

90 | engendering 'race' in calls for diasporic community in Sweden

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abstract

This article argues that theorists of black/African diasporas should interrogate the specific ways in which 'race' is used to engage people in diasporic projects, and that such projects are intimately intertwined with specifically gendered, sexualized, and generational class relations and positionalities in specific national contexts and spaces. Attention to these intersections can help us better understand hierarchies of power between and among diasporic individuals and communities. This article focuses on historically specific Swedish meanings of racialized femininities and the different forms of agency women use to negotiate the gendered processes of racialization they encounter in a variety of settings and sources. It draws on interviews and fieldnotes conducted between 1994 and 2007, together with analysis of popular culture (music and radio programmes) and ethnographic material collected by Swedish ethnologist Viveca Motsieloa, and maps out some of the complexities utilized by different generations of Swedish women of African heritage in a changing Swedish landscape of racial formations. Their negotiations show how tensions and differences between 'second-generation' migrants and those of the 'first generation' are expressed *through* gender, sexuality, and differing understandings of 'race' (and the place of 'racial mixture').

keywords

racialized femininities; black and African diasporas; intersectionality; Sweden

introduction

In his much cited re-working of Lèopold Senghor's notion of *décalage*, Brent Edwards (2001) provocatively suggests that difference is an integral part of the structure of diaspora. Working against an effort to smooth out the wrinkles of a metaphorical and unifying diasporic cloth, viewing diaspora through this lens means paying close attention to its unevenness, gaps, and translations, and seeing them instead simultaneously as points of linkage and individuation within a larger whole.

This article aims to add similar complexity to simplistic calls for a 'Black Europe' by reminding us of the importance of *décalage*, focusing in particular on the role that 'race', but also gender, generation, and sexuality, plays as articulations and translations of black/African diaspora in the Swedish context. I suggest that in order to better understand how power is reproduced in diaspora, researchers can greatly benefit from integrating an intersectional perspective into their work (Lorde, 1984; Hill Collins, 1990; Essed, 1991; Crenshaw, 1994; de los Reyes *et al.*, 2002). An intersectional understanding of power reveals some of the hierarchies and other forms of power that are simultaneously enacted and negotiated between different diasporic communities positioned in specific nations (Brah, 1996; Nassy Brown, 1998, 2005; Campt, 2002, 2005). For example, specific enactments of 'race' can also enact heterosexuality and normative masculinities and femininities, and inform how specific individuals choose or choose not to experience, 'respond to', or make their own 'calls' to black and/or African diaspora in the Swedish context. As such, 'racialized' social practices also invoke hierarchies that have to do with gender, sexuality, generation, and class (Ali, 2003; Wekker, 2006; Campt, 2006). The negotiation of difference is the source of some of the perceived 'wrinkles' in diaspora, but also that which allows for connection and community. Not surprisingly, in the discussion that follows, negotiating difference within diaspora is also intimately tied to the negotiation of hierarchy and power.

Stuart Hall's (1996) notion of 'hailing' as a process of interpellation best describes the practice of diaspora. Engaging a Gramscian notion of interpellation, Hall suggests that as people are 'hailed' (called) to community they also exert a degree of agency to the extent that they can choose whether or not to 'invest' in (engage/respond to) such calls and representations of belonging and community. In these powerful moments of 'call and response', individuals participate in specific modes of translation in specific contexts, time periods, and encounters that can be seen both in everyday spheres of cultural production and in the narratives produced by individual men and women (Ibrahim, 2004; Wright, 2004; Campt, 2005).

Specific conceptualizations of 'race' play an important role in how individuals are both 'hailed' and 'hail' others to black/African diasporas. Indeed, a process of

décalage has had both an unsettling and a unifying role in many of the 'calls' to diasporic community being enunciated in European contexts (Gilroy, 1993, 2004; Nassy Brown, 1998; Campt, 2002). As I will show, in the Swedish context it is sometimes difficult to tease apart the terms black and African. 'Calls' to belonging are often coded with symbols and references that signify an imagined space and/or geopolitical entity of 'Africa'. At other times, belonging is based on understandings of blackness that are not so much tied to a national or geographical space, but relate instead to an experience of racialization as black and/or commodified mass media images circulating transnationally that 'speak' or articulate this experience – articulations that often reference Black America. Although there are clearly tensions between the terms black and African, they are frequently formulated together in this article as 'black/African' in order to mark a blurriness that is often equally characteristic of their lived reality, particularly in the Swedish context. Nevertheless, one of the main points of this article is to highlight the significant tensions and distinctions made between them. These are tensions that have to do with particular understandings of gender, sexuality, class, and 'race', but also the less well-researched issue of the impact of racial mixture in diasporic formation. As we will see, the narratives of some of the racially mixed Swedes cited in this essay suggest that processes of racialization in the Swedish context often function through implicit and explicit notions of non-whiteness, in ways that frequently render racially mixed Swedes of African descent 'black by default'.

