in” or want to escape from the *jantelag* of daily life. What brings people to these spaces is a shared idea of *Amerikan* freedom, expression, success, and the understanding that things are different within the bounds of the scene(s). Participants find comfort and belonging in being able to exercise the body’s social engagement system in ways that align with the needs of intergenerationally traumatized nervous systems.

The chapter that follows continues this path of what sets *Amerika* and *jantelagen* at odds with one another. According to Kaminsky, *jantelagen* manifests most obviously as a part of hierarchies in the workplace, but its “dehumanizing chill finds its logical antithesis in home, nature, freedom, summer, the wife and the mother, anything that can be conceived in opposition to the world of work” (Kaminsky 2007, 33). That difference is embraced to an extreme at some of the annual highlights of the Swedish honkytonk world. The next chapter will bring us finally to the heart of the country music scene in Sweden and how heritage, homesteads, and *Amerika* converge for one weekend every year in the Swedish countryside.

6. 'REBEL' FLAGS AND THE *AMERIKAN SPIRIT* AT KILLHULTS COUNTRYFESTIVALEN

On the second Friday of August 2017, Michael and I loaded up the car and drove south from Gothenburg towards the rural farmland border between Halland and Skåne. Our destination: the fifteenth annual Killhults Countryfestival. As we made our way through the countryside that late afternoon, I found myself simultaneously excited and reticent. When I'd mentioned to bluegrass and old time performers that I was planning to attend this particular festival, they were quick to warn me that Killhult (pronounced *sheel-hult*) was one of the rowdier events of the summer. Many folks described their first experience with a twinge of horror, their impressions colored by memories of broken bottles and watching festivalgoers stumble and fall over drunk—a stark contrast to the more constrained and musically-centered festivities at bluegrass and old time events. I had even heard a rumor that the year before someone died at the festival when they wandered away from the festivities drunk, passed out in a puddle, and drowned. Promotional materials for Killhult warn festival attendees ahead of time that the festival does not sell alcohol (only light beer), so they are encouraged to bring their own, but they will be held responsible for their behavior and actions. All of this is to say that I went into this festival with my guard up, grateful that I had Michael along with me as a second set of eyes and ears for the weekend.

We arrived at the festival in the bright light of the early summer evening. From the parking lot—a grass field already lined with American cars and pickup trucks (a remarkably uncommon sight in the Swedish countryside)—the only sign of the festival was the yellow wooden archway announcing the entrance to the Killhults Countryfestival. We paid our 300 *kronor* each (about \$38) entry fee for the two-day wristband at the wooden entry booth, and

walked in on a pathway lined with white canvas pup tents, the same kind we'd seen used the weekend before by Civil War reenactors who set up inside the Wild West theme park High Chaparral. The walkway took us in on the side of the main stage where the event's first act, Linda and the 4 Bucks, were already blasting their honky-tonk sound throughout the city-block long event space. The main stage, like the rest of the festival area, was made entirely of raw, exposed wood. The wall behind the performers was decorated with wagon wheels, a longhorn skull and horns, and a cowhide. Along the back of the dance floor, men and women in cowboy boots and split-soled dancing sneakers line danced to the music that blared over the speakers at a volume meant for a much larger crowd than the one that had assembled thus far.

As a whole, the venue reminded me of Fiddletown, an old restored Northern California mining town that just so happened to be represented on the cap I'd brought along to shield my eyes from the sun. The festival space was made up of intentionally distressed structures, stylized to appear as if they had long outlasted their originally intended purpose. With my back to the main stage, I tried to take in the space. To my left, a sign advertised a steakhouse selling sausages and hamburgers underneath a watchtower that was decorated with ploughs, saws, and a statue of a Native American with his hand shielding his eyes as if he was looking off into the distance. To my right was a barbeque pit with whole pigs rotating on a spit. All the way to the back and tucked in on the left was a second stage, much smaller than the first and arranged with wooden benches for seating rather than the large, open dance floor of the main stage. Far enough away to be hidden from sight, but not so far as to be sonically isolated. In open areas between permanent structures there were popup tents where merchants sold everything from fidget spinners to child-sized, Confederate-flag-embroidered leather vests, and rides on a mechanical bull. Later, after dark, a young man took up a sizeable amount of the open space while he

practiced cracking his bullwhip behind the dancing crowd, snapping at the discarded and broken bottles of vodka that dotted the ground at his feet. All around me was a mishmash of Americana that, like myself, seemed simultaneously at home, and remarkably out of place in this idyllic Swedish countryside.

In the after-dinner hours, the bright lights of the festival's stages hid the fact that the evening sky was darker than it should have been for mid-August in southern Sweden. When the sun dipped below the horizon and the temperatures cooled; overcast skies became heavy rain. Thick drops muddied the ground and sloughed off jacket sleeves, but none of that was enough to stop the revelry that surrounded us. While dancers two-stepped around the cramped dance floor in front of the mainstage, we joined the crowd spilling out from under the awning over the secondary stage.

In the cramped quarters, we made a new acquaintance: Hugo. His son had performed as a part of a Hank Williams tribute that had been a hit with the packed-in, excited, and damp crowd at the smaller stage earlier in the day. After chatting for a few minutes under a dripping awning, Hugo graciously offered up his camper van as a dry, quiet place to wait out the downpour and sit for a "quick" interview. In the end, our shared interests kept us talking for close to two hours, as proper introductions revealed we had more in common than a love of country music. Hugo, it turned out, was from Hishult.

TWO PATHS INTERTWINED: ALL ROADS LEAD TO KILLHULT

From Linghult to Linghult and back, again and again

I would be lying if I didn't also admit that my excitement for this particular event was largely driven by its location. As I have always understood it, Killhult is a part of a cluster of communities (perhaps better visualized as a few proximal farmhouses rather than villages) that

traditionally centered around the church in Hugo's hometown of Hishult (pronounced hees-'ult). Where we sat that night was just five-minutes' drive beyond my great-grandmother Anna's childhood home of Linghult, which, along with Hishult, still hold the most tangible evidence of my Swedish lineage.

This place had been the height of many a family pilgrimage going back over a hundred years and is the site of my most vivid postmemories. I'd been to these spots enough times in my life that I knew my way around without a map, but earlier that day had been my first opportunity to take Michael to see these places that lived on in the stories I tell while we cook and share our Christmas dinner of *lutfisk* (Hjalmar's favorite) and meatballs (Anna's specialty). We visited the small churchyard in Hishult where my great-great grandparents are buried, and the cozy iron-red farmhouse and barns arranged in a protective "U" shape in nearby Linghult that still (just barely) stands on the land where Anna spent her first two decades.

As we drove up that day and the country roads began to reveal familiar landmarks, I felt butterflies in my chest and a lump rise in my throat—a sensation akin to homesickness. Though instead of easing as we approached, the feelings intensified. It was as if my emotions were preparing to boil over with some combination of guilt, sorrow, and relief. The landmarks we were approaching exist as a vivid backdrop to my postmemories, the tales that hold my family's intergenerational trauma (see chapter four). Not only because the house still exists, and my great-great-grandparent's headstone still marks the ground where they were put to rest, but because the lived experience of this place in its heyday survived one generation further than anywhere else.

In 1924, when my grandfather ("*min farfar*," or my father's father) Herbert was six years old, his parents sold everything they had of value in Iowa, and bought passage on a ship back to Sweden for their family of four. Though parts of the trip were spent visiting Hjalmar's family

further north, my grandfather remembered spending much of the summer at Linghult with his mother's parents. At the time, both Hjalmar and Anna's fathers were ill, Hjalmar's older brother had recently passed away in Iowa and his last remaining brother in Sweden suffered from chronic health problems at home with his parents, who had recently been forced to sell their small slice of the ancestral family home at Hermanstorp. Family lore has always supported the idea that Hjalmar and Anna intended to stay in Sweden, but after a few months they realized they were "too American" and better suited to life in Iowa. I may never have the full truth to that tale, as it likely died with Hjalmar. What I do have is two letters that both gently support the intergenerational game of telephone that tells this version of events, as well as provide a glimpse of Sweden through the eyes of Swedish Americans in the post-World War I era.

The first letter was written to Hjalmar and Anna while they were in Sweden, from the pastor at Trinity Lutheran in their adopted hometown of Alta, Iowa, a Rev. J.O. Lindstrom. Lindstrom wrote in Swedish, as he had also emigrated from his Swedish birthplace to the States. The letter was dated August 12, 1924, and likely reached my great-grandparents in Sweden a few weeks before they set sail, again, for Iowa. After first providing a full update of the exciting events of "Fair Week" and the summer's weather, Rev. Lindstrom writes a rebuke of the "ecclesiastical circumstances" and "un-churchliness" that his "great friends" the Andersons encountered in Sweden. In agreeing with Hjalmar's sentiments in a (long lost, to me) previous letter, the Reverend writes:

It shows that Sweden, like all of Europe, needs a thorough revival of unity. The zeitgeist is consistently materialistic, and not only in Sweden. **I also have the idea that the people in Sweden think too highly of their culture**, etc. May the Lord, however, visit our dear Sweden with rich grace. 'Men where sin abounded, there grace still abounded.' Rom 5:20.

Lastly, our warmest greetings, and **there will of course be a hearty welcome back to Alta, the land that abounds with milk and honey.**

(Author's translation and emphasis)

In the context of the stories I've inherited, I read this letter to contain Hjalmar and Anna's permission to return. Both to Alta (where they would find a "hearty welcome back" along with the chance of prosperity) and to America (where they would find the less "consistently materialistic" community and "ecclesiastical circumstances" more to their liking). Whatever their plans were when they left the States, Rev. Lindstrom's response shows that they had doubts that they would fit in if they stayed in Sweden. And, more importantly, that the community that they had adopted as Americans would welcome them back with open arms.

The second letter was written by Hjalmar himself, and sent to his sister Gärda in Sweden on the tenth of December 1924, several months after my ancestors returned to the States. The copy I have was translated by Herbert during his return visit to Sweden with my father in 1981. A short opening paragraph includes both reluctantly early Christmas greetings, and a belated but hearty thanks for "the joy we had with you during our time home." He then wonders "how they feel at home" as "Mama's last letter said Papa was worse" and it is "no use to hope that he will be well again." As if by way of explanation, Hjalmar offers:

Mama¹⁵ said that Knute¹⁶ was better and that is good anyhow that he feels better and I hope soon he will be in full health again. But it is much better for Mama. **I am glad that Mama is as strong and God has given her strength that she can take all that she has had to go through.** I am thankful to you for the kindness you showed us. **It would have been good for mama if we stayed in Sweden but we think we have a better chance here so therefore we went back again.**

(Translation by Herbert Anderson, January 3, 1981, author's emphasis)

¹⁵ Hjalmar's mother is my great-great-grandmother, and the Anna Andersson described in chapter four, whose experiences are used as an example of the types of trauma suffered by individuals in private in Sweden during this era. Both Hjalmar's mother and his wife were named Anna, though his mother used the two "s" "Andersson," and his wife used the Americanized one "s" "Anderson".

¹⁶ Hjalmar's younger brother who suffered from chronic health problems. He would die five years later, before the age of twenty.

To my eyes, with their lifetime of experience interpreting the Swedish American emotional vernacular of my Anders(s)on family, the letter reads as if dripping with guilt and sorrow. The same guilt and sorrow that wells up in my own body each time I return to Linghult. That 1924 trip came at a formative time for my grandfather, and deeply shaped his connection to his parents' roots. At six years old, he was old enough to create memories that would stick in his mind, and that he would share with his descendants. With those stories, he passed to us his sense of loss. The evidence of our intergenerational trauma exists in the way we have reenacted this painful experience—of leaving the States for Sweden, and Sweden, again, for the States—over and over across multiple generations in my family (Menakem 2017, 9). Herbert's memories filtered down to me through my own father who made his first pilgrimage to this farm in the late 1960s, returned with his parents later in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and took me for the first time in 2002. I know these stories through them and the photos and documents they have saved and shared. Including a third letter, which reveals why, as many times as we go back, it may never feel like enough. Hjalmar and Anna returned once more, to great fanfare in 1954. But towards the end of her life, Anna wished she could go home one more time. In 1967 she wrote to her cousin Arvida:

Ja, only the old folks remain. I heard from Sigrid that you were up in Linghult one time over the summer. Ja, **if I could only go home one more time, but it will have to stay in my dreams**, because that is too expensive to do too often. It would be wonderful if some of my family could come and visit us, but that probably will not happen. . . . Drink a cup of coffee for me.

