

Microphone Prophets and Schooling Outside School: The Global Tribe of Hip Hop and Immigrant Youth in ‘The New Sweden’

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You know I’m not that smart, I’m not that much into school and homework...reading and writing and all that, but it doesn’t matter anyhow. My next-door neighbour, he is an architect; he is very well educated from the finest universities in London. He has applied for more than a hundred jobs, but no workplace wants to hire him because he is a ‘blackhead’. I’m also a ‘blackhead’ so why should I try to be good in school? I’ll never get a job that way anyhow. The only way for us to get somewhere is to do the things we are good at here – break-dance, boxing, basketball and rap. I’m all into music, so that’s what I’ll do. To be a microphone prophet is a safer future for me than to get good grades in school. (Tederico, age 20.)

Tederico is a rapper and a member of a Hip Hop collective in Hammarkullen, Göteborg. Hammarkullen is one of the better-known immigrant neighbourhoods located in Angered, an area in the north-east part of Göteborg, a city with half a million inhabitants on the west coast of Sweden. The youngsters refer to Angered as Los Angered, and there is a strong territorial awareness that keeps the many break-dance and rap groups all around Angered together as a coherent Hip Hop culture. They do not consider Angered to be a part of Göteborg. Angered is, as one of the rappers told me, ‘the third world in the middle of the first world’. Even if they are Swedish citizens, they say that they will ‘never be a part of Swedish culture’ and that they will never see themselves as Swedes. They belong to the Global Tribe of Hip Hop.¹

The initial words from Tederico may sound categorical, but it is no exaggeration to say that the school system has great difficulties in many immigrant-dominated areas in the big cities of Sweden. If, for example, we take a closer look at the 2,500 people from the Göteborg region who are registered each autumn at Göteborg University, we find that only 65–70 of

¹ A longer version of this article, with another title, will be published in *Handbook on Urban Education*, ed. William Pink. New York: Springer.

Education in ‘Multicultural’ Societies – Turkish and Swedish Perspectives, eds. Marie Carlson, Annika Rabo and Fatma Gök, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions, vol. 18 (Stockholm 2007), pp. 227-243.

them are from Angered, an area with more than 40,000 inhabitants. There has been a public debate about the under-representation of 'immigrants' in higher education. Göteborg University has launched diverse projects to attract the young people in Angered, but with little success. The problem is alarming, and to solve it we must dig deeper beneath the public debate. Segregation, marginalisation and the growth of new forms of poverty in many Swedish cities have created a demarcation line between Us and Them – the immigrant-dominated areas are at the heart of what we might consider an urbanisation of injustice.

Luxury alongside poverty

Since the mid-1980s a debate has raged among sociologists and other social scientists about patterns of marginalisation and poverty on the European continent, including the United Kingdom. The development towards a 'post-industrial' society has implied a growing social polarisation in many countries. New forms of social exclusion have pushed an increasing number of groups into marginalisation and ultimately into exclusion. The forms and intensities involved in this process of mounting class differentiation vary. However, it is still possible to discern certain common tendencies in the emergent New Europe.

In order to explain this development, politicians refer regularly to economic crisis. Simultaneously there has been growth, in GNP and accumulated wealth, in the European Union during the past two or three decades. Luxury and poverty have always existed side by side. However, the present situation offers something new in the form of growing gaps between the worlds of affluence and scarcity. Neither millionaires nor the destitute have at any time during the post-war period been so numerous as they are now. According to official EU statistics from 1998, before the incorporation of the former Eastern European states in 2004, there were 52 million poor people, 17 million unemployed and 3 million homeless in the EU (Wacquant 1999). These figures do not seem to be declining, and at the same time an improved competitive position has moved the European economy into a phase of strong expansion.

A background, which is important in this development, however, is the new international division of labour. In addition, there are crucial structural changes in the economy that have created a situation where, for example, the new Information Technology sector is putting greater demands on labour. Economies require qualified people with exponentially increasing competences, while many unskilled tasks in traditional industries are being eliminated. The simple truth is that there are no jobs for a growing army of currently redundant workers. The effect on immigrants and refugees who in recent years have moved to the suburbs of European cities is that they too are facing difficulties in entering the labour market. The permanence of contemporary patterns of poverty is clearly linked to processes of de-industrialisation and globalisation. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu characterises the new patterns of poverty that grow out of these structural changes as the 'Modern Misery', which has emerged independently of the state of the economies (Bourdieu et al. 1999). Those who have borne the new destitution on their shoulders have been powerless due to their marginal positions and their heterogeneity. The

political machines of established interests find it threatening to be in any sense identified with, much less a mouthpiece for, this modern misery.

The divided city

The dismantling of the institutions of the welfare state is also at the root of contemporary poverty. The British sociologist Scott Lash (1994) has characterised this as ‘institutional deficit’, which is particularly evident in the urban, ghetto-like environments where modern misery is more manifest. The American scholar William Julius Wilson (1993) has stressed the pattern of synchronisation between developments in Europe and the United States. The French sociologist Loic Wacquant (1993, 1999), on the other hand, has found decisive differences. One important such difference is constituted by the heterogeneous ‘ghetto areas’ in Europe. Another difference is that, in Europe, the demarcation line between the socially excluded and the rest of society is not as clearly related to the categories of race or ethnicity as it is in the US². There has been sociological controversy about how to characterise this new situation. Scholars on the right think that the development of the welfare state produced a social stratum which they call ‘the new underclass’, unwilling to work and deeply dependent on welfare subsidies. The opposite view blames not the victims, but the structural changes in the European economy during the last two or three decades.

