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Consuming the Vibe: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Swedish Dancehall

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Abstract

This research examines the racial and gendered dynamics of dancehall culture in Sweden, focusing on how participation in a transnational Black cultural practice shapes relationships between white women and racialized women within predominantly female dance spaces. Originating in Jamaica, dancehall has expanded globally, becoming both a site of cultural expression and a commodified transnational practice. While dancehall is often framed as empowering and liberatory, this study investigates how racialized hierarchies, notions of authenticity, and unequal power relations continue to structure participation within the Swedish dancehall community. Drawing on Black Feminist Theory, the commodification of Black culture, raced-gendered stereotypes, and the concept of colorblind ideology, the study explores how Blackness is consumed, negotiated, and embodied in dancehall spaces. The research adopts a qualitative multi-method approach combining semi-structured interviews, ethnography and autoethnography to examine collective dynamics and lived experiences in the Swedish dancehall community. The findings suggest that Swedish dancehall spaces simultaneously function as sites of community, pleasure and self-expression, while also reproducing racialized forms of exclusion and commodification. Particular attention is given to how Black cultural practices are legitimized, aestheticized, and consumed within predominantly white spaces, as well as how racialized women navigate visibility, authenticity, and belonging within these environments. By linking embodied cultural practices to broader social and political structures, this research contributes to discussions on race, gender, transnationalism, and cultural appropriation.

Keywords: dancehall, commodification, blackness, white privilege, power, racial colorblindness, Sweden.

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1 Introduction

The club was neither full nor empty; a few people, mostly women, were enjoying themselves on the dance floor, some of them showing female dancehall moves. I had gone to the party by myself, so I was a bit self-conscious dancing with people I didn't know. There was a group of really good dancers occupying a central spot on the dance floor. Around midnight, a group of Jamaican dancers came to the club. They were in Sweden to teach workshops and at the party to bring the "Jamaican vibe". They stood in the corner of the dance floor, sipping on their drinks and vibing to the music with small movements. After a few minutes, the group of girls dancing in the center moved to the sidelines to dance with the Jamaican dancers, leaving an empty spot in the center of the dance floor. The subtle reconfiguration of bodies on the dance floor showed how Jamaicans are considered to embody dancehall and authenticity in the culture and in the party landscape.
[Fieldwork notes and reflections, Irene]

That was my first time at a dancehall party, in Sweden or elsewhere. I wish I could say I had fun, but trying to observe, while dancing with people I had just met, and recurrently running to the bathroom to take notes was not an easy feat. Nonetheless, that night was the start of this research. That dance floor became a site of inquiry into belonging, performance, and power, where dance and movement revealed subtle negotiations between race, gender, and authenticity, all of them showcasing the transnational character of dancehall.

Despite this transnational character, dancehall is a cultural practice that remains closely linked to its Jamaican roots. Emerging from the Black working-class population in Kingston during the 1970s, it is considered a form of Black culture characterized by a vulgar attitude embodied by its participants in an unapologetic way (Cooper, 2004). After gaining independence from the British Empire in 1962, the economic status of the country, with high public debt, poverty, and no international influence, was in a precarious situation. During the 1980s, dancehall was (and still is) a way for young Black working-class people to escape, produce, create, and find their own identity on the dance floor (Monteiro, 2020).

Although dancehall has a rich musical component and history, this research will focus on the dance aspect. As a dance expression, dancehall encompasses a wide range of movements that emerged from dancehall parties and street culture. It is characterized by both individual and collective forms of movement, such as action songs, that reflect creativity, musicality, and, sometimes, social commentary (Page, 2005). One of the particularities of dancehall is that it is built on several moves, most of them with names and known creators, with each Jamaican dancer leaving their mark in a very expansive dance culture. This knowledge is spread from mouth-to-mouth: Jamaican creators teach the moves to their students, who teach them to their students. Another way is learning through social media videos. This orality and embodied aspect of knowledge plays into dancehall's popular culture aspect. Oftentimes during this research, I have wished that there was a centralized encyclopedia compiling all the existing moves and their creators. As a researcher, it would have made my life easier. As a dancer, I appreciate that this knowledge comes with time; it is not solely intellectual but requires the body to memorize the moves, while the brain remembers the names. It is knowledge that comes with dedication to an art form that is rooted in its foundations, but always evolving.

Within the broader framework of dancehall emerge different forms of expression, one of them female dancehall, which refers specifically to dance practices associated with women's embodied expression. Women often emphasize butt and hip movement, with whining as a central move. Stanley Niaah (2010) describes the movements in the following way: "in various body positions, the dancer's buttocks can shimmy, thrust, rotate, release and contract, push, press and pump, in a light, heavy, frantic, sharp, fluid or jerky manner" (p. 145).

By contrast, dancehall, sometimes referred to as male dancehall, encompasses a wide range of steps and styles that are not restricted by gender. Although historically associated with masculine-coded movement, male dancehall can be performed by people of all genders. Thus, while dancehall itself remains an inclusive genre open to everybody, female dancehall is a gender-specific form, usually performed only by women. It has become almost a distinct genre in dancehall, and one that has given dancehall a lot of international presence.

In fact, the contemporary dancehall landscape is increasingly shaped by the transnational circulation of Jamaican dancers and creators, many of whom tour around Europe, teach-

ing in workshops, festivals, or making club appearances. These appearances are often framed as a direct link to ‘the source’, with the Jamaican dancers being symbolic bearers of cultural authenticity. This touring circuit has created new economic opportunities for Jamaican dancers, allowing them to monetize cultural knowledge internationally. At the same time, this dynamic can reinforce social hierarchies, where Jamaican bodies and dancehall culture are simultaneously celebrated as cultural authorities and may be commodified within predominantly European consumer markets.

Building on these dynamics, this research examines how dancehall in Sweden operates as a transnational cultural space where race, gender, and power are being negotiated. I will focus on the racial dynamics within the Swedish dancehall community, composed mostly of women. Thus, my research explores how relationships between white women and racialized women are shaped through participation in dancehall culture. While dancehall can offer spaces for empowerment and bodily expression, it also raises critical questions about who is able to perform, have a central role, and benefit from Black cultural practices, and under what conditions.

To analyze these tensions, this research draws on three interconnected concepts. First, the commodification of Blackness and Black culture as a resource for pleasure. Second, it explores the intersectional racialized and gender stereotypes surrounding racialized and white women. Third, I situate these dynamics within Sweden’s discourse of colorblindness, where ideals of racial equality often work as camouflage for structural inequalities, limiting direct engagement with race. Through this framework, I will explore how Swedish dancehall spaces simultaneously reproduce and challenge racialized and gendered hierarchies, offering insight into the complexities of cultural appropriation in contemporary transnational dancehall culture.

For this, the Research Question to be answered is: *To what extent and how are racialized power relations reproduced and negotiated among women in Sweden’s dancehall community?*

With the following sub-questions:

- To what extent and how is Blackness commodified and consumed within the Swedish dancehall scene?
- To what extent and how do racialized gendered stereotypes shape perceptions of

racialized women dancers?

- To what extent and how does Swedish colorblind ideology influence how race is discussed, denied, or made visible within the community?

To answer the research questions, I explore the literature surrounding dancehall, focusing on its racialized and gendered dimensions. I employ Black Feminist Theory and colorblindness ideology in Sweden as a situated theoretical framework. In the Data and Research Design section, I outline the research's multi-method approach, combining interviews, ethnography, and autoethnography to capture personal and collective experiences within Swedish dancehall spaces. Finally, the findings are presented and critically discussed through this theoretical lens, highlighting how race, gender, and transnational cultural dynamics intersect within the community.

This research bridges gender studies and political science by examining dancehall not only as a cultural and gendered practice, but also as a political space where power relations are embodied, reproduced and contested. By connecting intimate bodily practices to larger political systems, I discuss how dance spaces can function as sites where questions of identity and cultural power are made deeply political.

2 Dancehall Literature Review

This literature review explores existing literature contextualizing dancehall in a post-colonial, racialized Jamaica, explores notions of gender and sexuality in Jamaican dancehall, and delves into scholarship on dancehall outside Jamaica, identifying a knowledge gap relevant for this research.

2.1 Historical Context: Colonialism and Black Bodies in Dancehall

Stanley Niaah (2004) conceptualizes dancehall as a "life/style" system (p.104), encompassing space, music, song, dance, fashion, language, and embodied meanings, with style itself at the center. The inner city and the Kingston ghetto are the spatial heart of this culture. Dancehall provides physical, ideological, and spiritual shelter for lower-class Jamaicans, especially those who came of age around independence (Stanley Niaah,

2004). Furthermore, by occupying public space through embodied performance, they signify opposition within Jamaica's race-class hierarchy (Stanley Niaah, 2004) and challenge colonial notions of fearing gatherings of Black people (Page, 2005).

Dancehall's colonial past shapes its relationship to the Black body. The body in dancehall is read as a site of continuity, from dances on the slave ships to dances on the contemporary dance floor (Stanley Niaah, 2008), and of resistance, reclaiming worth and aesthetic power against a "colonial legacy of racialized shame" (Noble, 2008, p.116). Stanley Niaah (2008) links the slave ship, the plantation, and the ghetto as spaces that produce "magical forms of entertainment and ritual" (p. 345) with performances emerging from conditions of extreme constraint. Complementary, Page (2005) argues that dances among Black people were tolerated as therapy for the enslaved, and that this "therapy/resistance duo" continues in contemporary dancehall (p.1). Black men and women faced a colonial legacy of "racialized shame" (Noble, 2008, p.116) which forced them to engage in Christian and colonial moral respectability, to prove they were fit for citizenship. However, through dancehall performance and the embodiment of sexuality, vulgarity, and power, they resisted the "bourgeois/Western and traditionalist gender norms that continue to define many postcolonial nationalist projects and cultures", Jamaica among them (Noble, 2008, p.123).

Dancehall not only challenges colonial structures of race, but it also creates community among Black people through action songs (also known as instructionals). These songs are repetitive, with choreographed dance instructions that some authors (Rohlehr, 2001; Smith, 2004) find as promoting uniformity, a "herd mentality" or being anti-rebellion. However, Page (2005) argues that this critique is superficial and that action songs are more complex than anticipated. Firstly, they use choreography for nation-building, using dance instructions as a means of constructing community and nationhood. Secondly, she interprets the sameness promoted by these songs as resistance, since the uniformity is organized around subversive acts such as waving flags against anti-government forces or "upsetting power dynamics associated with race and reestablishing authority around traditional knowledges" (Page, 2005, p.9) among others. Lastly, Page (2005) argues that action songs have been used as a less exclusionary means of entering the global music market, making the music more accessible to international audiences who might feel alienated by localized political content or homophobia present in some dancehall songs.

However, challenging these structures also has deterrents. Jamaican elite classes inherited colonial ideas of race and class. Thus, they frown upon dancehall because of its Black working-class origins and the performance of slackness and vulgarity associated with it (Cooper, 2004; Hope, 2006). For the upper classes in Jamaica, dancehall is seen as a loss of Christian values and a sign of declining morality (Monteiro, 2020; Flynn, 2014). These social and racial structures also intervene in what is considered high culture and low culture; thus, according to these structures, Black dancehall culture is considered a low way of culture (Monteiro, 2020).

Stanley Niaah (2005), however, criticizes the notion of dancehall reduced to its vulgarity and "slackness" component, meaning its sexually explicit and violent lyrics and performance. She challenges the narrative of a simplistic origin story that links dancehall to the 1980s neoliberal political shift, Bob Marley's death, and the rise of slackness as a post-1980 phenomenon. Firstly, she argues that "slackness" has existed in music long before the emergence of dancehall. Secondly, she rejects the focus on political economy as the only explanation because this negates other factors such as generational shifts in musical appreciation, the role of media and technology in moving private symbols into public spaces, migration and brain drain, and the cyclical nature of attention to slackness.

This broader perspective highlights dancehall as a complex cultural space rather than merely a site of slackness. Understanding this complexity is essential for examining other aspects of dancehall, such as how it shapes and negotiates gender and sexuality, two elements central to its performance and cultural meanings.

2.2 Gender and Sexuality in Dancehall

Various dancehall scholars use gender theories or queer theories to contextualize their analysis. The literature on sexualization in dancehall, specifically female dancehall, has different interpretations of female agency: on the one hand, some authors consider that female dancehall has a representation of female sexuality that, inevitably, caters to the male gaze as spectator and resource giver (Hope, 2006; Frank, 2007).

On the other hand, authors like Cooper (2004) consider that the pleasure experienced by the performers when dancing is empowering and grants agency. Particularly, Cooper

(2004) focuses on the concept of vulgarity and how it translates into hypersexual performances of sexual desire and femininity in the dancehall scene, conveying female ownership of the body that challenges respectability politics. Adding to the perspective of female dancehall as empowering McCoy-Torres (2017) presents her experience carrying out ethnography and autoethnography in dancehall spaces (such as clubs or workshops). She discusses agency from a perspective of self-pleasure and “introspective eroticism” (p.188), through which participants find their agency in the dance, without considering the male gaze in their performances.

Bakare-Yusuf (2006) presents a middle ground between these two arguments. She sees dancehall performance as norm-breaking and a claim to agency. Nevertheless, she has a multi-layered analysis, in which she positions female dancehall performance as acting within the constraints of patriarchal and colonial structures. Interestingly, Cooper (2006) questions Bakare-Yusuf’s claims around dancehall because of her positionality as an outsider to the culture (she’s a Nigerian scholar), bringing questions of authenticity and legitimacy in dancehall to the scholarly debate.

Expressions of masculinity are also studied in dancehall. Hope (2010) presents notions of hypermasculinity and homophobia in dancehall as reflections of wider patterns in Jamaican society overall, arguing that the same behavior for which young dancehall practitioners are judged, portraying violence or talking about sexual prowess, is also carried out by respectable middle-class men in Jamaica. Hope (2015) examines the male body in Jamaican dancehall culture as a site of contested gender identities, highlighting discourses of hyper-heterosexuality, aggression, and the policing of masculinity. By examining the figures of the ‘Bad Man’ and the ‘Fashion Ova Style’, Hope (2015) portrays different expressions of masculinity, highlighting that both still resort to resources like homophobia to assert their masculinity.