(Author's translation and emphasis)

For generations, we have been coming and going from this very countryside—unable to fix the past—but instead re-inflicting the trauma of feeling simultaneously at home, and remarkably out of place. (And always in search of a cup of Swedish coffee.) In all that time, I never dreamed I'd

visit for any reason other than to check and see if Anna's Larsson family home still stands. And I had no idea that one of the major modern events that takes place in the rural farming community my family left from is an annual country music festival.

And yet. Here I sat in a camping van in a muddy, rainy, unlit, grass-covered parking lot, with a man I'd just met, who invited me in because he knew my great-grandmother Anna's great-nephew.

From Hishult, with two stopovers in New York

"Ah! I know Benno!" Hugo said after we realized the geographic proximity of our histories, and I offered the name of one of my remaining relatives. "His father, he had the grocery store in Hishult. The world is small!" he said, as we both laughed.

Hugo's family had been in the area around Linghult since long before my great-grandma Anna's departure. What a small world indeed. His grandmother (same generation as Anna) had even gone to the States for a time in her younger years. Yet here we sat, nearly a century after his grandmother returned to Sweden and my great-grandmother chose to go back to the States, and now we both found ourselves back at this same place. And we were both here for the country music.

When the three of us (Michael joined for this interview) first settled into the seats of his van, I focused my questions on his experience at the festival, and what it was that drew him to country music in the first place. I did not start by boasting of my heritage ties to the land not much more than a stone's throw from where we sat. But as our conversation went on, we naturally found ourselves making connections and comparing notes. Our histories overlapped in ways I never could have anticipated. Hugo and I both came from Swedish American stock. In my case, this identity grew from those who left Sweden to eventually settle for good in the United

States. For Hugo, however, his came from those who went to the States, but ultimately opted to return and settle in Sweden, back in the same countryside where it all began.

Hugo's grandmother, Johanna, was from Hishult. She and three of her siblings had emigrated to the States, around the same time as Anna. Johanna's siblings had stayed and built their lives Stateside, but in the end Hugo's grandmother returned to Hishult so she could marry the man she'd left behind.

"Her love was too strong!" Hugo explained. "So, she came back after three years. Something like that." He had spent much of his childhood with his Swedish American grandmother, and absorbed her love of all things *Amerika*.

She was talking some English phrases, I remember, when I was a kid. And she was talking about New York and all of that. **I didn't know it could infect me in that way. But it could!** I was 4/5/6 years old when **I started to realize she was a little different because she has been over there.** I don't know. And here we were, listening to country music.

Just like my own ancestors, Johanna was "different" for having been "over there," even for a short time. As Hugo got older, his fascination with the States grew as he spent time with his grandmother. He remembered listening to country music on Radio Luxembourg, as well as American stations broadcasting from Germany, alongside his mother and grandmother, and later with his own son. When he was eleven or twelve, he got his hands on a book about the American Civil War, which extended his interest in the history of the United States. Eventually, he started collecting albums of his own. He was hooked:

I think it goes very well along with my own personality because—well, I'm talking too much. But you *asked* me to talk!—Because I'm very individual. I'm a loner. In one way I am. And I could find some, sounds stupid, but **I could find some of my own identity in the music.** I don't know. It was something, a feeling to my [motions to chest]. And then, I'm not speaking very good English, I'm not a professional English speaker, but I owe a lot of things to the music.

Interviewees regularly offered up that they were talking too much during our interviews. At the time it was an amusing curiosity because, as Hugo points out, I *asked* them to talk. My whole purpose was to hear what they had to say, but being put in the spotlight and treated like an “expert” witness to members of the Swedish country, or old time, or bluegrass scenes was a comfortable position for a disproportionate few. In hindsight, these asides—consistently not quite an apology, but certainly a testing of the waters—read to me as searching for the social cue that it was truly safe to operate outside the Swedish norms. A way to probe for solid confirmation that we’d stepped away from *Jantelagen* in order to discuss country music.

Hugo went on to describe how the music helped him learn English and fed his interest in the States. In his younger years he was drawn “over there” and went to help run his grandmother’s siblings’ restaurant in the US for a time. Then, like his grandmother, Hugo opted to return to Sweden, where *Amerika* remains a fixture in his life:

I am fascinated with the United States. . . . There is a vitality expressed by the Americans and more, I think, there is more competition. Only the very best.

Looking back at our conversation, Hugo’s reasons behind his love of country music align with the story of Swedish imaginings of *Amerika* told across these pages. At times, it seemed that what drew him to country music was so well engrained that he hadn’t really questioned it before:

I don’t know, I think it was the very harmonic music and then it turned to your inside. . . . I found them very interesting because I’ve always been interested in the West as well. The movies, the Western Movies. *That’s* something.

His interest in the West and the movies is what brought us back to his grandmother, and his heritage connection to “over there.” That she was different when she returned, and her stories shaped the imagined narrative space that is *Amerika* for Hugo. When it came to the music, however, there was more to that story:

I mean, the text, for example were amazing. . . . There is a very, very good way to express the hard times and personal feelings. . . . Poetry of the highest degree.

For Hugo, the music opens a world of emotions that are otherwise difficult to access in daily life.

Importantly, the bar to access those emotions—to understand and emotionally interpret the stories the singers were sharing—was set to a manageable height:

It is very simple, very logical, the country music poetry. It is very logical; everybody can understand it. Music for simple people, straight people, not complicated people. Open-minded people. I think it is the music for this kind of people.

We can be intellectual and listen to country music, but I'm generalizing as well. **It is anchored among the people who are more, who are standing with their two feet in the shit.** To be brutal. It could be. I think it is. The country music people are very loyal to the music.

What I heard him to be saying in this moment was that country music was for down-to-earth people, the people who know about the realities of life. This music, then, starts to get at a specific identity, one that perhaps grew from a narrative I started to outline in chapter three, where *Amerika* became the place to retreat to when they didn't quite fit in Sweden.

Through this intergenerational connection, he finds a source of identity that sets him apart from those on the outside of the scene. Even if the stories are simple and logical, and “everybody can understand it,” it is still a path that is chosen, not one that will passively find you. In those words, and the emotions they carry, Hugo connected to the sense that something was missing:

There is always some kind of longing for something beyond. There is! That's one hundred percent true! **I think we are longing for something, all of us.** We are longing for something. We are waiting for something. Many times, **it could be something abstract, but there is something. Urgent, or something.**

Longing. Waiting for something intangible or abstract. In our conversation that night, he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was they were longing for.

I've had years since our conversation to ponder Hugo's words from that night. Sometimes I could kick myself for not pushing further, not following up on one idea or another. For not asking for more stories about his grandmother, or what he thought he—personally—was longing for. In truth, however, I didn't know at that time that I would be talking about trauma. When we met, I didn't know how this conversation would fit into my version of the tale of the Swedish country music scene. There were things we talked about that night that I found fascinating at the time, and I pushed him further on, but turned out to be wholly irrelevant to this dissertation in its final form. With the benefit of hindsight, and years of studying scholarship that might explain this sense of longing, what I hear in Hugo's words is evidence of that same intergenerational trauma that keeps bringing me and my family back to this place. The traumatic event may have occurred a hundred years before but that trauma continues on. It manifests for me as a sense of homesickness for a home that was never mine, and for Hugo as an abstract sense of longing for something intangible that is still missing. Something that was lost when one quarter of the Swedish population picked up and left for the New World. That trauma created gaps in the lives and life narratives of families on both sides of the Atlantic. And at least some of the holes left in the wake of those are backfilled—likely unintentionally, and yet powerfully—by their descendants who have elected to dress up, head out, and celebrate at events like the Killhults Countryfestival. Of those people who put on their cowboy hats and boots with spurs for two days and nights of line dancing and debaucherous revelry, I think Hugo said it best:

They have been picking the raisins out of the cake. **I think this is a fantasy US world. They have picked everything.** They have picked the Confederate flag for example, and they have picked the cowboy illusions and all of that. **It is a conglomerate of their dreams of freedom, maybe,** and all that. And I belong to that group of people as well, yes, I do, because I have always been fascinated by America.

AMERIKA IN THE SWEDISH COUNTRY MUSIC SCENE

All around me during those days at Killhults Countryfestivalen, people were in costume. Cowboy hats and (fake) side arms, leather coats with fringe, American flag bandanas, and even the yellow and black striped jump suits worn by the Dalton Brothers after they had been captured by (Belgian cartoon character and Wild West sheriff) Lucky Luke, were all scattered amongst the crowd. The sea of seemingly mismatched iconography was a combination that fully embodied the simultaneously “American” and yet un-Americanized nature of *Amerika* in the Swedish country music scene. Much like other events I’d attended, this festival felt like a step away from everyday Sweden, as if the rules of behavior and interaction were different here (see chapter five). Folks around me were boisterous, voices were louder and gestures larger than if I had been at a non-country music event in a Swedish city center.

My Swedish American self felt at home, even though I knew I was wildly out of place. At the same time, I was hyperaware of the small details that betrayed the fact that I was not Stateside—like the lack of brand advertising on any of the merchant tables, or that the sausages that were for sale at the steakhouse were definitely not hotdogs. What was clear to me, was that the experience of being in this space—the sights, sounds, tastes, costumes—were not designed to duplicate a modern American country event, but instead function as a marker of a group identity, as cues of safety and belonging to those within the Swedish scene who came to live out their *Amerikan* dream. As one country musician put it:

There will always be groups that have their own community, values, music. . . .
A lot of people there get the chance to live out their dream with their cowboy hat and boots, their trench coat. They never get to do that in normal life. It is very liberating. You can be yourself, and nobody is gonna judge you.

In America, that’s how people are. They take their space, express themselves, use their voice. (Country musician, guitar and vocals)

Ethnomusicologist Kristin Solli, whose work focused on the Norwegian country music scene in the early 2000s, argued that in these spaces where American musics are adopted into non-American contexts, emblems of America are used not to evoke a sense of Americanness but instead as markers of a wholly separate, local group identity. According to Solli

These symbols, then, help construct a festival collective, and for many festival participants being a part of this collective is often more important than knowing the history and background of the symbols. As such, the festivals tend to be centered on evoking a general sense of Americanness rather than on recreating ‘accurate’ representations of U.S. culture. (Solli 2017, 220-221)

This sentiment was echoed by many participants in the Swedish country music scene, which had absolutely created its own definition of belonging. Whether indoor or outdoor, summer or winter, multi-day festival or one-night-only show, in my experience, events advertising live country music in Sweden shared consistent characteristics. Crowds gathered dressed in clothes specific to the occasion: cowboy hats, chaps, long leather coats, American flag dresses, and Civil War era outfits were common. Though these costumes draw on images imported from the United States through music, television, and movies, many of these active participants in the Swedish country music scene are expressing their shared interpretation of *Amerika*, which has filtered through family stories and imported images of the United States for decades.

There were many emblems of *Amerika* and its Wild West that had become signs that I’d found the right “place” during any fieldwork trip. Eventually, leather fringed jackets and red-white-and-blue bunting stopped looking out of place on the Swedish countryside, and started functioning as markers that I’d entered the right space and was there to be immersed in the correct scene. But over the course of my fieldwork, and especially on those two days at Killhults in the context of the international events that were unfolding back home at the exact same

moment, there was one symbol that broke the illusion of safety and belonging for me: the Confederate battle flag.

The Confederate battle flag in Killhult and Charlottesville

On August 11th and 12th, 2017, the deadly Unite the Right Rally brought white nationalists from all over the US and the world—including Sweden—to Charlottesville, VA, USA (Teitelbaum 2017). The long-planned events were in response to the city's decision to remove a statue of General Robert E. Lee, a part of a larger push across the American South to dismantle Confederate monuments in public spaces in the aftermath of the racially motivated mass murder of Bible study attendees at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 19, 2015 (Gibson 2020, 192). As protesters and counter-protesters gathered in Charlottesville that day, tensions “quickly exploded into racial taunting, shoving and outright brawling, prompting the governor to declare a state of emergency and the National Guard to join the police in clearing the area” (Stolberg and Rosenthal 2017). The violence resulted in three deaths and dozens of injuries, generating an international news spectacle that spread haunting photos of bloodshed in the shadows of the Confederate flags and Nazi emblems waved by participants as symbols of white nationalist solidarity.