Those marginalised groups of mobile immigrants or refugees who are labelled in Europe as ‘the new poor’ or ‘outcasts’ have, during the past fifteen years, been forming ghettos across the continent. In Sweden the best-known ghetto-like areas are Rinkeby (Stockholm), Angered (Göteborg) and Rosengård (Malmö). All these neighbourhoods are involved in what Wacquant defines as a process of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant 1993, 1999). The societal and medial discourse demonises the conditions of life in these areas so that, both inside and outside them, fear and insecurity are created. We can see a moral panic based on stereotypes regarding criminality, race, culture and religious antagonisms, which additionally exacerbate conditions for people who are already sidetracked by poverty and alienation. As we can see, the social tensions are growing. Lash (1994), instead of asking ‘if’, asks ‘when’ the European version of the Rodney King affair will occur: will it be in Berlin, Marseilles or Rotterdam?³

Now we know. The European version of the Rodney King riot started on 27 October 2006 in Paris. To be more precise, it started in the immigrant-

² Wacquant (1999) defines ghetto as a social and spatial formation formed by a stigmatised and homogeneous ‘ethno-social’ category. If we use this definition in a rigid way, it is hard to talk about ghettos in Europe. The areas addressed in this text, where the majority of the ‘new underclass’ or the ‘new poor’ live, are ethnically heterogeneous. Nevertheless, in the media debate as well as in research, the term ‘ghetto’ is used, and that is the reason for my use of the term in this essay.

³ Rodney King is the Afro-American who was beaten up by a group of policemen from Los Angeles Police Department. A citizen with a video camera filmed the scene. In a trial in 1992 the policemen pleaded not guilty. The same day, the biggest uprising in modern American history took place in Los Angeles.

dominated Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. The police were hunting down two young French citizens whose parents came from Mali and Tunisia; they tried to take shelter in an electric power station, and were burnt to death. The same evening citizens in Clichy organised a meeting to demonstrate their rage against the police. Later that night, hundreds of young people in Clichy and other suburbs attacked the police with stones and Molotov cocktails. This was the start of the most serious uprising in France since May 1968. For three weeks the country exploded in flames, and the authorities had to put in more than 25,000 extra police. But the riots did not die down until a 'state of emergency' was proclaimed in 300 French cities. And now across Europe there is only one broad question: whether and when these riots will start again. Can such disturbances be exported to other countries? The Swedish media showed their anxiety by interviewing social workers, young people and social scientists during the weeks France was burning – is a French situation possible in Sweden?

The situation may not be as rough in metropolitan areas in Sweden as it is in France. But official reports on the living conditions in the immigrant-dense suburbs of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö are not uplifting reading. Of all children and young people up to 17 years of age, 40 per cent live in 'exposed urban districts', to cite a parliamentary committee on Big City Conditions. The majority of people in these districts have backgrounds in all the 'Third World' continents. The largest proportions of youngsters of non-European immigrant origin are to be found in districts with extremely low incomes. For example, the disposable annual income among families with children in many neighbourhoods in Angered is £14,000 sterling lower than that in the city of Stockholm. In Göteborg and Malmö, there are districts with extremely low incomes that coincide with a 90 per cent immigrant population, and where more than half of the children up to 6 years of age have parents who are unemployed. These circumstances have put Sweden into a state of shock. The so-called Swedish model, the famous welfare state, is eroding. The situation of child immigrants in Sweden can in some respects be compared to the conditions for blacks in the United States, where one in two black children live in poverty. A recent investigation (Salonen 2003) of child poverty found that 73 per cent of the children in Rosengård live in families that are below the poverty line. Sweden has for some time also been a two-thirds society, or more correctly a four-fifths society. In Göteborg, a classic working-class city with half a million inhabitants of whom nearly 150,000 have an immigrant background, social entitlements doubled between 1990 and 1993. Even though the situation of the Swedish economy has stabilised since then, processes of marginalisation, poverty and discrimination have become permanent, as Sweden has become a country of 'Us' and 'Them' like many other European countries. The unemployment figures amongst immigrants are higher than for the 'ethnic Swedes', immigrant youths do not attend higher education, and so on.

Research on the new areas of poverty in European metropolitan districts suggests that, in contrast to the traditional working-class areas where poverty was an integral part of the working-class culture, the new areas are suffering from a lack of solidarity and community spirit (Mingione 1996). Local, collective and territorial identity, which previously provided security and a feeling of

self-assertiveness, is now replaced by instability. There exists, it is claimed, uncertainty and alienation in relation to the rest of society. At the same time, internal conditions are saturated with competition and conflict-ridden antagonisms between different groups. These patterns can, of course, also be discerned in Sweden. The new immigrant-dominated suburban districts in the three Swedish metropolitan areas constitute fragile communities, the key feature of which is extreme ethnic heterogeneity. For many adults who see their residence in a particular district as a temporary solution, the social space provided by this district offers a weak basis for any community spirit. Instead, it is the family and the commonality of one's own ethnic group that are charged with a new meaning.

