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This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Popular music and society*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Fornäs, J. (2010)

Exclusion, Polarization, Hybridization, Assimilation: Otherness and Modernity in the Swedish Jazz Age.

Popular music and society, 33(2): 219-236

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007760903236814>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-4484>

Exclusion, Polarization, Hybridization, Assimilation: Otherness and Modernity in the Swedish Jazz Age

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The introduction of jazz in Sweden 1920-1950 fed into a series of interconnected identity discourses through which modern forms of subjectivity and difference were renegotiated. This was simultaneous with the formation of the modern welfare society, in Sweden called “folkhemmet” (“the people’s home”), implicating a form of identity politics for including all citizens. This democratic and modernizing reformation of the state and society demanded a reformulation of which forms of identity were acceptable. Jazz became a privileged symbol of this new age, and the jazz scene served as an arena for playing out conflicting views on issues of age, class, ethnicity, gender, and other dimensions of difference. When confronting the inherited domestic traditions, the exotic and alien character of the strange jazz sounds highlighted several kinds of “Others” that were perceived as both enticing and horrifying (the young, the low, the black, the female, etc.), challenging the stability of national identities while delivering modern elements of a new and more ambivalent map of subject positions.

In 1922, American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald published *Tales of the Jazz Age*. The term “the Jazz Age” is still often used to describe the period from the end of World War I 1918 to the Great Depression 1929. It is still today historically unique that a set of music and dance styles was so widely used to depict a whole new era. Jazz was an ultra-modern American art form with ambiguous associations both to the urban western metropolis and mythological African jungles. Like the aesthetic high modernisms, it tended to blend the new with the archaic, while with its popular spread, it also bridged between population strata and thus challenged inherited divides between sexes, races, and classes.

In other countries than the US, jazz was an even more alien and provoking presence, adding a national tension to those of the other identity dimensions. Also, in non-Anglophone countries, the linguistic dimension reinforced this sense of radical difference. That very same year 1922, Swedish cabaret artist Karl Gerhard recorded his song “Jazzgossen” (“The Jazz Boy”), which offered a satirical but also eroticized depiction of young, slim upper-class men dressing up for jazz dance, putting on mascara on their eyelids, tripping on high heels and wagging their little bottoms. Twenty-five years later, in 1947, a broadcast “Julpotpurri” (“Christmas Medley”) made funny juxtapositions of rural Swedish Christmas and urban American blackness, telling about Father Brownie, “black as soot,” coming with a boat from Harlem to sing a Christmas tree tune with a nonsense scat song.

Listening to what was sung to jazz music and written about jazz in the 1920-1950 period, it soon becomes evident that this music was strikingly often linked to ideas of identity and norms for how modern people should behave. When jazz was established in Sweden, it was used as an emblematic symbol for the cultural breakthrough of high modernity, which implied a new world dominance of the United States of America and its crucial dependence upon ‘black’, African-American styles. Its early reception gave a focus to negotiations of the modern transformations of identity and difference orders. A vivid discourse distributed across a wide range of media and genres thematized relations to different kinds of Others and re-articulated prevalent divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This was a period in which the modern Swedish welfare state, “folkhemmet” (“the people’s home”), was invented, with its own identity politics, where the state and its citizens, media, and public sphere in words and deeds found out which ways of being were to be acknowledged or counteracted. Jazz as a typical modern and foreign genre served as a point of crystallization for such ideas, in a wide set of discourses, where key positions were formed in groups of texts and utterances that linked age, class, ethnicity, and gender in specific ways. In new versions, similar discourses and positions linger on today too, linked to other musical genres. The early jazz example

offers useful clues to the basic dynamics of identity and difference formation put in play by cultural modernity.ⁱ

Various Jazz Age cultural voices in the USA celebrated new forms of communication technologies that made possible expanded leisure practices of consumption. This bred individualism and hedonism, destabilized inherited norms of behavior and made ethnic and sexual minorities more visible. Some dared explore previously banned positions and fuse adulthood and childishness, white and black, male and female, straight and gay. Others protested against them in a mix of amused joking and phobic hatred. But together they contributed to a collective reflection on – and transformation of – such identity themes. An even more complex dynamics developed in areas where American culture or even the English language was relatively unknown, foreign, and distant, which added both geopolitical and linguistic dimensions to these oppositions.

My intention here is double. (A) First, I will hint at the many principal ways in which identity dimensions intersect and should be considered as co-constituted rather than separate from each other. There are instances where gender, class, and ethnicity run in parallel, forming a homology that creates a common theme in a cultural formation such as a youth subculture (Willis *Profane Culture* 191). However, this tight constellation of identifying modes more often forms what might be called a dynamic *intersectional heterology*, in that the relations between dimensions shift in contradictory ways, rather than always being analogically organized or reinforcing each other (Certeau 171ff; Fornäs *Cultural Theory* 114f and 234-258). (B) Second, I will do this by analyzing step by step four main *difference positions* taken to new and/or foreign music styles as well as forms of identity, and how these positions tend to evolve over time, from separation to fusion.ⁱⁱ By analyzing the principal positions taken towards jazz-related identity transgressions, and the way they developed across time, the idea

is to uncover a dynamic that is typical for modern society, and can be used to understand other and later discourses of cultural styles and identity formations as well.