My analysis draws on ethnographic interviews and research (Sawyer, 2000, 2002) conducted between 1994 and 2007, combined with an analysis of popular culture (music and radio programmes) and additional ethnographic material collected by Swedish ethnologist Viveca Motsieloa (1999, 2001). Taken together, this material suggests that in the Swedish context what has been called 'Black Europe' must be conceptualized in relation to both differences within specific European nation-states and differences between European nations. The significant body of scholarly research on black and African diasporas generated from within a US context has unintentionally resulted in an overrepresentation of the Americas in African Diaspora Studies, as well as a frequent reproduction of US formulations of the experience of 'race' in the study of community formation and identity. As researchers, we need to be mindful not to miss the 'gaps in translation' that Tina Campt (2005) so eloquently theorizes – gaps that can occur when different meanings of blackness are brought into contact with each other and hierarchies are invoked, which obscure the impact of other power matrices (such as class, gender, sexuality, generation, and national context) on how people envision community and belonging (cf. Nassy Brown, 1998; Ali, 2003). While North American understandings of 'race' play an integral role in how calls to black and African diasporic community are negotiated in the Swedish context, 'race' is nevertheless experienced in intersectional frameworks and configurations. Thus, one of the primary goals of this article is to map some of the gendered and

generational articulations of black/African diasporas emerging within the Swedish context, and to highlight the importance of difference therein.

Sweden: 'a place without race'

What is perhaps most significant to understanding calls for black community in Sweden is the extent to which Sweden is a national context that, in the post-war period, has built its self-image at least in part on being a country without 'race' (Pred, 2000). A particularly high moral purchase was ascribed to Swedishness as an 'exceptional' nation, where racism was until recently linked to the violence of skinheads and extremists and the problem of 'other' nations and places (Sawyer, 2000). **In this context, power has been hegemonically conceptualized more often in terms of culture, ethnicity, class, and gender rather than 'race', and it is only since the late 1990s that the terms racialization and post-colonialism have found limited acceptance within academic circles and analyses** (Molina, 1997; de los Reyes and Kamali, 2005; Groglopó and Ahlberg, 2006; Sawyer and Kamali, 2006).

Yet while Sweden has made efforts since World War II to link itself to discourses of solidarity, internationalism, and colour blindness, **paradoxically it remains a country that also continues to be understood abroad as, if not perhaps the whitest of nations, then at least a place with quite a lot of white people** (Sawyer, 2000; Mattsson, 2005). Yet, this is not only a racialized national construction, but also an explicitly gendered one. **Blond hair, blue eyes, and pale skin have been imbued with particular meanings not only of whiteness, but also as 'exemplary' traits of female beauty** based on deeply rooted sexist and racist couplings that posit Swedishness and Scandinavian/Nordic ancestry in binary and hierarchical opposition to Africanness and blackness – conceptions that were cemented in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such **gendered inscriptions of Swedishness with whiteness came not only from abroad but also from within the nation itself, as integral to Swedish modernization and the creation of 'The People's Home'**.¹ For example, the Swedish State Institute for Racial Hygiene (established in 1922) gave legitimacy to ideas of racial hygiene and inheritance, which had far-reaching and specifically gendered repercussions for Swedish population and reproductive policy (Broberg and Tydén, 1991).² In Sweden, from the early 1940s to the 1970s, it was largely poor, uneducated women viewed as having 'deviant sexualities' who were sterilized as part of a social engineering project aimed at eugenically oriented social transformation (Broberg and Tydén, 1991). Between 1935 and 1974 over 60,000 Swedes were sterilized; in particular people who were categorized as 'insufficient', 'imbecile', 'deviant', and a 'burden to society', categories that included those who were racially mixed, single mothers with multiple children, and 'travellers' (Zaremba, 1999). Set in relation to the size of the total national population, according to

1 The People's Home is a central concept tied to the Social Democratic Party's history, which emerged in the mid-1900s and describes political goals of, among other things, a welfare society.

2 In 1922, Sweden became the first country in the world to establish such an institute. It was supported by all major political parties.

3 Biological meanings of 'race' were an integral part of Swedish colonial history and the establishment of hierarchies of 'civility' and 'incivility'. In particular, the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology focused the majority of their resources on studying the indigenous Sami (as well as Finns) living in the northern region of the country by measuring and comparing skulls with those from 'Swedes.'

4 The most well-known person is *Adolph Ludvig Gustaf Albrecht Couschi*, otherwise known as 'Badin'. Born on the island of St Croix in 1747, a then Danish colony, he was 'given' to the Swedish Queen

these statistics only Nazi-Germany had a higher percentage of forced sterilizations (Lindquist, 1991).³

Another example of such gendered understandings of 'race' is the 1930s discourse on 'A and B people', which, according to Ylva Habel (2002), promoted an ideal female Swedish body, 'the girl with platinum hair' and the beauty of Greta Garbo. These discourses valorized blond hair colour in particular as a bodily marker of normative (white) femininity (Habel, 2002: 76–77). The valorization of blond hair and blue eyes as indicative of a privileged form of whiteness could also be seen in Swedish beauty pageants, where the 'Swedish blond and blue-eyed type' emerged as an important discourse in Miss Sweden competitions from the 1950s onwards (Mattsson and Pettersson, 2006). Here, specific convergences of hair and eye colour as ideal 'feminine bodies' signified not only whiteness, but an idealized respectable and middle class femininity (*ibid.*: 288–289).