The Third World in the middle of the First World

Things are different for the young. During leisure time they are out on the streets cultivating friendships that supersede the ethnic boundaries drawn by the parental culture. All adolescents are in the process of seeking their outer and inner selves – this is part of the identity work of modern youth. In these multiethnic areas, the constant encounters with young people from other cultures, with Swedish society and with today's multifaceted, global and media-based youth culture, imply that new points of departure are being created for identification processes, which of necessity are embedded in work on adolescent identity.

Here I draw on a research project in Hammarkullen, one of the immigrant suburbs of Angered in Göteborg, which ran between 1997 and 2000⁴. One of the salient features amongst the groups with which I had contact is their openness to absorbing and testing different expressions, articulations and outlooks on the world derived from different cultures. Although most of the youngsters I met are Swedish citizens, they do not consider themselves Swedish. On the other hand, adopting their parents' national identity is not self-evident either. 'Cassius' from Tunisia told me:

I'm not Swedish, I never could be Swedish 'cause this society don't want me, but I'm not Tunisian either, but of course I'm more Tunisian than Swede. You

⁴ The Swedish Research Council for Social Science (Socialvetenskapliga Forskningsrådet, SFR) financed the project for 3 years, through 1997 to 2000. The main purpose was to study identity work among young males in a segregated, immigrant-dominated suburb. The point of departure was that these young men should be active in expressing themselves through different aspects of youth culture. I carried out the research alone. It was a qualitative field study that utilised ethnographic methods, primarily participatory observation and interviews. I visited the area for two or three days a week during a period of 18 months, and during the rest of the time I did the writing. Altogether I carried out 30 in-depth informant interviews with individuals as well as groups. I also did interviews with other affected parties such as parents, social workers, teachers, etc. At a general level, participatory observation is a method in which the researcher participates in relevant areas of the reality and everyday life of the 'research subjects'. In this case, participatory observation meant observing events, listening, asking questions, and being part of the interpersonal interaction in contexts that were important to the study. Since the project was interested in the biographies of the young men, individual in-depth interviews were conducted in two rounds, the first at an early stage of the study and the second just before the analysis and final writing began.

see...I couldn't go back to Tunisia 'cause I have no future there. I've been going to school here in Hammarkullen, I have all my friends here, I have my life here – but this is not Sweden, it's Hammarkullen and Hammarkullen is a reservation, there are no Swedes living here so it's not Sweden – it's Hammarkullen. It's like the Third World in the middle of the First World, if you see what I mean.

The most recent general election in Sweden in 2002 supported the picture of a general pattern of decreasing voter turn-out. Today, in a number of different groups within Swedish society, we see an increasing tendency towards dissociation in relation to the official forms and institutions of politics. This new pattern has been presented as a threat to, or a crisis for, democracy. Although these developments are general in nature, they are more prominent among young people and immigrants than among many other groups. Muhammad, 20 years of age, born in Somalia, a Swedish citizen for 8 years, commented:

They say on TV that immigrants have to be integrated and that we should do this and do that. But how the fuck can we be integrated into society when they don't even want us there really. They shut the door, got it. That's how I see it. They shut me out of society, then they want me to participate. You understand? How can you participate when you can't even get in... I don't see myself as a member of this society, ya know. That's how I feel. I'm a Swedish citizen, I'm not going to vote. 'Cause I don't care, got it. I don't care. Why should I get mixed up in their business. It doesn't feel like my business. Even though I'm a Swedish citizen and have lived here for ten years, I don't care. Ya know, that's how I see myself. I don't want to integrate anything. I don't want to be part of... I have nothing in common with Swedish society.

Muhammad is in many respects representative of the young people with whom I had contact during the time I was doing my research on segregated, suburban immigrant youth and their cultural expressions. The most striking common feature of the stories they told me has to do with exclusion, non-participation, and a feeling that 'real Swedes don't really want to get to know us immigrants'. Their stories are about experiencing that official Swedish institutions are not intended for them. Time and time again, they return to the feeling of not being wanted, of not fitting in, of not having a place – and to the frustration of 'not knowing what I should do with my life'. They are Swedish, problematically so. Moving to their parents' homeland is not a practicable solution either. Even though they have family and friends there, enjoy visiting (if this is at all possible), and may perceive themselves as more, for example, Chilean or Somali than Swedish, their parents' homeland remains a different world from the one they grew up in and have an internalised relation to. There is no future there either.

Given their feelings of non-belonging both in Sweden and in their parents' homeland, many of the young men I interviewed consider the identity offered by immigrant status to be their primary identity. They are neither Swedish nor Chilean or Somali, but immigrants, or – as they often call themselves – 'Blackheads' or 'Blackies'. These young people are brought together by the alienation of being immigrants. All of them are 'Blackies', regardless of where they have their roots – in Europe, Latin America or Africa. 'Alienation is our nation' and 'Reality is my nationality', claimed one of the youngsters – with an

alien passport – in a reference to the well-known rap artist Kool G. Rap. The innovative cultural work these young people are involved in – and which I have focused on in my research – deals with, among other things, redefining this alienation and deciding for themselves what it means. The new cultural patterns being created not only highlight frustration and pain, but also the power and potential, the joy and community that also exist in the environments where they live their lives. Among other things, this is a matter of taking from ‘the Svens’ (the ethnic Swedes) their right to interpret how these environments are understood and defined. ‘We aren’t people you should feel sorry for, I hate it when there are discussions and Swedes say ‘poor immigrants’. We are not poor immigrants. We have our pride, you know, we’re not wimps.’ They defend themselves against being turned into victims. This is why they have, for instance, consciously taken over the epithet ‘Blackie’, a term originally used by xenophobic Swedes. Thus, just as blacks in the US have taken up the derogatory ‘Nigger’ and given it another meaning, young people in Angered have transformed the meaning of ‘Blackie’.