Demonizing exclusion

In some instances, identity dimensions line up in neat pairs, when for instance a dominant pole of male middle-class adults stand against the interlinked subordination or sometimes resistance of young people, ethnic minorities and immigrants, workers and women. Their interrelations can then be understood in terms of *homology*, indicating a formal parallelism between them, pointing at an underlying, shared polarity such as power/subordination, traditional/new or normal/different (Willis *Profane* 189ff, *Ethnographic* 127ff; Middleton 9ff, 153-166; Shepherd 7, 90; Shepherd and Wicke 34-41).

When the “New Woman” turned up in the newspapers, novels, and song lyrics of the 1920s, the working class and youth also got a stronger presence as self-conscious actors in the public sphere, and, with jazz, also ethnic groups that had been considered foreign or alien. Young boys, women, and black artists like Josephine Baker or Louis Armstrong were depicted, marketed (and themselves managed their own images) as pleasure-seeking creatures overstepping all established boundaries. The moralizing critique of these norm-breaking identity drafts also followed parallel trajectories. In calls for its *exclusion*, jazz was *demonized* as an unwelcome intruder because it was an American import but also because it was understood as Black jungle music with African roots. It made adults act out repressed desires in childish ways, women became uninhibited in masculine ways and men emotional in ways that were seen to be feminine. It broke rules and jumped across carefully guarded borders between the old and the new, the ageing and the young, the high and the low, the domestic and the foreign, white and black, Europe and America, male and female.

Almost until World War II, visiting African-American jazz artists were regularly depicted as idiots, savages or animals. In the short essay "Varning för jazz!" (Danger! Jazz), published in the Musicians Union's journal *Scenen* (The Stage, issue 12, 1921), Musicians Union Chairman Hjalmar Meissner described jazz as "a terrible infectious disease that with rapid strides approaches our healthy coasts," threatening each musician to destroy his musicality and in the long run "unfailingly become an idiot." A 1923 poem by author Sten Selander talks about "seven blackies" who "waste their strength on drum, banjo, and cymbal," having by mistake been "let loose from some negro asylum." And at Louis Armstrong's first Swedish concert tour in 1933, he was unanimously denounced by all press reviews as "cannibal offspring," a disgusting gorilla from the deep jungles, a "mentally disturbed" maniac escaping from an asylum, playing sounds that were "more nature than culture": not real music but rather "an ill-bred instrumental roar" (Lyttkens 61ff; Fornäs *Moderna* 209ff).

The attacks on jazz repeatedly pulled other identity dimensions in as well. They feared that Armstrong and his fellows not only could transform white Swedes into black savages – coded both as African (in race terms, where black and white were regarded as polar opposites) and as American (in terms of nationality, where young, superficial America stood against old, civilized Europe). They also feared that this music – and the modern urban lifestyle it gave voice to – made adults turn into big children, that men become feminine and women took on masculine behaviors, and that heterosexual norms could be transgressed as well. In similar terms as with blackness, conservatives attacked "the modern woman" for neglecting home and family for seeking pleasure in dance and music. Lots of topical songs of the 1920s, for instance many revue songs by Ernst Rolf, were worried that this modern erosion of traditional female values made women escape their conjugal duties to only strive for their own individual satisfaction.ⁱⁱⁱ Even radical intellectuals like the critical author Ture Nerman in 1933 disliked the Americanization of mass culture in "jazz and charleston, chewing gum and pullovers, the feminization of men and the emasculation of women" (*Boxarnäsan*). After WWII, these

borders between genders and between nations continued to be rigorously defended by conservatives who feared that they might erode. In a 1947 film called *Jens Månsson in America*, the popular singer-actor Edvard Persson performed a song called "Sweden-America Hand in Hand" where he denounced both the Black and the female: "America is not only jitterbugging and gum-chewing or Hottentot music. America is also things like timber-chopping and real male stuff in farms and factories."^{iv} All kinds of transgression were criticized, in all identity dimensions, and the low and foreign was to be kept outside, excluded from the community of decent citizens.

In these and innumerable other examples, there were clear homologies between identity orders. In all of them, the traditionally subordinate or marginalized position (young, working-class, female or ethnic minorities) enjoyed an increased visibility and started to challenge the unitary norms of the dominant position of middle-aged, middle-class male whites. This resulted in counterattacks driven by fear and disgust, where defenders of the traditional order tried to push back the devastating dissolution of boundaries and reinstall firm hierarchical dichotomies. The rising alternatives were demonized and exorcized, in stubborn efforts to keep them silent and invisible, symbolically expelling them from ordinary society of responsible people, back into the dark underworld where they presumably must be kept locked in, excluded from the decent community of normal citizens.