While emerging biological meanings of race normalized and linked whiteness with specific gendered understandings of Swedishness in new ways in the twentieth century, images of black people were, not surprisingly, fairly limited and stereotypic. Yet, despite the absence of large numbers of Swedish citizens of African heritage prior to the 1960s, multiple meanings of Africanness and blackness have circulated in Sweden for some time. These images constitute a potent 'colonial library' (Said, 1978) that provide ambiguous, though nevertheless accessible, 'calls' to black/African community that are clearly reflected in the writings of missionaries, travelogues (Gustafsson Reinius, 2005), and illustrated children's books and textbooks (Palmberg, 2000). Swedish international 'development' aid discourses have also been significant in shaping a shifting catalogue of often paternalistic and later more masculine and heroic understandings of Africa and African liberation struggles (cf. Palmberg, 2000; Eriksson Baaz, 2005). Furthermore, representations of and writings about artists and musicians such as Josephine Baker (Habel, 2005) and Louis Armstrong (Fornäs, 2004) have also contributed to a construction of blackness that was intimately aligned with discourses of primitivism, exoticism, and sexuality. Yet, what is consistent in this imagery of blackness and Africanness is a stereotypical image of a racial and sexual 'Other' against which conceptualizations of (normalized) Swedish masculinity and femininity were constructed. At the same time, it is important to point out that while there have been individual black people who migrated voluntarily or forcibly to Sweden in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth centuries, their resistances, histories, and constructions of alternative meanings of blackness and self are at present an important part of Swedish history still waiting to be documented.⁴

racialization as a gendered experience

Although the body is a racial signifier of major proportions in the West, the bodily markers themselves are cultural and historical rather than being plain to the naked eye.

(Nassy Brown, 2005: 125)

While this article attempts to foreground gender and sexuality as important to diasporic formation, it also suggests that generation is equally significant. Age and generation influence how the everyday is engaged and experienced, and highlight the fact that the everyday is also a changing landscape where global as well as national, economic, and political events and discourses shape the 'diasporic resources' (Nassy Brown, 1998) available to members of these social groups. Diasporic resources include the specific images and symbols of black/African community circulating in the media – resources that can be strategically used (or not) as tools by people to create community and alternative understandings of self.

What I refer to as 'first-generation' Swedes of African heritage are a group of individuals born in the 1950s and 1960s who were most often the children of Swedish women and African American and/or Caribbean musicians or sailors, or 'mixed race' children adopted from the US.⁵ What this generation shares is the experience of growing up in white communities surrounded by the Swedish families of their white mothers and frequently with little or no contact with children who looked like themselves. Yet, what is also a common element of many of the narratives of women of the first generation are stories of being 'educated' in the meaning of bodily difference in a 'colour-blind' Sweden of the 1960s and 1970s. They describe the experience of learning that particular aspects of their bodies were markers of racial difference, as well as gendered and sexual difference. Mila, a woman now in her late 30s and a child of a white Swedish mother and Barbadian father, recounts in 2006 her experience of growing up in Sweden as follows:

People rarely talked about my skin and when they did it was uncomfortable, like 'ohhhh you are brown'. But my hair was different. People would reach out on the bus to touch my afro hair when I was little! And as a child there's not so much you can do...you just take it. It's an offence to a person's dignity really...it's almost like they reached out and touched my breast! And even if I am now an adult, I can see sometimes in their eyes they would still touch my hair if they only dared (laughs)! ...I was the only one who looked like me in my family and I wanted my mother's long blond hair so badly.

Like many of the stories told to me by my informants, Mila described growing up in 1970s Sweden as a time when the 'brownness' of her skin and her 'afro hair' marked her as different not only from other children (in her case, in the rural community in which she grew up) but also in her own family. Whereas skin colour seemed a taboo topic, she describes how people remarked on her hair and wanted to touch it, comparing this to the forms of violation she might experience if someone touched her breasts. Here, the social practice of marking racial difference is experienced by Mila as also a sexual violation made possible because of her youth. Indeed, it is age and her status as an adult that now protects her from this practice. While differences of skin colour are taboo, hair is described as a more 'speakable' marker of not only perceived racial, but also

Lovisa at the age of eight and grew up in the Swedish royal palace (Wikström, 1971). Many stories as well as songs circulated about 'Badin' during the 1800s, whose given name Badin derives from the word joker and fool (Pred, 2004: 7). Alex Frank Larsens' 2005 documentary *Relatives of Slaves (Slavarnas släkt)*, described Denmark's slave history and asks the question of what happened to the hundreds and possibly thousands of slaves brought to Denmark. Denmark was up until 1848 one of the world's largest slave nations and little is known of the experiences of those individuals and their descendants. One exception are members of the Zamore family, who are found in Sweden and Denmark (Skåne) and who have traced their ancestry from Karl XIII's hovman, a former Danish slave (Larsmo, 2005).

