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. By “everyday” I mean the encounters and negotiations that occur as people follow their daily life pathways; that is in the “non-spectacular” aspects of life (Essed: 1991). I discuss how the travel of peoples, goods, and capital, has also come new encounters and negotiations of meaning and power. Modern meanings, and in particular, those based on bound 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.

Meanings of “Africa” and “Africans” are not static, but under constant reformulation and change. For example, the criteria used to define concepts such as “Africa”, “Africans”, and “African cultural productions” has been given varied significance by different actors positioned in different locations and time-periods. These are meanings that are not only racialized, but also gendered and sexed. Perhaps most well known are the ways that black African men and women’s bodies have long been a foil onto which Western capitalist longings for a different self, culture, and nation have been projected (Gilman 1985; Morrison 1992; Roedriger 1991; Sawyer 2000). At different historical periods, geographical locations, and cultural contexts normative understandings of “Europe” and “European men and women” have been reflected upon a mirror of an imaged “Africa” and “Africans.” These historical imaginings of an African “Other” have been used to legitimate power imbalances, privilege, and exclusion.

This paper looks at one such reformulation of meanings of Africa and Africans. I discuss how the marketing and consumption of “African dance” in Stockholm is a site where meanings of “African culture” 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.

Methods used for this research are anthropological participant observation and open and closed tape-recorded interviewing techniques. The interviews cited in this paper were conducted as a portion of a larger Ph.D. research project on Swedishness, racism, and Black diasporic identities in Stockholm (Sawyer 2000). As one part of my dissertation fieldwork during 1995-6 I participated in

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.
three different introductory and intermediate level “African” dance courses offered in Stockholm, with
two different instructors. I conducted formal tape-recorded interviews with both instructors (2) as well
as 10 of the female dance students. I also spoke informally with double as many dance instructors,
drummers, and students and took extensive fieldnotes during and sometimes after our discussions. The
interviews were analyzed through using a thematic content analysis where I looked at the
categories that informants invoked in relation to my own questions about why African dance has
become a popular dance form in Sweden.

In urban centers of Europe such as Stockholm, neo-liberal ideas that have come with
economic and political globalization have gouged welfare state benefits and created a Swedish
employment culture increasingly driven by policies of “flexible employment” and workplace
“restructuring.” These policies have also produced negative social effects upon men and women in
Stockholm, the 1990s has seen an increase in women’s stress and employment “burn –out” as they try
to balance the pressures of maintaining a career in a gender segregated employment market and family
life. For those men and women who bear the additional categorization as “immigrant” in Sweden
migration to Europe has not often brought the economic security and acceptance sought, instead, many
encounter not only a gender segregated employment market but also one that is racialized.
Alternative employment, status, and advancement strategies are often taken: for example, to study, to
migrate, and/or find employment in the informal economy.

It is within this racialized and gendered employment market that the African dance courses
discussed in this paper should be placed, they are just one of the small alternative economic “cultural”
niches created by African men in Stockholm the last 20 years. As a group Africans3 in Stockholm
experience relatively high unemployment, and when employed, they tend to find employment
overwhelmingly in low-paid service sector positions (as cleaners, public transportation, and in elder
care) (Sabune & Sawyer 2001). Yet compared to other “immigrant groups”, such as the numerically
larger groups of Iranians, Finns, and Greeks who live in Stockholm, African cultural productions are
markedly visible in the city of Stockholm. In the last 10 years, one can read shop signs around town
This public scene is also gendered, with mostly African men dominating in the discotheques and as
organizers of festivals, dance and drum courses, and African women as entrepreneurs in the sale of
food, hair, and clothing. Hence, it should be pointed out that this paper takes up just one
of these
public African scenes – the African dance courses.

Cultural Studies theorist Jackie Stacey in Global Culture, Global Nature (2000) analyzes the
marketing, and consumption of “non-Western” cultures by Westerners in what she aptly terms the
“cultural supermarket.” In this argument consumption makes globalization possible and in such
“cultural supermarkets” non-threatening images of “cultural Others” (and their food, dance, and
Traditions), are displayed through particular, and often feminine, products. According to Stacey,
whose work looks at the British context, these consumption patterns are decidedly gendered (117-
118). For example, she discusses how self-help books and products provide Western women with the
possibility for a self-transformation that is interwoven with ideas of “global cultures” and their
connections to “nature.” In her analysis there is a clear coupling between “global cultures” (i.e. “Third
World” cultures) and “nature” in the products offered in Western “cultural supermarkets.” This can be
seen in advertisements’ portrayals of “non-Western” people’s in nature settings (in jungles, near
oceans, on mountain-tops) as well as the accompanying texts that promise relaxation, harmony and
balance through consuming the product.4 The consumption of such items are analyzed by Stacey as a
way for Westerner’s to negotiate their ambivalence to Modernity’s promise of Progress,
Individualism, and Science (now firmly linked with capitalism and technology).