In Sweden, the voices of demonizing exclusion were abundant, even dominant, in media texts and cultural works from the early 1920s until the mid 1930s. They continued to persist after that too, but their hegemony then seemed to have run out, as can be seen for instance in the reception of later African-American jazz artists. After World War II, the remaining Nazis and ultra-conservatives were exceptions diverging from a more open, tolerant, and inclusive discourse. This continued until the mid 1950s, when polarizations again were electrified around the youth subcultural styles fuelled by the advent of rock and roll, leading up to the

combined political and lifestyle struggles from 1968 to punk and the early 1980s' youth revolts (Savage). As for the patterns of homology, they are not bound to historical periods but continue to be effective in a more continuous fashion. They are also relevant to the other main positions discussed below, even though these enact other modes of intersectionality as well.

Primitivist polarization

A second matrix was formed by those who instead celebrated the young and new or the racialized or gendered “others” but still forced them to remain objects in a counter position to their own normality, reinforcing patterns of *polarization*. From its early phases until our times, modernity has a strong *primitivist* current in both high and low genres, looking for remedies for the torments of civilization in something radically different: in “the Child,” “the Woman” or “the Negro.”^v

This happened in popular films and song lyrics where representatives of these Others were depicted as refreshing contrasts to the boring old white men who needed to loosen up a bit and give room for a more modern, relaxed, and fun way of life. Instead of condemning young women seeking pleasure in jazz dancing, some popular songs expressed a fascination and even sympathy for them. From “A Quiet Flirt” (1932), where the girl freely does whatever pleases her, to “Wilhelmina” (1950), who always flirts and is untamed by all men, keeping them as slaves.^{vi} In tangos of the 1930s and 40s, it was often gypsies who were symbolically adored (while deeply despised in everyday life) for allegedly having the passionate expressivity in their bodies.^{vii} Yodelers from the Central European Alps as well as reindeer-herding Laps from the Nordic Alps were inserted into happy hot and swing tunes, and depicted as naïve children playing with the most modern sounds and dance movements.^{viii}

In more sophisticated modes, a similar position was influential in modernist currents in all the different arts. German philosopher Walter Benjamin stressed that the “modern” was not only

the cult of the new, but rather involved wish images that distanced themselves from the recent past yet ambiguously linked the emerging future with the archaic, primal history: “the ‘modern’ as the new in the context of what has always already been there” (Benjamin 4, 10, and 544). This may be seen in abstract art, futurism, and dada, where “natural” geometric forms or the archaic unconscious were made to serve anti-traditional purposes of a fresh, contemporary expression. It was particularly evident in the long series of primitivisms that were the hottest fashion in the late 1920s, in high arts as well as in popular culture.

Avant-garde authors like Artur Lundkvist (1906-1991), inspired by D.H. Lawrence and Sigmund Freud, belonged to those who precisely praised the jazz combination of primitive African jungles and hyper-modern urban America, in expressions that mirrored the stereotypes of moral panics, only turned upside down. This was clearly expressed in his 1929 jazz poem “Saxofonstycke” (“Saxophone Piece”): “Play, Negro, black brother! / You new Christ, deliver us with your shiny saxophone! / Light the fire in the flesh, / give us the first hot joy and the grounds’ scent of morning – / Stun! / Liberate from the day, from what has been and what is, from all memories, all deeds, from the burden of civilization and millennia.” In an essay on hot jazz from 1935, a typical formulation was: “Machine-song fuses with jungle cacophony, cries of jungle birds: the intricate union of civilization and primitivity” (Eriksson and Lundkvist 74f).

Lundkvist’s primitivism linked gender and race closely. This linkage can be read as a further example of homology and parallelism, but here one may also uncover how the different identity orders were interconnected by mechanism of *projection*. In a book built on his journey to Africa, *Negro Coast* (1933), he projected his fascination for the Other not only on Black men but also on women. Both were regarded as earth-bound bodies, identified with nature and raw instincts, which modern white men should reconnect to in order to cure their neurotic agonies. This was how he depicted the Black jazz musician, but also the African train

driver becoming a kind of cyborg combination of animal and engine in the jungle, as well as the Black prostitute with which Lundkvist believes he has transcended ethnic and gender borders in a purely bodily and instinctual sexual act. Like so many primitivists, Lundkvist tended to project inner-subjective experiences of alterity onto sociocultural (ethnic and gendered) others, as well as to project aspects of one identity order onto another, depicting Africans as children or womanhood as terra incognita. His socialist political commitment to anticolonialism and his reflecting attitude to identity constructions got completely lost in this overwhelming terrain.