Another common response to the situation of rootlessness felt by young immigrants is to focus on their own neighbourhood or suburb. It is primarily boys and young men who use this strategy for creating identity and security. The place where you grew up, where you live, where you spend your everyday life and where you have your friends obviously becomes a factor of crucial importance in stabilising your identity, if you are considered an alien in the world outside your own area. Among the young men I met, there is a strong need to charge with meaning and elevate the local physical environment as well as the youth community. ‘Hammarkullen – that’s our place on earth’, but Hammarkullen is not part of Sweden, it is a ‘reservation’. Hammarkullen is another world, another form of community. Hammarkullen offers security and protection and is the social space for common interests.

The Swedish authorities – a colonial army

When, after a day’s work, the social workers, teachers, youth-club leaders and administrative staff climb into their cars and drive ten-plus kilometres home to their housing areas in Göteborg’s inner city, they are replaced by security companies and police as if it were a ‘changing of the guard for the occupying power’. Many I have spoken with consider the relation between Angered and the rest of Göteborg to be colonial. Given this understanding, the police have a clear mission, and particularly in Hammarkullen the young people’s relationship with the police has a long and inflamed history. In interviews, young immigrants tell of how they have long felt provoked and harassed by the police. ‘If they come here with their batons and cocky attitudes, then we have a cocky attitude back. Just ‘cause we’re some sort of underclass doesn’t mean we put up with anything, ya know.’ Santos, a 20-year-old Peruvian, talks at length and with intensity about his experience of their relations with the police.

When I started to visit the area, one of the first things that happened was a confrontation between young people and police. At this time there were no neighbourhood police in the area. When a 19-year-old man was about to be seized by a police patrol, a large group of youths intervened in order to rescue

their friend. The patrol car's windshield was smashed and the policemen lost control, became panicky and called in reinforcements. Within a few minutes, 22 additional police cars arrived to head off the 'riot'. The next day, big headlines were circulated in the press. Youths from Hammarkullen were depicted as an unruly mob, as hoodlums. The circumstances that, according to the young people, were the actual cause of the disturbances were not presented in the media. On television, Channel 4 was the exception. The local news desk arranged a debate between young people and the police. On this occasion, it became clear that the media had not provided the whole truth. Indeed, the young people were not shown as hooligans, and they did not correspond to stereotypical portrayals in the evening papers – portrayals of immigrant youth as dangerous and brutal. Instead, these young immigrants appeared to be just the opposite – vocal, mature and sober. During the live broadcast, they even invited the police to attend a 'class' they wanted to give, provided the police were interested. In their opinion, the police needed to acquire more knowledge about the living conditions of immigrant youth and the big city. Many police officers come from small towns and have little idea of what it means to live in a modern, big-city suburb. Their knowledge of what it means to be an immigrant is even more limited.

Adults living in the area also perceived the 22 extra patrol cars and the newspaper articles as insulting. They demanded a meeting with and an explanation from the office of the police chief. No one from the office came to the meeting, but two former neighbourhood police, both of whom have a good name in the district, attended instead. Because neither of these officers was present during the event in question, they were unable to respond to the questions posed by the indignant participants at the meeting. It was poignant to see an elderly Chilean refugee stand up and take the floor. He was extremely critical of the police and said, 'I have been at the soccer stadium in Santiago as a political prisoner, I have seen police and the military attack people in this way, but I never thought this could happen in Olof Palme's Sweden.' In order to understand how many young people view the media, we need to remember that events such as this 'riot' and their consequences constitute the relevant background. There is a strongly expressed aversion to all the images of misery, poverty and trouble that the media are perceived to ration out at regular intervals. Every negative reference in the papers or on TV is considered an insult. The media are not thought of as an independent, neutral or critical institution. On the contrary, the perception is that the function of the media is to label the immigrants as second-class citizens.

Tha Klika

Tederico, the young man we met earlier, has a close friend called Victor, a 19-year-old of Latin American origin, who comments on the media-made image of his own suburb in the following way:

Hammarkullen is really a reservation. Rinkeby is too, in Stockholm. When I'm in Hammarkullen everything feels okay. Everybody badmouths Hammarkullen, but nobody's been there. That's why people don't want to be anywhere else, 'cause then things aren't okay. Now I'm in Hammarkullen, it's another world. I

know everybody and everybody's just like me. When I leave Hammarkullen I come to Sweden, and when I'm in Sweden I feel discriminated against. It doesn't feel like Sweden is my country and it never will. Even if... I have a theory that the world is where you want to live. If a place feels good, you should live there. But Sweden doesn't feel like my country. When I look around I only see white, blond people. I really don't want to be part of that society. There's no reason to 'cause I don't feel at home there anyway. Then maybe you wonder 'why the hell are you here then'. There really are a lot of problems. I was born here, ya know, and I don't know what I'm going to do with my life really. There just shouldn't be any barriers.