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2 I have translated all Swedish interviews into English.
3 In this paper when I refer to Africa, I am referring to what is often called “Black Africa”, that is, sub-Saharan Africa. The
reason for this distinction is that many Africans themselves often make a distinction between Arab northern Africa and Black
Africa, and because I believe that the stereotyped racialized and sexualized images associated with Black peoples though
overlapping with stereotypes of Arab Africans, are distinct.
4 See for example Body Shop images as well as Lipton Tea’s marketing brochures associated with TCHAE. In the Lipton Tea
advertisement a single, white, women are portrayed as walking alone on the shores of a beach. She has white, flowing
clothes on, and the words under her read “A more calm way to live.”
Michel Foucault (1995) has written extensively about the ways that political and economic projects are intimately tied with the body; in particular he describes how modern bodies were created by modern discourses of self and sexuality. Addressing the Swedish context, Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren (1987) describe how Swedish modernization in the last century also focused on the individual body as a way to re-shape the nation and its citizens into modern subjects—body movement and comportment all became evidence of class and national belonging. Yet writers such as Ann Stoller (1995), Anne McClintock (1995) and Floya Anthias & Nira Yuval-Davis (1993) have argued that modernity and the creation of modern identities cannot be fully understood without placing it in a post-colonial context where gender, race, and sexuality have informed divergent projects of nation and the creation of national subjectivities. For example, Vron Ware (1992) Floya Anthias & Nira Yuval-Davis (1993) describe how racialized and gendered understandings of Africans and African sexuality have been used to discipline and control white women and their sexuality. As such white women have been important markers and protectors of the ethnic group/and or national boundaries, and their sexuality an important boundary against “pollution.”

Globalization theorist Jackie Stacey (2000) suggests that one way that Modernity, as a society of “risks and harms,” is negotiated in Western industrialized centers is through imagined contact and embodying of people and cultures imagined as not modern, those who are imagined to be Traditional and “natural.” This desire for contact with nature and the natural can be traced in the Swedish context to late 1800s industrialization and the new bourgeois class’ interest in nature (Frykman and Löfgren 1987). As the following example shows, this was a nature that was not only gendered but at the same time raced and culturalized. Swedish city writer Ludvig “Lubbe” Nordström describes his time with Swedish coastal fishers in 1907 by saying:

And the lazy city females came down to look at us. They asked about everything, standing in a line on the jetty in the blazing sun. ‘And isn’t it dangerous out at sea, when a storm blows up? And isn’t it cold to lie out in the boat?’ And they looked at the local girls and at me. At my naked, tanned, and hairy breast, which glittered like an African’s under my open shirt. And the eyes of the pale city females shone; the glistening water, the boat, and we fisherfolk were mirrored in their moist eyes, and the corners of their mouths watered, the saliva coated their teeth as in anticipation of a good meal. Those city females, those city females! (My emphasis, Nordström 1907:61 as cited in Frykman and Löfgren 1987: 54)

Here, “lazy” Swedish city women drool and their eyes become moist at the vision of bodies in nature. In this example, through contact with working people whom he calls “fisherfolk,” Lubbe describes himself as similar to an African. His language is not only gendered, but racialized and sexualized; for example, the city women are pale and longing, the workers brown and sweating, and “Lubbe,” now resembling an African with hairy visible breasts, imagines himself as vital and desired.

Barbara Browning (1998) writes that African culture and African dance in particular has long been an important tool used by Westerners to question and critique Western society and life. In particular, it is the embodied quality of sensuality that is attached to Africanness, and she argues that African dance is perceived as sensual in the West just because it is sensuality and sexuality that are qualities that Western societies vilify and reject. Yet, and perhaps just because of this, it is this sensuality that is secretly desire (7). Indeed, as many Foucauldian inspired writers have pointed out, sexuality and the creation of normative and deviant sexualized identities was central to European modernity yet interestingly, for Browning there are positive counter hegemonic aspects to the characterization of African cultural forms as sensual and sexual. Here they refashion meanings of Africa and Africans as "infectious" and "a pathogen" and in these moments, instead, it is Western society that is "sick" (7).