Figure 1. Adolf Hallman: “Det vita slaveriet” (“White slavery”). Erik Lindorm: *Revyn 1928* (*The Revue 1928*), Stockholm, 1928. © Cecilia Steen-Johnson. Photo: National Library of Sweden.



Figure 2. Slas alias Stig Claesson: “Blues till Bessie Smith” (“Blues for Bessie Smith”).
Gustaf Rune Eriks: *Vitabergsklubben “målare – poeter”* (The Vitaberg Club “Painters –
Poets”), Stockholm, 1948. © Stig Claesson/BUS.

In practice, there was often an unstable wavering between the first and second position, between excluding misogynic xenophobia and polarizing primitivism. The figures of “Woman” and “Negro” had an ambivalent position as the Others of culture: they were feared and despised but also desired at the same time. One position could thus easily slide over to the other, in both directions. Two visual images may illustrate this. The caption to Adolf Hallman’s illustration “Det vita slaveriet” (“White Slavery,” 1928) suggests that “whites are oppressed by the blackies and they let us dance to their saxophone.” The image depicts an African first-mother goddess with the horn player as high priest, alluring the white New Woman to transgress the racial border in dance and with the poor young boxer become a willing victim of the superiority of these Black bodies. In a drawing by Slas (alias Stig Carlson) to a Gustaf Rune Eriks poem called “Blues for Bessie Smith” (1948), the gigantic

mouth of the blues queen is hovering above the young men listening by a table at a music café, the female orality with its musical and sexual overtones thus in several ways presented as an all-absorbing fascination. Songs like “The Dangerous Sex” (1927) or ”Harlem’s Rose” (1934) also described women as simultaneously weak and strong, pitiful and menacing.^{ix}

In the Swedish jazz discourse, primitivist polarization had its peak around 1930. The next generation of young jazz-inspired authors, with men like Gustaf Rune Eriks, shunned away from such romantic metaphysics and instead valued more factual expertise and straight realism. The victory of German Nazism with its “Blut und Boden” mentality, leading to the disasters of World War II, made the grand gestures of primitivism even less convincing to radical intellectuals. However, the position never vanished completely. It resurfaces regularly, for instance in the founding mythologies of rock music, soul, and funk.

Even today, modern women, non-European ethnic groups, young people, and popular entertainers alike tend to be caught in a similar double-bind: as simultaneously despised and fascinating “low Others,” with an allegedly privileged access to modern experience. For instance, youth subcultures are often regarded as seismographs of emergent trends, not least in their use of new media and new patterns of globalized cosmopolitanism, and in rap or contemporary R&B, special attention is repeatedly given to female, non-white or working-class performers who are depicted as marginalized victims of the music business who still manage to enslave their audiences by an artistic performance that cuts through centuries of boring civilization and returns to the original roots in the savage body.

As for the mechanism of projection, it is a constant presence in cultural practices of identification, as one of the main processes through which homologues are produced and reinforced. But this does not cover all the intersectional relations in play.

Diversifying hybridity

Key homologies and forms of projections between identity orders may thus be traced by intersectional analysis, but the dimensions often intersect in much more *contradictory* ways, substituting clear dichotomies of domination and subordination with complex crossings of ambivalent positions. For instance, conflicts bound to gender, age, class, and ethnicity may sometimes counteract each other, preventing any simple and straightforward interpretation of such discourses.

Jazz singer Alice Babs was just 15 when she had her breakthrough in the film *Swing it, magistern!* (*Swing It, Schoolmaster!*, 1940).^x In that film, assisted by male schoolmates and teachers, her character – a kind-hearted school pupil – finally convinced the school and the adult world of the blessings of swing. It all ends in total harmony, like in films such as *Dirty Dancing* (1987) half a century later, but not least in the scene with the title tune, where she teaches her male teacher to swing, there is a temporary, almost carnivalesque, reversal of gender and age hierarchies. However, the identity dimensions here intersect in an ambiguous manner, since the rebellion of the schoolgirl is supported by a bunch of lustful elderly men, and with the strict headmistress of the school as the main enemy. This is a case where contradictions between identity orders tend to result in a general chaotic *messiness* where homological reasoning does no longer suffice. Generational hierarchies are subverted, and it is also true that a young woman gets to sing in her own voice, but in certain respects the gender divides are at the same time rescued and even reinforced, as the male teachers manage to reform themselves and retain power in the depicted school world.



Figure 3. Alice Babs with Adolf Jahr in the film *Swing it, magistern!*, 1940. Press photo from Sandrew-Metronome.

In the radio series *Vårat gang* (*Our Gang*), which also became a film (1942), a rather tame youth club community can be seen as a mild germ to a youth cultural formation. There, Alice Babs described herself as a “Jitterbug från Söder,” (“Jitterbug from the South,” 1940).^{xi} The swinging girl defines herself against conventional family values but does not leave the heterosexual matrix. She wants to be free, sing, and dance rather than getting married, giving voice to a youthful freedom desire and a female independence, but only within the confines of a prolonged adolescent period.