I spent those same two days halfway around the world, yet still surrounded by Confederate flags at the Killhults Countryfestival. But the flags around me weren't flying in the wind or hanging on poles. They were attached to people's bodies. They were on patches and shirts, on logos, vests and hats. When entering these *Amerikan*-themed spaces in Sweden, I was conscious of my own American baggage and experiences surrounding many of these symbols, and my goal was always to understand what they meant in this context, not to preach about my conception of their “real” meaning. I'd spent much of my fieldwork acclimating myself to being

around these flags, but on that particular weekend it was impossible to separate my own emotional response to that flag from the experience of seeing it all around me. A momentary glance at my most important fieldwork tool—my phone—snapped me back to the violent reality of what the Confederate flag has come to mean back home.¹⁷ I went to take a photo, but instead was distracted by a news alert about violence, and a picture of that flag waving amidst the growing unrest in Charlottesville. As I looked up from my screen, refocusing on the country festival around me, I saw a child, no more than four or five years old, running past me wearing a Confederate flag patch on his vest. I felt frozen as a pit formed in my stomach and a lump in my throat, I tried to remember how to breathe. In retrospect, I can see that what I was feeling was my nervous system activating, preparing for *fight, flight, or freeze* (see chapter four). Where I came from that flag symbolizes hate, and that hate was being publicized widely. Even though I was already convinced the flag did not hold the same meaning in Sweden as it did back home, I could not help but see the symbol through my American eyes. The Confederate flag’s unexpected presence in these Swedish spaces is part of what drew me to this topic in the first place, but in the context of that historical moment—the transitional period back in the States—this was an activating topic to come back to, over and over again.

What I was also experiencing, in real time, was the cognitive dissonance that emerges from conflicting *indexical signs*. Though a full exploration of the complexity of semiotics and the flags of the Confederate States is largely beyond the scope of this dissertation, a rudimentary

¹⁷ The summer of 2017 was a very disorienting time to be away from the States, only able to watch from the outside as the news seemed to show my country falling apart. Without “normal” life happening around me, the only input I had was the chaos that was documented in the headlines. I generally ignored these things when I was “working,” but it was just impossible to look away on this particular day.

overview might provide a shortcut to clarity in the following sections.¹⁸ It all comes down to an issue of semantics: a disagreement over the meaning of a particular *sign*. Semiotics is a perspective through which to understand “signs, their objects (or perceived meaning), and the effect these signs” create in observers (Gibson 2020, 205). In *Music as Social Life* (2008), ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino explores the ways that semiotics can be used in the study of music, with a focus on *icons*, *symbols*, and *indexes*. A *sign* is “anything that is perceived by an observer which stands for or calls to mind something else and by doing so creates an effect in the observer” (Turino 2008, 5). Essentially, it is the smallest unit that can be used to communicate. A *symbol* is something that requires “not only specific linguistic definition but also social agreement” (Turino 2008, 10). From the perspective of linguistics, this is the way in which a written word must have both an agreed upon pronunciation and meaning in order to be mutually understandable. That leaves us with *icons*, which “spur imaginative connections of resemblance” between the sign and the object it stands for (Turino 2008, 7), something like a picture. In regard to the Confederate flag itself, ethnomusicologist Nathan Gibson summarizes these relationships perfectly:

[A] drawing or picture of a Confederate flag would be considered an *iconic* sign for a Confederate flag, if through resemblance, the person looking at the drawing or photograph thinks of a Confederate flag. Another way that signs are related to their objects (what they stand for), is through *symbols*, or . . . words with shared meanings. For example, a Confederate flag is a Confederate flag because it is generally agreed upon that the piece of red, white, and blue material fabric in question should be called a Confederate flag. (Gibson 2020, 205)

¹⁸ Nathan Gibson’s (2020) dissertation *Performing America and Rebellions in Finland: 60 Years of American Roots Music in Finland (1957-2017)* contains an excellent and full exploration of the semiotics of the Confederate flag and the routes it traveled before its arrival in Northern Europe.

Signs can also take on meaning through co-occurrence. An *index*, or *indexical sign*, comes through the repeated experiencing of the *sign* and the *object* together (Turino 2008, 8). These are associations that are formed through our life experiences, rather than through conscious effort. Smoke, for example, is often described as an index for fire, as the two are inextricably linked through repeated simultaneous exposure. According to Thomas Turino, “we typically do not reflect on the reality of the object that the sign calls forth, but we simply assume its reality as commonsense because it is part of our experience. . . . the initial indexical sign-object connection is perceived as fact” (Turino 2008, 9). Indices, then “have a kind of reality function” in how they operate as a part of our understanding of *signs* experienced in daily life (Turino 2008, 9).

The cognitive dissonance I experienced on that day in Killhult arose from two conflicting realities. Simultaneously, my perception of the Confederate flag as a symbol of hate and vitriol was being both challenged by its presence around my body as a marker of a collective identity embraced by many at this jovial Swedish event, and reinforced by news and images of violence and discord back home in the States. Participants in the Swedish country music scene insisted that, in a Swedish context at this time, the flag had nothing to do with race or oppression. It was, in fact, a symbol of the opposite: of their rebellion against cultural hegemony, and what it means to be Swedish. It was a marker of their chosen identity, and a symbol that unified participants in the scene. But that left me wondering: How was it possible for such disparate meanings and associations for a single flag to coexist? Was it really true that the Confederate flag could be invoked to mean something so seemingly harmless in an interconnected world, and from a community with such deep ties to the United States? How and when did these two realities bifurcate? How does the Confederate flag fit into ideas of *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination? I will attempt to address these questions in the sections that follow, beginning with a bit of

historical context for the symbol colloquially known in the United States as the “Confederate flag.”

While the Confederate battle flag’s presence and use has been a site of contention for generations, the cultural weight of this particular symbol in the US is perhaps heavier now than it has ever been before. It is not my intention with these pages to defend the use of this symbol in the US, but to explore how its long history led to its regular use as a symbol of rebellion in Sweden. After the initial shock of encountering the Confederate flag during my fieldwork, it quickly became apparent that—though its modern baggage was not unknown—this symbol had taken on a different meaning for those who displayed it at Swedish country music events. My goal in the following section is not to justify the modern US context of the Confederate flag, but to examine how the flag’s early history established a path through which it, eventually, came to be used as a symbol of anti-intellectualism and pro-capitalist sentiments in many rural areas of Sweden.

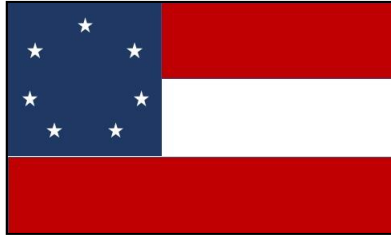
Design and early history

The Confederate States of America (CSA, the Confederacy) was a collection of eleven southern states that separated from the Union after the election of President Abraham Lincoln. During its short tenure, between the years 1861 and 1865, the Confederacy was represented by three different official flags. The flag known in modern parlance as the “Confederate flag” was not one of them. What we now call the “Confederate flag,” also known as the “Rebel flag,” the “Starry cross,” or the “Southern cross”—and in Sweden as *sydstatsflaggan* or “the Southern states’ flag”—was actually a “battle flag” used to identify the Confederate Army on Civil War battlefields.

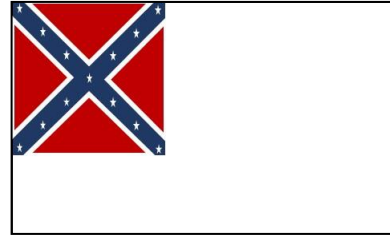
The first two official flags adopted by the Confederacy did not fulfill their primary function at the time: to unequivocally identify its soldiers as they marched onto Civil War battlefields. The design of the first, known as the “Stars and Bars”—a name often erroneously associated with the Confederate battle flag (Gibson 2020, 196)—consisted of two horizontal red bars separated by a white stripe and a blue square containing a circle of stars in the upper left corner (see Figure 2a) and bore a striking resemblance to the “Stars and Stripes,” the flag used by the Federal Government of the United States of America.¹⁹ The two were so difficult to distinguish at a distance that Confederate generals were known to have mistakenly fired on their own reinforcements after confusing their “Stars and Bars” at a distance for their enemy’s “Stars and Stripes” (Webster and Lieb 2008, 172). This is what prompted some units to adopt a replacement, the red square emblem with crossed blue bars that was to become known as the “Confederate battle flag.” This was not an official flag representing the government, but an unofficial emblem of the Rebel Army used on battlefields beginning in the early months of the Civil War (Webster and Lieb, 2008, 172). The battle flag’s square design (see figure 2b) was originally based on South Carolina’s Secession Convention flag and is the root of the oblong “Confederate flag” we know today (Webster and Lieb 2008).

¹⁹ With its thirteen horizontal red and white stripes (representing the thirteen original colonies) and a blue box in the upper lefthand corner containing a constellation of stars (representing the total number of states), the “Stars and Stripes” was established by the Continental Congress as the flag of the United States of America in 1777. Over the centuries, the flag has changed to adjust to the constellation as the Union expanded. At the time of the Civil War, the constellation had 34 stars.

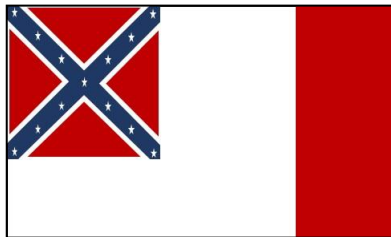
Figure 2



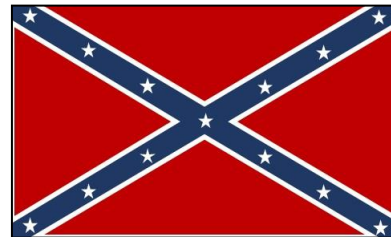
2a. The first flag of the Confederacy, or "Stars and Bars" (1861-1863)



2b. The second flag of the Confederacy, or "Stainless Banner" (1863-1865)



2c. The third flag of the Confederacy, or "Final Edition" (1865)



2d. The modern Confederate battle flag, or "Rebel Flag"

In an attempt to formally rectify any battlefield confusion, the Confederacy went on to change their official flag in 1863, and again months before the government dissolved in 1865. The "Stainless Banner," as this second flag was known, was completely white except for a square containing the Confederate battle flag in the upper lefthand corner (see figure 2b). This updated design, however, was possible to confuse for a white flag of surrender on a windless battlefield (Webster and Lieb 2008, 172). In 1865, the Confederacy attempted to alleviate confusion again by adding a vertical red stripe to the flag's rightmost edge (see figure 2c). This "Final Edition" of the Confederate flag remained the official flag of the Confederacy until its demise at the end of the Civil War in 1865. Through all of the chaos of four years of war and the backdrop of changing flags representing the Confederate government, what remained as a

constant symbol of the Confederacy—and, more importantly, of its soldiers—was not the official flags of the Confederate government, but the unofficial battle flag.

At the end of the Civil War, the Confederate battle flag was treated as contraband, and its display was largely forbidden by federal forces during the Reconstruction Era (Coski 2005, 46). This was likely what spurred the terms “Rebel flag” and “Confederate flag” to be used interchangeably by southerners and northerners alike as early as 1867 to refer to the St. Andrew’s cross battle flag design (Coski 2005, 48). The flag most often seen today—in the more “traditional” rectangular shape of states and nations (see figure 2d)—is a design change that evolved due to demand. When restrictions around the battle flag were relaxed in the decades following Reconstruction, northern factories that produced flags of all types, shapes, and sizes, found that there was little demand for the square battle flag (Coski 2005, 57). Instead, there was a preference for oblong shaped flags, comparable to the “Stars and Stripes,” which was often flown in tandem with the Confederate battle flag post-Reconstruction (Coski 2005, 58).

During the “Confederate memorial period” between 1890 and 1915, rules around the battle flag’s display were relaxed and it began to be used as decoration in unofficial capacities, including during soldiers’ reunion picnics, memorial activities, and other festive events in the American South. Its use in these spaces is what redefined the flag as a symbol of respect for those who had fallen rather than as an emblem for a fallen state (Webster and Leib 2008; 2016). In effect, this frequent bundling of Civil War memorial activities and the Confederate battle flag represented a new *indexical cluster*, a “repeated grouping of a set of signs such that the signs become indexically tied to each other in one’s experience” (Turino 2008, 197). Turino argues that *indexical clusters* are “a basic tool for political rhetoric and propaganda” which “through constant repetition . . . come to be *felt* as true and do not tend to elicit the analytical assessment

inspired by symbolic propositions and arguments” (Turino 2008, 197-198). That is to say, the redundant co-occurrence of memorials and the Confederate battle flag aided in the disassociation between the battle flag and its original context as a tool of war and symbol of a vanquished rebellion. This revised connection between the battle flag and memorial activities creates a complicated, and perhaps disingenuous, realignment as it ignores the longstanding association between the battle flag and the Confederacy. However, using the battle flag as a symbol of the people—specifically the men who served in the Rebel Army, rather than as an emblem of the failed government of the Confederate States of America—is an integral component of the internationally known version of events known as the myth of the “Lost Cause.”

