

THE MAJORITY SOCIETY'S VIEW OF "THE OTHER" VERSUS THE MINORITY'S VIEW OF ITSELF. HOW THE TRAVELLER PEOPLE ARE REFLECTED IN SELECTED TEXTS FROM BOTH SIDES

Bo Hazell

Language and culture are the two most important factors for the survival of a people as a minority in their own right.¹ Historically, minority peoples have often been exposed to persecution by the majority society, e.g. forbidden to use their own language, cultural manifestations suppressed and oppression of different kinds, leading to the eradication of not only a large number of Jews, but also the Romany and Traveller peoples. Romanies and Travellers have been exposed to different forms of persecution for several hundred years. In a couple of the Nordic lands a bounty was offered for "tattare" – the majority population's pejorative name for Travellers.* In Sweden in the 1560s, the Swedish Church forbade its priests to christen, marry or bury "tinkers" and in 1647 an ethnic cleansing law was introduced, "Notice of the Tinkers' expulsion from the land". The law meant, in effect, that anyone in authority who encountered "a pack of tinkers" could immediately sentence all the adult men to death by hanging and banish the women and children.

Details of this and other outrages against individual groups of people are almost nowhere to be found in European children's school-books – with the exception of the persecution of the Jews. The majority population's disparaging view of different minorities has been sustained right up to the latter part of the twentieth century through

* Translator's note: *tattare* is an old-fashioned and pejorative term for people of Traveller origin in Sweden. In Ireland and Great Britain, comparable pejorative terms include tinkers, vagrants, (k)nackers, rogues, itinerants and "Puck of the drom". The term Tinkers is used as a standard synonym for gipsies in Scotland and Ireland, and it also denotes someone who mends pots and pans. While there is still an understanding in Ireland that tinkers are Travellers, constituting an ethnic minority in their own right, this perception is almost non-existent in the UK. It is important to note that *tattare* and tinkers describe groups of Travellers who live in different parts of Europe. In other words, the Swedish and English terms do not convey precisely the same meaning, but they are the closest equivalents available. Throughout this text, the term tinkers denotes *tattare*.

racist depictions in newspaper articles, books and films. In Sweden professional working-class authors, amongst others, have controlled the contemporaneous negative view of "tinkers" by means of stereotypical depictions of Travellers as either criminal and dangerous or as seductively beautiful, with supernatural powers and other romanticizing stigma. In the latter case, they have in this way provided for the majority population's need for the romantic and the exotic.

Ethnologists described "the tinkers" during the period between the two World Wars as an inferior group of people with dangerous racial qualities, which led to the enforced sterilization of young men and women of Traveller stock. In the 1960s, researchers were of the opinion that the Travellers did not constitute a group of people in their own right, other than belonging to society's lowest level, with criminality as one of their most typical qualities. ("Swedish Travellers and their ancestry" by Adam Heymowski, 1969.) As late as 1993, a doctoral thesis on "tinkers" was published that was entirely built on criminal trials, pilot studies (judicial enquiries) and lawcourt records, police reports, prison archives and similar public records. It was observed that the Travellers have "many traits in common with others within the criminal world" and that "their identity is obviously formed as that of a felon's". ("Bortom all ära och redlighet – tattarnas spel med rättvisan", "Beyond all honour and order – the tinkers' game with justice" by Birgitta Svensson, 1993.)

In Sweden there are between 25,000 and 30,000 individuals who are believed to be of Traveller stock. By demonstrating how on the one hand they are portrayed by the majority population in songs about "tinkers" and, on the other hand, how the Travellers themselves, in their own songs, describe their existence both through their own cultural tradition and dominant reality and dreams, I hope to increase an understanding of "our" view of "the others" and explain how negative descriptions in books, newspapers and movies may, by extension, become a breeding ground for discrimination, racism and genocide.

The "tinker myth" in poetry and song

The picture gained from the texts in Travellers' own songs is complex. They are concerned with the Travellers' everyday life, with poverty and starvation, with the Traveller families' constant and recurrent journeys

for provisions, and with the oppression of the majority society. But also with the Travellers' dreams of a better world, of macho-type heroes, the beautiful traveller girls and the yearning out on the roads when spring comes, where – despite a constant state of exile – it is also possible to know freedom and safety, and besides that get to meet other Travellers to exchange news about relatives from different parts of the country.

I shall first illustrate the majority society's usual "tinker myths" in poetry and song, and then describe the Travellers' own song and story-telling tradition.

Levi Rickson, alias "Jeremias i Tröstlösa" [a Swedish poet], wrote *Tattare-Emma* (Emma the Tinker), a song about a young, beautiful Traveller girl. He described her father, Tinker Måns, as a thief and a rogue.