The young Alice Babs was controversial. Eric Westberg, head of the Swedish popular composers’ copyright society STIM (equals the British PRS), called her a “slyna” (“slut”) and thought “female swing singers should get spanked on their bottoms and be placed at the school desk.” He later took back his words and was quickly forgiven by Alice. She had by then presented a humble self-defense in another song, “Swing Anyway,” in the film sequel

Magistrarna på sommarlov (*Schoolmasters on Summer Holidays*, 1941).^{xii} In that song, she mentions that some have called her “slut,” confesses that she knows that her taste is much more simple than that of Richard Wagner, but that she likes it anyway and just wants to be allowed to enjoy her simple music. The comparison with classical music pulls a class dimension into the mix with gender and age: in all these identity dimensions Alice delivers a brave but humble self-defense from below.

Alice Babs also recorded an ad song for a radio company: “I’ve Got a Little Radiola” (1939).^{xiii} It is a celebration of a desired mediatized cultural globalization, where the radio sounds let her imagine she is criss-crossing the world. She hears swing among “Harlem’s Negroes” and lets it be enriched by the spleen of London and other accents from Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and Tunis. The equally famous comic artist and songwriter Povel Ramel in a long series of tunes likewise explored the theme of connecting the world in playful identifications with different cultures. For Babs, Ramel, and others, the world wasn’t dichotomized into bipolar opposites like black and white. Instead, there was a spectral diversity of possibilities for identification, to which the self could open up and accept its own flexible multitude. Ramel loved to wildly combine Swedish countryside nerds with Indian fakirs, Chinese mandarins, and West-Indian calypso, in songs from “Vårt eget Blue Hawaii” (“Our Own Blue Hawaii,” 1942) and “Ittma Hohah” (1947) to “Naturbarn” (“Natural Child,” 1956) and “Måste vägen till Curaçao gunga så?” (“Must the Way to Curaçao Roll That Much?,” 1959). He certainly based this repertoire on common stereotypes, but carefully avoided the West-Rest binary that characterized racism as well as primitivism. Much of Ramel’s work thus moves into a third position, that of *diversifying hybridity*.

This enjoyment in lifestyle experiments also implied a certain critical distance to conventional positions of Swedishness. The attraction of jazz was part of a turning away from both the old agrarian history of Sweden and the traditionally strong German influences that had been so

compromised by the Nazis and World War II, and towards the West and the United States.

The hybridizing texts of Ramel and others used American styles (swing, crazy humor etc.) to distance themselves from the dethroned old ways and look for fresh alternatives in tune with high modernity, but they also added flavors of identification from all over the globe. This may be seen as a strategy to become part of a kind of globalized cultural imperialism to which no expressions were foreign, but is certainly also implied a mobilization of identity positions that opened them up to further change and self-critique.

As late as 1946, a Nazi named Erik Walles in a nasty lampoon, “Jazzen anfaller” (“Jazz Attacks”), feared the spread of immorality by a music born out of sex and drugs and alterity, arguing that jazz was invented by “drunk Negroes in the red-light districts.” The humorous Povel Ramel immediately made a witty reply in the song with the same name as Walles’ text, with a definite delight: “Jazz will celebrate a terrible victory: before you know it, you’re a Negro!”

Again, intersectional relations of contradiction and messiness can be found in every period and every context. As soon as one looks closer upon supposedly clear homologies and deconstruct their polarities, a hidden in-between area is disclosed where things are not so clear anymore, but where identity orders intersect, creating ambiguities and ambivalences.

Outspoken voices of diversifying hybridity are more sensitive to conjunctures, but once more, they did not disappear just because the 1950s installed a new and more stable identity regime where they were temporarily pushed into the background. They returned with a vengeance at several later moments, including the period from 1968 to the fall of the Berlin wall.

Normalizing assimilation

In Sweden, the racist hostility to jazz had largely lost its grip already by the late 1930s, and around 1950, it had become an accepted part of the domestic music scene. This societal

acceptance had to be conquered through the constitution of internal quality scales to distinguish good from bad, highbrow from lowbrow. With bebop after World War II, Swedish jazz – in the footsteps of its US big brother – had developed its own artistic avant-garde that increasingly distanced itself from all simple entertainment. The New Orleans revival of so-called “trad jazz” served an intermediate middlebrow role of catering for the more pragmatic dance functions while still upholding some kind of legitimacy through its notions of reproducing the historically authentic sounds, whereas the simpler and more diluted jazz inflections in mainstream pop were expelled from the honorable jazz community.