5 There are no official statistics on how many people are included in this category. This is because Statistics Sweden does not register people by ethnicity or 'race' but instead does so by the categories of nationality and birthplace. Since 1998 there are statistics on parents' nationality and birthplace; however, it is problematic to map meanings of 'race' onto these terms.

gendered and feminine difference. As we will see, hair is a recurring marker of racialized femininity and of particular significance for many women of African heritage as they experience and negotiate diaspora (cf. Ifekwunigwe, 1999; Ali, 2003; Byrd and Tharps, 2001; Kawesa, 2006). Mila's narrative also points out some of the paradoxes of the normative power of whiteness during this time period. For while skin colour and hair texture were remarked upon and evaluated in relation to whiteness, they were seldom used to designate a specific 'racially mixed' subjectivity. In this sense 'mixed race' does not mark a distinctive category of difference characterized by mediation or ambiguity; it functions instead as a generationally inflected national discourse of colour blindness that these women must necessarily navigate in ways that define and construct their experiences of what it means *not* to be white in Sweden, as well as the cultural fiction of either colour blindness or racial neutrality.

In her 2001, semi-autobiographical Swedish radio documentary 'To see that which is not seen', Viveca Motsieloa describes the importance of generation and context to the engendering of racial meanings in ways that directly parallel the comments of Mila cited above. She recounts that in her own childhood she was exposed to few and almost only stereotypical images of black 'painted children' in school songbooks, and tells of her discomfort in music class singing lyrics such as, 'the Hottentots sneak forward' – lyrics that gave her what she describes as a 'feeling of being invisible'. Like Mila, Motsieloa stresses the link between 'race' and gender:

I remember how I felt invisible when I read the 'girl's magazines' like *Frida*, where in the hair and makeup tips section they confirmed my feeling of being outside by excluding blacks as well as portraying a European beauty ideal.

(Motsieloa, 1999: 1)

Motsieloa paints a 1980s Swedish landscape devoid of images of blacks, and describes her experience of rejecting available images of (white) femininity because they were exclusionary of black physical features and reproduced an ideal she did not identify with. The absence of black and African people and representations as points of identification during childhood is an important theme in many of the interviews and narratives from the first generation. Their memories of their past emphasize a lack of images that reflect and affirm them as members of Swedish society and as persons of African heritage. At the same time, generation and time period are equally important in this context. This generation also describes how the mass media provided them with alternative positive images in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, one woman in Motsieloa's documentary radio programme describes how, in the 1980s, she 'looked around for other people with similar hair' and asked herself 'what do I have in common with all the dark skinned people in the world?' She goes on to say that African American actors and musicians, such as Eddie Murphy, Whoopi Goldberg, and Prince, were important figures through which she could engage her own

diasporic belonging and construct more positive meanings of herself as a person of African heritage.

The acclaimed television adaptation of Alex Haley's book 'Roots' was named by several people as significant to their self-understandings. For example, one woman in Motsieloa's radio documentary describes how after 'Roots' aired on Swedish television she was often called Kunta Kinte at school, and Motsieloa herself states that after seeing the programme she concluded: 'I was more like the slaves than the slave-owners'. She describes the programme as a potent 'call' to a more political understanding and identification of 'race' and her own African heritage. Indeed, many of my informants described how the media, and North American television and films in particular, were critical diasporic resources for them in the 1980s. For some of them these resources became important tools for re-creating a sense of self that affirmed their African heritage, particularly in relation to perhaps the most loaded marker of 'racial' difference in the Swedish context – hair. Matilda, in her 40s and the child of a Tanzanian father and white Swedish mother, described how in the 1980s there were few television programmes about the civil rights movement, but after seeing a programme on Angela Davis '[I] held my head up high and started wearing my hair out in an afro. Today [2007] it is in fashion and no big deal, but then I was the first in my town!'

Despite the fact that in the late 1970s, it was primarily North American images of black people and cultural forms that began to appear in Sweden via the media, these images nevertheless functioned as ambiguous yet accessible 'calls' to black diasporic community. For example, Moa (a woman in her 40s and the child of a white Swedish woman and a Caribbean father) commented in 2005 that such media images often made her feel *inadequate* as a black person growing up.

I was just a little skinny girl with big hair, and African Americans were cool and hip, and Angela Davis had her Afro, and black people were shouting on TV that they were black and proud. But I was a teenage *mulatto* alone in the South of Sweden with no one to support me. I always feel like I am not really black enough when I look at African Americans.

To Moa, the black community portrayed on TV were adults who were cognizant of and connected to other black people – individuals with collective and communally defined interests and activism. Thus, despite the fact that she shared the physical markers of 'big hair', her age and isolation distinguished her from these images, and also consequently this community. In this way, age and race/skin colour were paradoxically not enough in her eyes to qualify her as belonging to the community portrayed in African American TV images. For her, these television images of black femininity were read as distinctly American, and their specificity thus rendered them insufficient 'calls' to black diasporic community. At the same time, these images provided some of her scarcest and most valued diasporic resources.