Emma the Tinker

*The grandest of lassies back home,
I swear it's true,
Is the Tinker-Måns' girl, dark-eyed Emma,
A lovely maid
Now her hair is as black as the darkest of nights,
Not surprising, then, that I long for her!
Now her hair is as black as the darkest of nights,
Not surprising, then, that I long for her!*

*If only you'd heard her laugh,
Believe you me,
Oh, what you have not understood
Would become clear.
Now her mouth it is red, oh, and white are her teeth,
And oh, oh, as soft as a lady's are her hands.*

*When the fiddler playing inside the barn
Strikes up a dance,
It's her from the woods, Emma Tinker,
Who's fairest of all
To see: kicks up her heels like no one else,
When it's time for the polka, so her dress is a-whirl.*

*She moves just as though she had springs
Under her shoes,*

*Oh, not just a sole made of leather –
See her dancing!
Wherever she goes, oh, the girls are a-quarrelling,
Lads are a-fighting for weeks in a row.*

*Oh, my father back home, he just says
That I am a fool,
Who sighs after Emma the Tinker.
But why should I care
If Tinker-Måns, her father, is a poor man,
Who's known as a cheat and a thief and a rascal.*

Emma the Tinker is described as extraordinarily lovely, with seductively beautiful hair, dark eyes and magic powers that blind lovesick youths, and make the other girls quarrel and the lads start fighting. Levi Rickson makes use of all the contemporary stereotypes of "tinker chicks", though with love and tenderness. It is said that he was secretly in love with the Tinker Emma prototype.

The stereotypical picture of "tinker women" as seductive and mysterious nymphs who bewitch men to fall in love with them dates from the 1920s, when Gunnar Grip sang in *Tattarekärlek* (Tinker Love) on a 78-rpm – "*stackars den som en gång får en tattarjanta kär*" (pity those who ever fall in love with tinker girls).

The phrase comes back almost word for word in many forms, amongst others in *Visa vid elden* (Ballad at the Campfire, which was written by a Traveller in 1889 in Tynset, Norway and is very popular among Scandinavian Travellers, since they, too, cherish the myth of the Traveller women's mystic power. The theme recurs, for example, in Lasse Johansen's CD of Traveller songs from 1998.

This inward sense is found in other songs, but with a different turn of phrase. One example is Bob Dylan's *Spanish Harlem Incident*, which Mikael Wiehe translated in 1982 as *Tattardrottning - episod i juninatt* (literally, *Tinker Queen – Episode on a June Night*). The tinker queen is surrounded there by a magic love force that takes hold of a man with such strength that he cannot resist without becoming completely defenceless. "*Din galna glöd kan ingen tämja. Asfalten smälter där du går. Jag är värnlös. Kom och ta mig till dina magiska trummors land. Du måste säg' mig nånting om min framtid som du ser den i min hand.*" (This is Wiehe's Swedish translation of the first verse of *Spanish Harlem Incident*, which reads in the original as follows:

“Gypsy gal, the hands of Harlem / Cannot hold you to its heat. / Your temperature’s too hot for taming, / Your flaming feet burn up the street. / I am homeless, come and take me / Into reach of your rattling drums. / Let me know, babe, about my fortune / Down along my restless palms.”

Even a social-minded poet like Mikael Wiehe permits himself, therefore, to describe a woman from a Swedish minority with mystifying and exotic traits. His description of “tinkers”, like that of other writers, reflects a 1980s ignorance. Quite simply, the majority people did not know that the *tattare* were a people in their own right, but instead believed that they were “ordinary” Swedish people, who were dropouts and possibly also a form of socio-economic group. As late as 1982, nobody had actually queried the old, mythical picture, and the romanticized depictions of the 1980s are therefore very reminiscent of the 1950s. It was only in the year 2000 that Travellers were recognized, together with the Roma people as one of five national minorities in Sweden. Compare this with Norway, who some years earlier recognized Travellers (Norwegian: *tater*), not as a part of the Romany group, but as a national minority in their own right.

Even though the more complimentary characteristics dominated 1980s songtexts, examples of the opposite are also to be found. In 1983, the duo Krister & Sten released an LP recording on which one of the songs is called *Taterplåga* (Tinker Plague), i.e. the same words that were often used as newspaper headlines in the 1940s. In the song, the “tinkers” are described as drunks and thieves.

A third “tinker” myth”, which survived right up until the 1980s, was that of the sweet and relaxed “tinker life”. In 1986 Leif Axel sang a song with the title *Det bor en tattare uti mitt hjärta* (there lives a tinker in my heart). The picture he conveys of “the tinkers” is that they live a free and unworried life, that they take each day as it comes and get along in a happy, if poor, existence. “*Han ville fly bortom sol och måne, och ligga stilla i lingonris. Och vänta gryning i någon hage, på härligt ansvarslöst luffarvis.*” (“He wanted to fly beyond the sun and the moon, ’midst the lingonberry twigs make his camp. Lie awaiting the dawn in some pasture or other, in the fine, carefree way of a tramp.”)

Compare this description of a “tinker” with the picture of a “decent” and hard-working Swede who, in a good ascetic, Lutheran fashion toils from 8 in the morning until 5 at night, always doing what is expected of

him, following all his routines to the letter, but dreaming of a more varied, more relaxed and more exciting life. Is it really the non-Travellers' need for a freer, easier and more relaxed existence that has shaped the enduring "tinker myth"?

Leif Axel's song is also interesting in another respect, in that it shows that a change in the "tinker portrayal" was under way. It explains, in fact, the stereotyped descriptions – that "tinkers" drink and get into knife fights – as an invention of the farming community. "*Men kniv och slagsmål och mycket brännvin är bara sagor i bondehus.*" ("But knives and fights and lots of brandy are just fairytales in the farmhouse.") The 1980s debate about immigrants and people who were different must also, at least to a certain extent, have left deep marks in the "tinker portrayal", even in the songtexts.