In the 1940s, at the height of this incorporating process, one may discern four aesthetic positions that each made one specific combination of two intersecting polarities: that of high/low (art and popular culture) and that of new/old (modernity and tradition). (1) Alice Babs’ “Swing Anyway” and most other early songs with her or Ramel exemplify a kind of “popular modernism” for which the new was adopted but without fine art ambitions. (2) The craze for genuine old New Orleans jazz instead formed a kind of “popular traditionalism,” where the highest esteem was given to the most authentic original recordings and styles with roots in the low strata of the people. An early example was the instrumental “Mississippi Mood” (1944) that made use of traditional blues elements.^{xiv} (3) In Sweden, the weakest among the four positions was the position of “art traditionalism,” where Duke Ellington and others tried to install jazz among the ranks of the true fine art classics. A Swedish example was the instrumental “Lulle’s Lullaby” (1945), with its ambitious and serious profile.^{xv} (4) Bebop and other experimental currents finally developed a kind of “art modernism,” cutting off from the classical heritage but still claiming for a position high above all kinds of simple entertainment. The instrumental improvisation recorded in 1945 as “Jam Session” with the appropriately named Expressen’s Elite Orchestra is a splendid example.^{xvi}

In the end the elevating strategies won the victory after rock music had in the 1950s won the battle on the popular flank, and Swedish jazz was in the 1960s and 70s successfully established in higher music education and systems for subsidies and awards. Parallel to this process, the identity topics in texts linked to jazz tended to vanish. Jazz was assimilated and normalized in Swedish musical life, and so were the many “Others” who had found a voice in its environment. This integration could well pass through the exoticizing polarization of primitivism or the playful hybridization of Povel Ramel, since both these positions could actually spread knowledge of the foreign and pave the way for getting used to alterity. But there were also early examples where jazz sounds were rather seamlessly fused with something depicted as solidly Swedish, expressing a fourth and final position in the identity politics of the era: a normalizing assimilation of what was once so alarmingly alien.

In tunes like “A Swing on the Grass” (1939), jazz was assimilated into an innocent traditional countryside culture of local dances for all age groups: “Johnny has said farewell to old-time dance. He has rehearsed diligently every night, therefore he has the best swing band in the area.”^{xvii} Since most Swedes at that time had firm and still never broken ties to rural life, such a transposition was less a nostalgic romanticism than a strategy to appropriate the music of the absent black Other and find a place for some of its expressive tools within a local context. The nostalgic aspects were of course already there, and growing in importance as the old rural society gradually faded away, but in the beginning this was more than just nostalgia.

In Povel Ramel’s “Johansson’s Boogie-Woogie Waltz” (1944), a movement from Harlem to little Swedish Tranås ends up in a hilariously normalizing symbiosis. The lyrics tell that the accordionist Johansson’s son has brought a Harlem jazz record to his home in the dark rural forests. The father “changed the tune in genuine Swedish fashion” by inventing boogie-woogie waltz. This career was a striking image for Ramel himself, whose lovingly and ironically self-reflexive fusion of naive Swedish yokels and the mundane international pop of

its time bridges hybrid diversity and normalizing assimilation. Johansson didn't "become a Negro" (as in "Jazz attacks" two years later); instead, he made the African-American music genuinely Swedish. The stitches were still audible, making the song a comic hit, but soon the integration was to become rather seamless. The effect was to assimilate the otherness that was (African-)American modernity (and its various new and different lifestyles) into the Swedish everyday.



Figure 4. Povel Ramel's first major hit "Johanssons boogie woogie vals," (1944). Copy by permission from the archive of the Swedish Society of Popular Music Composers (SKAP).

This was also expressed in another Ramel song from the same year, "One Hundred Per Cent" (1944), where Alice Babs sang: "From each curl to each toe I am figuratively speaking yellow and blue. / [...] But I know an exception where there is nothing Swedish: / *Yes, yeah, yes* – of course I mean *swing!* / I am certainly Swedish, but in every song I become immediately transformed: / *One hundred per cent all American!*"^{xviii} Here, the American style is celebrated as a rescue and a vitalizing force, putting an end to boring pre-war existence and promising a

new world of consumer pleasures and identity-boosting cultural practices. This seamless fusion of Swedish and American may in turn be read as a new normality, slightly reminding of the “Sweden-America Hand in Hand” song from 1947, though less conservative.

In these songs, intersections of nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and age run in shifting directions, but the effect is to integrate the aesthetic styles as well as the identity positions that were previously seen as alien others into the common normality. This way, jazz sounds and at least some of the behaviors and lifestyles that once had been so controversial were naturalized and assimilated into the ordinary.

Intersectional matrices

Thus, the alien jazz styles and some of the altern identities that had been associated with them were finally integrated into the Swedish “people’s home” (the “folkhem” that was Sweden’s version of the modern welfare society). Soon, jazz became naturalized as a favorite and unproblematic group of styles to express this familiar welfare society, with the music of Monica Zetterlund, Jan Johansson, and Georg Riedel from the 1960s. It was no coincidence that a soft jazz idiom was used for the beloved song where Monica Zetterlund regretted the loss of the Swedish “people’s home” and its “sweet dreams of a more reasonable world,” “Where did They Go” (1976).^{xix} By then, a melancholic inflection of jazz had almost become synonymous with the high modern Swedish everyday. Jazz had indeed traveled far from being that infectious disease that once seemed to threaten its virgin coastline!