Trauma and the myth of the Lost Cause

It has often been said that after the Civil War, the Confederacy effectively “won the peace” by maintaining control over the post-war messaging and gaining acceptance for the Confederate battle flag, their most visible symbol (Coski 2005, 77). After their defeat in 1865, former Confederates wrote their own interpretations of the history of the Civil War and its aftermath, creating a body of knowledge known as the “myth of the ‘Lost Cause’” (Webster and Leib 2008, 169). This included the narrative that “southerners fought the war for honor, state’s rights, and in defense of their homeland which was invaded by the northerners” (Erickson 2019, 118). At its essence, the Lost Cause narrative argues that the Confederacy was not defeated in the Civil War, but instead that it was “overcome by a superior force, not a superior civilization,” the implication being that the South may have been overpowered, but its ideals live on (Coski 2005, 58). Over time, and with the support of many, this argument became “deeply embedded in American southern culture through music, literature, published histories, monuments in public spaces, Confederate veterans’ groups and their descendants, public holidays, and

commemorations, and the ‘received wisdom’ of families” (Erickson 2019, 119). The Lost Cause myth, or narrative, has stood the test of time and has proliferated through literature, advocacy, policy, and pop culture representations of the Confederacy and the outcome of the Civil War, a process similar to the one that created distinct lore around *Amerika* in the Swedish Imagination, as discussed throughout this text.

If approached within the context of trauma studies, we can perhaps see how it is possible for the collective rewriting of history that makes up the myth of the Lost Cause to be the result of trauma processing. As discussed in chapter four, traumatic memories are “the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences” that are held outside the “existing mental schemes” of our life narrative (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 176). In order to process these memories—that is, in order to stop them from haunting us—they must be integrated into one’s life narrative, which requires traumatized persons to revisit the memory and “complete it” by transforming the unassimilated pieces into narrative language (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 176).

Traumatic memories are, by definition, intolerable. As van der Kolk and van der Hart asked, “How can one bring the traumatic experience to an end, when one feels completely unable and unwilling to resign oneself to the fact that one has been subjected to this horrendous event or series of events? How can one resign oneself to the unacceptable?” (1995, 178). When faced with the unacceptable, traumatized persons may construct “an alternative, less negative or even positive scenario” to encompass their trauma, which can shift the balance of the trauma’s power by creating flexibility in an otherwise stagnant and haunting memory (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 178). Therapists have found success with something as simple as picturing a flower growing at the site of an atrocity or having victims of violence imagine “having all of the power

they want and applying it to the perpetrator” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 178). Indeed, the authors continue:

Memory is everything. Once flexibility is introduced, the traumatic memory starts losing its power over current experience. By imagining these alternative scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror. (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 178)

The unimaginable loss suffered by the United States as a whole during its Civil War, and the crushing defeat suffered by the Confederacy, has been well documented (Costa et al. 2018). In its aftermath, much was swept under the rug in the name of a swift reunification under the Federal government and the Stars and Stripes. There was a need, on both sides, to resign to living alongside people who were very recently considered “the enemy.”

Trauma is found in the words of the survivors, and “the question of who is left to voice the traumatic complaint lies at the very intersection of so-called individual and collective trauma” (Caruth 2016, 121). As discussed throughout this dissertation, trauma is not interpreted in a vacuum. Instead, it is understood within the context of our lived experiences, the stories we tell ourselves and others, and that others tell us. In the aftermath of an “earth shattering experience”—like being on the losing side of an intranational war—a lack of “a stable subjective perspective” from which to interpret events is a large part of what makes the experience traumatic (Caruth 2016, 121). Therefore, creating a stable perspective of events is a component of healing, even if that perspective is not subjective or from a place of truth because the truth would be too painful to fully explore. Literature, movies, music, and other ways we tell stories become the tools through which we collectively understand the past. My intention here is not to dismiss the century of damage that has been done by proliferation of pro-Confederate mythology in the United States, but to illustrate how the process of the transfer of intergenerational trauma

can be an excellent tool for understanding the reasons for fundamental—and perplexing—shifts in historical narratives.

The “Lost Cause” narrative was prolific, and, with the help of the Confederate battle flag, it reached an international audience through American exports of popular culture. The battle flag began to be seen everywhere from print advertisements to sports arenas as an emblem of the modern South (Coski 2005, 79). Early Hollywood dramatically shifted the way in which Americans thought about the Civil War and the Confederate battle flag in the first half of the twentieth century. Most famously, the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939) painted a glorified picture of a largely civilized and honorable South and the ways it had been victimized and decimated by northern invaders (Webster and Lieb 2008, 73-4). Simultaneously, the film minimizes the struggles of enslaved persons, whose fates were depicted on screen as merely a peripheral component of the conflict, likely the most “unacceptable” component of many traumatic memories of the era (Gallagher 2009, 157). In his analysis of Hollywood’s dissemination of the Lost Cause narrative, historian Gary W. Gallagher argued that “Studios, producers and directors seldom have a didactic purpose. . . . Yet films undeniably teach Americans about the past. It is likely that more people have formed perceptions about the Civil War from watching *Gone with the Wind* than from reading all the books written by historians” on the subject since 1939 (Gallagher 2009, 158). While parts of the Lost Cause narrative do not stray from historical fact—the human toll and economic losses of the South throughout the war were indeed devastating—certain truths are glossed over in these early films (Gallagher 2009, 160).

In the following decades, the Confederate battle flag made its way around the world on the coat tails of the “Stars and Stripes” and the US military. During World War II, it was common to see the Confederate battle flag displayed by southern soldiers who were deployed in

the European theater. Though some dismissed the display of the rebel flag as youthful hijinks, it was also a concrete demonstration of the ways in which southern culture is “steeped in stories of Confederate heroism, along with a paucity of career opportunities that made the military more attractive” (Coski 2005, 92). The prevalence of the Confederate battle flag in the Korean theater can best be explained as a way to fill the “patriotic vacuum” that existed for forces fighting under the flag of the United Nations (Coski 2005, 116). Many American soldiers knew nothing about the UN before shipping off to Korea. Once they arrived, they found themselves suddenly fighting under its pale blue flag instead of the red, white, and blue of the United States. In looking for alternatives to the Stars and Stripes, they landed on the seemingly non-political Confederate battle flag as an outlet for their sense of national identity and patriotism in the face of war (Coski 2005).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, *indexical signs* gain their meaning through context. These associations are not formed through conscious effort, but instead through the lived experience of the *sign* and *object* in tandem. This is the process by which the proliferation of the Lost Cause narrative redefined the Confederate battle flag as a symbol of the South in the beginning of the twentieth century. If we were to continue discussing the trajectory of the battle flag in the US beyond the early 1940s, we would quickly find the flag being used by segregationist politicians and hate groups that opposed civil rights in the United States (Webster and Lieb 2008, 174). By the time of the US Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, the Confederate battle flag was being used regularly to oppose the integration of schools (Webster and Lieb 2008, 174). In the decades that followed, the flag was a site of contention due to its conflicting interpretations that varied across state and political lines. While it was still used as a representation of the South and Southern identity, it was impossible to hide

its connection to racism and white nationalist agendas. By the 2010s, the symbol was still being used by both country musicians and rappers in the US, but largely for its shock value (Crelling 2019). The 2015 massacre in Charleston, VA—in which the shooter was associated with the Confederate battle flag and other emblems of white nationalism—was a tipping point that inspired many in the US to call for its removal from public display, and led to the events in Charlottesville, VA, the day that I was at the Killhults Countryfestival in Sweden.

In the spirit of a vulnerable ethnography, I admit that these pages served a secondary purpose, as an exercise that helped to retune my own trauma response to images of the Confederate flag. As an American who has lived in the north, south, east, and (mostly) west—and who was well schooled in American national and political history and iconography during my time working as a page on the Floor of the US House of Representatives during the hyperpatriotic post-9/11 era—seeing this symbol, particularly Stateside, has always made my stomach turn. These pages were first drafted after the flag reemerged as a symbol of radical nationalism in the States and revisited multiple times, including during both the height of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 and in the aftermath of the violent events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Though the analysis of these events' impact on general perceptions of the Confederate flag in the US is outside the scope of this document, I can certainly say that they shaped the way my nervous system reacted to this symbol after my fieldwork. I detest all of what the flag has come to represent in the US, especially over the course of my lifetime. I could not write these pages without acknowledging the violent and traumatic history that this symbol carries in this American context. However, understanding the aforementioned history of the battle flag and the intricacies of its early symbolism was an excellent exercise to reestablish a stable perspective from which to approach the section that

follows, and be able to specifically address what the Confederate battle flag means in a Swedish context as disconnected from my American, and emotionally charged, understanding of the symbol.

***Sydstatsflaggan* and the Swedish “rebel” spirit**

As the night got darker and folks moved on from their first and second rounds of drinks, the crowd took on a familiar shape. Line dancers kept to the back, spilling off the official dance floor to find adequate space for proper boot scootin.’ Mid-crowd country two-steppers would reign in their moves as space dwindled. All the while the rowdier crowd, mostly made up of men and women with *sydstatsflaggan* details in their ensembles—embroidered on a leather vest or jean jacket or as an emblem on a t-shirt—pushed up towards the stage. These late-night hours were a time to let go, be loud and boisterous, and to have fun.

Those I spoke with argued that *sydstatsflaggan* has little to do with the United States, and instead is an emblem of the music and the rural Swedish community that has grown up around it.

According to one country music fan:

I don’t raise my rebel flag because I’m a racist or I like the Klan. I can have my rebel flag on my car, for example, because I like the music. For me, it will be a symbol of the music or the Southern way. . . .

Of course, you can find racists in Sweden which will raise the confederate flag and use that as a Nazi or a racist symbol. But today, here, I can guarantee you, as I said, there is not a Klansman here. There is not a racist here. Ah, well, probably some racists. But none of them, none of them fly the Confederate flag in a white supremacy way. . . .

And sometimes when you see an old party wagon, an old Chevy coming down the road, they’ve got the Confederate flag hanging out, it’s a way of saying:

“Bleep you! I’m not gonna be middle aged, average!” You can use it in that way. Like, uh, “Up yours!” symbol.

And once again, not in a racist way. But, like: **“I am not a part of the society! I’m gonna drive my car and drink my beer!” In that way.**

When I asked in interviews about people's earliest memories of seeing the rebel flag, the most consistent answer I got was related to toys or lunchboxes that featured images of "the General Lee"—the car from the 1980s tv show *Dukes of Hazzard*. It arrived as many ideas of *Amerika* did, then, as a form of pop culture. Though there was a noticeable drop in the number of these flags that I saw being flown on camper vans and at festival vendor tables throughout the length of my fieldwork (between 2013 and 2018), *sydstatsflaggan* was still being proudly worn and displayed by many who identified as *raggare*, the subculture that helped to transform the flag's meaning in this Swedish context.

Raggare is the Swedish word for a subculture that embodies a 1950s rockabilly aesthetic, everything from antique cars, to clothes, to slicked back hair, and is associated with more rural areas in Sweden. More than a music scene, this subculture was largely focused on car clubs and an appreciation for antique cars—the fact that the cars were mostly of American origin was of secondary importance to the design of the car itself (O'Dell 1997, 157). Though *raggare* prefer rockabilly music, many also attended country music events, as these spaces often blurred and blended genre lines to encourage broader participation. As noted in chapter two, *raggare* were not the focus of my fieldwork, but there was significant overlap with these lovers of rockabilly and fans of country music in Sweden. It was from the *raggare* subculture that the "Rebel" flag was first adopted as an anti-establishment symbol in Sweden. According to one former *raggare*:

You've seen the typical Raggare, he's like a greaser, like Fonzy.

Don't tell anybody, when I was in my twenties, I had this wave [pompadour] in my hair. Not anymore. But yea, funny to say it is like a time capsule. From like the late fifties.

But the American flag and the Confederate flag, that was like introduced in the seventies in that kind of car culture. And that was because then the car guys and girls, they loved the USA. USA was number one.