Lastly, there remains the most enduring "tinker" portrayal of all, which was to be found as early as the nineteenth century, which clung on throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The portrayal is to be found in, amongst other places, Gustaf Fröding's poem *Skojare* (Rogues) which was included in his collection of poems *Guitarr och dragharmonika* (Guitar and Accordion) from 1891. It was set to music 80 years later, in 1971, by Torgny Björk and was recorded on LP by Herr T & Hans Spelmän.

The poem has been read by several generations of children and adults, and may well be said to be part of our cultural inheritance. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the fact that the text needs to be able to withstand a critical examination and re-evaluation. Of course, one could brush this off by saying that it reflects a past epoch and the "tinker portrayal" of that time. But one might also query whether we should still be continuing to help preserve, uncritically, the nineteenth-century "tinker portrayal" in our own time.

Several Travellers maintain that they find its content offensive and are amazed that the text continues to be performed in an official context. A middle-aged Traveller suggested that I should exchange the designated "rogues" and "load of tinkers" for "bloody Lapps", "Jewish pigs", "nig-nogs" or other racist expressions for persecuted groups in society.

"Perhaps then you will understand what I mean," he said.

Rogues

In Kattebohult lives a whole load of tinkers

In Kattebohult out in Bo
And you'll find such a racket, all thieving and backchat:
A right set of rogues, don't you know.

That's the very same place where the black vagrants live –
In the whole of our district none worse –
The church, law and council can say what they like,
But the vagrants they don't give a curse.

The old gelder, now, was still hanging around
On the road, in the spring that's passed lately –
As a sneak and a horse-thief he wasn't too bad,
When you think that he's soon turning eighty.

And that old wife of his, who is sickly and weak,
And her face no fair object of wonder,
Found it easy last autumn to steal and to beg –
Though walking was almost beyond her.

Now they're sitting at home back in Kattebohult,
Where they're running a pub on the quiet,
With a house full of rascals from morning till night:
You can hear them all when you walk by it.

And the boys are all larking, and getting in fights,
And carousing from morning till eve,
And the women are all leading lecherous lives
With scum lowlife you wouldn't believe.

And although the authorities do what they're able
To banish such lowlife as these
– No sooner have one lot been sent on their way
Then the next lot emerge from the trees.

When the missionary priest, Alsterlin, showed his face,
He was easily dealt with, it's said,
For they tarred him and feathered, and rolled him around –
There's not one that's got brains in his head.

Now they say you can straighten a fir tree that's bent,
Turn a wolf or a lynx to a lamb,
But make civilized folk out of *that* vagrant ratpack
In Kattebohult if you can!

After the Second World War, the Swedish authorities' view gradually altered with regard to Jews, but not with regard to Travellers, who continued to be described using the same stereotypes as before. In the 1970s, researchers presented yet another view of "the tinkers": that they should be categorized in the socio-economic group corresponding to the lowest level of society, and that as a result they did not belong to any specific minority people. In this way the Travellers, in the authorities' eyes, ceased to exist as a people in their own right.

In the 1980s and 1990s it was the immigrants, instead, who were singled out as a problem. Several immigrant nationalities acquired the label of criminals, including Kosovo Albanians and Gambians. The so-called white power music did not become an issue until later. In 1996, a Swedish music producer and record distributor was sentenced for inciting racial hatred because the song "We're Ready", by the Finnish white power group Mistreat on the CD *White Solidarity*, conveyed a racist picture of African immigrants, who were called scum and niggers, and blamed for taking both jobs and land from the Swedish people.

The municipal court's sentencing read as follows:

The song *We're Ready*, which is to be found on the record, has a clearly racist purpose: the white race is to be shielded from mixing with people of another race and skin colour. The content of the song is repugnant. It is an important public responsibility to take a standpoint against such expressions as those in question and in every way seek to prevent their utterance and spread. The consideration of the large group of people that the song seeks to address weighs heavily here. On account of what has been stated – and specifically in order to make it absolutely clear that songs such as *We're Ready* cannot under any circumstances be tolerated in a democratic society – the municipal court finds that a prison sentence must be given to NN for his crime.

In connection with this sentence being pronounced, some Travellers talked to me about Fröding's poem and wondered where the difference lay. In one case the subject matter was concerned with the descendants of immigrants who came to Sweden during the course of the sixteenth century, in the other it was concerned with immigrants who came here at the end of the twentieth century.

The song and story-telling tradition

The Travellers' own narratives and songs – a number of them dating from the Middle Ages, others more modern – have remained a well-kept secret for the majority population. They were performed at the camping place, when the camp-fire was lit and only Travellers were present. Many of the contemporary cultural practices of those of Traveller stock have their roots in this culture, but few singers of Traveller background perform Traveller songs in public. These are the songs that are saved for coming home or when meeting other Travellers.

The art of story-telling has always been important for Travellers, especially since many were illiterate and oral narration was the only way of preserving the old stories and handing them on to generations to come. Even today, almost none of the Traveller narratives are transcribed without being carried on according to oral tradition. They are concerned with everything, from heroic sagas to first-hand narratives of more or less true stories from the markets and from business journeys.

Many Travellers are brilliant story-tellers with the capacity to improve and highlight the stories with gestures and body language. In such cases, others are often inspired to contribute to the entertainment with something of their own. This might be reading poetry or declaiming an epic that could be up to a hundred verses long. A number of these poetry cycles have been set to music and many people therefore prefer to sing them.