In Hammarkullen there is a local version of Hip Hop culture. I have spent much of my time in the area with a group of 10–15 young men, aged 17 to 25, who make rap music. They are part of a bigger Hip Hop collective of 50 young people who make rap music, produce graffiti and break-dance. The members of this rap group have their origins in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. They regard themselves as constituting an ethnic alliance, whose task is not only to represent the young from Hammer Hill (the name with which they have literally re-baptised their district), but also to speak for all the immigrant youth from all the suburbs in Sweden. This group aptly calls itself The Hammer Hill Click or Tha Klika, and its main aim is to create respect and goodwill for its own suburb. When Hip Hop grew out of the Bronx, New York City, in the late 1970s, it was a response to social devaluation and stigmatisation. For Hammarkullen's youth, Hip Hop is also a means of improving a city district's sullied reputation.⁵ 'We don't want Hammarkullen to be known because there are a lot of problems here, we want everybody to know about Hammarkullen because the best rappers and break-dancers are here.'

Demands for respect are made only by those who have been treated disrespectfully. Hip Hop is a cultural expression of demands for respect. Hip Hop is a street culture. This does not mean that it has no interest in reflecting on the society of which it is part. But the knowledge that is valued in the Hip Hop culture is not something one learns in school. A rapper can in a sense be seen as an 'organic intellectual', who makes use of personal experience to analyse history and the contemporary social reality (Holmes-Smith 1997). In this culture's eyes, the schools have lost their credibility since they are founded on His-story, i.e. on descriptions of history by 'the white man'. The schools rest on a Western, Eurocentric perspective where universal principles are preached

⁵ This Hip Hop community was, as most youth subcultures are, dominated by males. Only 5 or 6 of the 'members' in the collective of around 50 persons were young women. They were excellent rappers and definitely accepted as equals in the community. All the girls had immigrant backgrounds and all of them were engaged in making rap music. Some of their lyrics were feminist-orientated, but most of their songs had the same topics as those of the boys. Musically they were more into soul music and singing than the majority of the young men. On certain occasions they performed together with the young men as a single act. But during the time I did my fieldwork there was only one constellation that experimented on a regular basis and mixed boys and girls during their rehearsals. There were, of course, other girls, girlfriends and different kinds of 'hang-arounds', who came and went. These girls were a part of the milieu, but not really a part of the collective. The reason for this was that they were not considered to be Hip Hoppers and because of that they did not belong to the nucleus group with the mission to represent the neighbourhood.

at the same time as society practises segregation, discrimination and inequality. 'Democracy is hypocrisy and has to do with cheating the poor.'

Click or Klika is a designation of 'Clique', which refers back to the youth gangs of the so-called Chicano culture in Los Angeles. There, a 'clique' means a solidly coherent group. To define themselves as a clique implies that the members have mutual bonds of trust which approach their relationships to their original families. However, to have borrowed a group designation from Los Angeles, and tattooed one's body in the same way as one's 'brothers' across the Atlantic, does not entail identifying one's living conditions with those of young Chicanos in Los Angeles. Residing in a 'depressed' area of Sweden and Göteborg is quite different from inhabiting an American ghetto, the kinship is primarily on a symbolic level.

Informal learning processes

Tha Klika started as a close group of comrades and had many features in common with the characteristics of exclusive boys' clubs. One of the hallmarks of the 'Clique' was that the members' mutual sense of responsibility was so strong as to make the group's coherence resemble, in some respects, what exists in a family. The continual talk about being brothers was more than rhetoric. It reflected caring and consideration between individuals. Hard words, irritations, conflicts and rudeness occurred, of course, and there were cases of individuals who left the group because they did not fit in. But the underlying loyalty, the belonging and the shared feeling for the 'task' were stronger than in any other youth group I have had contact with.⁶

Such youth groups have often been portrayed as male-dominated collectives that build upon the needs for separateness and security in an uncertain, demanding world. Through the 'collective self' that the group constitutes, a marginalised and powerless individual can gain strength. Being a member, allowed to take part in the collective warmth, is the primary motive and each member can hide his uncertain self in the gang. Relations within the group have also frequently been seen as dominated by superficial contacts. The tension between a confident, tough surface and a weak self-image has endowed the collective with an inner life in which, as one prerequisite, nobody exposes himself and talks about himself and his own thoughts, feelings or needs. Togetherness does not allow the individual room to show who he 'really' is. This type of socially and psychologically structured gang is usually also a kind of closed fortress, permeated with separation-anxiety and fear, as well as sometimes controlled by demonic leader-figures.

This characteristic has limited relevance for the groups I got to know in Angered. On the contrary, in a group like Tha Klika, knowledge about each

⁶ It was not that easy to gain access to the group. They were initially suspicious and not very interested in being 'research objects'. It took me more than 3 months to be accepted as the 'intruder' with the tape recorder. Once 'on the inside', it was no problem for me to take part in all aspects of their cultural activities. Obviously, my knowledge of and interest in 'black music' helped me to gain acceptance by the group.

other, and the possibilities of showing who one is, are among the prerequisites for the collective. Most of these young people were active Hip Hoppers, and this in itself may have promoted the climate between the individuals. Hip Hop is an expressive culture that bases its idioms upon each participant emphasising his own subjectivity and creating a personal style as rapper, graffiti painter or break-dancer. One's personality and the distinctions between individuals are of central significance in this culture. An implication is that nobody can hide himself and bask in the light of others. Every member has his own assignment and role in the group. But to maintain this function, training is needed. In regard to creating music and performing on stage, as well as to the codes in daily life, there is a mentor system which provides the new initiate with a 'guide' or, perhaps more accurately, a 'big brother' in the group. This older brother helps, encourages, trains and leads the new member into the secrets of Hip Hop and rap music.