At that time in Sweden, there was a very left politics wave going through Sweden, I mean, the young people of the universities, they were communists. Almost everybody was. It was a very, very big left wing politics wave through Sweden.

And the flag there, it was a reaction to that: 'I'm not with you lefties! I'm gonna drive here, and I'm gonna like USA, whatever you say!'

From the beginning it was the Stars and Stripes. The American flag. . . . And the rebel flag came later. I doubt that anybody knew what the rebel flag looked like then. That [the rebel flag] is newer, more like in the late eighties, I think. I think. (Country music fan, former *raggare*)

As this fan introduced to the discussion, the Vietnam War era was a contentious time for perceptions of the US in Sweden. According to Tom O'Dell, "in contrast to the forties and fifties, where America could have hardly been thought of in in more positive terms, the sixties placed America in a light which was increasingly critical, and even directly negative" (O'Dell 1997, 161). With the rise of the New Left politics and anti-imperialist sentiments in Swedish urban centers came vocal opposition to everything American "from politics, which were widely dismissed as a 'bourgeois' attempt to protect the interests of wealthy capitalists, to mass consumption and cultural imperialism, which were said to lull the masses into a false sense of contentment" (O'Dell 1997, 175). These attitudes created faults along class lines, as many working people, who "did not belong to the university educated middle class" like many in the New Left movement

"resented the presumptuousness of these young intellectuals who called for the overthrow of the capitalist system, and designated themselves as the voice of the workers...From their perspective it seemed rather odd well off high school and university students were complaining about capitalism's injustices, at the same time that they seem to spend most of their time drinking wine, talking, and/or protesting. (O'Dell 1997, 191)

As these protests often included the burning of American flags, in counter-protest many *raggare* "proudly flaunted their American-made material possessions, by slowly cruising [their American cars] around the center of town, playing fifties rock'n'roll music, waving large American flags,

and trying to stop or disrupt the demonstrations” of the Anti-American movement (O’Dell 1997, 192). It is through its repeated display in this context that the American flag, and eventually the Confederate battle flag, became more than a symbol of “one’s sympathies with the American government, American people, or American culture, the flag became a means of distancing oneself from Swedish intellectuals and university students” (O’Dell 1997, 194).

In a way, the symbolic embrace of icons of the United States mimicked anti-Swedish sentiments from generations past, which manifest in the extreme choice to emigrate. According to film scholar Ann-Kristin Wallengren, earlier mass emigration

was clearly a hard blow to Sweden’s rulers that so many people—well over half a million in the first decades of the twentieth century—wished to leave the country because they were dissatisfied with its politics and ideology exactly the time when nation building was at its most intense, when the government, state, and other official bodies were working hard to create a national identity and a sense of belonging using history and national romantic art, literature, and music. The Swedish sense of nationhood received a telling blow . . . official authorities during the periods of emigration, calls it a ‘national trauma’, a ‘terrible bloodletting.’ (Wallengren 2014, 18)

Rather than taking the drastic step of uprooting lives and families and moving across the globe to make a point, *raggare* openly embraced elements of *Amerika* and—somewhat differently from participants in the bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden—carry those elements along with them into everyday life with choices in clothing, hairstyle, and other decorative regalia. It is in this way that performing *Amerika* remains an open act of rebellion against broader Swedish society, without the hassle of emigration.

For context in this discussion, it could help to note one major difference between the collective imaginations of Sweden and the United States as it relates to the concepts of “state” and “nation.” Whereas in the States, according to O’Dell:

The state is usually perceived to be synonymous with the federal government; It is a large, impersonal, bureaucratic entity. The nation, on the other hand, is more closely aligned with the notion of ‘the people’, a larger collective to which one has obligations, or an entity to which one may be sentimentally bound. (O’Dell 1997, 183-184)

In Sweden, however, conceptions of “state” and “nation” are more likely to be conflated into a single idea of “society” where “the people and government have been perceived as closely united, working together towards a common future” (O’Dell 1997, 184). This difference spills over into the ways national flags function inside the two countries. Again, according to O’Dell,

while the American flag has largely functioned as a public symbol to which children pledge allegiance in school, the Swedish flag has been less of a public symbol of the state and the nation, and more of a private symbol used to mark intimate occasions. In this sense, the desecration of the Swedish flag was not only seen as a desecration of an official symbol, but also as the destruction of something which intimately denoted the individual’s personal relationship with the imagined community. (O’Dell 1997, 184-185)

Whereas in the United States we display the American flag for sports events as a show of national unity, in Sweden they use small wooden Swedish flags as decoration beside a birthday treat. Because of this fundamental difference in the function of a national flag in Sweden, where it could be a symbol of “something which intimately denoted the individual’s personal relationship with the imagined community” (O’Dell 1997, 185), attacking the American flag could be taken quite personally. In a Swedish context:

The desecration of the American flag also implied the repudiation of a deeply entrenched set of Swedish values which many had closely associated with America—and which were often embedded and conflated with images of America. In this sense, the destruction of the American flag was the desecration of a symbol which had stood for such things as freedom, democracy, and productivity, all of which had been framed since the end of World War II in terms of the market, large scale industry, mass production, and perhaps most importantly, mass consumption. (O’Dell 1997, 195)

Burning an American flag, then could be interpreted by those outside the New Left as an attack on imagined connections to the United States that had been cultivated across the generations

since the first waves of mass emigration (see chapter three). Waving the American flag, however, was “not necessarily a declaration of unconditional love and support for America and all that it stood for” as “far from all working-class youths who could sympathize with the American war effort” (O’Dell 1997, 194). It is in this space that both the American distinction between “nation” and “state,” as well as the Confederate battle flag, provided an interesting opportunity for self-expression in Swedish rural communities. Through the lost cause narrative and the emblem’s role in post-Civil War memorial activities, the battle flag had taken on a significance similar to that of the Swedish flag as an emblem of connections to an intimate identity, celebrated as decidedly separate from the confines of a governmental system. Therefore, the “Stars and Stripes” continued to be used by the New Left as a symbol of an imperialist United States, and the *sydstatsflaggan* could stand for the people. According to one bluegrass musician whom I asked to explain his understanding of *sydstatsflaggan* in Sweden:

This is the *real* America. It is not the Northeast. It is not the New England, Seattle, whatever. It is Alabama, Georgia, whatever. And that is where true America is. I don’t think it has anything to do with slavery. It is just America in its *cleanest* form.

It is a strong thing, to me. I would never express myself with [Confederate flag] badges and so on. And it is difficult to wear a badge because there are so few things that you can relate to because you have all of these mixed feelings towards any of these things.

There are bad things with America. There are good things with America. I’m not biased in thinking that all of America, all of USA, there are many good things.

But when people here relate to American values, it is not what I consider the good things in America that they relate to.

It is the things that are in opposition to mainstream Swedish, European, Scandinavian values. Because they [the good things] don’t differ very much from Scandinavian values.

(Bluegrass musician, mandolin)

The complex overlapping history of the back-and-forth transfer of people and symbols, as well as fully contained stories that reappropriate imported ideas for local purposes, make the Swedish American borderlands a fascinating space of convergences. While the presence of the Confederate battle flag in the Swedish countryside at the Nääsville bluegrass festival was one of the glaring outliers that initially drew me into this topic, its presence became less and less important to the story as my fieldwork went on. This was due both to shifting international understandings of the symbol in the context of the racially charged climate of the States at the time and because the flag became just one of many emblems of *Amerika* that marked the inside of the music scenes I studied. The more I asked about the battle flag, or other items that I saw as intrinsically tied to an American identity, the clearer it became that these scenes had been curated not to appease rules set by an international genre but to fit the needs of those who participated. In the chapter that follows, I will turn to the final process that shapes the Swedish scenes, which is often the natural conclusion of processing trauma across generations: nostalgia.

7. "AH! WE OUT-AMERICA THE AMERICANS!": NOSTALGIA AND SWEDEN'S *AMERIKA*

It was Saturday, March 17th, 2018, my last night of fieldwork. In two days' time, I would be on a plane from Gothenburg back to the States after eleven months and two weeks of watching, listening, and learning from folks in the *Amerikan* music scenes in Sweden. After all that time, you'd think I wouldn't have been so shocked to see St. Patrick's Day celebrations in full swing all over Stockholm's Old Town as I rushed towards that evening's venue, but all along the cobblestone streets, bars and pubs were packed to the brim with patrons enjoying a merry evening while taking advantage of advertised thematic drink specials. Unfortunately, I couldn't allow myself to get distracted by the festivities as I made a beeline down the street towards a place I'd always wanted a chance to see—Stampen.

Though traditionally a jazz and rhythm n' blues pub, for the night Stampen had been transformed into a packed, bustling honkytonk. As the crowd filled in, it looked like every single person from the Stockholm country scene was present and accounted for. Just a few hours ago, many of us in attendance had stumbled off a cruise ship together after a raucous night enjoying the best honkytonk Sweden had to offer. The annual Country Cruise took place on the Baltic Sea, sailing roundtrip between Stockholm and Åland while making good use of the more lackadaisical alcohol policies of international waters. The crowd showed the familiar signs of Swedish country music events, complete with cowboy hats and stylized outfits. Unlike the ship's crowd the night before, folks at Stampen seemed to tone it down to better fit the urban vibe. Even the Facebook invite made it sound like the perfect setting for me to say goodbye (for now) to the Swedish country music scene:

You are warmly invited for an evening jam packed with the hottest country music that Sweden has to offer! Two bands on stage, a country DJ, and an atmosphere straight out of Nashville's local honkytonks. Put on your boots, and let's go! (Facebook invite, author's translation)

The two bands on stage were filled with some of the best honkytonk musicians I'd come across in Sweden. Belle and the Brothers opened the show, fronted by Kitty Wells-inspired singer/guitarist Frida Ljunberg. The headliner, the Country Side of Harmonica Sam, was a group that I had, in fact, already seen perform once that day as one of the morning's performers on the Country Cruise. Though they sound as if every note they play comes straight out of American honkytonk's well-loved canon, The Country Side of Harmonica Sam plays almost exclusively original tunes with an extreme adherence to the old sound and style, and in costumes that fell somewhere on the spectrum between "singin' cowboy"/movie star Gene Autry and TV personality/country musician Porter Wagoner.

During both sets, I stood towards the front of the crowd alongside an old time banjo player I had interviewed several months before. At one point, she leaned over and, through the din of the crowded bar asked, "Does this make you homesick?"

I had to laugh a bit. The truth was that, yes, listening to this music did make me feel homesick. But it was a very confusing kind of homesick, because this was really unlike anything I had ever experienced back home—unless it came from a decades-old recording.

"I don't know if they do it quite like this in the States anymore," I answered, gesturing to the retro spectacle of costumes and precision the musicians portrayed on stage.

She beamed with a proud smile. "Ah. We out-America the Americans!"

And just like that, on my last night in town and in only five words, she articulated my entire project. "Out 'America' the Americans?" I asked, hoping for more.

“Yes!” she answered, now shouting into my ear over the band’s next song. “Sometimes Swedes want so badly to do things the right way, to do them the authentic way, we do them even more authentically than the Americans.” And with that, we went back to listening to Peter Andersson’s pedal steel and the warm, twangy vocal stylings of Harmonica Sam. I tried to stay in the moment but instead was lost in my head, remembering fragments and fieldwork moments that connected the dots between the nostalgic scene before me and the regular enactment of an *Amerika* that can truly “out-America the Americans.”

NOSTALGIA FOR BEFORE OR BEYOND

For us [in Sweden], America is not a foreign land. Our past, present, and future are linked. There is a tapestry of connections and crossings where people meet that cannot be explained as pure coincidences. Our ancestors worked fastidiously on both sides of the Atlantic for their daily bread, and it is on us to remember their efforts for generations. (Brorson et al. 2014, 9, author’s translation)

The term *nostalgia* finds its roots in the Greek words for longing (*algia*) and home (*nostos*), which together reflect the feeling of “longing for a home that no longer exists—or never existed” (Legg 2004, 100). Often described as central to nostalgia are a positive (though often with a tinge of painful) associations with a particular space and time. Nostalgia’s connection to “home” traverses the physical and the intangible, and blurs lines of the reality and illusions that emerge from reflective memory. It can both extend and shrink our sense of distance from the past by establishing an emotive link between “long ago” and “now.” Spurred by a—perhaps gradual, perhaps sudden—loss of innocence or place of safety, the roots of nostalgia grow in intimate spaces. The transfer of nostalgia from one generation to the next is deeply tied to the intergenerational hold of trauma, as both emerge from the intergenerational stories told to (re)create family history that make it possible to live meaningful lives in the shadows of our shared tragedies (Frankish and Bradbury 2012, 295). As demonstrated in the Brorson quote at the

top of this section, this process is well represented by romantic ideas of *Amerika* in the Swedish imagination, and a steadfast dedication to remembering what was lost by those who came before us so that we could, hopefully, gain.