Traveller songs are often melancholy, telling of the camp bonfire, love, death, religion, poverty, freedom, dreams, nature, “tinker chicks”, *burobengen* (a Travellers' name for non-Travellers), and life on the open road.

It may seem strange that the Travellers, who for centuries have been treated so badly by those in power and by the majority population, still, in the twenty-first century, choose to declaim or sing at their festivities poetic works, set to music, that are concerned with ancient Swedish national heroes. However, it is not the contemporaneous national romantic temperament that is being expressed here, but their own view of their environment and how men and women should behave towards one another. The Travellers appreciate the Viking saga descriptions of men with traditional

masculine qualities who make sure that justice is done and proceed directly from word to action, fighting for their honour with a sword in their hand. The Travellers pay tribute to the way in which the heroes defend their defenceless sweethearts and wives. Many of the Traveller women adore the battlesongs' description of trysts between a rugged "real man" and his delightful lady love.

Several of these heroic and battle poems are taken from Esaias Tegnér's *Frithiofs saga* and have been set to music in thirty or so different forms. Many even improvise with their own melodies on the spot. *Frithiofs saga* is based on an ancient Icelandic saga from the fourteenth century and tells of the love between the son of a well-to-do Norwegian farmer, Frithiof the Bold, and his foster sister Ingeborg, King Bele's daughter. When the book was published in 1825, it was so celebrated that it came to be regarded as a Swedish national epic. The Travellers were also fascinated by *Frithiofs saga*. Many christened their children after the main characters and, little by little, the story became a part of their culture. Even today, both men and women can be heard declaiming stanzas from *Frithiofs saga*.

The Traveller songs are mostly to be heard only under festive circumstances. It is not unusual for them to be sung by women. They choose a song according to the occasion: songs of battle, heroism and fighting, or more restrained songs. They may be songs that honour and pay tribute to men, songs to stimulate and enhance the atmosphere, songs of good fortune in battle, or songs about someone being wounded.

The performance is rendered with great feeling and those present are deeply engaged. The battle songs, for example, are performed as pantomimes in which movement and mimicry have a symbolism that is well-known to all Travellers. For both the singers and the audience, the songs are a way of finding an outlet for feelings of nostalgia. Old memories are brought to life. The singers are both an important link to what has gone and a means of unification that increases feelings of solidarity among those present.

Regardless of whether the verses are declaimed or sung, the words are changed from one performance to the next. The memory may fail, or else the text is adjusted to the mood that feels right for the occasion.

Few songs have aroused such admiration among Travellers as that of "Grindborg the warrior". The version below is taken from the Svenskt Visarkiv (Swedish Song Archive) collection of texts, but its original origins are unknown. Grindborg is a brave warrior and lady's man who is prepared to fight for his cause, and he battles on to the bitter end.

When I have heard and seen *Grindborgsvisan* being performed, I have noticed that the same patterns of movement return at certain points. The singer stands bent slightly forward and makes big sweeping arm movements, as if he is being fought or is stabbing with an imaginary knife.

Two warriors sat upon a summer's eve
Before their Nordic mountain dwelling-place.
Blood-brothers they, and strangers quite to fear.
Their custom'ry apparel iron and steel.

But Grindborg was the name of one of them.
He gripped his drinking horn with fingers five.
He said: "I'll wager for my lady love
To drink this brimming horn right to the dregs."

Then quoth the king in loud and mighty wrath
"Up, fighting men! Avenge this deed with blood!
Though ye be armed with steel, yet still take heed,
For Grindborg fights in battle like a bear!

The song about Grindborg's fight has 44 verses, but many Travellers know it off by heart. The whole of *Grindborgsvisan* is to be found in its entirety at the end of my book about the Traveller people.²

The oldest songs have been passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation, which means that the same original songs today may have words or melodic development that have become separated. Some people maintain that their own version is the right one. Among song researchers it is a known fact that traditional songs seldom have an "absolutely" original text.

The most famous Traveller song in Scandinavia is probably *Burobengen*, transcribed by Alf Prøysen, but its origins are unknown. The song originates from Norway, in all likelihood, and was probably

written by a non-Traveller. Some of the wording in the song text points to this.³

If you want to hear my song, now, if you want to hear me tell.
Down in Seterdalen's farmlands, where my mum and dad still dwell.

If you want to hear my song, now, then I'll tell it to you true,
And how I became a *fant*⁴ is what I'll now explain to you.

So one eve at Gjøvik market I met such a company.
With cold words and colder glances, how they all looked down on me.

Now they called me *burobengen*,⁵ and the farmer's blood a-boilin'.
Quickly reaching for the knife, I lunged and stuck it in his *belsin*.⁶

Travellers most often sing in Swedish – or, in this instance, Norwegian – and blend in occasional Romany words. One example of this is the song *Sjunn pre miro tjavoar*. I have heard this song on several different occasions. The spelling of Romany words varies from family to family, or even from person to person, as there is still no generally recognized Romany written language to be found in Sweden. The pronunciation and spelling of Romany words has been adapted to the Swedish language and the words are subjugated according to Swedish grammar.⁷ The whole song *Sjunn pre miro tjavoar* is included in my book, with different spelling variations.⁸ [Romany words, which are still used by Swedish Travellers even today, are printed in italics in the English version below.]

Oh, *listen to me, Traveller-boys*, I want to *sing* a song,
About how life has treated me.
So that you won't *travel* along the same track and *road*.
For if you do you'll come to regret it ere long.