I met a number of rap gangs regularly for a year and a half, and my field notes contain many observations about the social and musical learning processes that took place in these groups. The discipline, seriousness and intensity with which they trained were recognisable to me from other contexts (Fornäs et al. 1995). What I found new were the clear division of work and the almost school-like situation. Efforts were required of all the individuals, chiefly in the form of writing texts but also of suggestions for melodies and 'beats'. Sometimes the rehearsals became seminar-like events in which, for example, one of the older experienced members told about the history of Hip Hop or of blacks or native Latin Americans, or someone reviewed a book he had read. Perico from Tha Klika, when I ask him whether he enjoys school, speaks of the relationship between the learning that takes place in school and what happens in the rap group:

School isn't my bag, but I get by...you could say that the group is also a kind of school, see...like Immanuel, he's a Muslim and he takes care of his own, Muhammed and Niladh who are Muslims too, you know, so he teaches them about their history and I teach Ronaldo and Pablo and the other little rappers who hang around us about Latin America's history – not like 'come here or there at five o'clock and I'll test the lesson', but more when we meet, and then we chat and I can talk a little as if lecturing when I tell it was this or that Indian tribe living at the time, and this or that year when it happened, it was then that the Spaniards came, the Indians had a certain religion and all that.

It's fun to talk, you see, and now they're going to make a new song about Latin America's history, see. I said one person can concentrate on the Inca kingdom, another can take up the Spaniards when they came and wiped out a whole continent, and the third can talk about the situation in Latin America today. Nobody in Latin America likes the USA – even though we rap and this comes from the USA, there's a difference from the country and those blacks and poor people; the government is something else. Then there can be part of the text about one's own thoughts on how that should be handled.

Here, the group and the Hip Hop culture are an arena for seeking understanding, which schools and parents are not able to provide. But the group also has to do with each individual's need of belonging, security, closeness, meaning, identity and respect. Thus, 'rowdy youth groups' cannot be considered destructive *per se*. On the contrary, they may well comprise a form

of ‘organisation’ of which the school has everything to gain from developing a comprehension. The basis of any pedagogy must be to develop, *together* with the young, a content and forms of instruction that are considered meaningful and, in the students’ eyes, credible. This must also apply to the young in the high-rise suburbs. They are entitled to instruction which does not ignore or avoid the fact that the Swedish society they have to grow up in is stratified into A- and B- citizens, that a structural racism exists, and that it is not true everyone has the same chance regardless of social, cultural, economic, religious and ethnic background. The schools should not compete with the youth culture, but should use its resources to develop intellectual tools which, taking account of the young’s capacity for understanding, gives them a possibility of investigating and understanding contemporary life. In this way the schools can become credible. Only when school is perceived as an institution that takes its task seriously can the trust be built up which is needed for the young in these areas to choose university education in the future. The emergence of the New Sweden has made it increasingly important that teachers reflect more profoundly upon the school’s function and their own role. Their loyalty toward the structures in which they participate is far from self-evident or unproblematic.

88-soldiers

Being a ‘clique’ also implies that what the members do is more than just to express themselves through music; in a way it is possible to look upon the group as a kind of political manifestation. Tha Klika has no problem combining the cultural with the political, the aesthetic with the ethical. Being a ‘clique’ means that, in spite of their different origins and creeds, they are an inseparable unit. Within this clique, every individual has a fundamental right to claim religious or ethnic particularity and to represent any branch of rap music, as long as he or she is loyal to the defined common task of the group. The task is to regard oneself as a soldier with music as a weapon or to be, as the Clique says, a ‘microphone prophet’. As has been noted, the group’s lyrics deal with police brutality, discrimination and racism in Swedish society; they also embrace friendship and gang solidarity, reverence towards Allah and Islam, the history of Latin America, everyday life in the suburb and so on. The group also issued a mini-CD. One song is entitled ‘88-soldiers’. When I ask what they mean by that title, one of the Latin Americans in the group responds: ‘Man, you must think, think for yourself – what do you think, man?’