Homophobia is highly present in dancehall culture; nonetheless, Ellis (2011) proposes a queer performance hermeneutic for dancehall. She argues that the hyper-masculine and homophobic rhetoric of the Jamaican dancehall culture, paradoxically, enables queer expression instead of avoiding it. By examining three dancehall performance events, she concludes that the extreme performativity of heteronormative norms reveals the absurdity of these norms through different ways of parody, queering, perhaps involuntarily, in dancehall performance. Importantly, she defines queer not only as sexual

orientation but as a “signifier of sexual and gender nonnormativity, a break in the line of gender” (Ellis, 2011, p.12).

While these debates on gender, sexuality, and power illuminate dancehall’s internal social dynamics, they also raise important questions about how such performances and meanings shift when dancehall moves beyond Jamaica. Examining dancehall in transnational and diasporic contexts, therefore, expands the literature by exploring how the genre is reinterpreted across different cultural and geographic settings.

2.3 Rythms Without Borders: Dancehall Outside Jamaica

When it comes to dancehall outside of Jamaica, studies have examined the dance form in several places. One study in a West Indian community in Brooklyn, New York, focuses on women’s agency and empowerment (McCoy-Torres, 2017). The author carried out an ethnography and an autoethnography to examine the embodiment of pleasure and self-eroticism for women. She highlighted that women in dancehall reclaim space by performing femininity (McCoy-Torres, 2017). Despite its location outside Jamaica, the study focused on Black practitioners in dancehall and their empowerment, with no mention of how the uprooted dance practice could affect their performativity.

Another geographical site of research outside Jamaica has been Toronto, Canada. Flynn (2014) focuses on the Jamaican and Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, a city often overlooked in diaspora studies, despite its large Caribbean immigrant population. In her study, she places dancehall as a way of connection with Jamaica for immigrants, but also as a site to challenge the social hierarchies present in Canadian society and the discrimination faced by immigrants (Flynn, 2014). Furthermore, she argues that scholarship on dancehall needs to diverge from the situatedness of the Jamaican context to explore diasporic movements and dancehall practiced in other geographical locations and cultural spaces (Flynn, 2014).

In Japan, Sterling (2006) explores the power dynamics of learning dancehall and Black culture as Japanese dancers. Despite the cultural appreciation expressed by Japanese practitioners and their admiration of Jamaicans, at times shaped by fetishization, Japanese dancers occupy a position of privilege. This is tied to broader constructions of Japaneseness that frame Japan as an economically and culturally powerful

nation, able to selectively consume and appropriate other cultures, including dancehall, on its own terms (Sterling, 2006).

In the European context, Celena Luz Monteiro (2020) analyses the intercultural Dancehall Queen scene observed through competitions in Vienna and Jamaica, fieldwork in dance classes and performance events in London, and digital ethnography examining social media. Monteiro (2020) argues that female dancehall is a decolonial black performance culture articulated through “bruk out feminism”. The research theorises “bruk out” as a Black epistemology and links the hypervisibility of female dancehall performance through excessive flesh and movement to practices of silence and withholding as resistance and an exercise of the right to opacity (Monteiro, 2020). It focuses on how the intercultural encounters between European (both white and non-white) and Jamaican dancers in the Dancehall Queen scene both reproduce colonial and racist power relations and generate strategies of coalition that refuse the centrality of whiteness. The thesis also showcases how “bruk out feminism” creates a shared symbolic space in which both Jamaican and European women negotiate sexuality, race, class, and embodiment, challenging notions of high-art culture and highlighting the importance of popular dance practices from a sociopolitical standpoint.

The literature about dancehall in Europe and racial relations within dancehall is still scarce. Monteiro’s (2020) thesis is a step forward in filling this knowledge gap, but further research on dancehall in Europe is needed to gain a deeper understanding of intercultural racial dynamics within dancehall. Building on this gap, future scholarship could also engage with Stanley Niaah’s (2004) call to examine overlooked dimensions of dancehall culture, such as event types, venues, and performance practices. This would offer a more nuanced understanding of how racialized and intercultural dynamics are produced and negotiated through localized dancehall spaces.

In this thesis, I aim to fill the existing gap in dancehall research in Europe by studying the Swedish dimension of dancehall as a dance practice. Furthermore, the ethnographic approach of my research partially answers Stanley Niaah’s (2004) by examining dancehall as a dance practice and examining events such as dancehall parties.

3 Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Theory

This research is framed by a critical Black Feminist theoretical lens that explores the socially constructed racial and gendered dynamics within Sweden's dancehall community through three interconnected concepts. First, the commodification of Blackness examines how white women may engage Black bodies, dance styles, and cultural aesthetics as pleasurable resources. Second, raced-gendered stereotypes highlight the tensions that may be faced by dancers in the dancehall scene in Sweden. Third, I explore race in Sweden and colorblind ideology, which denies structural racism under the myth of racial neutrality, and is critiqued as a mechanism that may hide racial dynamics. Lastly, these frameworks are explored together with dancehall literature to create a critical theoretical framework to analyze racial dynamics within dancehall in Sweden.

3.1 Commodification of Blackness

The concept of commodification of Blackness serves as the first pillar of this theoretical framework. It refers to the process through which Black culture, identity, and embodied difference are transformed into consumable goods and experiences within dominant (often white) cultural frameworks. Commodification turns Blackness into an object, something to be used, desired, performed, or purchased, rather than engaging with Black people as subjects with agency and complex histories (hooks, 2015).

This objectification of Black culture suggests a construction of Blackness and Black culture as "the Other", following Said's (1978) concept of "Othering" as a discursive practice in which the West imagines the East. Said's imaginary idea constructs the East as an inferior opposite used to define Western identity and superiority, with the aim of not portraying a real picture of Eastern cultures, but to base this idea on stereotypes and simplification that grant the West control over the East. Therefore, the commodification of Black culture can be understood as a racialized process in which Blackness is constructed as an appealing "Other", as authentic, exotic, or cool, while its meanings are appropriated and sold inside a system that still privileges whiteness and allows for the consumption of cultural difference.

Additionally, the consumption of cultural difference under capitalism is based on the "creation of desirable contrasts to everyday life and mainstream notions of identity

using another culture's objects, symbols, styles, motifs and subjects" (Cruz et al., 2024, p.963). This gives way to the cultural debate between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation, a widespread debate when it comes to the consumption of cultural difference, especially Black culture. Under this context, race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure in a capitalistic consumerist context (hooks, 2015). Racial differences are not rejected; instead, they are marketed. In this context, Blackness becomes a playground through which white subjects affirm their own power (hooks, 2015). This consumption of Blackness becomes a way to live an experience through which dominant (white) subjects can feel transgressive, without questioning the systems that privilege them. In fact, white supremacy "operates as a given, in which many of those who are White may not necessarily recognise or even acknowledge its existence" (Bhopal, 2018, p.21). Thus, sheltered by white privilege, individuals may commodify not only cultures but also the bodies and beings of individuals. Thus, power can be affirmed through intimate and personal relations with the Other, not just by consuming the culture.

Under this framework, the Other is framed as exotic, erotic, exciting, and everything that the dominant culture perceives itself to lack. Rather than possessing the Other in a traditional colonial sense, commodification operates through the desire to be changed and transformed by the contact with the Other (hooks, 2015). This approach to different cultures or to Blackness is often framed in an open-mindedness or non-racist perspective, through the belief that proximity to cultural difference broadens perspectives, that it is cultural appreciation (Cruz et al., 2024), but ignoring the power structures that shape the experiences of the individuals being romanticized (hooks, 2015).

This romanticization often rests on the assumption that the Other possesses more vitality, sensuality, authenticity, and life experience precisely because of their difference (hooks, 2015). Blackness then becomes a site for the imagination: an imagination of fun, rhythm, emotion, and embodied and ancestral knowledge, all qualities constructed in opposition to whiteness (hooks, 2015). Thus, the commodification of Blackness gives the consumers an opportunity to experience the Other and those imagined characteristics without committing to their struggles or renouncing white privilege. In other words, one can "Eat the Other" (hooks, 2015), but only by taking the selected aesthetic and affective dimensions, while still reproducing power structures.

Indeed, this is what makes commodification seductive, also to the groups or cultures being commodified. What was once deemed with disdain or considered less is now approached with admiration by the majoritarian public. Thus, those who once were invisible and ignored “can be seduced by the emphasis on otherness, by its commodification, because it offers the promise of recognition and reconciliation” (hooks, 2015, p. 26). However, this reconciliation is superficial since it does not require a material change, redistribution of power, or accountability.

In addition, the commodification of Blackness does not always require the physical presence of Black bodies. Cultural forms, gestures, styles, and affective registers associated with Blackness can circulate independently of Black subjects (DeFrantz and Gonzalez, 2014). Nonetheless, Black performance remains shaped by Black experiences, Black sensibilities, and Black people. When Black performance circulates detached from Black people, it risks becoming another form of commodifying culture, by stripping it of context and history while solely focusing on the aesthetic appeal. Thus, performing Blackness without Black people is not simply imitation. It reflects a broader cultural logic in which Black expressive forms are abstracted, redistributed, and consumed (DeFrantz and Gonzalez, 2014). The sensibilities and differences remain recognizable, aesthetically, but the communities that generated them may be marginalized or rendered invisible.

hooks (2015) further describes how the commodification of the Other positions Blackness as a cure for “cultural anhedonia” (p.26), described as the inability to experience pleasure or happiness that comes with the insensitization of living in a capitalist society. The Other is imagined as being more alive, more sensual, and more grounded spiritually. Thus, Black culture is used to escape the insensitization of living in a market-driven society, to find meaning beyond respectability and the barriers of the mainstream, predominant culture. Through the consumption of Black culture (music, dance, style, language), white subjects seek sensual and spiritual renewal (hooks, 2015), and Blackness becomes a way to reinvigorate the dominant culture by adding difference.

In fact, escaping cultural anhedonia through consuming cultural difference is something pushed forward by ideologies like neoliberal multiculturalism. The issue appears when consumption happens through a depoliticized approach without any self-reflection whatsoever (Cruz et al., 2024). Research shows how people, when aware of these

commodification processes, try to address the tension between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation through self-authorization mechanisms such as reforming, restraining, recontextualizing, and rationalizing (Cruz et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the commodification of Black culture reveals how racial difference becomes marketable within capitalism. Blackness becomes desirable because of how it is constructed as difference. In this process, admiration easily can shift into appropriation and extractivism, as recognition turns into consumption and acts of appreciation end up standing in for deeper structural transformation. In this research, I examine to what extent the dynamics identified by hooks (2015) are present in Sweden's dancehall community and how.

3.2 Intersectional Raced-Gendered Stereotypes

The second theoretical concept for this framework focuses on the controlling images of Black women and respectability. The focus is on images of Black women because the role of masculinity in dancehall has been widely explored by authors like Donna P. Hope (2010, 2015). Furthermore, the dancehall community researched in this thesis is mostly formed by women (both white and racialized). Thus, the racial relations being explored are predominantly between white and racialized women in Sweden as well as their relationship to Jamaican dancehall.

The controlling images of Black women are “designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life.” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 69). This way, inequality becomes some arbitrary construct rather than a system, and the responsibility to overcome this is put on those suffering oppression. This societal construction helps build the idea of what a respectable or good society is and what is outside of it, so that the people standing at the margins of society are the ones who define and clarify its borders (Hill Collins, 2000).

Hill Collins (2000) uses Dona Richards' (1980) thoughts to define how, under Western ideas, the world is understood in a binary way. For example, culture vs nature, white vs Black, male vs female, etc. For this process to work, there is a need to separate the self from the object, meaning that Western understandings of the world require an objectification process of the other (Hill Collins, 2000). Feminist thinkers situate

women's identification with nature as the central point of their subjugation to men. However, postcolonial theory and Black studies suggest that for racialized people, their construction as animalistic or more "natural" is what supported the system of colonialism and white supremacy (Hill Collins, 2000). In this binary and hierarchical understanding of the world, Black women are at the intersection of overlapping processes of othering, being objectified and oppressed by patriarchal and racial categories.

In her work, Hill Collins (2000) identifies specific controlling images of Black women, meaning stereotypical representations that naturalize and justify Black women's oppression within a specifically U.S. context. Among these are the mammy, the Black matriarch, the welfare mother, the Black lady, and the Jezebel/whore, each image performing ideological work. For instance, the mammy constructs Black women as loyal, desexualized caregivers devoted to white families; the Black matriarch frames them as domineering and emasculating within Black households; the Black lady represents an attempt to counter stereotypes through respectability and middle-class propriety; and finally, the Jezebel, or whore, depicts Black women as hypersexual, sexual deviant, and always available.

For this thesis, the figure of the Jezebel is particularly significant. Female dancehall performance, for instance, often emphasizes sexuality through the movement of hips and buttocks, touching one's body while dancing, fashion choices, and bodily display. Within dominant frameworks, that type of performance risks being read through the controlling images of the hypersexual Black woman. As bell hooks (2015) observes, Black female bodies are represented in popular culture in ways that still reproduce ideas about Black women that were part of the discourse supporting racism during the 19th Century. She argues that "the black female body gains attention only when it is synonymous with accessibility, availability, when it is sexually deviant" (hooks, 2015, p.66). Thus, the control of Black women's sexuality has always been part of the oppression exercised towards them.

However, these controlling images can also lead to resistance (Hill Collins, 2000). For instance, Hartman (2018) argues that Black women have used waywardness, doing whatever they want, and being uncontrollable, as a tool of resistance towards a system that sees them as only and exclusively these stereotypical images of what Black women are and what they should aspire to be. Waywardness then becomes a way of rejecting and

rebellious against the idea of “respectability” by claiming life in a context of precarity and violence (Hartman, 2018). A way to do that can be through dancing and claiming your own body and your agency through it. According to hooks (2015), dancing emphasizing the butt can be read as a way to claim the body. It is no longer a mannequin like it was in slavery auctions, nor a silenced body. It challenges the idea that a black body is a mark of shame.