It was when *I was in* my eighteenth year,
When I *came* from the *prison* once more.
Then *I got to see* that she *had* one *other* farmhand.
So you *understand* that I *lost* my temper.

Some of today's young Travellers have a conscious desire to raise the status of the Romany language. *Jon Pettersson* and *Ronny Lundin* are examples of those who work to keep the language alive through writing and performing new Traveller songs in Romany. These songs have recently become very popular, not least on Dinglarradion and Rommanoradion, two radio channels on the Internet presented by Travellers themselves, which began to broadcast at the turn of the millennium.

The refrain to Pettersson and Lundin's song, *Honkar du mi kamkli än*, consists almost entirely of Romany words. If a non-Traveller reads the songtext, he doesn't understand a word (see below). An interesting experience for a person belonging to the majority population. The song is about a man who wants his girl to come back to him and wonders whether she is still his, or has given herself to someone new.

*Honkar you mi kamkli.
Ler ja ava to/ti pali.
Lakkas diro tji pre mander now.
Bidar you pre miron.
When ja avar pali vri.
Or have diro lett je vaver mussj.*

In the same way that a sense of mystery has built up around the Romany language, Traveller songs are seldom performed in the presence of a *buro*.

"In our opinion, the *buroarna* [plural form for *buro*] have already destroyed so much of our culture that we don't want to give them access to our traditional ways. They're not going to have the chance to destroy our songs as well."

This was uttered by a male Traveller in the course of the 1990s, during the time of the great thaw, in the form of recognition and apology on the part of the Swedish state and church.

And even today there is a fear on the part of some Travellers in allowing the *buroarna* access to their language and songs. The exchanges of views on Travellers' home-pages bear witness to this. As late as 2001, a Traveller wrote as follows on one of the talkboards on the Web:

"We must be careful with our language and not expose it to ghana who should not have it." [The word *ghana* or *gana* means both a

people and *people* in general, and is sometimes used instead to denote non-Travellers.]

In recent years I have heard the vast majority of Travellers stress the importance of documenting the songs on CD, before it is too late.

"There are far too many old Travellers who take fine old songs with them to their graves," says a young Traveller who is actively working to preserve the Traveller culture.

In the Swedish Song Archive, which has thousands of recordings of Swedish traditional songs, there are only a few recorded Traveller songs, and these may not be listened to until 70 years after the person who recorded the songs has died. In effect this means that no-one can listen to the songs until about the end of the 2090s or the beginning of the twenty-second century, unless the performance prohibition is lifted when the people concerned die. However, the study of note and text material is permitted.

The prohibition stems from the fact that when the song recordings took place in the 1980s, the singers were afraid of reprisals from other Travellers. This fear originates from the fact that it used to be considered a punishable offence to reveal the Romany language and Traveller songs to non-Travellers.

When I made a programme series with Traveller songs for Sveriges Radio (Swedish Radio, SR) in 1997, this was the first time ever that many of the songs could be heard on Swedish radio. Despite the fact that the programme was broadcast on P2 (the most exclusive national network with classical-, jazz- and folkmusic), there was a really strong resonance among the listeners – especially among Travellers. After each broadcast, listeners rang in to say that they recognized some of the songs and narratives from their own music traditions. Others sent in letters with neatly written out songtexts in both Romany and Swedish. Some stated that they would love to be involved if any more programmes were to be made. The telephone calls from interested listeners in both Norway and Sweden continued for three months, which bore witness to the strong interest for Traveller culture's music.

Right up until the end of the 1990s, there was no professional record or tape recording of Swedish Traveller songs. When I travelled around among Travellers in the mid-1990s, there were many who allowed me to hear recordings of Norwegian Traveller songs, which

reached Sweden via the close contacts between Travellers on both sides of the border and were then copied from family to family so many times over that they were almost drowned out by tape noise.

At the same time, Swedish Traveller singers began to perceive the extent of their people's interest in their own music. The first CD of Swedish Traveller songs was produced as a private initiative in 1999, and shortly thereafter the Föreningen Resandefolket (Association of Traveller People) received 75.000 Swedish crowns (ca 8.000 Euro) kronor from the government to document Swedish Traveller music on CD. Two years later, the Statens Kulturråd (State Council for Culture) awarded a further grant to the association as evidence of the authorities' recognition of this unique musical treasure.

Among the Swedish Travellers who are represented on the first CD-release should be noted *Lenny Lindell, Tomas Lundberg, Ronny Lundin, Lasse Nordström-Friberg, Birger* and *Jasmine Rosengren*, as well as *Ralf Novak Rosengren*.

Three Norwegian Traveller singers who have become known even among Traveller people in Sweden are Lasse "Dahle" Johansen, Elias Akselsen and Åge Aleksandersen.

Åge Aleksandersen appears mostly in Norway, but has also made appearances at Traveller gatherings in Sweden.

Lasse Johansen has his own dance-band orchestra. On occasion he uses a particular Traveller song when he is playing with his dance-band, although he then does so in an arrangement that is suited to the dance orchestra's form and style. In 1998, Lasse Johansen released his first CD of purely Traveller songs.

Lasse Johansen is concerned about the Travellers' culture in many respects. For a number of years he has collected in old arts and craft objects which have been produced by Travellers and he plans to build the framework of the world's first museum of Traveller culture. This will be part of the Glomdalens Museum in Elverum and it is hoped that it will be ready for inauguration in about 2005.