II

Dance courses in Stockholm are almost exclusively taught by West African men; and Gambians in particular. Yet, the explanation as to why just this group has been most active in teaching African dance (and drum) to a mostly female, Swedish and Finnish, working class clientele can be found in the work of anthropologist Bawa Yamba (1983; and with Ulla Wagner 1986) who discuss Gambian (male) migration in relation to other Africans migration to Sweden in the last 40
years. In comparison to the East Africans who came with grants associated with Swedish development projects, African-American war resisters and jazz musicians, South African and Namibian activists, and Liberian students who came in the 60s and 70s, Yamba suggests that the Swedish political and social climate that greeted the Eritrean and Gambian migrants later in the 1980s differed significantly (1983: 30-31). If the climate was, according to Yamba, "friendly" and the Africans "studious" in the 70s, in the 80s, Sweden was in recession and the Eritrean's who came were political refugees (Yamba 30-31), forced to flee their country due to war, and the Gambians young boys who saw Sweden as an "El Dorado" (Wagner and Yamba 1986: 202). According to Yamba (1983) this made for markedly different encounters with Swedish society for the two groups, as Eritrean’s, classified as "political refugees", received a variety of resources and economic support by the Swedish state, whereas the Gambians, as holders of three-month visas, received no assistance (paraphrased from Yamba, 30-31).

For Gambian men then, one of the ways to stay in Sweden was to quickly "get attached" to a Swedish woman (Wagner and Yamba 1986). It is likely that economic and social vulnerability explain why just this group has, since the 1980s, has been central in the marketing of African dance (and drum) courses in Stockholm. Gabriel, a Gambian man in his 40s who was then unemployed linked the economic vulnerability of Africans in Sweden with the dance courses they offered in Stockholm. He said:

If you are an African, one way to survive is to teach African dance or drum, it doesn't matter if you have never danced professionally or trained at home under someone! Here you can teach them (Swedes) anything and even say you are a 'Masta'...they (Swedes) will think it is African tradition just because a black is doing it. (August 3, 1995)

His description speaks of the difficult time that many Africans, in particular Gambians, have on the Swedish job market. In order to gain employment, Gabriel suggests that some African men re-make themselves into musicians and dancers and benefit from racial stereotypes of musicality and sensuality associated with their bodies.

Barkary, a Gambian dance instructor in his 40s who had taught in Stockholm for the last ten years, also described his involvement in African dance courses as linked to Swedish cultural politics. He suggested that his job as a teacher was not only about economic exchange (he worked as a subway driver), but also about the transformation of meanings of Africa. He invoked racialization, culture, and power inequalities when he said:

I think you become a victim of discrimination and segregation if you don't have a strong self-confidence. I am proud of who I am. When someone looks at me as a Black man I am proud. But when someone comes on the street and says 'you are black!' you become irritated, because he is thinking black is something negative. And this is very serious and important. And this is one of the reasons I am not leaving African dance. You know I drive a subway, for 12 years, and that is how I live. But I won't leave African dance. One of the main reasons [I teach African Dance] is to maintain my culture, to spread it out, so people can learn. 'YES! We [Africans] are here! And you should be proud!' (May 6, 1996)

Both Gabriel and Barkary description of African dance is framed with a discourse of racialization and marginalization. Within these frames African dance is not only about economic exchange, but also the redefinition of meanings integral to Africans sense of self and belonging in Stockholm. For Barkary, the instruction of African dance in Stockholm contains the possibility of redeeming Africans and African culture from degrading Western, and Swedish, meanings.