Importantly, this dynamic must be understood in relation to racialized differences in sexual display. White women often possess greater cultural flexibility to experiment with nudity or sexualization without being reduced entirely to sexual stereotypes. When white women reclaim nudity and sexuality as artistic expression, this is often deemed brave and artistic. For Black women, however, hypersexuality frequently operates as a preexisting frame through which their bodies are interpreted (Hill Collins, 2000). The image of Jezebel and sexual availability precedes them, shaping the way their performances are perceived.

Hill Collins (2000), however, does not leave Black women confined within these images. She traces a growing body of literature and cultural production that focuses on a positive self-definition of Black women, their empowerment through collectivity, and self-growth. Black women, through culture and art, keep pushing not only to reverse the controlling images they are subjected to, but to create new, multi-layered images that can better represent their lived experiences.

Within this framework, Black performance of sexuality can be theorized as a deliberate departure from respectability politics. Rather than aiming to conform to the “Black lady” image of middle-class propriety (Hill Collins, 2000), some female dancehall performances embrace what might be called sexualized autoveneration (Monteiro, 2020) or self-eroticism (McCoy-Torres, 2017), practices in which Black women celebrate, adore, and center their own bodies and desires through dance performance. This resonates with the concept of waywardness from Hartman (2018), which entails claiming pleasure and movement as ways of resistance.

3.3 Race in Sweden: Colorblind Ideology

Discussing Black culture and its commodification, as well as the different images of Black women, inevitably leads to examining how race is discussed and understood in Sweden. A key concept in this context is colorblindness: the dominant social belief that race should not be acknowledged or discussed, based on the assumption that ignoring racial categories promotes equality and prevents discrimination (Adolfsson, 2024). However, scholars argue that this colorblind ideology can obscure the realities of racialized experiences and structural inequalities, making racism harder to address (Kennedy Macfoy, 2014; McEachrane, 2014b; Adolfsson, 2024).

Reluctance to talk about race is partly linked to its historical association with biological theories of race, which were discredited in the mid-20th Century but still shape public discomfort. In Sweden, one of the reasons for the avoidance of the term race is the fear of it being understood as the biological understanding (Adolfsson, 2024). Because of the historical background linking race with the Holocaust UNESCO (1950) proposed using the term “ethnic groups” instead of “race”.

Another understanding of race, and one that links to this research, is seeing it as a social construct rather than a biological reality, involving categorization based on physical appearance or social relations. Viewing it as a socially constructed category makes it possible to examine how racial categorization operates in society, making discrimination and racism tangible (Adolfsson, 2024). This perspective also opens the door to the creation of ideological, normative, and cultural frameworks surrounding racial difference (Adolfsson, 2024), which would not be implicit in a biological understanding of race.

A social construction approach to race is often linked with a process of racialization: a process of giving meaning to social groups that did not have it before, showcasing how race can also be fluid and context dependent (Omi and Winant, 2014). It is “a dialectical process attributing meaning to biological features, leading to the assignment of individuals to a biologically reproducing category” (Adolfsson, 2024, p. 30).

For this thesis, race is understood as a sociocultural construct that shapes lived experiences despite its lack of a biological basis (Adolfsson, 2024). This concept interacts with racialization as a process of identity formation, with meaning and consequences.

Lastly, ethnicity and ethnic identity also play a role, since these terms represent social groups with a shared identity perceived by their members, rooted in a common understanding of origin and other factors. Thus, the Swedish ethnicity can be understood as an ethnic group being negotiated and contested in the dancehall community.

Talking about race in Sweden is closely tied to a dominant colorblind ideology. Colorblind ideology engages with a broad narrative and self-image created around Sweden and other Nordic countries as global champions of human rights, equality, and social justice. This self-image is often linked to the idea that Scandinavia was not involved in European colonialism and thus stands outside the stories of colonial oppression associated with other European nations. This ‘Nordic exceptionalism’, as McEachrane (2014a) calls it, is the foundation of the extended idea of Scandinavia as just an observer and not an active participant in colonialism, thus not acquiring any of the racial stigmas pervasive in other European countries. However, this notion of a raceless Scandinavia is contradicted by the predominant racial ideas surrounding the ‘Nordic race’, often linked with whiteness (Adolfsson, 2024), and a history of Nordic countries participating and benefiting from the Atlantic slave trade (McEachrane, 2014a). These histories complicate the idea that the Nordic countries exist outside of racialized power structures.

Colorblindness often operates through two main mechanisms: color evasion and power evasion. Color evasion refers to not addressing racial differences and instead talking about the similarities between individuals and groups (Neville et al., 2013). While this approach is often framed as promoting equality by “not seeing color”, it can invisibilize the specific experiences and challenges faced by racialized communities. Power evasion, on the other hand, involves the argument that society already offers equal opportunities to everyone, thereby denying the existence of structural inequalities (Neville et al., 2013). This perspective shifts attention away from systemic forms of discrimination and frames racism as an individual issue or a problem that has already been solved.

In fact, examples of colorblindness in Sweden include the exclusion of the word race from the Discrimination Act of 2008 (Adolfsson, 2024; McEachrane, 2014b). The Act, which entered into force on January 1st, 2009, includes the word ethnicity as grounds for discrimination, but not race. Thus, all claims of racism in Sweden are not accepted by law, and instead need to be legally addressed as ethnic discrimination or claims against ‘ethnic identity’ (Adolfsson, 2024). The logic behind this exclusion is

linked to the biological understanding of race mentioned in the previous section and the belief that, since there are no human races in a biological sense, using the term race would help consolidate it as a category of identification (McEachrane, 2014b). Thus, colorblindness ideology influences legislation, which in turn has a real impact on the lives of racialized people in Sweden.

The thought of race as something socially irrelevant is spread in different Nordic countries, and “a consequence of such widespread denial of race and more routine forms of racial discrimination is a double marginalization of people of color - black people in particular” (McEachrane, 2014, p. 4). However, race is not marginal, and black people are hugely discriminated against in Sweden. This discrimination is evident in terms of harassment (hate crimes), employment, housing, and education (McEachrane, 2014b). Despite the data showing the discrimination and racism suffered by racialized people, there is a resistance in Nordic countries to seeing racism.

However, research shows that white supremacy is present in Swedish society. In fact, Swedishness is often associated with whiteness. Historically, the Swede or Nordic has been described as the “whitest of the whites” (Adolfsson, 2024, p.43). It is relevant to notice that the idea of the Nordic race and Swedishness is built excluding Sámi people, the largest ethnic minority in Scandinavia, albeit not the only one. Thus, this builds the Nordic countries’ image of being racially homogenous (white) until the arrival of immigrants in recent decades (Kennedy Macfoy, 2014). And therefore, as not having issues of structural racism, unlike countries in which racial struggles are more prevalent.

In her thesis, Adolfsson (2024) showcases that Swedishness is highly associated with whiteness, despite colorblind ideology. In fact, Sweden as a country is considered multicultural, but participants in her research link Swedishness to whiteness. This shows how, despite the dominance of colorblind ideology in Sweden, race continues to shape social realities and experiences in meaningful ways. Race remains present in Swedish society even when it is publicly denied or avoided. Adolfsson (2024) captures this paradox by describing race as “a ghost standing in the sunlight” (p.71): something that is widely claimed not to exist, yet continues to structure perceptions, interactions, and inequalities. In this sense, the reluctance to engage with race does not show the absence of racism, but instead reveals how racial dynamics persist in more subtle and often unacknowledged forms.

3.4 Theorising Dancehall in a Swedish Context Through Black Feminism

This thesis draws on Black Feminist Theory to analyze how dancehall operates as a site where Blackness, femininity, and power are negotiated in the Swedish context. Bringing together theories of racialized representation and commodification in the Swedish context of racial colorblindness, I conceptualize these processes as intertwined rather than separate, shaping how Blackness and racial relations are represented in the dancehall community in Sweden.

The theoretical concepts used in this research stem from a long tradition of Black Feminism in the United States of America. However, in Europe, in general, and Sweden in particular, there is a perception of race and Blackness as something related to migration in recent decades (Lukate, 2019), and not as something foundational. Thus, many of the politics of Black people, and especially Black women “are often erased from or misrecognized in the European imagination” (Emejulu and Sobande, 2019, p.3). Taking this into consideration, I aim to use Black feminist concepts while being aware that they might not represent all of Black people’s realities, and including a European and context-based perspective, especially considering the context of racial colorblindness in Sweden.

A crucial starting point is the construction of Black women as the racialized Other, as objects opposed to white women in a binary understanding of the world. Controlling images position Black femininity as excessive, hypersexual, and outside respectability (Hill Collins, 2000), offering a lens through which dancehall’s aesthetics of sensuality are read by the public. As Cooper (2004) argues, notions of vulgarity in dancehall are historically tied to Blackness, poverty, and moral transgression, reinforcing these racialized hierarchies while also making them visible.

At the same time, work by Black feminists such as bell hooks (2015) highlights how these same markers of difference are re-signified through the commodification of Black culture. In racial capitalism, Blackness becomes a resource for pleasure, consumption, and identity-making (hooks, 2015), especially as dancehall circulates transnationally. This dynamic can be key to understanding how dancehall is understood and practiced in Sweden, how dancers articulate Jamaican culture, its power, and historical implications.

Scholarship on dancehall adds further to this framework by putting gender, sexuality, and women's agency as some of the main topics of research in this field. As argued by Hope (2015) and Bakare-Yusuf (2006), female dancehall performance can simultaneously function as a site of agency and as a space shaped by patriarchal constraints. The performance of eroticism and "slackness" may challenge respectability politics and enable expressions of autonomy and pleasure, while also remaining entangled in dynamics of the male gaze. These tensions resonate with Black feminist debates on whether such performances subvert or reproduce controlling images, or operate within an ambivalent space that does both. Although this research focuses on the racial relations aspect of dancehall in Sweden, women's agency on the dancehall scene is still key to the controlling images of Black women and to the commodification of Black culture; thus, discussions on gender and expressing sexuality may still occur, understanding that race intersects with many other categories in women's lives.

Bringing these perspectives together highlights a key contradiction: the same embodied practices in dancehall can reproduce racialized and gendered stereotypes, enable forms of agency and resistance, and be appropriated as a commodification of Blackness. This contradiction becomes particularly salient in the Swedish context. Within its national discourse around race, shaped by colorblindness, it is interesting to see how the racialized meanings of dancehall are enacted in the dancehall community and how this Blackness is consumed.

By theorising dancehall in Sweden through Black feminism, this thesis understands the scene as a site where controlling images and commodification, and gendered performance intersect within a colorblind framework. It examines how these dynamics shape the circulation of power between Black and white dancers, and how Blackness is simultaneously regulated, consumed, and rearticulated in this context.

4 Data and Research Design

This research is grounded in an interpretivist approach, in which "objective and subjective meanings are deeply intertwined" (della Porta and Keating, 2012, p.24), meaning that social reality is understood as socially constructed, context-dependent, and shaped by the meanings individuals give to it. Ontologically, the research engages

with race relations in Sweden as a subjective and socially produced reality, particularly within a national context characterized by colorblind ideology. Rather than treating race as a fixed or universally experienced structure, this study examines how it is perceived, negotiated, and given meaning by dancers within the Swedish dancehall community.

Epistemologically, knowledge is generated through the interpretation of the dancers' experiences, which are subjective to their individual perceptions, shaped by their background and their relation to the community. This study relies on the perspectives of white and racialized dancers to understand how racial dynamics are articulated (if they are) in practice. Centering participants' accounts in the creation of knowledge, this research seeks to capture how individuals make sense of their own positionality and the broader cultural and racial politics of dancehall in Sweden.

In line with this interpretivist framework, the aim is not to produce objective or generalizable claims, but to "discover the meanings that motivate [human beings'] actions rather than relying on universal laws external to the actors" (della Porta and Keating, 2012, p.24). Therefore, developing a context-based understanding of how race, power, and embodiment are experienced and negotiated by dancehall dancers within this specific social and cultural setting.

I use ethnography as a methodology. Ethnography is a methodology that uses different methods that involve having direct contact with humans "within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions" (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 3). The result is often a recount of human experience, taking into consideration theory as well as the reflexivity of the researcher.

Following O'Reilly's (2009) definition, it seems like ethnography is a perfect framework to understand human interaction and society as a whole. Nonetheless, authors like Stacey (1988) question the ethics of this methodology from a feminist standpoint, considering it exploitative towards the communities partaking in the studies. She concludes that, ethnography by its nature can never be fully feminist, but it can be 'partially feminist' if the author reflects on their positionality and takes into account all these ethical considerations.

Taking into consideration these dilemmas, I still think that ethnography as a methodology is a good way to study the dancehall community in Sweden. Particularly due to my involvement in the community, where I have been a participant for over a year and

a half. This allowed me to form an idea of some of the inner workings, participate in many events, and establish organic relationships with some of the participants. In the following section, I reflect on my positionality as a researcher and the ethical considerations during the research, as well as give an in-depth explanation of the methods chosen and the coding process of the data.

4.1 The Ethics of Researching Dancehall from the Margins of Whiteness

My research is grounded in an awareness of my positionality as a researcher, both during knowledge production and interpretation of the data. As a white dancer actively engaging in dancehall spaces, I recognize that I am not a neutral observer, but a participant within the same processes I want to analyze, including the commodification of dancehall. My presence in these spaces inevitably affects the data I am able to access and how I interpret it.

My position can be understood as both an insider and an outsider. While I participate in the dancehall community and share embodied experiences with other dancers, I occupy more of a periphery position within the community. This partial belonging is something I carefully reflect upon, since I am aware that it grants me access to certain spaces, but not to others, which are characterized by friendships and intimate relations in which I do not partake (nor intend to, given my role as a researcher). Thus, my understanding of the community is linked to what can be perceived in public and semi-public spaces, such as parties or dance classes.

As a non-Swedish researcher, I initially perceived language and cultural differences as potential barriers to building connections with participants. Although classes are often conducted in English, informal interactions frequently take place in Swedish. Oftentimes, I have felt that disconnection as a sign of non-belonging, and doubts have crept in on whether my positionality would allow me to conduct proper research. I was concerned that this might hinder my ability to approach participants and establish rapport. Over time, however, I have come to understand this positionality as also offering advantages. My status as a foreigner can create a certain distance, which may enable participants to articulate their perspectives more freely or feel like they have to explain

established practices in the Swedish culture that they might otherwise take for granted or find uncomfortable to discuss.