Perhaps the best-known upholder of tradition in Scandinavia, as far as old Traveller songs are concerned, is Elias Akselsen. He used to travel around pubs and restaurants in Sweden singing pop songs from the 1960s and 1970s, but he now focuses solely on genuine Traveller music. He has made a name for himself on radio and TV in both

Norway and Sweden and taken part in concerts in several halls in both countries, including the prestigious Bergen Festival.⁹

There are also well-known musicians, artists, performers, actors, film producers, authors, and radio and TV personalities, whose Traveller origins are known only to other Travellers. I have been in contact with several of these "famous names", but the majority of them are hesitant when it comes to talking about their background in public. Some of them are even in denial about it.

A very well-known rock artist had this to say when I contacted him: "Sure, now and again when I'm out doing concerts I get Travellers coming up to me and asking if I'm related to the Travellers. It's happened several times, in fact. But, as far as I know, my parents don't have any Traveller blood in them. There might be some on my mother's side. People are always saying that her maiden name was a typical Traveller name. If I ever manage to find out for sure, I'm not scared of going out and talking about it. Far from it."

Many Travellers are convinced that a well-known danceband musician is a Traveller. Some have even pointed out that they have mutual relatives.

"It is thought that he is of Traveller origin," said one of my informants. "You can see it in the way he is, the way he moves. One time I was at one of his gigs with some other Travellers. After the group had performed, we wanted to talk to him, but he wouldn't have it. He just went away."

When I contacted this same artist, he was somewhat irritated by my question.

"You're not the first one to ask this. What was it you called it? Traveller? No, I'm not a... Traveller. "

Even among known radio and TV personalities there are Travellers who keep quiet about their roots. A programme presenter on SR, who never revealed anything about his Traveller background, was so inspired about the radio programme I did for SR and UR (Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company) in 1997 that he decided to tell his colleagues about his origins. No-one reacted negatively: quite the opposite. But he is still not ready to tell people in general.

Many artists with immigrant backgrounds are quite happy to state which land they originate from. Why are the circumstances not the same as far as known artists with a Traveller background are

concerned? They themselves say that they are worried that the public has such a distorted and antiquated picture of “tinkers” that it could spoil their careers.

One person who was doubtful about taking part in the radio programme about the Traveller people in 1997 was the singer *Christina Lindberg*. She expressed fears that it would have a negative effect for her if the public got to hear about her background. After seeing the TV documentary about Travellers she changed her mind.

“Yes, today I stand up for who I am. No-one should be worried about saying that they come from a Traveller background,” says Christina.

Calle Jularbo, alias *Karl Karlsson* (1893-1966), was one of Sweden’s most famous accordionists of all time. He and his son *Ebbe Jularbo*, alias *Eberhardt Karlsson* (1915-1991), kept their Traveller origins secret for many years.

Close relations of Jularbo have told me that the Karlsson family tended not to talk about their ancestors. It was a taboo subject. Calle Jularbo only spoke his mind about this on a few, rare occasions. Nowadays, in the Jularbo museum in Avesta, his entire genealogical table is to be found on public view. From this it is clear that he is descended from Traveller folk.

Well-known relations, at least among folk music fans, include the Lorenssons and the Brolins from Skåne. *Lorens Brolin* (1818-1890), from Abbekås, was an accomplished fiddler, who even had occasion to play for the king. His songs are represented in *Svenska Låtar* (Swedish Songs), part 3, from Skåne. His father, *Johannes Brolin* (1785-1860), was also a violinist, as were five of his sons. Lorens’ oldest son, *Carl Lorensson* (1857-1933), received a national folkmusic award in 1910 for his fiddle-playing technique.

Uno Greger Tord Lindberg (born in 1929) is a name well known to many older people in Sweden. When he travelled round the country in the 1960s and 1970s on salvation tours, he was known as *Målle* by the entire Swedish population. Målle became the Maranatha Christian Church movement’s most talked-about preacher when he held highly ecstatic meetings in tents in the mid-1960s.

The whole thing started when Målle hired a tent, which he set up outside the village of Målilla, in Småland. The first evening only 50 people came. But Målle’s ecstatic and spectacular revival meetings

roused a good deal of interest. Absolutely everyone came – at one stage 5,000 people. Eventually, he even succeeded in attracting raggare (members of a gang of youths who ride about in big American cars from the '50s and pick up girls to show off when cruising downtown). Sometimes women attending the meetings would throw their bras up onto the stage. Målle began to travel around to the markets and set up his meetings tent cheek by jowl with striptease and mud-wrestling tents. Målle's Maranatha meetings soon ended up on the front pages of the newspapers with headlines such as "Tents, women and song". People accused him of being an agitator and a clown, a surrogate Jesus making showbusiness out of God.

Målle wanted to break down the usual meetings conventions and attract new groups. His most spectacular meeting was held in Örnsköldsvik, where he arrived by helicopter and lowered himself down from the air to the mass of people who were standing waiting to be allowed into the tent meeting. On his arm was the name Målle in glittering letters.

Målle Lindberg has never made a secret of his background. The papers called him "the singing Gipsy". Although Målle is a Traveller, he accepted to be labeled as "Gipsy", something which a number of Travellers criticized him for, since they think it is important to use the correct term.