Interestingly, while Matilda remembers media images of Angela Davis and hair styling in particular as useful tools in her own racial self-fashioning, for Moa these images made her feel 'inadequate', and they did not facilitate her capacity to bridge different understandings of 'race' as a criterion for diasporic belonging. Instead, her use of the term *mulatto* to describe herself seems to mark an unbridgeable distance from the cultural and political mobilization of African Americans. The distinctively Swedish aspects of femininity with which she identified emerged later in her narrative, when she spoke of dating men later as an adult:

I'm not the blond, blue-eyed Swedish woman type, but I am Swedish inside and out. And when the guys begin to say I am exotic, I have to remind them that, 'Hey I'm a Swedish girl. Now remember that, and don't be naughty!' (laughs)

Here Moa describes how she experienced and negotiated potent bodily markers historically linked to an idealized (white) feminine 'type' at an everyday level. She suggests that her body is 'read' as non-white and thus 'exotic' by men, and that such a reading implies (hetero)sexual looseness, a lack of respectability, and ultimately challenges her status as Swedish. In these moments, her assertions of her Swedishness seem tied to notions of 'living up to' her own conceptions of normative ideals of white femininity that are also deeply intertwined with respectability. Moa's apparent rejection of 'calls' to a black/African diasporic community and her investments in Swedishness are intimately bound up not only with 'race' but also with gender and sexuality, for she later describes the complete absence of people of African heritage in her life. Here, her use of the term *mulatto* suggests not only a distancing from alienating images of black femininity, but also a particularly gendered and racial subjectivity aligned with Swedishness and consequently white femininity.

Yet, this is not the only strategy for understanding oneself as a racialized and gendered subject. Other informants describe how more positive black/African diasporic tools were made available to them in larger cities in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, Motsieloa explains that as a teenager, reggae clubs became important places for her to engage with what she saw to be more positive meanings of blackness and Africanness. She describes these as 'places I had a place in', suggesting that these were spaces where she felt no ambivalence about female beauty and femininity, but instead felt included in that which defined them.

The importance of alternative spaces for understanding oneself as not only a racialized but also a gendered subject was also stressed by another informant in 2007. Eva, a woman in her 40s born to a Caribbean father and white Swedish mother, has become an important interlocutor for my own thinking about processes of racialization in Sweden. In what were often comparative and autobiographical conversations, Eva described her coming of age as a process marked by an increasing engagement with the meanings of blackness and Africanness. While Motsieloa spoke of the importance of reggae clubs, Eva (who

belongs to an older generational cohort) described reggae, salsa, soca, Haitian, Dominican, and Afro-Cuban spaces as an important part of her self-affirmation, as she had often felt 'unattractive and like an animal' growing up. Her brown skin, gender, and salsa dancing skills gave her a sense of community, as well as the status of a 'competent' (attractive) woman in these spaces.

For Eva, participation in a broad spectrum of black/African diasporic spaces meant a growing awareness of the performative aspects of black femininity. In her words, there were many different ways of 'living blackness' in these spaces and she moved freely between them. She described her participation in these spaces as a young woman as follows:

The femininity I could 'achieve' was something that was a clear performance. It was, and is for example, crazy high heel shoes and very feminine clothes... Party make-up was totally dramatic... There was clearly a camp dimension to it.

According to Eva, it was and remains the practice of moving between different diasporic spaces and her ability to be competent in these spaces that reveals the learned dimensions of belonging in black/African diasporas. Eva stressed how her ability to move between and 'pass' in *different* diasporic communities reveals the fact that these are not spaces in which to find a 'home', but instead sites where she negotiated different gendered and racialized competencies, performances, and temporary forms of community. Here, her mixed racial heritage presents her with opportunities for connection and belonging in the many different and specific visions of black/African diasporic community being articulated in Sweden during this time.

Eva later stresses the importance of time period and generation (and ageing in particular) to gendered understandings of 'race' in the black/African diasporas. As increasing numbers of Cuban migrants began arriving in Sweden, Spanish became an additional and important competency in these spaces – a competency she does not command. For this reason, she says she no longer feels quite as 'in' as she did in the 1980s. Yet, this is also because in 2007 she experiences herself in these spaces as an older woman, and thus is not invited to dance by men as often as when she was younger. Her experiences remind us of the importance of ageing to femininities in specific diasporic spaces. In these dance club spaces shared heteronormative understandings of age create hierarchies between women that position them differently in relation to both men and women of their own age, as well as to those younger than them. While Motsieloa and Eva both describe how these spaces of African heritage provided them with forms of much-longed-for affirmation as women, it is unclear how 'race' and the politics of blackness actually worked to create hierarchies between women in these sites. For example, it is also possible that, in relation to darker skinned women, their 'racial mixture' and perceived 'non-blackness' provided them with other forms of social currency, value, and/or privilege in these spaces (cf. Thomas, 2004).