My positionality is shaped by a recently discovered racial and ethnic ambiguity that affects how I am read in different settings. This reflection stems from personal experiences of being misidentified as non-white while living in Sweden. These experiences have highlighted for me how racial categories are socially constructed, fluid, and highly context-dependent. For white Swedish participants, I was sometimes perceived simultaneously as an outsider who required clarification about local norms and as someone who shares racial identity. For racialized Swedish participants, while I remain an outsider, I also do not fully conform to the notion of “pure whiteness” often associated with Swedishness (Adolfsson, 2024). Thus, my positionality helped me approach these topics more openly.

Importantly, this reflection is not an attempt to claim an identity that is not mine, but rather to acknowledge how my perceived identity shifts across contexts and how this influences interactions in the field. It also emphasizes the importance I give to approaching questions of race and belonging with nuance and reflexivity.

In terms of interpretation of the data, I was vigilant about how my positionality shaped the analytical process. I strived to ensure that my interpretations were coherent, critically grounded, and aligned with the existing literature. At the same time, I remained open to possible contradictions or tensions I perceived in the data. For this, the analysis and the data collection were done taking into consideration self-reflection in order to avoid reproducing biases. In the following section, I explain the different methods I used for the research and how my positionality affects them.

4.2 Methods

Following the interpretivist approach, I will use different ethnographic methods to give a full perspective on the dancehall community in Sweden and the experiences of its dancers: interviews, participant observation, and autoethnographic reflections. In this section, I explain the logic behind each of them.

4.2.1 Interviews

Interviews with several dancers were the main tool of data collection for this research. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for flexibility. The goal was not to standardize or compare answers, but to let the participants explain themselves as they saw fit. My interviews were guided by the four points suggested by Blommaert and Dong (2010), focusing on making the participants feel comfortable, especially given the sensitive topic being addressed.

I used purposive sampling to recruit interview participants (Ahmad and Wilkins, 2025). Due to race being a key topic of my research, I purposefully asked white and racialized participants if they would be interested in doing interviews. Although the dancehall scene in Sweden is predominantly white, I wanted to give a voice in equal measure to the racialized people in the scene. These participants were selected because of their active involvement in Sweden's dancehall through their participation in regular classes with Swedish teachers, but also in workshops with Jamaican teachers and dancehall parties. I approached the participants in different ways, some of them after class, and others through social media. I gave a brief description of the research topic and sent an information sheet and consent form for them to read in detail and sign before the interview took place (see appendix). Those signed consent forms were stored in the Lund University Google Drive, which is an encrypted safe option.

The participants were six women, and of the six interviewees, three were white, and three were racialized. I am using these two categories for sampling and anonymity purposes; however, I must underscore that neither of those is a monolithic category. Each individual in each category has their own particularities regarding their race and ethnic identity; however, by including these details, I would be giving away private information that would easily identify them, since the dancehall community in Sweden is rather small. Therefore, I have decided to categorize the participants under "white" and "racialized" without giving specific information about their race or ethnic background. To avoid the risk of naturalizing whiteness as a "de-racialized norm, with 'race' being the defining property and experience of 'Other' groups" (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 29) in this research, I examine the category of whiteness in dancehall as I do with the racialized category. This is a simplification of complex realities, but one needed to preserve the anonymity of these women. For this reason, I use pseudonyms when quoting them.

The interviews were conducted during the months of March and April of 2026 with different dancehall dancers in Sweden. Opening with a generic introductory question, the interviews covered a wide range of topics such as the meanings of dancehall for participants, their experiences in the community, cultural appropriation and commodification of dancehall, race and blackness in dancehall, race in Sweden, and finally, questions about creating community through sharing dancehall culture (see appendix). On average, interviews lasted around 57 minutes. The longest was 1h05min and the shortest 47min29sec.

As a researcher who is also somewhat part of the community and has a personal relationship with some of the interviewees, I found it challenging to carry out some of the interviews. I was aware that, for some of the dancers, these are sensitive topics closely linked to their identity and their lived experiences; therefore, in some of the cases, I found myself being accommodating and not challenging some of their claims. It was also challenging to engage with some of the data in the analysis process, since sometimes the things said did not correspond to the image I had of the participants, or I was aware that some sentences or words used could make me want to “protect” the image of the participant. Being aware of this personal and researcher bias, I made an extra effort to be reflexive in the analysis process and deciphered in which moments my personal connections were present to avoid them affecting the results.

4.2.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation is one of the methods under ethnographic methodology. As the name indicates, it consists of observing a community while participating in it, and it is usually carried out in communities where the researcher already belongs (O'Reilly, 2009). In my case, by the time I started the research, I had been taking regular dancehall classes in Sweden consistently for a year and a half, as well as attending dancehall parties and occasional workshops with Jamaican dancehall dancers.

My participation in different key events for the community allowed me access not just to observe and get a better understanding of the culture, but also to be perceived as an insider by the members of the community through shared experiences (Geertz, 1993). Although I have participated in multiple events during this research, my participant observation and fieldwork notes are limited to two key events: two dancehall parties that happened

in public venues and clubs. This is a conscious decision to prioritize data obtained in a public space and not in private places such as classes or workshops. Furthermore, the parties happened during weekends in which Jamaican dancers attended, so during the event, I could observe the intersection of the different theoretical bases of this research: white and racialized Swedish dancers, Jamaican dancers, and an outsider gaze represented by club goers who are not part of the dancehall community but stumbled upon it during a night out.

Before attending the parties, I informed some of my dancehall teachers (also event organizers) about my intention to do my thesis on this topic, and I wanted to observe dancehall parties. After this, one of my teachers recommended parties to attend and added me to a group chat in which dancehall events are discussed and promoted. Since both parties were held in public clubs open to the public, I informed some of the attendees about my research, obtaining verbal consent. Despite the public nature of the parties, I refrained from making any of the attendees identifiable in my observations, as well as giving information about the parties, such as the day they happened or the city in which they were hosted.

The observations carried out at the parties are used in this research to illustrate concrete moments showing how race and sexualization can appear in the dancehall scene in Sweden. But they were also used to inform some of the questions I asked the participants, and, in some cases, I shared with the interviewees some of the key observations made at the parties so I could get their opinion and interpretation on the matter, particularly in those cases in which the Jamaican dancehall culture clashed with Swedish culture. These observations are also complemented with autoethnographic reflections, which, in some cases, add context to some of the experiences from the interviewees through shared lived experience.

4.2.3 Autoethnography

Lastly, the third method I will use is autoethnography, which consists of placing the self in a broader political context, in this case, racial understandings in the dancehall community in Sweden. Not describing personal dynamics alone, as one would do with a diary, but seeing how those dynamics work in a politicized context (Ettorre, 2017).

Autoethnography is the missing piece that complements the information from interviews

and participant observation. As Ettorre (2017) suggests, the strong reflexivity that comes with autoethnography can bring deeper insight into the research. Dance is an embodied experience charged with cultural meaning. Feeling the same movements as the dancers do helps me understand their experience better. From my own bodily experience, sensing what it feels like to learn new moves and repeat them over and over, until it becomes second nature. I can also experience what it feels like to flow with the music and the people surrounding you. This provides a good insight into the dancers' experiences and the ways they negotiate their bodily feelings with cultural notions of dancehall.

I have danced dancehall for many years, and the tensions between commodification of Black culture, cultural appropriation, and representation of Black women have always been present in how I understand the dance. I believe my insight as a dancer can also contribute to the conversation. In this sense, I draw inspiration from Luhrmann's (2010) provoking text "What Counts as Data?". In this chapter, she explains how, during her fieldwork experience studying communities that believe they can do magic, she herself had bodily experiences of magic. Thus, I believe some of my embodied experiences can be useful to give deeper context to some of the responses of participants.

Lastly, the authors Rantakallio and Dankić (2025) conducted ethnography and autoethnography around race in Hip Hop scenes in Sweden and Finland, and their reflections on the whole process have also helped me position myself in this research, both in terms of my own racial and ethnic identity, and in relation to conducting research in a community I am somewhat part of, showcasing how autoethnography is a good tool to understand urban dances and culture.

My autoethnographic reflections have been kept up to date in a fieldwork diary and will be processed with the rest of the data collected for this research, only choosing to quote those segments that are relevant for the analysis.

4.2.4 Coding Transcripts and Fieldnotes

For the analysis of the data, I will use Thematic Analysis, "a method for identifying and reporting patterns or themes within the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). Some authors describe the process of thematic analysis as letting categories and themes 'emerge' from the data. Although it is a somewhat poetic image of the analysis process,

I agree with Braun and Clarke (2006) that it undermines the active role of the researcher in engaging with the data and curating categories and themes based on the data.

For the coding process of the data, I used Rubin's (2021) five-step coding process mixed with the phases of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Getting familiar with the data: I transcribed the data myself, including interviews and some fieldwork observations I had recorded during my participant observation. This allowed me to get familiar with the data and to note down my initial ideas.
2. Open Coding of a Sample: I open-coded the first two interviews to start creating a comprehensive first version of the codebook. I went through the two interviews, noting down each possible code I saw in the data, and coding the fragments accordingly. After open coding a sample of two interviews, there were 33 different codes.
3. Searching for themes: After having a code list, I examined the meaning behind each code and how they could relate to each other, to group them into themes. In the process, I cut down some of the codes that were not relevant for the research and fused together some codes that had similar meanings. Those 33 initial codes were reduced to 20 codes, which were divided into 3 themes.
4. Reviewing the themes: I checked if the themes worked in relation to the coded samples and the whole data set, which included going through the samples again and coding new interviews. During this process, three new codes emerged, leaving the final codebook with 23 codes divided into three main themes (see appendix). Some of the codes are inductive (e.g., Westernization of DH) and some of them are deductive (intersecting raced-gendered stereotypes).
5. Closed Coding of the dataset: Finally, I used the closed codebook to code all of the data.

Overall, the thematic coding process made it possible to move from individual interviews to broader patterns of meaning across the material. The coding process and working this closely with the data allowed me not only to identify what participants said, but also to get a clearer picture of how they position themselves in relation to dancehall culture. In the next findings section, I will present these patterns and later examine them in the discussion section in relation to the theory used for this research.

5 Findings

There are three predominant themes in the data I analyzed. The first one is “Jamaican dancehall meets the Western gaze”; the second one is “Gendered racialized bodies and images”; and the third one is “Race and belonging in the dancehall scene in Sweden”.

The findings of the interviews¹ are supported by autoethnographic and ethnographic abstracts.

5.1 Theme 1: Jamaican Dancehall Meets the Western Gaze

This theme focuses on dancehall’s Jamaican origins meeting Western interpretations and the changes this presents. It captures how participants negotiate cultural authenticity, ownership, and ethical engagement with dancehall when it moves from Jamaica to European contexts. Includes codes like Commodification of Dancehall, Dancehall as Black culture, Going to Jamaica, Respecting the culture, and Westernization of Dancehall, among others.

Respecting the Culture

Within the Swedish dancehall scene, the concept of “respecting the culture” is articulated through a range of mechanisms. Across interviews, participants consistently identify several key practices through which respect is enacted:

1. Giving credit to Jamaican creators of dance moves.
2. Incorporating discussions of dancehall culture and history
3. Taking workshops with Jamaican dancers
4. Travelling to Jamaica as a means to legitimize knowledge
5. Critically reflecting on whiteness, colonial histories, and processes of westernization of dancehall

¹The names used after the quotes are pseudonyms, not the real names of interviewees.

These mechanisms operate at different levels (e.g., teaching, lived experiences, and reflectivity) but collectively shape how practitioners situate their engagement with dancehall in relation to its Jamaican roots.

Giving Credit and Talking About Culture

One of the most widespread mechanisms is the practice of giving credit. Teachers commonly name specific dance moves and their creators during classes and ask students to repeat them, embedding recognition of Jamaican origins into the learning process. This is sometimes complemented by references to dancehall history and stylistic evolution (e.g., old school, middle school, and new school). However, the depth and continuity of such cultural contextualization vary. In many cases, discussions of culture are limited to introductory sessions, rather than being consistently integrated into ongoing teaching. For example, the classes I attended provided brief overviews of the culture at the beginning of the semester, but the teachers focused more on giving credit and promoting workshops with Jamaicans to the students. Other teachers, however, dedicate significant time to establishing a cultural framework for their classes. As Thea explains:

“When we start the semester [...] usually I talk about it [the culture] for like 20-30 minutes, [...] just to set the tone for what this class is. If you are coming just to learn cool moves or choreography, I’m sorry, that’s not gonna, [...] I do one, maximum two choreos per semester, the rest of it it’s like eh, really understanding what is the culture.” (Thea, racialized dancehall teacher)

Despite the recognition of these mechanisms, their implementation is not standardized across the fragmented Swedish dancehall scene. Teachers adopt varying approaches to cultural transmission, making responsibility for sharing knowledge highly individualized. This variability shapes students’ experiences and their connection to dancehall’s Jamaican foundations. As Leena notes:

“I feel for me, I already have a solid base of, I know what the culture is like... but I feel like the people who only learn about dancehall through the classes in [name of city]², I feel like they don’t really understand what dancehall actually is, unless they actively themselves really dive into it. But it’s not provided in the classes, the classes are basically just dance.” (Leena, white dancer)

²The name of the city is redacted for anonymity reasons

Jamaican dancers are perceived as the embodiment of the culture, as said by one of the interviewees: "Jamaicans, they are the culture" (Leena). Thus, those who are not Jamaican but still engage in dancehall are considered to have a bigger responsibility to maintain connections to the Jamaican roots of the dance. In a way, some teachers consider themselves cultural bridges. As Thea explains:

"Like we have privileges and responsibility in a different way than I feel, a Jamaican, [...] you know, this is their story basically. So if I'm gonna tell it I have to really highlight: "okay, this is the person who said this, this is, you know, where you can get the real source or information from, or," authentic information, it's gonna be authentic because I'm retelling maybe what that person has said, but that's where, you know, I'm just a bridge." (Thea, racialized dancehall teacher)

Many teachers then encourage their students to take on workshops with Jamaican dancers as a way to respect and bring back to the community.