Other sounds and voices then took over the role of expressing otherness, initiating new spiral movements of exclusion and assimilation. I have exemplified four basic “difference positions” or strategies for identity politics in relation to new styles of music and of people, linking into a dynamic historical development from separation to fusion, but also each of them continually

reproduced and running in parallel, with many texts and voices wavering ambivalently between two or three of them.

1. Demonizing *exclusion*, in various forms of phobic stereotyping and moral panic where self and other are kept strictly apart and encounters minimized.
2. Primitivist *polarization*, where self and other remain conceived as dichotomous opposites but where productive mutual contact is strived for.
3. Diversifying *hybridization*, where a multitude of polarities exist side by side and tend to dissolve dichotomies into a less rigid playful plurality of polysemic positions.
4. Normalizing *assimilation*, where what used to be seen as alien is more or less fully accepted as normal and integrated in the collective self, resulting in a kind of re-traditionalization of what was once so new and strange.

The integration of the “Other,” in the form of a foreign identity position or a new musical style, again tends to establish a standardizing tradition that may in turn start new spirals of exclusions. This was how the intersectionally linked identity orders were formed in Sweden as it stepped into high modernity, in a dialectical play of identity and difference, self and other.

This dialectic continues, only with other styles and subject positions in play. In today’s popular culture, related combinations of positions may for instance be discerned in relation to ethnic hybridity or queer sexualities as they are expressed in comedy shows or contemporary R&B, with various political and cultural actors selecting different strategies: expelling the deviant, celebrating otherness, mixing or blending elements from different domains.

It may be tempting to think of hybridity as only good and exclusion as bad, and this is also my general attitude to the four positions, but it should be acknowledged that this is not always the case. Sometimes exclusion may well be legitimate, for instance in relation to paedophilia or Nazism. But when used against cultural phenomena, it has two main drawbacks: undermining both tolerance (through violence against the different others) and creativity (through missing

chances for productive exchanges). Polarization has the advantage of charging differences with fascination that may lead to fruitful encounters and useful self-critique. But it also threatens to lock identity positions in a stiff and absolute oppositional relation that in practice deprives the others of their own voices and reduces them to representations of what is the antipode of the dominant position. Hybridization can doubtless empower dynamic encounters between people and between cultural forms. But it also has its problems, for instance when degenerating into chic flirtation with trendy styles where the density of inherited traditions are lost. Finally, assimilation is fine if it integrates and acknowledges many different positions in a shared, in principle universal and global whole. But it can also serve as basis for new exclusions, since each “we” implies a new “you others.” Also, some of the creative moment of fascination and tension in polarization and hybridizing gets lost if all is melt into the same grey normality.

My conclusion is thus double. (A) Identity orders always need to be studied as they intersect in many different and unpredictable ways, including homology, projection, contradiction, and messiness. It does not suffice to discern the prevalence of strict hierarchies in the gender, age, class, and ethnic dimensions, and then take for granted that each of these polarities overlap in a neat way. Instead, they often cross and counteract each other, necessitating a more complex mode of analysis in order to understand how radical and conservative positions were distributed between various positions in the social and cultural fields. (B) The four basic positions of exclusion, polarization, hybridization, and assimilation repeatedly both combat and feed each other as people try to follow the pace of modernizing times in forming opinions on new music styles as well as new identity formations. They serve as an enlightening way to discern overarching patterns in the dialectics whereby alien or innovative aesthetic styles and social norms or behaviors may be integrated in the normative mainstream of a certain period and region. It is not difficult to find similar phenomena and processes today, even if the styles and terms change.

Notes

ⁱ Andersson et al., Mc Eachrane and Faye, and Pred study processes of othering in other Swedish cultural fields and historical periods. Atkins (*Blue, Jazz*), Danielsen, Johnson, Radano and Bohlman, Ware and Back, Wiedemann, and Whiteoak approach stereotyping in popular music and the appropriation of jazz styles in other countries. Certeau, Hall, Naficy and Gabriel, Pickering, Pietersee, and Todorov analyze the general “othering” mechanisms in play in cultural identity formation. The author wishes to thank referee Mel van Elteren for useful comments, and Roger Bergner, Per Flodmark and Lasse Zackrisson for tracing pictures.

ⁱⁱ This exposition builds on *Modern People: Jazz and Welfare Society* (Fornäs *Moderna*, see also “Yokel” and “Swinging”), analyzing several hundreds of popular songs as well as films, radio programs, literary works, essays, and other Swedish 1920-1950 sources that linked jazz to issues of identity.