After some intense thought, dismissing the explanation that they are a total of 88 persons, I realise that it has to do with the symbolism in figures that the neo-Nazis employ when they render cryptic greetings to Hitler. H is the eighth letter in the alphabet and 88 is consequently HH or Heil Hitler. So I ask if it is just something the Nazis use to praise Hitler. The whole gang bursts into laughter and one of them says:

Sure – we rip those symbols off the Nazis and create total confusion for them, you dig, man. In one year’s time they can’t go around in the city any more with their 88-tattoos ’cause we’ve snatched their symbols. For us, 88 means Hammer Hill (the literal translation of the name of the suburb Hammarkullen) and 88-soldiers represents us being soldiers, the soldiers of Hammarkullen, and we are

ready for war. We've had enough, we don't want to take all this crap any more – do you get it, man? You get it. In this song everybody is there, all 12 have their own rhymes about their own thing. Muhammed and B-boy speak for the Blacks, for their people and their religion...you hear that they rap around Allah and 'breaking the law' and...then we Latinos are coming with the message to our people about the brown ones, you understand, man...then we are creating certain rhymes together so it becomes 'niggaz and latinos got to unite 'n' fight' and that sort of thing, you get it, man. You know, the song begins with different sounds like that, then it eases its way over to violins, beautiful and disturbing like that, then there are sounds showing that there is a war going on, you understand, and then we come in and talk cool, first saying that we aren't gonna take any more crap and then...we really get going...

The title of another song is *El Mensaje* (The Message), written by two of the Latinos in the group. The lyrics tell about the Mapotcho tribe, the only Latin American Indians that the Spanish conquistadors failed to defeat. The song is about the fate of the Indians; it tells us that their history is similar to that of the blacks from Africa. Their histories are parallel: the plundering and the enslavement by the white man, by Europe. This is still the situation – all exploited people must unite against 'the white man's love of money', then the Mapotcho tribe is something strong to identify with – 'no retreat, no surrender'. The song starts with an aggressive Spanish guitar, which symbolises the scent of gold and the hubris of the conquistadors. Gradually, this chord recedes into an Indian melody-line that becomes stronger and clearer. This folklore-inspired melody is played on an old Indian string instrument and symbolises the resistance on the part of the Indians. The song is in praise of those Indian tribes who were driven back farther and farther up in the Andes and whom the Spaniards never managed to subdue. Even if these boys do not have any Indian ancestry, they strongly identify with these South American Indians. When I ask if any one of them has an Indian background, they tell me that it does not matter. It is not a question of blood in that sense; the identification is grounded on another, symbolic level. Alexander, 19 years of age, with parents from Chile, says:

Even though I'm not an Indian, what the Spaniards did hurts me. It's too bad the culture will disappear, for other people too. We don't want to lose it. Even if I don't have Indian blood, we're proud to come from a country where there were Indians, and in the song – *The Message* – we're trying to say that all Latin Americans are the same people and that we all have the same blood. A long time ago we experienced the same thing and we have the same fate. We can gain power if we just unite, but it's not that way today, we're not united, in Sweden we're different – Chileans, Bolivians and all. But we feel like one and the same people, like Latinos. Europe has tried to screw us. We shouldn't be against each other – it should be us against them... and them – that you can think of however you like, ya know...

On the CD, there are two more songs. 'One is more commercial, you know, like more funky gangsta-shit, and it's called *West Coast Slang*, whereas the name of the other one is *Pig-hunting Season*, which deals with police hostility towards us and how we are against the police.'

Even though a territorial mythology constituting a kind of 'nationalism of the neighbourhood' (Cohen 1997) is created, there is at the same time a strong sense of internationalism in this milieu. The most palpable feature of my contact with

this multiethnic Hip Hop collective remains their definition of themselves as representatives of and spokesmen for what they themselves define as the 'new underclass', which does not only relate to Sweden. The members of Hammer Hill Click show a kind of 'glocal' consciousness; they have a strong local identity, but they relate to, and are at the same time connected with, other parts of the world – Bogotá, Cape Town, Los Angeles and Paris. It could be said that they are a part of an underground Hip Hop network that is global. Through the World Wide Web they exchange beats and lyrics with other Hip Hop groups. They buy CDs, videos and clothes from all over the world, and they inform themselves about the conditions for Chicanos in Los Angeles, Aztec Indians in Latin America, Somali refugees in Italy, etc. They consider themselves as a part of 'The Global Tribe of Hip Hop', or 'The Hip Hop Nation'. Sometimes they say that they live on the 'Hip Hop Planet'. Pedro, 23 years of age, who came to Sweden from Latin America when he was four, says:

I am alive through Hip Hop – Hip Hop is the centre of my brain. If you think like that it is easy to understand other people from other parts of the world that also are into Hip Hop. If you are Hip Hop you have a lot of things in common...Hip Hop people all over the world have the same language so it is easy to live with them. Hip Hop is a language for those who live in ghettos...in the concrete jungle...

And Cassius chips in:

We belong to the Hip Hop Nation. That means we have more in common with Hip Hop people in Berlin, Cape Town and Mexico City than we have with someone that lives in this town that don't think like us. We out here are all One, even though we come from everywhere – you know, we are citizens of the world – what keeps us together is that we are all on the outside, we don't have no place inside society.

One might ask whether my presentation of the group is a bit too romanticised. One of my aims with this essay is to get behind the moral panic that governs the public debate. This means that I am putting my focus on the creative aspects of the youth community in Hammarkullen. The media, on the other hand, notoriously concentrate on ethnic conflicts, criminality and the dangerous youth. In reality, crime rates for this area are on the same level as for the whole of Göteborg.⁷

In one sense the young men in The Hammer Hill Clique are unusual. There are few other politically articulate groups of young immigrants who see themselves as 'soldiers' and the multiethnic cultural expression they create as armoury. In another sense, they are quite ordinary. In several comparable districts around Sweden, similar meetings and fusions between different groups of young people are taking place. Each area has its specific preconditions, such as its own specific history, its own ethnic composition, etc., thus resulting in different youth cultures being created in different areas. Although the local variation is great, there are still certain fundamental patterns that characterise

⁷ In the book *AlieNation is My Nation* (Ordfront 2002) I give a more complex picture of this subculture and the local community.

most of the immigrant-dominated suburbs irrespective of their location – Stockholm, Göteborg or Malmö. One is the subordinate role of girls in street cultures that outwardly give shape to the patterns of development outlined above. Another striking feature concerns the identification with, and impact of, those lifestyles and ideals formed in the frustrations and wrath of the North American ghetto culture.