Taking Workshops With Jamaican Dancers

A recurring theme among both teachers and students is the importance of "going back to the source," understood as learning directly from Jamaican dancers. One way of doing this is through participating in workshops led by Jamaican creators touring Europe. Jamaican dancers often go on tour around Europe, where they teach in different cities. These workshops are often organized locally, with dance schools or individual dancers taking the initiative to invite Jamaican dancers to teach in specific cities.

Participation in these workshops is widely framed as an opportunity for artistic development, but also as an ethical practice. Interviewees describe them as a way to learn "from the source" and to give back to the culture. This is particularly emphasized by teachers, who often view the financial compensation aspect as an important showcase of respect: paying Jamaican dancers directly for their knowledge rather than learning steps through online posts in social media. In the weekly classes, Swedish teachers often refer to the workshops in which they learnt the steps when they are teaching them. At the same time, learning moves through social media platforms remains a widespread practice within the scene, even if sometimes it is criticized for avoiding direct engagement with the creators.

For some dancers, attending workshops is constructed as "the right thing to do," carrying a moral and, at times, political dimension. As Birgit admits:

“I still take the classes just to support because I know I’m teaching, so I still need to make sure that I pay the money back to the right people, but it’s a political choice that I do that, I don’t enjoy the classes where I have to stay for 30 minutes doing one step over and over to perfection.” (Birgit, white dancehall teacher)

Besides this political choice and clear ideas of what dancehall should be based on its roots and authenticity, there is a fear of being critical of the way Jamaican dancers teach their classes nowadays. The reason for this silence goes back to the notion of respecting the culture. Jamaican dancers are seen as the embodiment of this culture; there is a widespread feeling that going against the Jamaican way is disrespecting the culture. Silence is a common topic among dancehall dancers in Sweden, which will be explored further at the end of this section.

Going to Jamaica

Going to Jamaica is seen as a way to gain cultural knowledge “from the source”, but also as a way to legitimize your knowledge and role in dancehall, especially in the case of teachers, who see this as a sort of rite of passage to be able to teach dancehall as a non-Jamaican. Iris highlights this by saying:

“I’m seeing all the white girls teaching dance, and maybe they go one time to Jamaica, and suddenly they got the certificate to teach. Why is it wrong if I’m still training and in it? Eh, and when do you get the diploma, when, who gives you the ok to teach?” (Iris, racialized dancer)

Many dancers go to Jamaica several times with the goal of “learning from the source” and getting the “real dancehall experience”. This includes going to classes with Jamaican dancers, especially those who are not touring Europe, and going to dancehall street parties. As Karla explains:

“It’s a whole different experience when you take a class in Jamaica, in the street or at some crew’s HQ or whatever, you get a whole experience instead of taking it in a class here with mirrors everywhere” (Karla, racialized dancer)

In many cases, going to Jamaica becomes part of the dancehall journey and is seen as an experience of authenticity. The trips are also approached with ideas of respecting the

culture, with clear dos and don'ts regarding how to enter the dancehall space, especially when it comes to parties. However, this awareness of "taking space" is dependent on each individual; some are very mindful of their stance as guests in the culture to the extent of feeling self-conscious about dancing and taking up space at the parties as non-Jamaicans. In general, there is a consensus among participants that in Sweden, these types of conversations about how to enter the space are more common than in other European countries.

Most interviewees who have been to Jamaica agree that it was a great experience that made them get even more into dancehall. However, many also agree that the increase in dancehall-related tourism means that Jamaica has lost part of its authenticity over time. The longing for authenticity is present in all interviews, and going to Jamaica is seen as a way to achieve it, presenting an underlying romanticization and fetishization of Jamaica and dancehall culture. These ideas shape how participants reflect on their own positionality and privilege, leading to the final and utmost show of respect in dancehall: deconstructing white privilege.

Deconstructing White Privilege in Dancehall

Although I would argue that this is the most important step when it comes to respecting the culture, it is the least talked about and the least exercised by dancehall dancers. Oftentimes, the discourse around respecting the culture is very focused on the mechanisms previously mentioned, but white privilege is not as commonly discussed publicly, and it is not operationalized in the same way as the other practices.

Despite the lack of mechanisms for the deconstruction of white privilege, the role of whiteness when practicing a Black cultural form, such as dancehall, is a present topic in all interviews. Participants, to a greater or lesser extent, reflected on their own privilege as white Europeans, or, in some cases, as racialized Europeans, particularly from Sweden.

Most of the teachers and dancers are aware of the racial and economic relations between European and Jamaican dancers, with whiteness being privileged over Blackness. As Birgit reflects:

"Like we have to understand the power that we have as the white people with the money, somehow." (Birgit, white dancehall teacher)

References to white people being given deferential treatment are present in many interviews: white teachers in Sweden having more students than Jamaican teachers, white dancers being offered more commercial jobs, white dancers taking up space in Jamaican street parties, even to the extent of Jamaican dancers adapting to the white-European way of teaching, and the dance itself evolving to accommodate ideas of whiteness.

These self-reflections often appear accompanied by self-doubt, especially regarding the teaching of the dance and getting an economic benefit from it. Many of the teachers share having intrusive, guilty thoughts about whether or not they should teach as Europeans. These thoughts are shared equally by white and racialized teachers, particularly Iris recalls:

“I had a long conversation with the school owner, like I don’t wanna own something that I haven’t practiced for a very long time, and how is that gonna be, am I disrespecting the culture? Am I taking a space from someone else that maybe is correct for the work?” (Iris, racialized dancer/teacher)

However, I have not seen these thoughts expressed in public forums such as classes with Swedish teachers or workshops with Jamaican teachers. Furthermore, the interviewees who considered these types of reflections agree that these are their thoughts, but that these conversations are not common in dancehall or are only addressed in private rooms.

Regardless of whether these reflections are made privately, when it comes to teaching class, most teachers follow the first few mechanisms for respecting the culture: giving credit, encouraging students to take workshops with Jamaican dancers, and, to a lesser extent, talking about Jamaican and dancehall culture. However, most of them do not dig deeper with their students on the implications of white people dancing black culture, or the power dynamics that emerge from that, even though they may privately reflect on it.

Silence makes an appearance once again. It acts as an instrument of power, showcasing how the avoidance of having certain conversations reproduces and maintains racial and economic power structures despite most participants having similar thoughts on this regard. Silence surrounding whiteness camouflages the fact that these racial dynamics have a strong effect on dancehall as a cultural form. The circulation of dancehall as a marketable dance style depends on racialized systems of value that shape what is consumed, celebrated, and sold. The reluctance to discuss whiteness makes this process

easier to ignore, allowing commodification to appear neutral rather than politically and racially structured.

Commodification of Dancehall

Like many cultural forms, especially those originating from Black culture, dancehall is undergoing a process of commodification. Dancehall is turned into a marketable product, detached from its Jamaican roots and appealing to broader (and whiter) audiences. Nonetheless, the dancehall community is actively engaged in keeping the art form linked to its cultural origins in Jamaica by mechanisms of “respecting the culture,” as explained before.

All participants interviewed show critical engagement with dancehall and practice some of the mechanisms to respect the culture mentioned previously. For many, this critical engagement with dancehall stems from a journey of discovery of “true dancehall” after engaging with more commodified forms of dancehall. As Karla recalls:

“I started to dance dancehall, but not in this like not that serious dancehall not ‘real dancehall’ if you say like that, but it was still kind of dancehall music, but the teacher wasn’t that educated and didn’t know about the culture and anything like that, we just moved to the music.” (Karla, racialized dancehall dancer)

Some of them narrate experiences of having appropriated dancehall culture themselves in the past. However, all these experiences are reflected upon as part of the journey and a lack of awareness on their part. Today, all interviewees frown upon that behavior both in their past selves and in other people. Particularly, a few interviewees are critical of big dance schools in their cities that teach dancehall without following the respectful mechanisms. For some, the classes that do not share the cultural part of dancehall do not even feel like dancehall.

This way of commodifying dancehall by not being culturally aware has an opposite side: those who are so into the culture that they end up confusing cultural appreciation with appropriation. Some of the interviewees share stories of dancers going to Jamaica and using their trip to Jamaica to justify their appropriation of the culture. Some examples of this type of conduct explained by participants can be: appropriation of the dancehall aesthetic (clothes, wigs, braids, etc.), occupying spaces for Black Jamaicans (space at parties, music videos, gigs, etc), using patois in social media posts as a “cool and fun”

way to write posts, or reaching the point of assuming racial ambiguity.

Taken together, these accounts show that appropriation in dancehall is not only an individual matter but part of a broader dynamic in which cultural elements are detached from their Black Jamaican roots, circulated as style, and sometimes turned into a source of profit or social capital. This tension between admiration, appropriation, and commodification also prepares the ground for the next section, since the same processes that make dancehall desirable and marketable are closely tied to its westernization.

Westernization of Dancehall

Unlike commodification, which involves detaching dancehall from its Jamaican roots, Westernization refers to how the dance has been reshaped through whiteness and Western influence while still remaining connected to those origins. Participants with longer experience describe how dancehall has evolved to accommodate European interests, which some, like Birgit, link to Jamaican dancers adapting to Western teaching and market demands. This has created generational tensions, with older dancers sometimes viewing newer styles as overly shaped by the European gaze. These differences are also felt in practice, as illustrated by the following autoethnographic reflection:

I went to a workshop with two Jamaican dancers, one female from the new school and one male from an older generation (a bit between middle school and new school vibes). In the female class, we did three moves created by her. We learned them without music first and then tried them with music. After a while, I could feel what Birgit said about the westernization of dancehall: it felt like we were focusing a lot on where our arms should go rather than grooving and enjoying, so it looked very two-dimensional when I did it. I did not feel like I was moving my body from the center, but rather dissociating the arms and the legs, without focusing on the groove. On the other hand, the male dancer (older generation) taught steps that were less intricate (but not easier) and did it using music from the beginning, giving importance to the attitude and the groove. Thus, I could feel that I had to be present the whole time and that the moves were coming from my core rather than just moving my arms and legs in a very defined way. Both creators are Jamaican but I could feel the generational change in the way they moved and the way they taught the class. Both classes and styles were enjoyable in different ways, but the second one had a different energy of pushing boundaries and moving in a groove-focused way. (Autoethnography, Irene).

Such changes are often interpreted through a discourse of authenticity, where Jamaica and Jamaicans are framed as “the source” of a more “real” past form of dancehall, producing a sense of nostalgia that can romanticize or fetishize Jamaica while overlooking dancehall’s ongoing evolution through global and local influences. Other participants, however, view these shifts as a natural process of creolization, where dancehall is understood as a living form shaped by continuous cultural exchange.

Ultimately, these perspectives raise questions about what counts as authenticity and what purposes it serves, particularly in relation to respect for cultural roots and the reproduction of whiteness within the scene.

Silence in Dancehall

Silence is a factor present in most interviews and throughout the different themes. It appears in different ways: by not wanting to answer certain questions, by changing the topic to return to more comfortable themes (such as white interviewees switching from race to gender), or by explicitly stating that certain topics are never discussed in the community. As Iris reveals:

“There’s a lot of things that we don’t talk about in dancehall because people are like, scared to discuss with the Jamaicans, but, like I said, certain conversations would happen in certain rooms.” (Iris, racialized dancer)

In this case, Iris refers to questions of who has the right to teach dancehall and the relationships between Jamaican Black men and European white women, but also the broader silences that shape these discussions within the dancehall community. These silences are not directed solely toward Jamaican cultural authority or based only on reluctance to challenge Jamaican teachers; they also exist internally among dancers in Sweden. Several interviewees expressed a sense of isolation in raising critical issues, with some stating that they feel like they are the only ones talking about it. These silences are articulated particularly regarding sensitive topics such as interracial relationships, gendered power dynamics, or homophobia. This suggests that silence operates not just across cultures, but also horizontally within the local Swedish community.

Issues such as the relationships between Jamaican men and European women are described as widely visible, yet rarely openly addressed. Interviewees refer to these relationships as an issue in the dancehall community due to power imbalances. Rather

than being discussed collectively, these dynamics often remain as private reflections or feelings of individual discomfort. Interviewees' comments indicate that there is an unspoken awareness of these tensions, but limited dialogue around them.

This silence is closely linked to the recognition of Jamaican dancers as holders of cultural power. While Jamaican authority within dancehall is often respected, the negotiation of that authority, especially when it conflicts with Swedish social values, is frequently not talked about. Silence, therefore, acts as a form of deference towards Jamaican dancers and culture, and as a mechanism to avoid conflict in the Swedish dancehall space. An example of this is Leena's statement:

"I know one Jamaican workshop, I don't remember who it was, but it was a female dancehall workshop in [name of city] a couple years ago and she said in the beginning of the class that guys were not welcomed on the class, because in her culture they don't participate in female dancehall and then the Swedish teachers had a bit of a discussion about: obviously we don't stand by it, but we are like, humble that it's not our culture and it's this Jamaican teacher who decides who can attend the class or not." (Leena, white dancehall dancer)

Here, silence showcases how Swedish dancers do not openly challenge Jamaican authority, and they do not go into depth about what these exclusions mean or how they should be navigated. In fact, there is a recurring framing by participants of these issues as finding a "fine balance", showcasing the difficulty of addressing them openly. Instead of fostering open dialogue between participants, these tensions are often managed through partial acknowledgment, personal negotiation, or silence.

Silence is then a strong structuring force within Swedish dancehall communities. It shapes how dancers relate to Jamaican cultural authority and also how they relate to one another. Sensitive issues are often recognized by individuals, but they remain insufficiently spoken about, which makes some of the individuals feel isolated in their critique. In this way, silence functions as deference to Jamaican dancehall culture and as internal community regulation, maintaining social cohesion while impeding deeper public discussions about race, gender, and power. Some of the perceptions surrounding the interconnection between gender, race, and power are explicitly explored in the following theme: gendered, racialized bodies and images.