Målle himself takes this criticism in good part and continues to call himself a Gipsy. When he released a new CD at the end of the 1990s, he gave it the overall title of *Målle Lindberg med zigenarkompet* (Målle Lindberg and Gipsy Company). Two of the songs have Gipsy links: *Fritänkaren och zigenaren* (The freethinker and the Gipsy) and *Du svarte zigenare* (You black Gipsy). The introductory melody, *Jag har bott vid en landsväg* (I have lived on the country road), has nothing to do with Gipsies or Travellers, but Målle chose to include it for other reasons.

"It reminds me of my own upbringing and how I lived on the roads myself."

The song is performed instrumentally and is combined with Målle talking about his childhood.

As I sit now in the silent hours of the night and listen to the yearning tone of this melody– of the public highway – then my thoughts and feelings go back to the time when my forefathers

travelled by horse and cart along the roads. I can remember what a great opportunity it was to go with my mother and my father to a horse market and there get to experience an old-fashioned animal market. To get to know the smell of the horses and cows. And even to experience the dust from the country roads. It's like being a nomad who has no roots in the Swedish welfare society. It gives me a feeling of nostalgia. Yes, Målle, he's still keeping going. He dreams and he listens in the night to this beautiful, wonderful melody. "I have lived on the road the whole of my life."

Among the younger artists a changing attitude is discernible in their choosing to remain secretive about their background, e.g. the case of the Swedish rap artist *Remedeesh* who, out of regard for his relatives, does not wish to disclose his surname; *Malik Fredriksson*, who recently even retracted his old family name of Faltin; and *Ken*, who has – as he puts it – a few drops of Traveller blood in him on his father's side.

For the first time ever, a CD has been released in which rap songs are performed in Romany. "*Hej rommano rakklo kammar rommani tjäjj, hej rommano rakklo bässjar stadia på snej*" (or in Traveller terms, "Hey, Traveller guy has a Traveller girl, hey, Traveller guy has his cap on awry").¹⁰

A few years ago, a rap interpretation of a Traveller song would have been unthinkable. But in the same way that young immigrant musicians continue to develop their traditional music, young Travellers do the same, despite the fact that the older ones wrinkle their noses at the "fashions" of youth.

"As the younger generation, we want to use our language in the music, but it has to be the kind of music that appeals to young people," says Malik Fredriksson, who is the rapper in the refrain above. "There are young Travellers who went astray, and recognized themselves and their own situation in the old Romany texts."

Another Swedish article of Traveller origin is the singer, songwriter and recording artist Toni Holgersson. At a radio broadcast concert in Örebro Toni told of his background, and I interviewed him in connection with this.

"Unfortunately, I don't know very many Traveller songs. When I was little, my dad sang *Rommano rakklo honkar rommano tjejj* to me. It

was great, especially as I couldn't play a proper part in Traveller culture – I had a foot in both camps.

"I grew up with my mum. I stayed with my dad every other weekend. He was a Traveller, but a bit ashamed of it. It all came out in the end, though, when we met my grandfather and grandmother and other relatives. I was curious and proud, in a way. My grandfather had worked in the circus. I felt different from other people. And that's how you want to be. You want to be unique. Although when I asked what a Traveller was, I didn't get a proper answer.

"There are loads of young Travellers, boys and girls, who haven't been told anything by their parents. Probably because they don't want to be called "tinkers". It's a real insult. If you ask someone to define that word, they'll usually put the word "bloody" in front of it.

"I know that I'm a Traveller, and I recognize a Traveller if I see one. I find it difficult to understand why other artists who are Travellers won't step forward. I can't see any problem with it. It's just the same as someone asking me where I come from. I'm a Traveller because my dad was one. It's no more remarkable than that. And I'm proud of my origins, even though I'd really like to know more about where the Traveller people came from."

The most famous foreign artist with a Traveller's background is probably the French guitarist and jazz musician *Django Reinhardt* (1910-1953), who was a so-called *Sinti-Traveller*. He made a name for himself in the Quintet of the Hot Club of France, and on a trip to the USA he performed with Duke Ellington's orchestra.

A large number of Romany music groups in France, Germany, Switzerland, Holland and the Benelux countries use Django Reinhardt as a musical prototype. Nearly all of Reinhardt's relations devote themselves to music in one form or another. Some of his descendants in Germany – *Bawo* and *Lulo Reinhardt*, as well as *Bavo Degé* – have formed a Sinti group that performs songs in Romany.

In the Republic of Ireland, and in Northern Ireland, the Traveller name has become a selling point. Cassettes, LPs and CD recordings often include the words *Traveller's music* or *Traveller artists*, even if the artists are not performing Traveller songs but simply well-known popular songs. *Margaret Barry*, who was a Traveller, started in the 1940s as a street-singer outside her mother's recording company in Belfast. When she was sixteen she travelled around in Ireland and

performed at markets and football matches. In the 1950s she made her debut on English TV, took part in several folk festivals and gave a concert at the Royal Albert Hall. In the 1970s she toured the USA and gave a concert in, amongst other places, the Rockefeller Center in New York, where huge crowds flocked to listen to the simple street-singer from Ireland.

The Fureys were one of Ireland's most popular folk music groups in the 1980s and 1990s. The group members – brothers *George, Finbar, Paul* and *Eddie Furey*, as well as *Davey Arthur* – are all Travellers.