stretching the boundaries of blackness

As Motsieloa and Eva both point out, consumption and participation in alternative black/African diasporic music and dance spaces (spaces frequently created by migrants themselves) have been important for engaging alternative meanings of black femininity. Indeed, the emergence of Swedish musicians of both first- and second-generation African heritage, such as Dr Alban, Leila K, Neneh Cherry, Timbuktu, and Jaquee (to name only a few), have been important in changing the image of blackness, Africanness, and perhaps most importantly the public image of *black Swedes* both nationally and internationally. The fact that these entertainers' respective bodily performances portray and re-work black femininity and masculinity in ways that are used both by people of African heritage and by Swedes of many different 'racial' backgrounds suggests the malleability of 'race' for members of the diaspora in Sweden. These artists, each in their own way, incorporate a black *and* African diasporic sensibility in their sound and style to negotiate and expand our understandings of Swedishness.

Timbuktu, for example, the child of an African American father and white American mother, knits together a unique sound based on Ghanaian high life, Black American hip-hop, and Swedish troubadour style. Jaquee, who migrated from Uganda with her family as a teenager, sings about the symbolic violence of slavery and the beauty of her own dark skin colour. Her 2005 debut album, *Blaqalixious*, is a powerful example of *décalage* that serves as both a 'call' and a 'response' to the complexities of black/African diasporas in the Swedish context. As she explained in a recent interview: 'That album was about the feeling of not being seen or heard, of being a *blattetjej* [re-articulation of the derogatory term for immigrant girl]. To always stand between two worlds, not being Swedish but at the same time to "sell your soul" and do things that irritate some immigrants' (Cederskog, 2007: 13).

'Race' in Sweden is itself undergoing a series of shifts, which challenge contemporary research on black and African diasporas that focuses on people of African heritage and assumes a phenotypical definition of blackness. Perhaps more so than in other European countries (for example, Britain, France, or Germany), in Sweden a 1990s conceptualization of blackness as a multi-ethnic term of political solidarity that encompasses a range of migrant, racial, and ethnic groups continues to dominate popular discourse and is visible in an array of social and cultural arenas, from the music scene to political organizations (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2005). Here, shared experiences of economic marginality and racism are central to how the category 'black' is expanded to include migrant Iranian, Polish, Chilean, and Kurdish communities, together with people of African heritage (Ålund, 1991; Serhede, 1996, 2003). For example, some multi-ethnic male youth living in areas of low-income housing in Sweden make use of black diasporic resources such as hip-hop style to fashion alternative

masculinities and positionalities *vis-à-vis* Swedish society, proclaiming that 'blackness is a state of mind' (Serhede, 1996: 19). Here again, media images are important 'diasporic resources' not only for Swedes of African heritage but also for Swedes of migrant backgrounds, who utilize them to create alternative gendered understandings of self and community.

As a criterion of black and African diasporic community, 'race' has become an equally creative and elastic category in some migrant African communities in Sweden. While migrant Africans' 'calls' for diasporic community have gone unheeded by many first-generation Swedes of African heritage, white Swedish women are by comparison a significant part of many African migrant diasporic communities and organizations. Indeed, in Sweden, it is often these women (as both individuals and in group networks) who provide the 'assistance' some African migrants complain they did not receive from the first generation of Swedes of African heritage for negotiating the bureaucratic structures of Swedish society. Yet, the status of white women in these diasporic communities is also shaped by understandings of gender and sexuality that rely on, among other things, white women's (hetero)sexual relations with African migrant men. Similar to the white British mothers of 'black' children described in the work of Jaqueline Nassy Brown (2005) and France Widdance Twine (1999), these women struggle to negotiate the relevance of 'race' and meanings of whiteness, in particular in relation to their families and the communities and societies in which they live.

the second generation and migrant African calls to community

If the women of the 'first generation' of African ancestry describe Swedish society in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s as a social context in which there were specific and often quite limited meanings of blackness and Africanness available as they matured into womanhood, we have also seen that this is a social landscape that was rapidly changing. The limited and often North American media images they accessed were important tools for some young women of this 'first generation'. Yet, additional options also became available with the arrival of larger numbers of African and Caribbean migrants to Sweden in the 1980s, and the diasporic spaces they created.

Beginning in the 1970s with the migration of African and Caribbean students (for example, from Tanzania and Zimbabwe), Ethiopian political asylum seekers, Gambian tourists, and later in the 1990s, when larger numbers of Somali and Congolese refugees arrived, each of these groups brought with them internal class, ethnic, and gender divisions, as well as particular understandings of 'race' as the basis for community (Yamba, 1983; Sawyer, 2002). Parallel to these ethnically based conceptions, a shift also occurred in Swedish discourse. While it

still officially considered itself a colour-blind society, the Swedish government began to embrace cultural difference and multiculturalism, and migrant communities were encouraged to organize around nationality and ethnicity, with most of their activities oriented towards their 'homelands' and/or the integration of migrants into Swedish society. Many agencies organized parties and activities aimed at cultural transmission to youth, and articulated concern over the limited number of positive images of black community and personhood in Sweden. Some migrants created music and dance clubs directed not only towards members of their own ethnic communities but also to the general Swedish and migrant populations interested in reggae, salsa, soca, and African music and dance. It was this form of marketing and consumption that not only signified particular understandings of 'race' but also, as Eva points out, aimed to produce equally specific meanings of gender and sexuality (cf. Sawyer, 2006a, 2006b on African dance).