5.2 Theme 2: Gendered Racialized Bodies and Images

This theme examines how women's bodies carry racialized and gendered meanings in dancehall. It analyzes stereotypes, self-expression, and intersecting perceptions of racialized versus white femininities through dance. Includes codes like Images of racialized people, Intersecting raced-gendered stereotypes, Representation, and Sexualization.

Images of Racialized People

In the Swedish dancehall community, the perceptions of racialized participants appear to focus on two frameworks, which can be contradictory at times.

The first perception is the idea that racialized, or Black individuals, may "have it in their blood". While many interviewees reflect on the stereotypical nature of this assumption and often explicitly state that they do not want to reinforce racial stereotypes, they nevertheless suggest that racialized people might have a different, more embodied relationship to Black cultural forms such as dancehall. As Monica explains:

"And that's pushing away people of color within the style because all of the sudden we are saying: "we are the same and you have to do the same thing", and sometimes we will put ourselves, and I say ourselves as in the white girls in the scene in Sweden, we put ourselves above somebody who has African heritage or, a non-white person in the scene because [unintelligible] we learn from another culture, like we could learn more than somebody who has just this in their culture, in their roots." (Monica, white dancehall teacher)

Here, Monica critiques the rigidity of the racial equality discourse that can erase racialized dancers' cultural relationships. She also questions the fact that whiteness can be positioned as academically or technically superior within a Black cultural form because of the "respecting the culture" approach.

The second perception of racialized people, however, positions non-Jamaican racialized individuals as similar to white participants when it comes to authority in dancehall. According to this perspective, unless one is directly connected to Jamaican dancehall culture, racial identity alone does not constitute sufficient knowledge or legitimacy. As Birgit says:

“A lot of... [hesitation] colored people that was start to teach dancehall without supporting the source, because they had it in the blood, like [unintelligible] in the blood because they were Black, and then I would always wonder, would you do that as a white person? Or towards a white culture, would you do the same? Ballet, for instance, would we as a school accept that someone taught ballet that they didn’t know anything about ballet because they were white? [...] I do understand that it’s not the same procedures, but do we respect it less because it’s Black art?” (Birgit, white dancehall teacher)

This perspective focuses on professionalization and training to defend dancehall as a respected dance form, going against assumptions that Blackness alone grants authority in dancehall. However, this same logic can also have a side effect of casting suspicion on racialized teachers, prompting questions such as whether they are being validated because of their racial identity rather than their qualifications.

These competing discourses place racialized dancers in a particularly complex position, with some racialized dancers having experienced both of these discourses in their own dancehall journey. As two of the racialized dancers mentioned, on one hand, they experience pride in being associated with and appreciated within a Black cultural form. On the other hand, the stereotype that racialized individuals “naturally” possess dancehall ability can create for some of them a heightened pressure to perform exceptionally well.

“It feels good, but at the same time it takes away and puts a pressure on you, because, let’s say, I am a [racialized] person and you expect that already this class is gonna be easy for her because she’s like, “they just have it”. (Iris, racialized dancehall dancer)

Rather than being allowed the same individuality as white dancers, racialized participants sometimes feel they are representing broader racial or cultural identities. This way, characteristics that for white dancers would be individual, for racialized dancers are obscured by the expectations put on them because of their race.

The lack of representation in the dancehall scene in Sweden intensifies this dynamic. Racialized participants feel simultaneously hypervisible and underrepresented, facing both admiration and scrutiny. The lack of representation, particularly when it comes to teachers, is an issue raised by many participants, who believe that students take classes with teachers they identify with.

Additionally, some participants associate racialized people with greater confidence, expressiveness, or willingness to “take up space”, often contrasting this with Scandinavian cultural norms of restraint or timidity. Blackness is at times linked to ideas of coolness, and some believe that precisely this admiration towards Black people could signify a challenge to broader racial hierarchies.

However, interviews with racialized participants suggest that racial hierarchies do not disappear within dancehall spaces. Rather, they are often reproduced in subtler ways, even within communities that may imagine themselves as progressive or culturally inclusive. Thus, while dancehall may offer possibilities for challenging dominant racial structures, those structures continue to shape participation, legitimacy, and belonging within the community itself.

Intersecting Raced-Gendered Stereotypes

A recurring theme in participants’ narratives is the image of Black women as inherently strong, sexually confident, and unapologetic in their bodily expression. Black femininity is often associated with power, agency, and ownership of sexuality, particularly within dancehall spaces. Although this framing can be understood as an appreciation of Black women’s confidence and self-expression, some participants mention their awareness of the linkage between these stereotypes and the historically hypersexualization of Black women linked to colonialism and slavery.

What is particularly significant is that traits historically imposed onto Black women through oppressive racial structures (sexual openness, sensuality, etc.) are often reinterpreted by (mostly white) participants as evidence of empowerment or natural confidence. In this sense, dancehall may provide space for racialized women to exercise agency by reclaiming and redefining forms of sexuality that have historically been used to stigmatize them. Yet this reclamation exists within a complex framework, where empowerment and stereotype are closely intertwined.

In contrast, white women are often described as entering dancehall in search of liberation from restrictive ideals of white femininity, particularly the expectation of having to be respectable, controlled, or “the pretty girl”. In some cases, these notions of respectability are highly linked to Swedish social customs of “jantelagen” or avoiding individuality and showcasing personal success. Thus, for many of the white women, when they dance dancehall, they are also escaping from Swedish social norms that dictate how “proper

Swedish girls" should behave or express their sexuality. Birgit's reflection reveals this distinction between Black and racialized women, and white women:

"I've never watched a black woman and then thought that she would let go of the pretty girl, and more feel like, you know, as I say, part of the nature, something in the blood or, reclaiming... and then when it's the white I always say: "okay, she is tired of being the pretty girl" or, like, looking for perfection. Yeah. I actually don't know! [puzzled]" (Birgit, white dancehall teacher)

Thus, Black and white women's participation in dancehall is interpreted through different racialized gender ideas. Black and racialized women are imagined as connected to embodied sexual power, while white women are framed as transgressing their expected norms. Such distinctions reinforce racial binaries that see white women as respectable, restrained, and delicate, and Black and racialized women as inherently sexual, powerful, or "wild".

These similar reflections carried across interviews, regardless of the participants' race. A lot of them emphasized the shock that white girls receive when dancing dancehall because it challenges notions of respectability:

"But if it's a white girl, it's always like[...] Like both, this is not for her in a bad way, like she shouldn't dance like that. Or this is not for her, but it's impressive that she still can, because look at that brown girl, the black girl. Yeah, but of course, she can dance like this because this is her thing. But the white girl, wow. So it can't be both ways! (Karla, racialized dancehall dancer)

Here, Karla highlights the double bind in racialized perceptions of dancehall. White women's participation is often framed through contradiction: they may be criticized for performing a dance perceived as culturally "not for them", while simultaneously being praised excessively when they perform it well because their success is seen as unexpected. In contrast, Black and racialized women's skills are frequently naturalized, treated as something inherent to them, and therefore less remarkable. Their performance may be recognized, but it is often interpreted through assumptions that dancehall is "their thing", rather than through acknowledgment of individual talent. Thus, race shapes the expectations of the behavior of women in dancehall.

At the same time, these assumptions can flatten the diversity of Black and racialized women's experiences and performances. Although many participants described Black women's sexuality in dancehall as bold, expansive, and dominant, fieldwork observations at a dancehall party in Sweden complicate this stereotype:

"At some point in the night, a slower song started playing, and one of the Jamaican female dancers danced to it. She moved very sensually to the rhythm of the music, going to the floor, and there were no crazy jumps or overtly strong sexual moves. The dance felt delicate and like it was emerging from within her. She looked like she was in a trance, just feeling the music. A lot of people stopped dancing and gathered around to look at her, with no one daring to intervene, giving her the dance floor to feel the music and express herself in a delicate manner that still commanded power." (Fieldwork notes, Irene)

This moment captured at a dancehall party showcases how Black women's expressions of sexuality in dancehall are not limited to strong, exaggerated, or over-the-top performances. Instead, sexuality can also be soft, introspective, and delicate. Such observations challenge stereotypes of Black women in the dancehall scene, emphasizing different ways of moving and feeling the music other than the one that confirms a racial binary understanding of women.

Participants' interpretations of raced-gendered stereotypes reveal how dancehall becomes a space where racialized and gendered ideas about sexuality and femininity are both reproduced and renegotiated. While the culture may offer opportunities for empowerment, self-expression, and resistance, it also remains shaped by broader societal images that continue to position racialized and white women differently.

Sexualization

One of the recurrent topics in most interviews is the expression of femininity and the sexualization that comes from it. Many of them have stories regarding comments on social media or even experiences in real life while attending dancehall parties. Others reflect on their own perceptions of other women while dancing.

Interviewees highlight how the intentionality of the observer is key in these situations, and give a lot of importance to the external and the male gaze. For many of them, instances of sexualization happen when the onlooker does not know about dancehall, so

dance and cultural expressions that for these women are part of the dance are perceived as extremely sexual by external spectators, especially if the onlookers are men. This autoethnographic reflection showcases the feeling of being observed while dancing. It was recorded after a dancehall party in Sweden. The party was held in an open club, with people from the Swedish dancehall community, Jamaican dancers (men and women), and regular club-goers:

Funnily enough, Swedish guys staring made me feel more uncomfortable than Jamaican guys. At the party, Jamaican men were participating, dancing, and having fun with the other dancers, Swedish white men either stood on the sidelines watching or engaged in inappropriate ways with the female Jamaican dancers. I realized that I didn't have the confidence to perform certain dance moves that I would do in a dance class in an open club. The dance floor was occupied by women enjoying themselves and having fun with their friends, while men stayed on the sidelines watching. I felt very self-conscious the whole time, being careful of how I presented myself. While avoiding being sexualized by the (Swedish) male gaze, I also missed the opportunity to dance and go all out with other dancers. Some of the other dancers were going full out, doing moves, shaking their hips and buttocks in suggestive ways, but there was something in me that could not do that. I felt weird because in a dancehall class, I would have no problem acting sexy or doing explicit moves that can be read as sexual, but as soon as I step out of what I consider a safe space, I am too aware of my surroundings and who is watching.
(Autoethnography, Irene)

My observation is shared by other members of the dancehall community. They complain about the impossibilities to recreate a Jamaican ambiance in a Swedish club, because the cultural codes that rule the dancehall scene in Jamaica are often misread or distorted in Sweden, particularly through the sexualization of female dancehall dancers by men:

"But, overall in Sweden, throwing a dancehall party, trying to do it as in Jamaica in a regular club is very... Like, guys will sexualize you in a way that they think that you are a stripper who is booked for the party, not a dancer..." (Monica, white dancehall teacher)

Monica's testimony highlights how the cultural shift plays into the portrayal of women as sexually available. While dancehall in Jamaica incorporated sensuality and its

embodied expression, the performances there are embedded in the specific social norms and cultural understanding that distinguish dancing from direct sexual availability. However, in a Swedish club context, these nuances can be lost. Female dancehall dancers then become subject to being objectified and sexualized rather than being recognized as skilled dancers in dancehall.

What Monica describes is something I saw firsthand in one of the dancehall parties I attended. At that party, some female dancehall dancers took the stage to perform. They were Black women from Jamaica, and their performance had a wide range of reactions:

Jamaican female dancers started to dance on stage, and some of the white men who arrived at the club later gathered next to the stage where they were dancing. The dancers were doing female dancehall moves, and some of them were of an explicit nature. At that point, some of the men started throwing money bills at them at the stage. It seemed like the dancers stopped for one second, and then continued to dance even harder. There were also participants from the dancehall community (other women) recording their performance from up close, focusing on their butts while they were shaking them. When focusing on the DJ at that moment, I could see that he made some subtle hand signs, and two seconds later, a security guard appeared at the edge of the dance floor. He did not intervene, but remained there for a great part of the night. (Fieldwork notes, Irene)

It is not uncommon for female dancehall dancers to receive money at Jamaican parties as a sign of appreciation, as many interviewees pointed out when I shared this observation. However, they were surprised that this happened in a Swedish club. They questioned the intentions of the white men, unsure of whether they were aware of the Jamaican cultural context or if they were seeing Black women performing as strippers rather than dancers, concluding that it was probably the latter option.

Many of the interviewees also reflect on their own views of sexualization. In some cases, they conform to the idea of being sexualized and claim agency in the fact that they are doing it for themselves. For others, agency and active engagement with the dance play a key role in whether a performance is empowering or sexualizing. When making this distinction between passiveness and actively engaging in the performance, interviewees go back to the distinctions between Black and white women. They associate the passiveness with white women, whereas Black women are seen as more powerful,

actively engaging with the dance and with more agency during the performance. This comes to show how the race-gendered stereotypes found in dancehall are present in all the different aspects regarding women and their expression of sexuality.

5.3 Theme 3: Race and Belonging in the Dancehall Scene in Sweden

This theme explores racial dynamics and belonging within Sweden's specific dancehall scene. It documents how participants discuss (or avoid) race, Swedishness, social norms, and interracial relations locally. It includes codes like colorblindness, race in Sweden, and Swedish values, among others.

Race in Sweden

Participants express mixed opinions regarding race and anti-racism in Sweden, revealing both criticism and a little bit of optimism. Several interviewees describe Sweden as a society that is often "too politically correct", where open and nuanced discussions about race can be difficult to initiate or carry out. Some participants highlight that anti-racism is a journey that one must undergo by finding independent knowledge because there is a lack of critical perspective in education about Sweden's historical involvement in race-making processes and its role in colonialism. The absence of these topics from formal education is perceived as contributing to a broader societal reluctance to critically engage with race. At the same time, some participants suggest that dancers within the dancehall community may be somewhat more willing than the general Swedish public to engage in conversations about race, perhaps due to the Black Jamaican roots of dancehall and the fact that the community has a closer proximity to transnational cultural exchange.

Comparisons with other European dancehall scenes add further to these perspectives. Some participants argue that Sweden's engagement with dancehall is, in fact, more respectful than in other European countries, presenting Sweden as a relatively advanced country in its anti-racist efforts. In this view, Swedish dancers, event organizers, and those who plan trips to Jamaica are seen as more conscious of issues surrounding cultural appropriation versus appreciation. However, this positive view coexists alongside critiques of exclusion and whiteness in the dancehall scene, illustrating the contradictory ways in which the participants understand racial relations in the scene.