Frankish and Bradbury (2012) have shown that the transfer of nostalgia from one generation to the next often comes in the form of an unconscious narrative that evolves through the use of active silences and narrative reconstructions. Active silences involve the things we know—or have learned—we *just don't* talk about. Those silences can function “as a way of communicating rules, myths and metamessages to which the family may unquestioningly adhere” (Frankish and Bradbury 2012, 296). It is through these “silent, emotional, and indirect channels” that we come to know our parents’ distress and learn to “avoid engaging or raising difficult matters, offering a kind of protection against further distress” for both parent and child (Frankish and Bradbury 2012, 296). Parents and grandparents, in turn, use these silences as a way to protect their children from the full truth of what has happened in their shared past (Frankish and Bradbury 2012, 296).

I see evidence of this in my own ancestral past. Though I have four great-grandparents who were born in Sweden and emigrated to the US in the 1910s, the tales told here come from only one branch of my family tree. My dad’s mother’s side is not well represented here. My great-grandmother Justina (*min farmors mor*, or my father’s mother’s mother) was just as present in my dad’s childhood as Hjalmar and Anna, the protagonists of many of my stories. What I’ve learned, however, is that Justina (whose husband, Edvard, died at the age of 58, when my grandmother was still young and Justina still had two of nine children at home) was unable to talk about her past in Sweden. My grandmother Dorothy, daughter to Justina and Edvard, knew little about her parents’ lives before Iowa, to the point where she understood (erroneously) that

her maiden surname was not her father's birth name, but a name that had been adopted at Ellis Island upon his arrival—essentially Americanized in the arrival paperwork, as was a common practice in the era. Justina maintained her connections, sending letters back home to Sweden, baking traditional foods, and a picnic on July 4th that seems—to my eyes, and with the benefit of hindsight—to have functioned as an Americanized *midsommar* celebration for this branch of my family. Whenever she was asked about her time before Alta, however, she would tear up and shut down the conversation. According to my Aunt Barb, my dad's younger sister, that's how they “knew” they weren't supposed to talk to Grandma about Sweden. Instead, they did as children do, avoided the upsetting subject while, simultaneously, pushing those boundaries by lovingly teasing her for her thick accent and broken English.

Particularly in cases where these stories are told to children who have themselves not directly experienced trauma, intergenerational storytelling can shift family history into myth (Frankish and Bradbury 2012, 295). In chapter four I discussed the ways in which the integration of traumatic memories requires an intentionally created narrative in order to integrate traumatic experiences into the life narrative, as well as the process of postmemory that can transfer the emotive weight of trauma through the sharing of those narratives with the next generation. That same intergenerational storytelling, however, can utilize active silences and nostalgic narratives—focused on the upsides of life before—that transmit a positive emotive experience across generations (Frankish and Bradbury 2012, 305). Those nostalgic associations are a movement away from a traumatic past and towards a new future, helping to create a path forward that is less burdened than the past carried by the generation that suffered traumatic experiences firsthand. Therefore, the intergenerational transfer of memory and familial history relies heavily

on the interactions and overlap between trauma and nostalgia. Geographer Stephen Legg argues that there exists both a theoretical and practical link between the two:

While nostalgia denotes a positive attachment to a past real or imaginary home, trauma denotes the negative inability to deal effectively with a past event. While both conditions represent problematic engagements with the past, nostalgia often focuses on a time and place before or beyond a traumatic incident. (Legg 2004, 103)

The idea that nostalgic reflections focus on positive elements of a time and place that lie “before or beyond a traumatic incident” ties directly to Hirsch’s (2012) concept of postmemory. While nostalgia elevates the positive of the past with a hint of painful longing, the transfer of postmemories holds steadfast to the traumatic narrative. Postmemory is the process by which traumatic memories are transferred from one generation to the next. Often, like nostalgia, it involves the selective (re)creating and sharing of traumatic memories from parent to child. Through both processes, we can create a clear, but often imaginary, “homeplace” that is both situated in the past while simultaneously (re)experienced in the present. While postmemories will carry the weight of trauma, nostalgia emphasizes a positive connection to the past—though they perhaps together create a spectrum. As these narratives are passed through generations, in the (re)creating of our shared histories, they can shift towards the positive—towards the less painful nostalgic memories of the past as a way to heal.

In the context of the Swedish imagination, this dissertation has discussed two narratives that emerged in the aftermath of the trauma of mass emigration. The narrative that I inherited from my great-grandparents who left Sweden centered on the familial bonds that were broken, and included an idealized vision of Sweden: an iron red house with white accents in the countryside, or a picnic by a lake on a perfect summer day. The nostalgia I feel is for the life and family that existed *before* the trauma of separation—at least partially, as the positive associations

I carry with these images were likely overshadowed in reality by the hardships of poverty. I argue, however, that the nostalgia at play in the Swedish bluegrass, old time, and—most obviously—in the country music scene is a nostalgia for what lay *beyond* that same trauma of separation. It is a nostalgia that ties to the *Amerikabrev* (see chapter three) as well as movies and TV programming that showed and stories of the success found by those who left “home” for the New World. It is not nostalgia for a lived experience in one’s personal or direct family history, but for an imagined emotive experience that came from the possibility of success in *Amerika*.

How is it, then, that one could have nostalgia for something that never—quite—was? Sweeney (2020) argues that the experience of nostalgia is not actually directed at irretrievability of the past, or any real or imagined place. Instead, nostalgia is an emotional response to change that emerges from a “rational desire to take a break from the experiences of the present and to seek refuge in previously felt emotions” (Sweeney 2020, 187). Removing the triggers of time and space, and centering nostalgia as a longing to re-experience an emotional state, opens the possibility that we can feel nostalgia for experiences we’ve never had, or places we’ve never been. As we’ve seen in the discussion of postmemory, the emotive experience of events can be a strong component of intergenerational storytelling—especially when traumatic memories guide those stories. Vivid imagery of a parent’s past or homeland can become a part of their child’s lived experience, allowing descendants to “feel homesick for a home that they have never had and nostalgic for their life there” (Sweeney 2020, 189). Importantly, however, the depth of sensory experience is lost between generations. While the parent may experience an “overwhelming and involuntary rush of nostalgia brought on by a smell or sound” that reminds them of their homeland, their children will draw upon stories, rather than experiences, and mere stories will inevitably lack those undertones (Sweeney 2020, 189). Therefore, they would not

have the same associations with tastes, smells, sights, and sounds that can only be experienced firsthand.

The nostalgic *Amerika* that existed in Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music spaces grew from an idealized version of success and the “American dream” that exists in the Swedish imagination (see chapter one). This *Amerika* was articulated in letters (*Amerikabrev*) sent by purportedly successful relatives, from the stories of those who returned with riches, and from the movies and television that filled the leisure time and imaginations of those who stayed behind (see chapter three). From these sources, participants in these scenes are able to conjure the sights, sounds, and stories of the United States with an alarming precision. But as an American in these spaces, it always felt like something was missing, yet it was both so obvious—and yet intangible—that it took me six years to figure out what it was. Since this nostalgia did not come from firsthand experience, it lacked authenticity in its smells, flavors, and textures. The smell of the grill at Killhult wasn’t the same as charcoal in Virginia. My dance partner at Nääsville didn’t smell of Old Spice and sweat. And the murmur of the crowd had the sing-song lilt of Swedish vowels, rather than a clamor of American consonants. These details that are “off” to my American sensibilities, however, are not in any way incorrect or “wrong” in these Swedish spaces. Instead, the flavors of the sausages, the taste of the light beer, and the outline of snus cans (an oral-tobacco product commonly used in Sweden) in jean pockets are what make these bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes authentically Swedish.

Authenticity in bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes

In thinking about the nostalgia at play in Swedish country music scenes, I love the idea that participants can “out-*Amerika* the Americans.” Not only does this betray evidence of *jantelagen* in its taunt for an observer to find fault in a detailed presentation of American

honkytonk by Swedish performers—taking things so seriously and so genuinely that you can’t possibly laugh at their perfection—but this description is an opinion I’ve come to find is echoed by more than a handful of outside experts. Specifically about the Country Side of Harmonica Sam and their 2017 album *A Drink After Midnight*, country music critic Trigger Coroneos of *Saving Country Music.Com* wrote:

Country Side of Harmonica Sam . . . will leave your mouth agape, you checking the back of the album for a copyright date, and feeling like the ghosts of country music’s past have been resurrected right before your very eyes and ears. . . . [M]uch more astounding is that this is not even a North American band. **[They] are from Sweden of all places.** . . .

‘Shocking’ is really the only appropriate word here when you behold what they’re capable of. . . . If [they] had been around in the 50’s, they’d be in the Hall of Fame right now, and rival the other old greats in the influence they forged simply from the quality of the songs and performances. (Coroneos 2017)

I’d seen this five-man band perform a bunch of times over the winter, mostly at their monthly “Grand New Opry” event at a bar in Malmö—a regular headlining gig with a rotating cast of other Swedish country musicians to join them for a night of retro honkytonk—and in my opinion, Coroneos’ assessment is spot on. Each and every time they sounded somehow both lively and energetic, while nailing each note so perfectly that the audio could have passed for a recording. This strict attention to detail and adherence to the ways of the music’s American masters by Swedish country musicians has even been recognized with award nods. Particularly by the retro-focused Ameripolitan Music Awards, which is based in Austin, TX, and aims to celebrate modern country musicians who play in the style of pre-corporate country music, before the Countrypolitan era of the 1970s. In 2018, two of the five nominees in the category of “best honkytonk group,” were from Sweden—the Country Side of Harmonica Sam and the Green Line Travelers. Even the overall “best musician” category included Swedish pedal steel player and

member of the Country Side of Harmonica Sam, Peter Andersson. All of that is to say that these Swedish musicians' attention to detail was not going unnoticed by tastemakers in the United States.

Rave reviews from American sources have been showered across the generations of musicians from the Swedish bluegrass and old time spaces as well. In 1984, Per Fält's instrumental bluegrass album *Goda Vänners Lag: Instrumental bluegrass på svenska* ("In the company of good friends: Instrumental bluegrass in Swedish")—which brought together the biggest names in Swedish bluegrass at the time—was reviewed in the American publication *Bluegrass Unlimited*:

Whatever "*Goda Vänners Lag*" means in Swedish, it translates into dynamite music in English. I haven't heard a more crackling instrumental album in years. From Galax to Gothenborg [sic], you won't hear a tighter, crisper bunch of instrumentalists. This is what bluegrass is all about. **We sent it overseas, and now these folks send it back to remind some of us how it's supposed to sound.** (*Bluegrass Unlimited* 1984, as quoted in liner notes, *Goda Vänners Lag*, author's emphasis)

Accolades like these from Americans and opportunities to play in the States are huge sources of clout for bluegrass, old time, and country musicians in Sweden. But even with every effort to check all the boxes and exceed all expectations, Americans—like the ones quoted above—almost always add a layer of suspicion, rooted in the fact that they are “from Sweden of all places” (Coroneos 2017). This is met with an understandable level of frustration from bands that would rather drop the “Swedish” qualifier, and simply be “bluegrass,” “country,” or “old time” musicians in the eyes of audiences. From the perspective of someone who has regularly been talking about this unique group of Swedish musicians in American spaces for years, I can tell you that this combination of Sweden and cowboy music has never once been met with a response that doesn't equate the phenomenon to an oddity. To Americans, these are genres where

authenticity is closely tied to place, and a rural, white, American identity. The conversations I regularly had with participants in these scenes in Sweden, however, didn't necessarily see it that way. If musicians in Sweden can send the music back to the States to "remind some of us how it's supposed to sound" then can't it just be "bluegrass" instead of the entirely separate "Swedish bluegrass?"