That dance is linked to cultural politics is not new. A plethora of studies on the social and political meaning of specific dances are available (for example Burt 1998; Kisliuk 1998; Daly 1995; and Browning 1995). For example, Barbara Browning (1995) describes samba as a dance of the "body articulate", a speaking body (39). According to Browning: "Samba narrates a story of racial contact, conflict, and resistance, not just mimetically across a span of musical time, but synchronically, in the depth of a single measure" (39). For Browning the sambista's dance is a dance that “speaks” the
tabooed language of “race” and racism in Brazil (54). Works on dance in indigenous African societies also often highlight political aspects of dance and its potential to “speak” the unspoken (for example, Kisliuk 1998; Ajayi 1998). For example, dance in African societies is analyzed as an important educational tool for children that stresses traditional patterns in relationships and standards of conduct. Characterizing African dance, Peggy Harper (1997), describes how dance is related to group belonging that exhibits status and is “a vividly changing arena where social critique, aggression and opposition are expressed and managed” (394). Within a wide variety of cultures and movement patterns in sub-Saharan Africa, specific dances and music are related to certain status, age, and occupation groups. She says “In all African cultures, dance is an expression of social organization in that it differentiates and defines the roles of individuals, sexes, and groups within a society” (394).

III

Marketed to a specifically urban clientele in many European cities such as Paris, London, and Barcelona, as well as in cities in North America, dances such as Salsa, Tango, “Oriental,” and African have become a popular form of entertainment and exercise during the last 10-15 years. Consumers of these dances are mostly women living in industrialized urban cities. In Stockholm Sweden African dance emerges as a marketed, consumable product of leisure; a product that promises not only sensory and bodily pleasures, but a shift in the self as well.

If the dance instructors were generally West African men in their 20s-early 40s, students were on the majority white Swedish or Finnish women (there were also a few Latin American women), ranging from their 20s to 50s. These are women who had experienced some of the negative side effects of globalization and economic restructuring in the 1990s; some of them where on full or part time sick leave, with “burn out” and stress symptoms and unable (or unwilling) to participate in paid work. Some were employed though, and in a variety of fields; one was lawyer, another a journalist, yet the majority worked in the women dominated service sector in childcare, nursing, dental hygiene, the post office, and social work. Some of the women were single mothers and a few (also) university students. While some of the course participants had long histories of involvement in Stockholm's public African scene and were members of an African cultural organization, and/or frequented African discotheques, for others, these classes served as an entry into the "African scene" in Stockholm. Participation in the courses often led the students to become more interested in "things African". They would later venture out to one of the discotheques with classmates, and perhaps even interact socially with African men. As such these spaces were both border zones that were “safe spaces” of sexualized contact between white women and black men; women were in the role of students who would wear scanty clothing and dance in sexually suggestive movements in front of (mostly) black African men who were there in professional roles as either instructors or drummers.

Analyzing the interpretation of “Oriental dance” in Sweden Lasse Berg (2001) describes how Swedish women dancers describe dance as a way to re-connect with a natural womanly self. This was also heard in the African dance courses I attended and studied; as one woman put it dancing African dance allowed women dancers to “re-connect with our feminine and womanly sides. We can be real women again.” This re-connection with gendered understandings of self must be understood in relationship to local gendered demands of the Swedish modern society, where according to Berg “Swedish and European women have been cut off from this though the big and contradictory demands they are forced to confront in the modern society (…) and these demands have become part of the body in the form of tensions, seen in bunched shoulders and stiff hip movements” (ibid.: 168 translation my own). Through dance the students go through a gendered transformation, and embody a womanly self that is according to one dancer of Oriental dance “pressed back by a society that is dominated by manly values and that forces the woman to live a worn out and fragmented life, marked by double working and unreachable demands from all directions except her own (as cited in Berg 2001: 166).”

5 For example in a ceremony to legitimate oneself as an Asante leader (in Ghana), or to mark oneself as a young woman in a dance where one’s charms are unveiled to potential suitors (as with the Ga of Accra in the Otufo initiation rites) (Harper 395).

6 Surprisingly, on the dance floors of the African discotheques in Stockholm, I rarely saw the dance steps I had been taught in the dance courses. One informant, a fellow student of African dance, clarified this to me saying: "In the discotheques you do modern African dances, not the traditional ones we learn in the dance classes.” Indeed, that the dance steps we were taught were "traditional” was a distinction I would repeatedly hear in reference to African dance classes.
The dance students in the African dance classes I attended also sought personal transformation and re-connection with a more “natural” self. One way this could be seen is in the special clothes the women changed into before the course began. Taking off "work" or "street" clothes, most had special "dance" clothes that were often of a light material and generally revealed arms, legs, and feet. The tights, shorts, leotards, and tee-shirts were also frequently brightly colored, multi-colored, animal print and/or batik-patterned, and the women often accessorized their outfits with wooden-bead necklaces and earrings, and batik scarves tied around their hips and sometimes their heads. These were clothes that were not worn outside of the course: either in a leisure context or to go to work. Sometimes women would also apply lipstick and eyeliner before the class started suggesting that for many of the women, sensuality and femininity were integral to their African dance.