There are also many Travellers among those in the theatre and film worlds, but only a few of them have stepped forward and told of their background. There have been operas, operettas and plays about the Romany people, but almost nothing about or by Travellers. There are exceptions: in the mid-1990s, the former dramatic actress Arnevi Holmström wrote the play *Vildfågglarna* (The Wild Birds) about the Traveller's life. It was based on Tattarstan in Snarsmon in the Bohuslän region, on the border with Norway.¹¹ In writing this Arnevi, who is not a Traveller, had a mentor with a Traveller's background to check the text for factual accuracy. The work was performed during the summer of 1997 in Strömstad and Hamburgsund.¹²

The staged performance of *Tater* (the Norwegian equivalent term for *tattare*), promoted by the Oslo Nye Teater, was shown on Norwegian TV on 30 December 2001. It was written and directed by Per-Olav Sørensen, and several Travellers were involved in a consultant capacity. The company consisted of actors, dancers and musicians from Norway, Germany, the USA, Sri Lanka and India, with different backgrounds and different cultures. As rehearsals progressed, it became apparent that several company members were either Travellers themselves or had family members or friends who were of Traveller stock. *Tater* is not a documentary depiction of how the Travellers came into being or how they talked, but a modern, stylized version of a history with its roots in North Indian song and music tradition, but presented as an ultramodern package. The message is a massive criticism of the political, religious and medical science climate in Norway.

In the year 2000, the government and Swedish Church apologized to the Traveller people for the attacks made upon them by the

authorities and the church for hundreds of years. At the same time, they recognized the Travellers as a national minority within the Romany group. This means that future research on the Romany and Traveller peoples, at an academic level, will be pursued at one of the universities in Sweden. The Romany and Traveller peoples' histories will be written down, and linguistic research will take place there as well. What this will eventually mean as far as the Travellers' storytelling and song tradition is concerned, in the long term, is difficult to say, but one thing is certain: there is a pressing need to document the language and culture, since many of the older Travellers – whose knowledge of these matters is immense – will otherwise take their unique learning with them to their graves. An ABC-book is in the process of being published and several Travellers are writing their own dictionaries on their own initiative. Other Travellers emphasize the importance of linguists and language experts being involved in compiling the dictionaries, apart from anything else to endeavour to obtain a communal written language for Traveller Romany, at least in the Nordic countries.

Translated by Mary Katherine Jones.

¹ This is thus of overwhelming significance – especially when European law now requires its member states to acknowledge their minority peoples and support the different languages and cultural expressions that Europe's minority peoples represent. When, for example, the Swedish government acknowledged the Sami, Jews, Swedish Finns, Tornedalians and Romanies (including Travellers) as national minorities in the year 2000, the importance of research concerning each minority's culture, history and language was accentuated. Each minority culture is to be linked to a university or college of higher education. Politicians in many European states are currently having discussions on a similar basis.

² *Resandefolket – från tattare till traveller* (The Traveller people – from tinkers to Travellers) by Bo Hazell (Ordfront Förlag, Sverige, 2002), published with support from, amongst others, Vetenskapsrådet (The Scientific Council) in Sweden.

³ Cf. footnote 3.

⁴ *Fant*: a Norwegian pejorative name for Travellers, cf. the English equivalent, *tinker*.

⁵ *Burobengen*: *buro* is a Low German word for *farmer*, and in the past the Travellers brought the word to Scandinavian countries, where they still use it today

for *non-Travellers*. In Ireland and Great Britain, Travellers use the words *settlers* and *countrypeople*. *Bengen* is a Romany word and means *Devil, Satan* and the *Evil One*. From the beginning, Beng was an evil God in the Alakoh culture. In its compound form, the word *burobengen* is used by Swedish Travellers as a negative word for *non-Travellers* and sometimes also for *policemen*. Cf. English Travellers' pejorative words for non-Travellers: *buffer, flatties* and *feen*.

⁶ Variant of the Norwegian word *belling*, which refers to the leg of a boot.

⁷ One example is the verb *tradra* (to journey, travel, drive), which declines as *tradra, tradade, tradrat*. The present form is *tradrar*. The substantive *tjavo* (boy, guy; also son, child) declines in the plural as *tjavo*.

⁸ Cf. footnote 3.

⁹ In the Traveller cultural week in Örebro in the spring of 1997, Elias Akselsen performed in the concert hall of the regional museum and in a radio concert with a live audience. In November 1998 he recorded a CD, with financial support from Norsk Kulturråd (the National Council for Cultural Affairs in Norway). In his performances, Akselsen tries to keep as close as possible to the original character of the piece and therefore uses only acoustic instruments. In 1999 he received a new grant from the Council for a CD collection of old Traveller songs. Hulda Johansen (1918-1985) is also represented on the CD, thanks to a unique amateur recording from 1961. The CD also contains a booklet with pictorial and background material about Traveller culture. Elias' CD "*Høstdrømmer*" (Autumn Dreams) was released in 1998 and "*Her kommer dine arme små*" (Here come your poor little ones) came out in 2003.

¹⁰ Malik Fredriksson has also written a rap song in Romany, which is published in its entirety in my book. (Cf. footnote 3).

¹¹ This is one of several places in Sweden named Tattarstan (meaning *tattar* village), where Travellers have lived in history.

¹² Arnevi Holmström died on 16 March 2001; she was 54 years old.