Rarely was their authentic connection to these musics questioned by Swedish musicians—that is, until I started interfering by asking probing academic questions that forced the issue. One interviewee admitted that, after the several late-night conversations and one on-the-record interview we'd had at the 2018 Indoor Country Festival in Karlstad, she had a bit of an existential crisis around her participation in these scenes. The setup for the Indoor Country Festival, which took place completely inside a hotel during the bitter cold month of January, was a perfect arrangement for the kind of "deep hanging out" that ethnomusicologists dream about (Wong 2008)—and was something I found relatively hard to come by when studying a scene made up of geographically dispersed hobbyists. We were eating together, drinking together, dancing together, killing time together, and (of course) jamming together for two days and nights, and on very little sleep. I had arranged ahead of time to have several "official" interviews with musicians and those topics bled easily into the casual moments that filled the weekend, including some discussion about whether one could authentically play this music without being American.

A week or so later I invited one of the musicians from Karlstad to join me for some American pancakes at a restaurant in Gothenburg so I could have a small taste of home on my birthday. This wasn't intended as a "work" meeting, but, because our friendship had formed over our shared interest in old time, our conversations easily drifted towards the music. This is when

she told me about her existential crisis. I asked permission to jot a couple of things from our conversation in my trusty fieldwork notebook as we reviewed what happened in Karlstad. At the festival we'd talked at length about old time as a living tradition in Sweden and the overlaps and differences between the Swedish and American scenes. But after those conversations, she'd spent days wondering if it was "appropriation" to play this music and be a part of this scene if she's never lived the life that the music itself celebrates, lived in the American South, or even rural areas of Sweden. There wasn't the same moral question for her around playing Irish traditional tunes or Swedish folk music. She just wasn't sure if she had the right to play American old time.

I was pretty devastated to hear that my probing inquiries had caused anyone to question their right to play this music in Sweden. That was absolutely not my intention! I wanted to assure her that she has every right to play these tunes, but what right did I have to give reassurance? While my identity as a white American from a rural community might check some of the boxes for "authenticity" in old time spaces, to me *she* was the culture bearer. She had a much deeper connection to—and understanding of—this music than I could ever hope to earn through the simple fact that I was not born Swedish. To my eyes, sitting in front of me was one of the most "authentic" players of old time music I'd ever met. She grew up playing old time, her parents played in one of the earliest Swedish old time bands, she regularly travels to the US to play music with others, even her musical mentor was an American "culture bearer" of old time music. As I recall, we came up with some vague answers as to why it "didn't *not* make sense" for folks in Sweden to play old time. The term "appropriation" didn't seem to apply, since the power imbalance wasn't there. The commodification of old time music in the US, especially in the folk revival eras that brought old time to college campuses and urban spaces, intentionally pushed the

genre as a kind of “everyman’s” music, making it accessible to all. While this music may have once had unbreakable ties to specific regions of the United States, record companies and various modes of borderless distribution (streaming, etc.), as well as the movement and migration of the people themselves, has shifted—and in some cases erased—those boundaries.

Unfortunately, we got stuck on one potential disqualifier: that Swedish musicians were not from the rural US. One of my biggest fieldwork regrets was that I didn’t yet quite have the words to express why I thought it really does make sense for Swedes to play old time. In my assessment, and as I hope I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, this scene is a logical outgrowth of the interconnected histories of the United States and Sweden. Participants in the Swedish old time, bluegrass, and country music scenes are able to “out-*Amerika* the Americans” and form authentic connections to the stories in the music because of the intergenerational cultural connection that grew from real and imagined ties formed during the settling of the American West by Swedish emigrants. Whether learned in the intimate spaces of the family home, or via public media distribution of the collective narrative, *Amerika* holds a not insignificant space in the Swedish imagination—and a significant place in its bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes. The music truly does seem at home here.

CONCLUSIONS

The overlapping Swedish bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes are made up of several generations of a small and vibrant collection of participants who are dedicated to their music community. These communities were formed around the real and imagined connections between Sweden and the United States that draw on an interlocking history of emigration, media, and personal exchanges that created a unique conception of *Amerika* that comes to life at events and festivals. The idea of *Amerika* has taken shape in the gaps left behind in the traumatic

separations of families during early eras of mass migration, and has evolved across generations to meet the needs of those left behind. Whether it is a true heritage connection to “over there,” or a symbolic gesture announcing a sense that they “just don’t fit in,” participants are drawn to these spaces because they offer an (even if temporary) escape from the everyday *jantelagen* of Swedish society. The act of musicking within these spaces exercises the body’s social engagement system, where participants find comforting cues of safety that align with the needs of those that find themselves drawn to *Amerika*.

These pages have attempted to cover a lot of ground. As an ethnomusicologist, my aim was to explore what brought people and vitality to these music scenes, and what role that music played in the lives of participants. What I discovered as I pulled on that thread, was a project that—though it began with a simple, unexpected afternoon encounter with American musics and conflicting iconography in the Swedish countryside—became a decade-long journey that traversed two continents, included hundreds of hours of interviews and fieldwork videos, covered literature in neuroscience, psychology, ethnomusicology, history, trauma, and Scandinavian studies, and even involved dusting off and sorting through boxes of century-old family documents and photos. I approached these topics as a vulnerable observer, whose ancestral and emotional connections to the Swedish American borderlands was impossible to fully separate from the goings-on in these music scenes. What I found was that by not just mentioning any relevant biases, but instead fully exposing deeply personal and emotional connections, it allowed me to better craft a narrative that connected the many disparate pieces that were relevant to the topic at hand. As is usually the case when one chooses to approach a subject matter from a place of vulnerability, I do hope the avenues I opted to explore on the page retained their relevance for the reader.

Though at times I have drifted away from musically centered prose and towards the application of broader themes, a deep exploration of the ever-evolving understanding of trauma and its intergenerational impact was necessary for a full understanding of the broader application of a trauma studies perspective in music scholarship. In truth, I feel this document only scratches the surface of what is possible to explore in the connections between trauma, activation, dysregulation, social engagement, states of calmness, and music. Similar work likely could be done in many different music scenes. What I am missing from the neuroscience literature on music as trauma therapy is the role of percussion and more physically centered music making. Much of the literature I found focused on vocalizations and breathing, but left me curious about the neural impact of rhythmic engagement. Separately, and specifically within the realms of bluegrass, old time, and country music, I hope that in future projects I can better explore connections between preferred harmonies with tones that, according to Porges and Carter (2017), might trigger cues of safety. In bluegrass especially, men and women alike sing high harmonies—pitches that lie above the melody lines—that invoke the high tonality of a mother’s voice in lullabies. The subject matter of songs that emphasize this tonality often fall into the category of what my guitar and harmony teacher Jason Stewart would call “plum pitiful!” In those songs, the high harmony feels like a release valve that makes tales of death, loss, heartbreak, and loneliness take on a softer, manageable quality. The music itself feels—not soft, exactly—but non-aggressive. With the combined effect at a jam session of a good group cry, or of a community announcing that it is acceptable to feel that sadness through this music. There is perhaps also research to be done within the scope of gender studies and masculinity on the nervous system and emotive processing in bluegrass, old time, and country music spaces. These are genres where it is fully acceptable for men to sing and openly emote heartbreak and sorrow,

without needing to resort to anger and resentment, and where voices often exist in either the highest or lowest extremes of the male range. In the United States, at least, that is a rarity in traditional conceptions of manliness and masculinity.

As trauma studies continues to expand and connect to work in neuroscience, I hope this dissertation can also contribute to opening pathways towards using the lens of trauma to examine histories that may not have been impacted by violence and destruction, but still hold deeply traumatic truths. The study of postmemories and the intergenerational transfer of traumatic memory is beneficial even far beyond the intimate nature of a family story. The impact of a traumatic event—a fire, a war—can obliterate objects representing official forms of “memory” in an institutional setting. When it comes to trauma that is widely experienced, the “bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which one trauma can recall, or reactivate, the effects of another” can turn traditional archives and methodologies into unreliable witnesses (Hirsch 2012, 2). The exploration of postmemory is an avenue through which to “uncover and restore experiences in life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive,” especially in the context of historical moments from the perspective of women and underrepresented groups, as a counter-history and “means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress.” (Hirsch 2012, 15-16). This, combined with a critical exploration of public remembrances and media depictions in the aftermath of shared trauma, can bring new light to the unwritten or obliterated histories of those whose stories have been otherwise lost.

This project has been a detailed, and deeply personal, exploration of the Swedish American borderlands and its continued influence on the lives of people on both sides of the Atlantic. It is my contention that in examining shared histories in the US and Sweden through the

lens of trauma as a process of transfer opens a whole world of possibilities for understanding motives for increasingly sectarian politics in both countries. In the near term, it will be fascinating to see what role traditionally Swedish cultural products like Vilhelm Moberg's *Emigrants* series might or might not play in proposals for a *Svensk kulturkanon* (Swedish Culture Canon) that might serve to define what it means to be "Swedish." Stateside, I would argue that the intergenerational trauma of Civil War conflicts can be seen in modern political spaces, and perhaps there is a way to heal via activation of the social engagement system, as it certainly seems like the isolation of Covid years has not been beneficial to national unity.

Indeed, if not for the Covid years, I might have been back multiple times already for visits to with friends and family both inside and outside the bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden. I certainly carry with me a sense that this work is not over, and I hope to get the chance to request to re-interview some folks and get their input on the path I took with their stories. To return, as I hope to do again and again as I feel just as my great-grandmother did that it can never be enough, is to continue to challenge my own ideas of what it means to be Swedish, to be American, and to live on the Swedish American borderlands. As I sit here and type out these final words, so many years after I started this project, I'm reminded of my very first fieldnote. I remember scribbling the words out by hand as I sat anxious and jittery on the first leg of my journey to Sweden in the summer of 2016, completely unsure of how this project would shift my sense of identity. In closing, I am including that fieldnote in its entirety as a marker of where this all started:

June 7, 2016

On the plane to Frankfurt.

This officially marks the beginning of my fieldwork. This is my first official fieldnote. I hope it doesn't come back to bite me that I've decided to write this

in pencil. But, pencil has been my chosen medium for my whole grad school career, so why mess with success?

Something Michael said in the car on the way to the airport reminded me that **one of the main things I'm explicitly not looking forward to in this experience is having my whole idea of what "Swedish" is to be challenged or changed.**

I grew up Swedish. But I grew up American-Swedish. What we did, observed, felt, was filtered through several generations after it had been frozen in time. Frozen in the imaginations of my great-grandparents when they departed from Sweden in the 1910s. My grandfather's family even returned to Sweden attempting to move back, but ended up back in the US because they had been too "Americanized".

So, what is Sweden/Swedish to me right now, as I sit on this flight to the first official leg of my fieldwork?

Food tops the list. Meatballs, cinnamon rolls, and Christmas. Christmas tablecloths, glass bowls.

Clean, crisp, modern public spaces. Simple decorations. Dala horses.

Welcoming, happy people. Traditional ways. Farming. Potatoes. Decent people, not judgmental.