ⁱⁱⁱ Examples include “De’ gör gumman me’” (“So does the Old Girl,” 1927, with music by Jules Sylvain alias Stig Hansson and lyrics by Herr Dardanell alias Tor Bergström), (“På lediga stunder” (“In Spare Moments,” 1929, music by Irwing Yowa, Swedish lyrics by Herr Dardanell), and “Det finns en flyktig likhet” (“There is a Casual Likeness,” 1930, music Karl Wehle, lyrics Dix Dennie alias Gösta Stenberg).

^{iv} “Sverige-Amerika hand i hand,” 1947, music Alvar Kraft, lyrics Berco alias Berndt Carlberg; the film *Jens Månsson i Amerika* was directed by Bengt Janzon.

^v On primitivism and exoticism in music, see Barkan and Bush, Nenno, Toop, and Torgovnick. On jazz in Scandinavian literature, see Strauß.

^{vi} “En stilla flirt,” 1932, music Jules Sylvain, lyrics Gösta Stevens alias Gösta Nilsson, performed by Tutta Rolf in the 1933 movie with the same name. “Wilhelmina,” 1950, music Josef Myrow, Swedish lyrics Ninita alias Ingrid Reuterskiöld, sung by Brita Borg.

vii Some examples were “Du svarte zigenare” (“You Black Gypsy,” 1933, music Karel Vacek, Swedish lyrics Nils-Georg alias Nils Perne and Georg Eliasson), “Zigenarviolinerna sjunger än” (“The Gypsy Violin Still Sings,” 1943, music Sven Arefeldt, lyrics Helge Roundquist, performed by Ulla Billquist), and “En droppe zigenareblod” (“One Drop of Gypsy Blood,” 1946, by Gunnar Tigerström).

viii The former appeared in songs like “Joddlar-jazzen” (“Yodeler-Jazz,” 1936, by Sunde alias Erik Frykman and Silas alias Sven “Paddock” Karlsson, performed by Duo Ja), “Joddelswing” (“Yodel-Swing,” 1940, music Sven Arefeldt, lyrics Miguel Torres, sung by Alice Babs), and “Yodel in Swing” (1941, music Don Raye and Hughie Prince, Swedish lyrics Domino alias Georg Eliasson, recorded by both Alice Babs and Lisbeth Bodin); the latter in “Wooji, wooji, wooj” (1940, music Ernfrid Ahlin, lyrics Fritz-Gustaf, recorded by Harry Brandelius).

ix “Det farliga könet,” 1927, music Jules Sylvain, lyrics Alexander Stern; ”Harlems ros,” 1934, music John Malm, lyrics Sven Paddock alias Sven Karlsson, recorded by Maud Bensow and Arne Hülphers’ jazz orchestra.

x Directed by Schamyl Bauman; title tune with music by Kaj Gullmar alias Gurli Bergström and lyrics by Hasse Ekman. Alice Babs’ real name was Alice Nilsson, married Sjöblom.

xi “Vårat gäng,” 1940, by Sven Paddock alias Sven Karlsson, Åke Söderblom, and Jokern alias Nils Perne, recorded by Alice Babs and Lisbeth Bodin. “Jitterbug från Söder,” 1940, by Jokern, Sven Paddock, and Nisse Lind, recorded by Alice Babs. Both tunes were included in the film *Vårat gäng*, 1942, directed by Gunnar Skoglund. “Söder” (“The South”) was a famous working-class district in Stockholm.

xii “Swing ändå,” 1941, music Kai Gullmas, lyrics Hasse Ekman; the film was directed by Schamyl Bauman.

xiii “Jag har en liten Radiola,” 1939, music Jules Sylvain, lyrics Jokern.

^{xiv} Composed by Carl-Henrik Norin, recorded by Thore Ehrling's orchestra.

^{xv} Composed by Gunnar Lundén-Welden, recorded by Lulle Ellboj's orchestra.

^{xvi} As this tune with Expressens elitorkester was improvised, it has no composer; Expressen was its sponsor: a leading Swedish evening paper.

^{xvii} "En swing i det groan," 1939, music Sten Axelson, lyrics Sven Paddock.

^{xviii} Words in italics are sung in (broken) American.

^{xix} "Var blev ni av ljuva drömmar," 1976, by Gloria Sklerov and Harry Lloyd, Swedish lyrics by Hans Alfredsson and Tage Danielsson. On this later Swedish jazz period, see Bruér and Nylöf.

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Abstract

The introduction of jazz in Sweden fed into discourses renegotiating modern forms of identity in welfare society. In this new Jazz Age, music became an arena for reforming norms of age, class, ethnicity and gender differences. This article presents an intersectional and intermedial study of songs, films and print sources with such topics. The new jazz idiom was linked to enticing and horrifying forms of otherness. Four basic positions are highlighted in the successive integration of both jazz and identities, from separation to fusion: demonising *exclusion*, primitivist *polarisation*, diversifying *hybridisation* and normalising *assimilation*.

Keywords: identity, difference, intersectionality, discourse, modernity, jazz, popular music,
Sweden.