Notably, some participants also inadvertently reproduce the relation of Swedishness

with whiteness in their descriptions of identity. For example, when discussing her racial background, one participant explained that she was white and “completely Swedish” (Leena). With this statement, she subtly and inadvertently positions Swedish identity as ethnically and racially homogeneous, implying that to be fully Swedish is to be exclusively white. This observation is also shared by some of the racialized participants, with one of them making the following statement when talking about the demographic composition of teachers in the dance school where she teaches:

“But also within the teachers, u know. It’s like me and two other people that are not “Swedish Swedish” in that way.” (Thea, racialized dancehall teacher)

Here, the phrase “Swedish Swedish” functions as a racialized category, suggesting that individuals who are non-white, regardless of nationality and personal story, may still be perceived as outside the boundaries of Swedishness.

These narratives reveal how whiteness often remains an unspoken norm within both Swedish society and the dancehall scene, even in spaces that are rooted in Black culture. These findings showcase how the Swedish dancehall community is shaped by complex negotiations around race, belonging, and cultural legitimacy.

Colorblindness

A prominent theme emerging from the interviews is the prevalence of colorblind attitudes both within the Swedish dancehall community and Swedish society. Some participants describe a tendency to avoid explicit discussions of race, often referring to dancehall solely as “Jamaican culture”, without considering its roots in Black diasporic history and culture. In one interview, this distancing from Blackness is articulated through a participant’s interpretation of Jamaican national and cultural pride:

“Honestly? Just like, based on nothing, I feel like Jamaicans are so proud of being Jamaicans they don’t really want to, like, be part of like Black people that is like all of Africa, which is super far away and not connected at all. And Jamaica is such a known country both with sports and with music.” (Leena, white dancehall dancer)

This statement illustrates how race may be avoided through a focus on nationality, reducing dancehall to a culturally specific Jamaican identity while obscuring its significance

as a form of Black cultural expression shaped by histories of colonialism, diaspora, and class and racial struggle. Such narratives can work as a form of colorblindness by celebrating cultural products without engaging with the racialized power structures and substituting the racial component with a national one.

Within the dancehall community itself, participants identify colorblindness as an often unquestioned norm, particularly among white dancers. Several respondents express their concern that white dancers often fail to reflect critically on their own participation and performance of Black culture. Monica reflects on it this way:

“When the majority of the people in the class are white people performing a Black culture, are we reflecting on how we make that a safe space? I believe that a lot of people of color are not coming to the classes because they don’t feel comfortable when they see white girls putting themselves in the front, especially, like, if you go to the camp, a dancehall camp, where they would feel like they are more entitled in dancehall, I think that’s part of the colorblindness.”(Monica, white dancehall teacher).

Monica’s reflection highlights how colorblindness is not simply an abstract ideology but is reproduced through embodied practices and spatial dynamics. White dancers’ lack of recognition of their positionality may contribute to environments where racialized participants feel marginalized or alienated, despite the inclusive framing of these spaces. By ignoring race, rather than addressing it directly, inequalities within the community can be maintained or exacerbated.

Participants also link these tendencies to broader Swedish cultural norms. Colorblindness is often described as connected to Sweden’s reluctance to address difference directly, rooted in social values that prioritize consensus and conflict avoidance. In some interviews, this was associated with concepts like *jantelagen*, which discourages standing out or creating discomfort. One participant explicitly critiqued the Swedish discourse of “not seeing color”:

“I don’t like the way of “we don’t see color”, of course you see.. I’m here! Hello! I think it’s a way of, because Sweden is also very conflict, like scared of conflict, and you don’t wanna be the energy destroyer in the room, so we just like, “oh, everybody is gonna join, and everybody’s equal, and everybody’s gonna be...” But

it would be better to own it and respect it. And if you have questions, ask them straight away instead of walking around it." (Iris, racialized dancehall dancer)

This critique underscores how Swedish colorblindness may operate less as an expression of equality and more as a strategy for avoiding potentially uncomfortable conversations about race and (white) privilege. While framed as inclusivity, the refusal to acknowledge racial difference can dilute lived experiences, invalidate structural inequalities, and hinder meaningful anti-racist engagement.

Overall, these findings suggest that the broader colorblindness framework in Swedish society is also reflected in the Swedish dancehall community. Avoiding questions of race allows participants to celebrate the dancehall culture while neglecting the power dynamics present while engaging with Black cultural practices. Colorblindness is, then, not a neutral concept, but a mechanism that can hide inequality and reinforce existing racial hierarchies within supposedly inclusive spaces.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

In this discussion, I will go through the different themes emerging from the data to link them to the previous theoretical framework of commodification of Black culture, raced-gendered stereotypes, and colorblindness in Sweden. This way, each theme answers each research sub-question presented at the beginning of the research.

6.1 Consuming the Vibe: Dancehall as Commodity

Participants describe two main ways of engaging with dancehall. The first, common in mainstream dance schools, treats dancehall as simply another dance style, often detached from its cultural roots through the absence of crediting practices or cultural contextualization. This reflects the commodification and consumption of Black culture. The second involves dancers who actively seek to respect dancehall culture through mechanisms such as giving credit, discussing culture, attending workshops with Jamaican dancers, and traveling to Jamaica. However, despite these practices, whiteness and white privilege remain central to the Swedish dancehall scene, particularly through the lack of open discussion about their influence and consequences.

The question is whether the second group is commodifying dancehall. When examining the attraction towards dancehall that many participants expressed, bell hooks' text "Eating the Other" (2015) becomes highly relevant. In her essay, she describes the process of commodification not as possession in a colonial sense, but as a desire to be touched, changed, and transformed by the Other through the consumption of cultural diversity. The Other and its culture becomes appealing because it promises pleasure, excitement, authenticity, and personal growth (hooks, 2015). In this sense, engaging with Black culture can function as a way for dominant groups to seek emotional, social, or even spiritual transformation through engagement with racialized difference.

This framework is useful for understanding participants' attraction to dancehall culture. Many interviewees described dancehall as being transformative in their lives, bringing a sense of freedom, confidence, sensuality, or community, a place to belong to in contrast to Swedish social norms. However, this attraction often involves consuming Blackness and Black culture as a symbolic site of pleasure and transformation while overlooking the structural inequalities and racial power relations that shape the lived experiences of Black people themselves.

Importantly, the object of desire is not only dancehall as a cultural form, but also individual Jamaican dancers, particularly men, who are frequently associated with authenticity, charisma, and embodied cultural knowledge, or, in dancehall words, as being "the source". The romanticization of these individuals often obscures the unequal global and racial structures within which such interactions take place. In this way, the desire for cultural immersion risks reproducing commodifying dynamics, where Black culture and Black bodies become vehicles for self-discovery and transformation for white European participants, without necessarily challenging the hierarchies that shape those encounters (hooks, 2015).

The search for authenticity in dancehall through the connection with Jamaica and Jamaican dancers was a recurrent topic in the interviews, raising questions about authenticity in dancehall. There seems to be an idealization and romanticization of the dancehall culture, a nostalgic remembrance of what it used to be before whiteness and Westerners got into the scene. In this sense, some participants were critical of the way Jamaican dancers teach their classes now when they tour around Europe, reflecting on how this adapts the dance to white and Western ways of teaching dance. The participants

considered this a process of Westernization; however, it seemed like they were longing for a past that they considered more authentic, without considering that cultural forms, including dancehall, can evolve through time by being in touch with other cultures and receiving different influences, without whiteness being the only possible explanation. In some cases, this nostalgia took on an almost colonial aspect of wanting to maintain Jamaican and dancehall culture as “othered”, a site of entertainment and a source of authenticity for the few Europeans who found it first.

Nonetheless, it is true that some Jamaican dancers have embraced the opportunities that come with the commodification of dancehall. bell hooks (2015) offers a theoretical explanation for this: commodification can be very seductive for the culture being commodified and its members. The feeling of finally being seen and valued for a culture that was previously disregarded, and the prospect of economic profitability, are strong incentives for Jamaican dancers to participate in the commodification of their own culture. However, although most interviewees agreed that white and Western participants have the upper hand when it comes to economic power, it is very clear that Jamaican dancers have retained some cultural power, at least in relation to the Swedish dancehall community. All Swedish dancers I interviewed were keen on the importance of giving back to the culture, respecting it, and sharing the roots; not doing so would be very frowned upon by the dancers. Thus, although Jamaican dancers have partly been seduced by the promises of commodification, they have still maintained their ownership of the culture.

Interestingly, having ownership of the culture does not mean that dancehall is circulated through Black bodies. As DeFrantz and Gonzalez (2014) notices, Black culture does not need Black people to be articulated. Black cultural forms can circulate, be reproduced, and consumed even in the absence of Black bodies themselves. This is widely seen in the dancehall culture in Sweden, where Black and racialized representation is minoritarian. In fact, unless it is a specific dancehall event with Jamaican dancers, such as a camp, a workshop, or a dancehall party, white people usually take centre stage. This separation between cultural representation highlights how Blackness may be appropriated as performance while racialized bodies continue to be excluded, or, on the contrary, fetishized and tokenized, reinforcing patterns in which Black culture is valued more readily than Black people.

One particularity among the dancehall community in Sweden is the fact that these topics are rarely discussed among participants. The politics of silence within the community often function as a barrier to collective reflection and growth. An apparent reluctance to openly address uncomfortable issues, particularly those related to race, exclusion, appropriation, or power dynamics, can leave individuals feeling isolated in their concerns. Many participants, when speaking privately, voiced similar frustrations about problematic situations, yet often framed these experiences through a sense of personal alienation, asking themselves, “Why am I the only one bothered by this?” (Iris). This recurring perception suggests that silence does not eliminate tension, but rather makes it an individual matter, preventing members from recognizing shared patterns of discomfort and structural issues within the scene.

By avoiding open dialogue, the community risks avoiding opportunities for accountability, mutual understanding, and meaningful transformation. Transparent discussions about these tensions could instead serve to strengthen the community by validating members’ experiences, fostering critical awareness, and creating more inclusive spaces. However, when such concerns remain unspoken publicly and are only discussed in private settings, they are often displaced into closed-door conversations that can take the form of gossip rather than openly constructive critique. In this way, silence not only preserves existing inequalities but can also undermine trust and solidarity, as unresolved issues circulate informally without leading to collective action or systemic change.

6.2 Who Gets to Whine? Gendered Racialization in Dancehall

When it comes to stereotypical images, participants had similar constructions of racialized people, particularly of Black individuals. They were associated as different from white people through associations with naturalness, physicality, rootedness, and heightened sensuality. Historically, such representations have functioned as tools of domination, positioning racialized populations as closer to nature, instinct, and the body, while whiteness is aligned with rationality, civility, and restraint (Hill Collins, 2000). These colonial constructions continue to shape contemporary understandings of race and embodiment, and participants’ narratives frequently reproduced these stereotypes. Interestingly, most of the white participants mentioned not wanting to reinforce these stereotypes, but still fell into this distinction. Participants’ descriptions of Blackness as

inherently more rhythmic, expressive, or sexually liberated echoed exoticising frameworks, even when framed positively. For the racialized participants, the relationship to the stereotype was slightly more layered; they were aware of it and how it affects their relation to the dance, by evoking a sense of pride, but also an added pressure to conform to these ideas and perform in a way expected of them.

These dynamics become particularly significant when considering the intersection of race and gender. Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) work, the figure of the Jezebel offers an important framework for understanding how Black women's bodies have historically been constructed as hypersexual, excessive, and perpetually sexually available. This controlling image has functioned as a key mechanism in the oppression of Black women, legitimizing both the regulation of their sexuality and their objectification (Hill Collins, 2000). Participants' interviews reflected the continued presence of these raced-gendered stereotypes, particularly in discussions of how women's dancehall performance is interpreted differently depending on race.

On the one hand, Black women were described as powerful, strong, and in touch with a non-timid expression of femininity. Black women's expressions of sensuality are often read through pre-existing assumptions of hypersexuality (Hill Collins, 2000), meaning that their performances may be more easily sexualized. In this sense, Black women do not enter the dancehall spaces on neutral ground; their bodies are already inscribed with racialized sexual meanings that shape how they are perceived and undermine their level of skill in this art form by naturalizing it because of their race. On the other hand, white women were described as being timid and wanting to leave the "pretty girl" behind and were praised as brave for doing so. Participants shared experiences of social reactions to white women dancing dancehall as it being something unexpected for a white woman, deeming it both shocking and admiring. This double standard is explored by Hill Collins (2000) and reflects broader social patterns in which white femininity is afforded greater flexibility and innocence, whereas Black femininity is burdened by historically entrenched stereotypes such as the Jezebel. Ultimately, these contrasting perceptions reveal how racialized constructions of femininity differently constrain and reward women in dancehall spaces, reinforcing systemic inequalities in the recognition of embodiment, agency, and artistic legitimacy.

At the same time, dancehall can also function as a space of resistance. Concepts such

as waywardness, proposed by Hartman (2018), provide a useful lens for understanding how Black women may use dancehall as a means of reclaiming bodily autonomy, challenging respectability politics, and asserting agency over their own expressions of sexuality and femininity. Dancehall performance is often the performance of vulgarity and lower culture (Cooper, 2004). Through this dance, Black women can resist restrictive societal norms that seek to discipline or contain their bodies, instead embracing pleasure, confidence, and self-definition on their own terms. In this way, dancehall offers possibilities for empowerment and self-reclamation, even as it remains entangled within broader structures of racial stereotypes.

6.3 No Color, Just Vibes: Colorblindness in Sweden's Dancehall

Participants' reflections on colorblindness within dancehall often revealed a complex negotiation between cultural appreciation and racial discourse, and were very different between participants. Colorblindness appeared in different ways: one of the white participants explicitly mentioned dancehall as being Jamaican culture, rather than Black culture, putting emphasis on the national identity of dancehall and avoiding explicit discussions of race. Some white participants, however, were very keen on dancehall being Black culture and exploring how the racial power structures are visible on the dancehall scene in Sweden. When it comes to racialized participants, some were very critical of the notion of "not seeing color", highlighting how such perspectives can erase meaningful racial lived experiences. In contrast, others deemed talking about race not to be that important when discussing enjoying another culture. These different opinions had in common the acknowledgment of colorblindness in Swedish society, regardless of the importance participants gave to it in their personal answers.