While the first generation of Swedes of African heritage in the 1980s were 'mixed race' or adopted teenagers and young adults, the newly arrived 'second generation' were frequently adults (and their children). In the 1990s, this generation of migrants entered what quickly became a national context characterized by recession and the rise of explicitly anti-immigrant rhetoric and violence. During this period, Sweden was a society where derogatory racialized terms like immigrant (*invandrare*) and the equally negative terms *svartskalle* (blackskull) and *blatte* (there exists no accurate English translation) were used as markers of social exclusion and to legitimize the placement of non-white migrants in low-wage, low-status, insecure employment. Moreover, for many migrants, and Africans in particular, arrival in Sweden thus entailed a loss of class and educational status, and structural/institutional discrimination in employment, housing, education, and participation in the public and political spheres (Sabuni *et al.*, 2002).

The establishment of this second generation initiated additional 'calls' to diasporic belonging for the first generation – 'calls' that were often based on phenotypical understandings of 'race' and experienced as appeals for inclusion in particular African communities. Henrika, a young woman in her 20s when interviewed in 1995, was adopted from Ethiopia and grew up in a white, middle-class environment with few contacts with other people of African heritage. She described the few encounters she had with Africans as important moments of comparison and reflection on the meaning of the bodily signification of difference (once again symbolized though hair) *vis-à-vis* community and belonging.

It is very seldom that I meet them [African women]... I'm always curious when I'm out in the city. I always wonder what they do to their hair. It is my perpetual question. 'Oh, what have they done?' I say. I just stare, so they wonder if there is something wrong with me. I'm often very embarrassed. Sometimes I nod very carefully. It's more common for black men to nod. I feel like it's wrong in some way, that they think that I have an ugly hair style and that I've betrayed them with my clothing style. [I think] they can't really accept me, the

women. I don't think they really like my attitude. I don't know. It's just something I have started to think. I get embarrassed. I often feel that African women have a much softer posture... I feel aggressive, hard, and masculine when I meet African women.

In this excerpt, Henrika speaks of her encounters with African women and her **shy attempts to offer signs of recognition and commonality based on shared bodily markers**. Once again hair, but also clothing and body posture, are read as gendered markers in her search for an understanding of community. Here, she makes visible a form of black femininity that signifies in Sweden primarily as foreign. Clothing style and body posture are defining characteristics that evoke in Henrika feelings of comparative 'masculinity'. In the end, she describes her feeling that she has **'betrayed' African women, implying that their understandings of community are based on their own enactments of appropriate African femininities**. It is in these moments of encounter with African women that Henrika perceives herself as inhabiting an 'inappropriate' femininity: a more masculine femininity that entails a 'hard' and 'aggressive' body and sexuality that might be understood as lacking respectability in African migrant communities.

Moreover, some second-generation informants expressed frustration with parts of the diasporic community in Sweden they referred to as 'mulattos', 'adoptees', and 'half-castes' (Sawyer, 2000, 2002). They described their sense that their calls for diasporic community were rejected by first-generation African migrants – individuals they considered their potential African diasporic kin. **This lack of investment in migrant Africans' calls for solidarity was often attributed to the 'trauma of abandonment' (by black fathers or parents) experienced by members of the first generation**. Such traumas were often seen as something first-generation migrants held against all other blacks. As Samuel (a Ghanaian migrant in his forties in 1996) said with a bit of sarcasm: **'They're really Swedish. The only difference is they have this *unfortunate* brown skin-colour'**. Here Samuel suggests that the first generation has internalized and reproduced racist and stereotypical understandings of blackness and Africanness held by majority white Swedish society, and thus views their non-white skin colour as a 'misfortune'. As an example of the lack of community with this group, Samuel remarked: 'I look at them on the subway and always nod but they look scared or turn away with their noses up like something smells bad (laughs)! [But] we are all black here and experiencing the same misunderstandings'. Here, gender goes unnamed, and differences of experience and generation, as well as class position among migrants, override what Samuel feels is the shared experience of racism in Swedish society. **While African migrants also describe an equally unsatisfactory level of solidarity between African migrants in Sweden, this disjuncture is instead explained through reference to the common experience of migration and their shared position of marginality and struggles for survival in Sweden**. The first generation, on the other hand, was seen to have received numerous benefits from Swedish society in terms of education, language, and social capital. In Samuel's

view, such resources and advantages should have allowed or equipped them to help their 'African brothers and sisters integrate into Swedish society'.