Sweden is like Mecca to me, and to my people. **But do we ever really see it when we are there?**

In retrospect, I can confidently say this process helped me grow in ways I never could have expected, and I can reassure my past self that in no way have I lost my sense of what it means to be "Swedish."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Benedict. (1984) 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso.
- Anderson, Claire M. 2022. "'Spectaculars' and the Study of Popular Musicking." *Journal of Popular Music Education* 6, no. 2: 145–63. doi:10.1386/jpme_00081_1.
- Anderson, Philip J., and Dag Blanck. 2011. *Norwegians and Swedes in the United States: Friends and Neighbors*. Minnesota Historical Society Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Public Culture* 2, no. 2: 1-24.
- Arndtzén, Esther. 2022. "Måste-Böcker I Sveriges Nya Kulturkanon – Lundagard.se." *Lundagard*. October 20, 2022. <https://www.lundagard.se/2022/10/20/maste-bocker-i-sveriges-nya-kulturkanon/>.
- Arrhenius, Thordis. 2010. "Preservation and Protest Counterculture and Heritage in 1970s Sweden." *Future Anterior* 7, no. 2: 107–23.
- Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bennett, Andy, and Richard A. Peterson. 2004. "Introducing Music Scenes." In *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennet, 1–16. Vanderbilt University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctv17vf74v.5.
- Bensimon, Moshe. 2021. "Relational Needs in Music Therapy with Trauma Victims: The Perspective of Music Therapists." *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 29, no.3: 240–54. doi:10.1080/08098131.2019.1703209.
- Björnberg, Alf, and Thomas Bossius. 2017. *Made in Sweden: Studies in Popular Music*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Blanck, Dag. 2016. "'Very Welcome Home Mr. Swanson': Swedish Americans Encounter Homeland Swedes." *American Studies in Scandinavia* 48 no. 2: 107–21. doi:10.22439/asca.v48i2.5454.
- Blanck, Dag. 2017. "Migration and Modernity: A Swedish-American Argument." In *The Dynamics and Contexts of Cultural Transfers*. Ed. Margaretha Fahlgren and Anna Williams, Uppsala: *Avdelningen för litteratursociologi*. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-336755>
- Blanck, Dag, and Adam Hjorthén, eds. 2021. *Swedish-American Borderlands: New Histories of Transatlantic Relations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Breit, Sigrid, Aleksandra Kupferberg, Gerhard Rogler, and Gregor Hasler. 2018. "Vagus Nerve as Modulator of the Brain-Gut Axis in Psychiatric and Inflammatory Disorders." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9: 1-15. doi:10.3389/fpsy.2018.00044.
- Brittingham, Angela, and G. Patricia de la Cruz. 2004. "Ancestry: 2000, Census 2000 Brief." US Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/ancestry.pdf>.
- Broman, Per F. 2005. "'When All Is Said and Done': Swedish ABBA Reception During the 1970s and the Ideology of Pop." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17, no.1: 45–66. doi:10.1111/j.1524-2226.2005.00033.x.
- Brorson, Alf, Peter Russberg, Ulf Beijbom, and Tommy Hellström. 2014. *Farväl Sverige: En musikbok om Svenskarna som korsade atlanten för ett bättre liv*.
- Caruth, Cathy, ed. 1995. "Trauma and Experience: Introduction" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 3-12. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Caruth, Cathy. 2016. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Twentieth Anniversary edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Clarke, Lucy. 2017 "It's all about The Soul: Discourses of Authenticity in Old-Time American Folk Music." LUP Student Papers. <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/8904038>.
- Coroneros, Trigger. 2017. "Album Review – Country Side of Harmonica Sam's 'A Drink after Midnight.'" *Saving Country Music*. June 29, 2017. <https://www.savingcountrymusic.com/album-review-country-side-of-harmonica-sams-a-drink-after-midnight/>.
- Coski, John M. 2005. *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Costa, Dora L., Noelle Yetter, and Heather DeSomer. 2018. "Intergenerational Transmission of Paternal Trauma Among US Civil War Ex-POWs." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences – PNAS* 115, no. 44: 11215–20. doi:10.1073/pnas.1803630115.
- Crelling, Karin. 2019. "The Confederate Battle Flag: Why Is It Perceived so Differently in the US and Europe/Germany?" University of Washington Libraries ResearchWorks Archive. <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/43616>.
- Davis, Angela Y. 1998. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Demers, Anne. 2011. "When Veterans Return: The Role of Community in Reintegration." *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 16, no. 2: 160–79. doi:10.1080/15325024.2010.519281.

- Dibben, Nicola. 2009. "Nature and Nation: National Identity and Environmentalism in Icelandic Popular Music Video and Music Documentary." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18 no.1: 131–51. doi:10.1080/17411910902816542.
- Dudley, Shannon. 2004. *Carnival Music in Trinidad: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dudley, Shannon. 2008. *Music From Behind the Bridge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Edström, Olle. 2017. "A Very Swedish Phenomenon." In *Made in Sweden: Studies in Popular Music*, edited by Alf Björnberg and Thomas Bossius, 15-24. New York: Routledge.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Erickson, Edward J. 2019. "The Armenian Lost Cause and the Interpreted History of the American Civil War." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 39 no. 1: 118–24. doi:10.1080/13602004.2019.1575018.
- Erikson, Kai T. 1995. "Notes on Trauma and Community." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 183-199. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Erikson, Kai T. 2017. *The Sociologist's Eye: Reflections on Social Life*. Cumberland: Yale University Press.
- Fox, Aaron A. 2004. *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Frankish, Tarryn, and Jill Bradbury. 2012. "Telling Stories for the Next Generation: Trauma and Nostalgia." *Peace and Conflict* 18, no. 3: 294–306. doi:10.1037/a0029070.
- Gallagher, Gary W. 2009. "Hollywood Has It Both Ways: The Rise, Fall, and Reappearance of the Lost Cause in American Film." In *Wars Within a War: Controversy and Conflict over the American Civil War*, edited by Joan Waugh and Gary Gallagher, 157-183. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. doi:10.5149/9780807898444_waugh. Pp. 157-183.
- Garofalo, Reebee, and Steven Waksman. 2017. *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the U.S.A.*, sixth edition. Pearson.
- Ghanoui, Saniya Lee. 2021. "Translating sex culture: Transnational sex education and the U.S.-Swedish Relationship, 1910s–1960s." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Gibson, Nathan D. 2020. "Performing America and Rebellious in Finland: 60 Years of American Roots Music in Finland (1957–2017)." PhD diss., Indiana University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

- Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla, and Donna Orange. 2016. *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory*, first edition. Leverkusen-Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich. doi:10.3224/84740613.
- Gradén, Lizette. 2003. "On Parade: Making Heritage in Lindsborg, Kansas." PhD thesis, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- Hannerz, Ulf. 2002. *Transnational Connections Culture, People, Places*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press. doi:10.7312/hirs15652.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1-14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johansson, Ola. 2010. "Beyond ABBA: The Globalization of Swedish Popular Music." *FOGE Focus on Geography* 53, no. 4: 134–41.
- Jones-Bamman, Richard. 2001. "From 'I'm a Lapp' to 'I Am Saami': Popular Music and Changing Images of Indigenous Ethnicity in Scandinavia." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 22 no. 2: 189–210.
- Kaminsky, David. 2007. "The Zorn Trials and the Jante Law: On Shining Musically in the Land of Moderation." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 39 (January): 27–49.
- Kaminsky, David. 2012. *Swedish Folk Music in the Twenty-first Century: On the Nature of Tradition in a Folkless Nation*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Klareld, Ann-Sofie. 2022. "A Quest for Roots and Kinship: Family History in the Television Series Allt För Sverige (The Great Swedish Adventure)." *Journal of Family History*, 36319902210752–. doi:10.1177/03631990221075260.
- Koskoff, Ellen, ed. 1989. *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Legg, Stephen. 2004. "Memory and Nostalgia." *Cultural Geographies* 11 no. 1: 99–107. doi:10.1191/1474474004eu296ed.
- McClary, Susan. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Menakem, Resmaa. 2017. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- Moberg, Wilhelm. 1991. *The Emigrants: A Novel*. Translated by Gustaf Lannestock. New York: Simon and Schuster.

- Moberg, Vilhelm, 2008. "Why I Wrote the Novel About Swedish Emigrants: Address Delivered at the Annual Banquet of the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, Chicago, January 29, 1966." *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3: 63-77.
- Neal, Jocelyn R. 2013. *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- O'Dell, Tom. 1997. *Culture Unbound: Americanization and Everyday Life in Sweden*. Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press.
- Pandell, Lexi. 2022. "How Trauma Became the Word of the Decade — and the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Vox*. January 17, 2022. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22876522/trauma-covid-word-origin-mental-health>.
- Paul, Ronald. 2019. Sweden, Migration, and the Emigrant Novels of Vilhelm Moberg. *Socialism and Democracy* 33, no. 1: 186–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2019.1655857>.
- Pitts, Stephanie E. 2019. "Leisure-Time Music Groups and Their Localities: Exploring the Commercial, Educational, and Reciprocal Relationships of Amateur Music-Making". *Music & Letters* 101, no. 1:120-134. doi:10.1093/ml/gcz044.
- Porges, Stephen W., and Sue Carter. 2017. "Polyvagal Theory and the Social Engagement System." In *Complementary and Integrative Treatments in Psychiatric Practice*, edited by Patricia L. Gerbarg, Philip R. Muskin, and Richard P. Brown, 221-239. Arlington: American Psychiatric Association Publishing.
- Porges, Stephen W., and Andrew Rossetti. 2018. "Music, Music Therapy and Trauma." *Music and Medicine* 10 (3): 117–120. doi:10.47513/mmd.v10i3.635.
- Pough, Gwendolyn D. 2004. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*, first edition. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Prager, Jeffrey. 2016. "Disrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: Recovering Humanity, Repairing Generations." In *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory*, first edition, edited by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 12–26. Verlag Barbara Budrich. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvdf03jc.7>.
- Rogers, Jimmie N., and Stephen A. Smith. 1999 "Popular Populism: Political Messages in Country Music Lyrics." In *Mass Politics: The Politics of Popular Culture*, edited by Daneil M. Shea, 111-21. New York: Worth.
- Rosén, Eric. 2022. "Kulturen Ska Varken Vakta Gränsen Eller Ena." *Aftonbladet.se*. *Aftonbladet*. October 25, 2022. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/a/VPPV3J/eric-rosen-om-parisa-liljestrand-och-medborgarskap>.
- Schippers, Huib. 2010. *Facing the Music: Shaping Music Education from a Global Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Seeger, Pete. 1962. *How to Play the 5-String Banjo: A Manual for Beginners*, third edition, revised. Beacon: Published by the author.
- Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Solli, Kristin. 2006. "North of Nashville: Country Music, National Identity, and Class in Norway." PhD diss., University of Iowa. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Solli, Kristin. 2017. "Tales of the West: 'Americanization' in an Era of 'Europeanization.'" In *Global Perspectives on the United States*, edited by Virginia R. Domínguez and Jane C. Desmond, 217–238. University of Illinois Press. doi:10.5406/j.ctt1p6qpzw.27.
- Starr, Larry, and Christopher Alan Waterman. 2014. *American Popular Music: from Minstrelsy to MP3*, fifth edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stolberg, Sheryl Gay, and Brian M. Rosenthal. August 12, 2017. "Man Charged after White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville Ends in Deadly Violence." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html>.
- SVT Nyheter. October 25, 2022. "Oklart Syfte Med Ny Svensk Kulturkanon." *SVT Nyheter*. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/oklart-syfte-med-regeringens-kulturkanon>.
- Sweeney, Paula. 2020. "Nostalgia Reconsidered." *Ratio (Oxford)* 33, no. 3: 184–90. doi:10.1111/rati.12272.
- Sweet, Stephen. 1996. "Bluegrass Music and Its Misguided Representation of Appalachia." *Popular Music and Society* 20, no. 3: 37–51. doi:10.1080/03007769608591634.
- Tannion, Nicola Nemoni. 2017. "Ancestral Resonance: The Irish Other and the Irish Otherworld." PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Teitelbaum, Benjamin R. 2012. "Come Hear Our Merry Song: Shifts in the Sound of Contemporary Swedish Radical Nationalism." PhD Diss., Brown University.
- Teitelbaum, Benjamin R. August 14, 2017. "White Nationalists Give Up Trying to be Respectable." *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/white-nationalists-give-up-trying-be-respectable/docview/1928293350/se-2>.
- The National WWII Museum. 2023. "Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II." The National WWII Museum | New Orleans. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war>.
- Turino, Thomas. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Onno van der Hart. 1995. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 158-182. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wallengren, Ann-Kristin. 2014. *Welcome Home Mr. Swanson: Swedish Emigrants and Swedishness on Film*. Translated by Charlotte Merton. Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press.
- Webster, Gerald, and Jonathan Leib. 2008. "Fighting for the Lost Cause: The Confederate Battle Flag and Neo-Confederacy." In *Neo-Confederacy: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Euan Hague, Heidi Beirich, and Edward H. Sebesta, 169-201. New York: University of Texas Press.
- Webster, Gerald and Jonathan Leib. 2016. "Religion, Murder, and the Confederate Battle Flag in South Carolina." *Southeastern Geographer* 56 (1). Chapel Hill: Journal of the Southeastern Division, Association of American Geographers: 29–37.
- Wilson, William A. (1973). "Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism." *Journal of Popular Culture* 6: 819-35.
- Wolk, Douglas. 2023. "One Direction's Songwriters: They're What Make the Boy Band Beautiful." TIME.com. <https://entertainment.time.com/2012/11/13/one-directions-songwriters-theyre-what-make-the-boy-band-beautiful/>.
- Wong, Deborah. 2004. *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*. London: Taylor and Francis. doi:10.4324/9780203497272.
- Wong, Deborah. 2008. "Moving: From Performance to Performative Ethnography and Back Again." In *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, second edition, edited by Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, 76-89. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Åsard, Erik, and Wilhelm Agrell. 2016. *Det blågula stjärnbaneret : USA:s närvaro och inflytande i Sverige*. Stockholm: Carlssons.