Annika, a white Swedish instructor of African dance who is in her 30s, also stressed the transformative aspects of dance when she explained why African dance is so popular among women in Sweden. She said:

There is a big sense of community in the [dance] courses. You can come and look like you want. The way you look, any kind of body. You don't need to come in and conform to a certain form, like in Classical [dance]. Then there are those who go because it is a very good form of exercise, but then it also opens you up, it affects people...you move your body and in an organic way. Your body feels good and it influences your soul and everything. Your psyche. So that people keep at it year after year. People become so very changed. (May 10, 1996)

Here belonging in community and alternative criteria of the body are named as important reasons why women dance African dance. Dance is also described as producing an effect in the dancer—they become “open”, “organic”, and “feel good” in the body and in the soul and psyche. It is through the body in movement that the soul and psyche are changed according to Annika.

Clearly African dance in Stockholm undergoes a considerable interpretation and translation. For example two of the teachers with whom I spoke discussed the ways that African dance is transformed by the cultural politics of belonging in Stockholm: dance steps and music are tailored to (what they saw as) student's expectations and ideas about Africa in general, and African dance in particular. This meant that they taught dance movements that could be "easily broken into increments," those that "were less complicated". Both teachers spoke disdainfully about the ways that many of the (women) students regard these courses not as a space of complex cultural transmission, but, as Barkary said, as "a place to exercise", to "sweat and go home. Annika, complained about students' pre-conceived notions of African dance and their low expectations when she said:

A lot of people think that African dance [is] oh it is only to hop around and be free and do anything but that is in fact not African dance, that is your own dance to a drum. That is also cool because you ... it is using a lot of improvisation. And there you feel yourself to be free, but later you get steps. To go into it and work...that is how I have been taught, and that is what I would like to pass on. (May 10, 1996)

Here "African dance" is described as not being complex, as improvisational, a way an individual can do "free" movements to drum music. This is in implicit comparison to the many years of dedicated study required of students of "Western" dance forms such as ballet. Annika responded to the characterization of African dance as "just hopping around", by asserting the importance of learning "steps". Indeed she suggested that like other dance forms, in African dance there are specific "steps" that must be "taught" and repeated, and that they are not, necessarily quickly "validated" as correct. Here, a seemingly contradiction appears, as both Annika and Barkary earlier described African dance’s popularity as due to its openness as a dance form in comparison from the “strict” controlled movements in ballet. Now, they both bridged this distance and described the boundaries of African dance.

Barkary equates the transgression of boundaries of African dance with the racialized inequalities in Swedish society. Introducing power-relations and his positioning as a male
“immigrant” in Swedish society, he challenged Swedish dance teachers’ authenticity as instructors of African dance. Barkary said with irritation in his voice:

People tell me 'I dance Saba' but it is their teacher who has taught them saba. And what kind [of saba] is it?! There is Wolof, Jolla [ethnic and language groups], many others play saba so differently. It feels a bit stupid but you don't say anything. I think it is very important, I am not criticizing anyone, what is most important is that our culture is spread. But it is important that it is not spread the wrong way, so that it can always continue. If you are going to teach koko ... it is about respect you need to really go out and learn koko. Many people go on a trip and then open a school-- it is strange. What do they think? I have been living here [in Sweden] for 19 years and have listened to Swedish music, but I am not going to try to teach Swedish music and say 'this is what Swedish music is like!' It is about respect! But with African dance, it is a way to express feelings, it isn't just to write and ... I am still trying to learn, and I can't understand how they take it up so quickly. The Swedes were able to dance as well as anyone else, but it takes patience and to really go in and learn. It takes more then to go down for two weeks or a month in Africa and learn it is much more. It is very limited. You learn to dance as the teacher every country and every culture has its own steps and tune. But the steps I teach [I say] 'it is important to recognize the step and what you are doing, how they [in an African culture/countries] do it when they do it' (May 6, 1996)

