This paper explores the micro-politics of globalization, that is, how abstract and generalizing descriptions of processes of globalization are also a part of the negotiation of cultural identities in everyday encounters. Along with the travel of peoples, goods, and capital, has also come new encounters and negotiations of meaning and power where modern meanings of “race,” geography, and culture, have also necessarily come under reformulation and rearticulation. Questions of who “legitimately” belongs, and what criteria this belonging is based upon, have become hot questions for not only nation-states but also individuals and their local understandings of community and self.

I look at one such reformulation of meanings of Africa and Africans and discuss how the marketing and consumption of “African dance” in Stockholm as a site where meanings of “Africanness” are under negotiation. A goal of the paper is to show how “local” gendered and racialized power relations (and by that I mean the cultural politics of belonging in Sweden and Stockholm), are an integral part of the meanings of Africa and African culture that are produced in these settings. In particular, I will discuss how issues of “authenticity,” and in particular, how criteria such as gender, nationality, and the geographical space of Africa, are used by both instructors and students to negotiate perceived power imbalances between dancers and students. Through listening closely to their narratives it becomes evident that processes of globalization are also an integral part of the Stockholm everyday. Categories of ancestry, gender, biology, “race,” language, religion, territory, and “history”, were used as powerful agents in both the dance students and instructors claims of their own and other belonging to African community of dance.

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1 “African dance” is a non-specific term often used in Sweden to refer most broadly to body movements to (live) drum music. Unfortunately, in many of the dance courses, instructors rarely tell more than where they have learned to dance (in Gambia, in Guinea Bissau, in Kenya, for example), when in fact, instructors are usually basing their instruction on movements they have learned from specific individuals, in specific local contexts (often in African nations, regions, kinship groups, family gatherings and ceremonies) during specific time periods.