Several participants also described Swedish society as excessively politically correct, suggesting that broader social norms discourage open conversations about race, racism, and whiteness. Within this context, some perceived the dancehall community as a comparatively more open space than Swedish society, where issues of race could be addressed more directly than in mainstream Swedish society, even if such discussions remained limited and crossed by politics of silence.

Participants frequently compared Sweden to other countries, often positioning Sweden as more progressive, tolerant, or egalitarian in its handling of racial and social

issues. These comparisons reflect patterns of Nordic exceptionalism, wherein Sweden is imagined as particularly advanced in matters of equality, especially when compared to other countries, while systemic racial inequalities are downplayed (McEachrane, 2014b). This is present in some of the interviews, when participants would be slightly critical about Sweden's engagement with race, and then immediately after, mentioning how Sweden is doing it better than other European countries. Without questioning whether that statement is accurate, this type of commentary aligns with McEachrane's (2014b) explanation of Nordic exceptionalism and the belief that all is well in Sweden, which might hinder a critical engagement with dancehall.

Despite this self-image, participants' narratives simultaneously confirmed that, although Sweden might be read as a multicultural country, Swedishness remains implicitly tied to whiteness (Adolfsson, 2024). While being Swedish may formally be understood as a national identity accessible to all, whiteness continues to function as an unspoken norm that shapes perceptions of who is fully recognized as "authentically" Swedish. This was a narrative present both for white and racialized participants, both of whom inadvertently mentioned Swedishness as tied with whiteness, or, in the case of racialized participants, shared experiences of not feeling or not being read as fully Swedish. Thus, although colorblindness is used as an expression of equality, data shows that race still plays a key role in the sense of belonging and being accepted. Therefore, colorblindness acts as a shield or a strategy to avoid talking about race, while whiteness remains the norm and the standard to being considered Swedish.

This discussion concludes this research and helps answer the research question posed at the beginning, examining how power relations are reproduced and negotiated among women in Sweden's dancehall community. It demonstrates that while respect for Jamaican dancehall culture may serve as an important foundation, it does not automatically challenge the racialized and gendered inequalities that continue to shape participation within these spaces. On the contrary, surface-level cultural respect can sometimes obscure the reproduction of white supremacist dynamics, particularly through the stereotypes surrounding racialized and white women, even if these reproductions are unintended. The contradictions identified throughout this discussion highlight how dancehall in Sweden simultaneously operates as a site of cultural appreciation, embodied agency, and resistance, while also remaining vulnerable to the commodification of Blackness and the reinforcement of existing racial hierarchies.

Within the Swedish context, these tensions are intensified by dominant norms of colorblindness, which often frame inclusivity through the avoidance of racial discourse rather than through critical engagement with racial inequality. As a result, the racialized meanings embedded within dancehall practices risk being overlooked, allowing structures of white privilege to remain intact beneath narratives of openness and cultural participation. Challenging these dynamics requires more than performative respect; it necessitates sustained, open discussions about race, privilege, and representation within the dancehall community. Importantly, such discussions must move beyond acknowledgment towards actionable strategies. This also requires confronting colorblindness as a limiting framework, since recognizing racial differences and their material consequences is essential for deconstructing white privilege and fostering more equitable forms of participation. In this way, critical reflection and intentional anti-racist practice become necessary steps in reshaping dancehall spaces toward greater awareness and justice.

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7 Appendix

Interview Questions for Participants

Background and Entry into Dancehall

- Can you tell me about how and when you first became involved in dancehall?
- What is your racial or ethnic background?
- What attracted you to dancehall as a dance style or community?
- What role does dancehall play in your life today?

Meanings of Dancehall

- How important do you think it is to engage with the Jamaican origins of the dance?
- Where do people usually learn about dancehall culture and its origins in the Swedish dancehall scene?
- How is this usually discussed?

Experiences in the Community

- How would you describe the dancehall scene in Sweden?
- *How would you describe the social dynamics within the dancehall community in Sweden?*
E.g: who tends to hold authority or influence? What factors shape these dynamics? (race, gender, experience, etc.)

Commodification and Cultural Appropriation

- Do you think there are tensions around cultural appropriation in the dancehall scene in Sweden? How do dancers or teachers address and reflect on these issues?
- Sometimes commodification is understood as wanting to consume other culture's, specifically racialized culture, and be "touched" or transformed by it. Do you think this happens sometimes in dancehall?

*Possible follow-up prompts

- Are there disagreements or debates?
- *How do you think dancehall is circulated or marketed in Sweden (e.g., through classes, social media, performances)?*

Race and Blackness in Dancehall

- Dancehall is a dance form that originates in Black Jamaican culture. How do you think those roots are present in the Swedish dancehall scene?
- Do you think race plays a role in how people participate in the dancehall culture in Sweden? Or how they are recognized within the community? Why or why not? e.g: think of who is celebrated? Who has more presence in the dh community?
- Are there moments when questions about race become visible or contested?

Link to the next section with colorblindness in Sweden!

Race in Sweden

- In Sweden, people often say that society is “colorblind” or that race is not something people talk about. Do you see this reflected in the dancehall community?
- Do you think the Swedish context shapes how dancehall is practiced or understood here? In what ways?
- How comfortable do you think people in the Swedish dancehall scene are discussing race or racism? /// *Is dancing dancehall something that challenges the colorblindness of Sweden?*
- Do you think the Swedish way of talking—or not talking—about race affects how people understand dancehall as a Black cultural form?

Possible follow-up prompts

- Are these conversations encouraged, avoided, or seen as uncomfortable?
- Can you recall any situations where these topics came up?

Coalition and Community

- What do you think a respectful or responsible engagement with dancehall looks like?
- Are there ways dancers try to support or acknowledge the culture and communities dancehall comes from? *E.G: hurricane melissa workshop!*

Closing Questions

- Is there anything about the dancehall community that you think people outside the scene misunderstand?
- Is there anything we haven't discussed that you think is important for understanding dancehall in Sweden?
- SNOWBALLING! WHO ELSE COULD I INTERVIEW? IS there a way you could introduce me?

Coding Dancehall Interviews

Codebook

Name	Description
Collaboration - sharing power	Refers to practices of mutual support, shared authority, and inclusive participation. Participants describe teaching, co-creating, making space, or redistributing visibility and influence.
DANCEHALL in Sweden	Refers to descriptions of the dancehall scene in Sweden. Participants describe events in Sweden or dynamics specific to the DANCEHALL scene in Sweden.
Personal discovery+trajectory	Refers to descriptions of their personal journey of discovery of DANCEHALL. Participants talk about how they started in dancehall, what it means to them, the role it has in their lives, etc.
Racial-economic hierarchy	Refers to the unequal distribution of authority, visibility, legitimacy, and influence in the (Swedish) dancehall scene, particularly where white participants hold disproportionate power through economic resources and whiteness as cultural capital. Participants describe white centrality, white economic dominance, or the structural advantages that position white dancers/teachers/organizers as gatekeepers of the scene.
Silence	Refers to silence in the dancehall community in Sweden, explicit or implicit. Participants mention topics that are not usually discussed in the dancehall community, or avoid discussing topics by changing subjects or refusing to answer questions.

Name	Description
Theme 1. Jamaican DANCEHALL meets the Western gaze	Codes talking about dancehall culture meeting Western ideas.
Commodification of Dancehall	Refers to dancehall being turned into a consumable product, detached from its Jamaican roots. Includes references to using dancehall as a source of novelty, pleasure, identity, or "spice" without necessarily engaging in its cultural origins.
Dancehall as Black Culture	Refers to explicit or implicit framing of dancehall as part of Black cultural expression. Includes references to Black performance, Black history, Black aesthetic, or dancehall as Black practice. Also includes the reticence to name it as Black culture.
Going to Jamaica	Refers to idealized, exoticized, or sentimental portrayals of Jamaica as the origin or symbolic centre of dancehall. Includes when these images are contested.
Respecting the Culture	Refers to engagement with dancehall as a cultural form through different mechanisms, such as giving credit to Jamaican creators and dancers. Participants talk about responsibility in sharing and giving credit.
Rooted in Jamaica	Refers to statements that emphasize Jamaica's foundational role in dancehall culture and practice. Participants stress Jamaican history, lineage, and dancers as essential to dancehall culture.
Sharing Dancehall Culture	Refers to discussing the transmission of dancehall knowledge across settings such as classes, workshops, lectures, or informal teaching spaces. Participants talk about explaining the culture, history, or movement vocabulary to others.
Westernization of Dancehall	Refers to the ways dancehall is adapted, reshaped, or transformed through European or Western influence. Participants describe changes in style, meaning, movement style, and aesthetics that arise in dancehall contexts (Jamaican and non-Jamaican).

Name	Description
Theme 2. Gendered Racialized Bodies and Images	How are women's bodies and racialized femininities represented?
Expressing Femininity + Sexuality	Refers to dancehall as a space for participants to explore, perform, or affirm their femininity and sexuality. Captures agency and self-expression rather than external objectification.
Images of Racialized People	Refers to stereotypes, assumptions, or essentializing ideas about racialized dancers or women. Participants show claims that racialized people are "naturally" connected to dancehall, more authentic, or somehow born into the culture.
Intersecting Images of Women	Refers to the different and overlapping ways women are perceived in dancehall when race and gender interact. Participants compare, contrast, or describe racialized and white women through gendered stereotypes.
Representation + Identification	Refers to the importance of seeing oneself reflected in teachers, dancers, or others in the scene. Participants talk about recognition, relatability, role models, or how identification shapes participation and choice.
Sexualization	Refers to the framing of women's bodies in dancehall through sexualized gaze, desire, and objectification. Participants discuss how women are read and valued through sexual meanings.

Name	Description
Theme 3. Race and Belonging in the Dancehall Scene in Sweden	How do participants talk about race, whiteness, and belonging in the dancehall scene in Sweden?
Colorblindness	Refers to the avoidance, denial, or minimization of race as a relevant category. Participants explicitly or implicitly engage in colorblindness in the interviews, with claims such as race is not meaningful in this context.
Freedom	Refers to finding liberation through dancehall dancing. Participants mention feeling free because of dancehall.
Interracial Relations	Refers to interracial social or romantic relations in the scene, especially where race and power are intertwined. It includes references to attraction, intimacy, tension, or dynamics between white women and Black men, or other racialized pairings.
Race in Sweden	Refers to direct discussion of race as a topic in the Swedish dancehall scene or broader Swedish society. Participants explicitly talk about how race is named, noticed, avoided, or discussed.
Swedish Values	Refers to references to Swedish social norms, moral expectations, or broadly accepted forms of expression. Talk about what is seen as appropriately Swedish, occasionally including Scandinavian culture.
Swedishness = Whiteness	Refers to associating Swedish identity with whiteness as a norm. Participants connect belonging, legitimacy, or "being Swedish" with being white.



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

Consent to participate in a Master's Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences

I agree to participate in the Master's Thesis provisionally titled "Negotiating Blackness and Racialized Power in the Swedish Dancehall Scene".

You are invited to participate in a student research study examining how the Blackness of dancehall is negotiated within the Swedish context, particularly as the dance form is practiced both by racialized and white women. The study explores:

- How dancehall, as a Black Jamaican cultural form, is taken up in Sweden
- How racialized power relations are produced, negotiated, or resisted within the scene

The research aims to contribute to academic discussions on race, cultural appropriation, commodification, and gender within the Swedish context. Given the topics being discussed, sensitive information such as the race and ethnic background of the participants might be part of the interview. The following section gives a detailed account of how this data will be processed.

Your participation involves taking part in one semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method based on a flexible interview guide with open-ended questions that allow participants to answer in their own words. The key themes are prepared in advance, but the order of the questions can be adapted, as well as the follow-up questions, so participants can express their experience in greater depth.

The interview will focus on your experiences within the dancehall community. It will be audio-recorded (with your permission). You may decline to answer any questions or pause or stop the interview at any time.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to:

- Decline participation without explanation
- Withdraw from the study at any time before the analysis of data
- Request that your data be deleted before analysis

There are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate or for withdrawing.

Information on the processing of sensitive data

The following sensitive personal data will be processed:

- Voice recordings.
- Other identifying details, such as ethnic background, dancing experiences or context details.

The information you provide will be treated confidentially:

- Your name and identifying details will be removed from transcripts.

- Pseudonyms will be used in written material
- Any contextual details that could lead to identification will be altered when necessary to protect anonymity.

All audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored on the encrypted drive system of Lund University. Only the researcher (and the appointed relevant officer at Lund University, if required) will have access to the data. Data will be stored in accordance with the university's data protection guidelines and GDPR. Data will be stored for 2 months after the thesis examination and then securely deleted.

This study addresses issues related to race, power, and cultural appropriation, which may feel sensitive or personal. You are not required to discuss anything that makes you uncomfortable.

We do not share your personal data with third parties.

Lund University, Box 117, 221 00 Lund, corporate identity number 202100-3211 is the personal data controller. You can find information about the processing of personal data at Lund University at www.lunduniversity.lu.se.

You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time. You do this by contacting Irene Rodríguez (main researcher) at ir5641ro-s@student.lu.se or registrator@lu.se. We will, in this case, cease to process personal data that we have collected based on this consent. However, data included in results that have already been obtained will not be affected by the withdrawal of your consent. Certain data may also be archived in accordance with Swedish law.

You have the right of access to information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have incorrect personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our data protection officer via dataskyddsbud@lu.se. You also have the right to submit a complaint to the supervisory authority (Swedish Data Protection Agency) if you think that we process your personal data incorrectly

I agree to participate in the Master's Thesis provisionally named "Negotiating Blackness and Racialized Power in the Swedish Dancehall Scene," and I consent to Lund University processing personal data about me in accordance with the above.

Location	Signature
Date	Name clarification (initials)