Barkary introduces power differentials into a discussion of dance courses in Stockholm, as his comments speak squarely back to Swedish cultural politics. He critiques the white, Swedish, women who open "African dance" schools in Stockholm and suggests that they lack respect not only for "African dance," but Africans as well. He compares Swedes' relationship to African culture to his relationship to Swedish culture, and asks rhetorically why his acknowledgement of the rich complexity of Swedish culture is not reciprocated by Swedes who travel to African countries to study dance. The heavy weight of many centuries of unequal power-relations between Africa and Europe frame his statement Swedes' position of power and privilege in Africa contrast sharply with his position as a migrant in Sweden. Further, it should not be forgotten that the introduction of white Swedish women as dance instructors carves an already precarious economic niche created by West African men in Stockholm. Yet this is not how Barkary challenges the legitimacy of Swedish instructors, instead he introduces the powerful legitimating device of bound understandings of space, place, and culture.

Central to Barkary's challenge to Swedish instructors' legitimacy to teach "African dance" is the concept of a geographical Africa. Africa and physical proximity to Africa the continent, are important cultural currency to be exchanged for validation of one's belonging in relation to "African dance". According to Barkary, Swedish teachers are brazen and disrespectful primarily because they have not spent much time in Africa; and hence they lack a deep knowledge and respect for the complexity of African dance. This legitimating device emerged when Barkary discussed the difference between the Swedish and African contexts for transmitting "African dance". He described how he had grown up with dance, and referred to a specific context and community. He said:

What happens is that the experiences I have, they are due to the fact that I learned to play [drums]. It was an old man [uncle] who taught us and people [were] watching while we were dancing. To mirror and to play [the drums]. Those are two different things to mirror and to dance African dance. 'What is it that happens when you dance?' 'Why are you doing this?' [What happens is that] you come more and more into yourself. This is how you have to truly learn. (May 6, 1996)

Once again an African context is invoked as the more "legitimate" space for the transmission of "African dance". Instead of the Swedish dance class settings, with their mirrored walls, fluorescent lights, and repetition of the same dance steps over and over, Barkary invoked a context of kinship where an elder male taught and friends and family watched. "Africa" is an important conceptual
referent and source of legitimation to both dance instructors and students alike; as contact with, birth in, and duration of time in African countries embellished people with cultural capital.

Where one learns "African dance" mattered also to Annika. As a white, Swedish, woman working as a teacher in a sector dominated by black African men, Annika had encountered questions as to her legitimacy as an instructor of African dance by both students and teachers. Like for Barkary, geographical spaces in Africa are also significant legitimating sources for Annika. For example, in the interview, she pointed out that she had taken "more than ten trips to Guinea Bissau and to Western countries to participate in dance classes". However, this was not unusual: in the dance brochure one could often read about various instructors' visits to African countries. For example, a spring 1996 informational pamphlet showed a cartoon image of a lightly clad black woman dancing vigorously; clouds of dust surround her feet and beads of sweat fly from her locked hair. Underneath the image is the heading "African Dance", with the day, time, and names of the various courses and teachers. Annika is described as:

Annika: West-African Dance. Artistic leader and founder of ... [name of dance group]. With more than 10 years of experience of African dance, and with recurring regular trips to Africa along with a burning love for dance as an expressive form for the desire for wholeness and a meeting-over-boundaries, Annika has been given respect and acknowledgement as an inspirational pedagogue and dancer within Sweden and outside of the country, not least in West Africa.

Experiences outside of Sweden, frequent travels to Africa, and the respect (both inside of Sweden and "not least" in West Africa!) are used to silence bound understandings of "race", geography, and African diasporic cultural production. Annika spoke back to the racialized economic imbalances between Europe and Africa that Barkary raised. She described how dance course spaces are sites where hegemonic historical understandings of African peripherality, and European centrality are critiqued, and even occasionally inverted. Annika invoked this inversion when she responded to my question about how she was received when she took students to Africa to study dance. She told of how:

They appreciate it a lot when we go down [to Africa]. Most of them, there are exceptions, the majority were incredibly positive, we went down, for one times sake the whites come down, we learn their culture, instead of going down to change and take away everything they have. Instead of going down to judge, we came as small thankful pupils/children. (May 10, 1996)

In this configuration, "Africa" is the source for African dance, and Sweden is presented as on the periphery of such cultural production. Whites go to the "source", a geographical Africa, to "learn" rather than "change and take", and Africans are described as appreciative to be for once teachers, rather than pupils. In Annika and Barkary’s descriptions it can be seen that bound understandings of people, place, and culture are meanings that are a part of the African dance course community and can be strategically employed, or discarded, to meet individual dance instructors strive for legitimacy.