While Samuel stresses the importance of similar experiences of racism in Sweden, Henrika emphasized that there were also gendered and (hetero)sexual expectations embedded within second-generation 'calls' to specifically *African* diasporic community. Belonging here entailed particular demands on her as a woman – demands that were linked to (hetero)sexuality and sexual reproduction. Henrika cited as an example her encounter with an African migrant (a male ticket agent) in the subway who let her enter for free.

It's nice when someone wants to embrace you in their world. I think it's a nice gesture, in a way. But then there could also be other demands in the bargain that are not so easy to deal with, like [feigning an English African accent] 'You have to learn, you have to learn to speak African, you know. Ah woman, you have got to find yourself an African man'. Excuse me, but I feel Swedish! [Again with an accent] 'No! That cannot be. Oh no, you have to give your roots to the next generation'. It's such a double-edged sword.

In several interviews, first-generation Swedes of African heritage were often seen as not adequately invested in or responsive to migrant Africans' calls for diasporic community. Yet, the shift in Swedish racial formations has also meant that since the 1980s the first generation has also experienced challenges to their sense of belonging in Sweden in ways that were not possible in the 1960s and 1970s. As adults, and with some approaching middle age, this generation is now exposed to different forms of racial discrimination, discussions, and debates about racism in Sweden, as well as to media images of blacks, Africans, and their diasporas in new ways. They provide new tools for (re)thinking blackness and what it is or could mean in their lives.

conclusion

This article has focused on historically specific meanings of racialized femininities for Swedes of African heritage and the different forms of agency women used to negotiate the gendered processes of racialization they encountered in a variety of settings. I have tried to map out some of the complexities utilized by women of different generations of this group in a changing Swedish landscape of racial formations. For several women of the first generation, youth was characterized as a time when bodies and hair in particular were hegemonically perceived not only as racialized but also as gendered and sexual signifiers of difference from normative (white) femininity. In the Swedish context, the limited and often stereotypical images of black people they encountered formed the backdrop of their search, reflections on, and strategies for creating more positive understandings of a gendered self. Media images of America and Black Americans were particularly significant tools used by my

interlocutors to engage and articulate their conceptions of what was often black, rather than an African, diaspora *per se* in a given historical and generational context. These images were often linked to the US and Black America and highlighted resistance to racism, rather than to specific forms of African cultural heritage or liberatory struggles.

Furthermore, media images of Black America (individuals, music, personal style) became more readily available to the first generation during the 1980s through television programmes and news reports that often portrayed Black America in positive tones and coincided with a general progressiveness and the rhetoric of Olof Palme (a former prime minister of Sweden) and international solidarity movements in Sweden during this time. For some of the women in this article, these images provided additional tools through which to constructively engage and evaluate the gendered meaning of 'race'. Later with the arrival of larger numbers of migrants, newer diasporic spaces of more specifically pan-African music and dance emerged and proved equally important for some young women's crafting of alternative racialized femininities. While often focusing on specific African or Caribbean national or regional cultural productions, in the Swedish landscape they were also imbued with meanings of blackness. Yet, encounters with the second generation were not without their tensions, and problems of translation existed for both groups. The power relations that accompany their differential status in migration as well as the gender differences between men and women present formidable gaps to supposedly universal articulations of 'race' as a criterion for diasporic community.

My aim in the preceding discussion has been to argue a simple, yet important point: that theorists of diaspora should interrogate the particularities of how 'race' is used to engage people in diasporic projects, and that such projects are intimately intertwined with specifically gendered, sexualized, class, and generational relations and positionalities in specific national contexts and spaces. Attention to these intersections can help us better understand hierarchies of power between and among diasporic individuals and communities. I have shown how tensions and differences between 'second-generation' migrants and those of the 'first generation' are expressed through gender, sexuality, and differing understandings of race, as well as the complicated role of 'racial mixture' therein. Diaspora is a process of *décalage*, and to understand the moments of its 'unhappy translation' (Edwards 2001: 66), we must be better equipped to engage aspects of difference, power, and hierarchy that result from specific constructions of 'race', but also work in conjunction with our understandings of femininities and masculinities in and across specific contexts.

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author biography

Lena Sawyer is a cultural anthropologist, who has worked since 2000 in the Department of Social Work at Mid Sweden University in Östersund, Sweden. She received her PhD in 2000 from the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz and her dissertation was entitled *Black and Swedish: racialization and the cultural production of belonging in Stockholm*. Sawyer has published articles on gender, 'race', and African dance in Sweden, and was also co-editor (with Masoud Kamali) of an anthology on institutional and structural discrimination within Swedish education settings (2006, *Utbildningens dilemma: Demokratiska ideal och andrafierande praxis*). Her current research focuses on gendered normalization processes within the field of social work. One study analyses Swedish social work university text books and the other, more anthropological study analyses normalization processes within a Swedish state investigation home for 'children in need'. Sawyer has also published shorter essays, on whiteness in academic settings, her family and 'race', and is working on an essay about herself, her grandmother, and her relationship with Einstein.

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