Identification with the Afro-American culture does, however, contain a dualism. On the one hand, it appears as if the openness of this culture, its ‘call-and-response’ structure, leads to embryos of new communities and cultural models. Its aesthetic codes, particularly evident in the music, constitute a language that in certain respects loosens up ethnic boundaries or builds bridges across them. Such processes may create new forms of alliances and amalgamations. Herein we find a potential that may function as a basis for constructive dialogues and learning processes between those youngsters who employ these cultural patterns and Swedish society.

On the other hand, we can also see how marginalisation and powerlessness contribute to creating a fascination with the criminal gang culture of the ghettos, which in real terms may reinforce alienation, exclusion and segregation. Those tendencies of hostility towards the dominant culture – tendencies that already existed in the areas where many immigrant youngsters grow up – may be reinforced through identification with the most uncompromising and violence-centred aspects of the ghetto culture. It may thus cement and legitimate irrepressible, confrontational stances that are evident in certain areas. This is a likely growing scenario if the tendencies towards segregation and marginalisation cannot be broken.

Youth culture as a seismograph

Hip Hop emerged from the black ghettos of the US east coast during the latter half of the 1970s. Rooted in the oral and musical traditions of black culture, while also sensitive to the landscape of sounds in modern society as a whole, it gave voice to a new generation. With simple means, cultural codes developed in the streets and a new language was created, which in a new and effective way publicly expressed the brutal reality of ghetto conditions for many blacks. Hip Hop started as a way for young blacks to communicate with their ‘own people’ – through rap, graffiti and break-dance.

Today, rap has a rich content and the performers are not exclusively black. But it was, in fact, the hard-core Black Nationalist-inspired rap that gained the attention of non-blacks (Sernhede 2000). This politically engaged rap began to flourish during the second half of the 1980s, mainly through ‘black consciousness rap’ performed by Public Enemy, a group imitating the Black Panthers. This rap was inculcated with social realism and criticism. It soon had a foothold on the American west coast, with Los Angeles as the centre of its further emergence. This development needs to be seen against the background of the internal wars between gangs, the police brutality and the dope pushing, some of which provide the most salient themes of gangster rap. Militants such as Public Enemy were eventually surpassed by a street culture that also gave

expression to criticism of injustice in a racist society, but also articulated weapon fetishism, contempt for women and romanticisation of violence. In this context, so-called gangster-rap arose. This form of rap music had, during the late 1990s, a tremendous impact on certain groups of immigrant youth in Sweden, particularly in the metropolitan suburbs. The Hip Hop youngsters in Hammarkullen reflected this attraction to gangster-rap, but were also influenced by the east coast Hip Hop as well as ‘conscious rap’. Their expressions are closely related to what could be seen as a form of post-colonial political agenda.

The currents of migration, processes of marginalisation and patterns of segregation that have profoundly transformed Sweden during the 1990s often show immigration as synonymous with social exclusion. Comparing the Swedish situation with developments in France, the French sociologist Etienne Balibar (1992) denotes these conditions as ‘racism without race’. As we know from youth culture research, cultures developed by the young often make visible antagonisms and conflicts that exist below the surface of society. The immigrant young men I interviewed in ‘Los Angered’, Göteborg, do not expect anything from Swedish society. They are forced to grow up in a society in which ethnic boundaries are inflicted and where social inequality is transformed into cultural difference. The social and cultural logic at work here leads to a sub-cultural resistance that adopts ethnicised forms of appearance (Back 1995). The ghetto-culture poses, jargon and attitudes tend to offer an exclusive counter-identity – for ‘Blackies’ only. Thus young ‘ethnic Swedes’, who have been demoted to second-class citizens by the ‘two-thirds society’ and who are just as excluded as the immigrant youth, find their identity and forms of resistance in cultural expressions with other ethnic overtones and political preferences.

As noted above, in the cultures developed by the young, antagonisms and conflicts that exist beneath the surface are made visible. Thus, the youth culture can be likened to a seismograph. The young immigrants living in big-city suburbs are, in many ways, themselves invisible, in spite of the fact that they create expressive cultures. Segregation has deported them to demarcated reservations where contact with the surrounding society is limited. In this context, music and other cultural forms of expression are important. Culture endows an individual with the opportunity to give form to, and work through, his or her situation, not least because it creates the conditions for self-understanding and makes possible the development of collective strategies. Culture is also a channel through which a person’s situation can be communicated to others and which makes the terms of one person’s life visible to the rest of society. An important aspect of the work to break up the patterns of segregation is to offer young people in these areas – immigrants as well as Swedes, young men as well as young women – the opportunity to define themselves and thereby create arenas where they can expose themselves and formulate demands and critique of contemporary societal and cultural conditions.

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