Not surprisingly, bound understandings of bodies and their movements are a subtle subtext to student encounters within the "African dance" courses. Indeed, these were spaces where meaning is reflected upon, constructed, and negotiated. I became aware of the salience of the bound meanings of people, place and culture early on in the dance courses. On the first day of Annika’s class, while we were in the locker room changing into our "dance clothes", some students asked each other whether the instructor was a "Swede" or an "African". One student would only take courses offered by Africans, and said Swedish teachers were "unable to really dance African dance. Africans have dance naturally". After hearing that Annika was “a Swede” this student packed up her clothes and decided to leave the course. Students would also employ such bound meanings when they would compare their own (named as "Swedish") dance abilities to the Barkary’s (named as "African"). These comparisons would often borrow generalized and stereotyped ideas linking nation, racialization (i.e. through blood and nature) and culture. Annika also invoked national bodies when she described the differences between Swedish and African bodies:
Well, generally I think that Africans have an 'earthy' feeling that we [Swedes] have to work to get. We have to really consciously work to go inwards and try to find that feeling, work [ourselves] downwards to the earth and find that about dance while they...yes, and they just have it. It is so incredibly wonderful to see the musicality in the body that isn't as obvious for us. ... in part also because we don't have it in our society in the same way. ... Then the cold does its job, my God it is like, you can't bend steel! ... One becomes softer when one is down there [in Africa]. I can feel it myself, one is softer. One becomes more relaxed. The climate also plays its part in many aspects. (May 10, 1996)

In this description, African and Swedish bodies are polar opposites. African bodies are "soft" when compared with "hard" Swedish bodies. If African bodies are more genuinely "earthy," "soft" and musical, Swedish bodies must work hard to "soften", bend, and go inwards and downwards towards the earth and dance. These differences are, in Annika's estimation, due to society and climate. It is through "African dance" that Swedes "work" to make their bodies like Africans.

Once again, a geographic Africa is central to bodily transformation. It is traveling to Africa that the Swedish body is allowed to become "soft". Africa is a space where the body is "natural", "soft", and closer to earthly "instincts" while Swedes are portrayed as having to "consciously" work to go "inward" in the body. She reiterates the relationship between the "inside" and "outside" of the body. Here the Swedish body is portrayed as a conscious "thinking body" distanced from its "natural" instincts that lie inside.

Bound notions of culture and nationality present a serious dilemma to those Africans who seek to transmit African dance in Stockholm, as well as those white Swedish women who strive to dance African dance. For if African dance were "natural" to Africans, how then would it be possible for "stiff Swedes" to learn? In other words, if culture were hermetically aligned with geographic location and nation, "Swedish" students would never be able to learn and reproduce "African" dance movements. Barkary anticipated stereotypes of African bodies as having more "natural" dance abilities than Swedes. He dealt with this dilemma by strategically re-working links between biology and culture. He said on the first day of class:

> Many of you think Africans are natural dancers and that Swedes cannot hear the rhythm of the drums, and thus you cannot dance. But this is not true, we all grow up hearing the beat of the drum, we originate from the same place and that is our mother's stomach. The first thing we hear as humans is the **boom boom boom** of our mother's heart. (February 26, 1996)

Barkary creatively invoked the same language of biology implied in people's characterizations of "African" and "Swedish" natures. Indeed, he later told me when I interviewed him that he was tired of hearing that "Africans have dance in their blood". Instead, Barkary addressed such stereotypes on the first day of class, and invoked the common language of maternity, as he drew an analogy between African dance and music and with the experience in the womb. Here, the sound of our mother's heart is a powerful equalizer to charges of biologically different "natures".

Yet embellishing nationality with specific "natures", including the proclivity to certain body movements and rhythms, can invest black Africans with cultural capital and authority as transmitters of African culture. As mentioned earlier, many students would not take an African dance class taught by a non-African they suspiciously asked each other: "Is it a Swede or African giving the class" to try to figure out the instructor's origins before enrolling. Such linkages can prove beneficial to African instructors, as some Africans employ these ideas to strategically present themselves as dance and drum instructors. Here "nature", an essence of racism, can be re-worked to create employment for at least a few of the many unemployed Africans in Stockholm.

For Annika, such links between culture, nationality and racialization threatened to mark her as inauthentic as an instructor of African dance in Stockholm. She said, with irritation in her voice:

> To be African, and that means drummers too, if only you are African, they [Swedes] think it's right, what you do is right just because you are ... [African]. And that might not be...
right? You could hear a person playing in the subway and you just think 'No!' But people think that it is correct just because it is a black that is doing it. That can also be translated to dance... someone doing it that really can't do much. But people come to that person anyways, just because, just because he is black. (May 10, 1996)

Here Annika criticizes how male African bodies, as black bodies, are perceived to be more "natural" musicians and dancers than Swedes, and white Swedish women in particular. For Annika, racialization is a useless marker of differentiation, with little social meaning. Yet whether she agreed with them or not, it was clear from her responses that bound meanings of people, place, and culture required negotiation if she was to be taken as a "legitimate" teacher of "African dance". She did this creatively later in the interview when she said:

I have asked myself very often 'do I have a right to do this as a white?' [But] Mamadou has always supported me. He just says 'there is no difference between black and white. The main thing is that you have respect and that you are an artist'. And he really means it. But here [in Sweden] there are a few people who have felt threatened because I am white. And that I am 'one of those girls who is white and who teaches'. Many people think that one can't do that. ... It is Africans who believe that one should not take their culture. But it isn't about stealing their culture! You can never take their culture! There is not one of my students who think that I am African. It works mostly because I do dance trips with Mamadou, he is like a brother. So much of my job, of course I teach dance, but through dance you learn more. To cross boundaries. Boundaries in yourself, for me, for all others. Boundaries between different cultures, there are very strong meetings on these travels. ... [Returning to the topic of legitimacy] It is the same thing as saying one shouldn't sing Blues. Shouldn't one do that?! Then one should not do martial arts. You shouldn't do Karate if you are not Japanese or Tai Chi if you are not Chinese. It is the same thing. And I know Africans who have said 'Of course, I didn't think of that'. 'If there is a person who is doing Karate, of course [they should], that is obvious'. Like we shouldn't be able to do African dance, but they [continue to think that]! Yes, my god, it is like that! (May 10, 1996)

Annika distinguishes herself from the "girls" (diminutive) who "[are] white and teach..." Being referred to as "white" and a "girl" de-legitimates Annika as an "authentic" instructor. Yet, a discourse of European imperialism and cultural theft in Africa haunt her statement as she tip-toes around bound meanings of nationality, "race", and culture, and angrily responds to charges of Africans that she is "taking their culture". The power differences that such charges invoke are absent in her response that advocates, "crossing boundaries" and the charge of cultural theft is neutralized by equating African dance with Karate, Tai Chi and Blues music.

Mamadou, an African man, is an important legitimator for Annika in the field of meanings created around African dance in Stockholm. It is he who has taught her to disregard racialization as a marker of difference; he tells her "there is no difference between black and white". Through invoking the language of kinship (he is "like a brother") to describe their relationship, Mamadou reinforces Anoka's self-presentation as authentic dance instructor. Down playing hegemonic bound meanings of people, place, and culture Annika instead highlights those moments when boundaries are transgressed.

IV

"African dance" is not only an economic niche for African men living in the periphery of the Swedish economy and for Swedish white women to encounter and imagined Africa, and their own natural selves. It is also a space where people inhabit and imagine "Africa" to debate and negotiate racialized, gendered, and sexualized understandings of belonging and community in Stockholm. As such these are spaces of cultural politics where "African dance" is a constantly changing dance form and community, one that is formed by the gendered desires and economic interests of those involved. In this paper I have shown how the cultural politics of belonging in Stockholm, in particular hegemonic and static meanings of people, place, and culture are reproduced but also, opposed in African dance courses. These were provocative sites where people nationalize their bodies and movements to critique, as well as to legitimate their own, and others, gendered belonging. While
static, bound understandings of nation and racialization were a potent bundle of meanings to be reckoned with, Barkary, Annika, and the students I spoke with, all portrayed the criteria of belonging and community as strategically under fierce negotiation, and change.
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