Black barrio women's BLM demonstrations in Sweden 2020

– A decolonial analysis of corporate media's regime of anti-Black misrepresentations

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations in Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic, centering on how Swedish corporate media constructed a racialized regime of representation. Utilizing Stuart Hall's theories of encoding, decoding, and transcoding, enriched with decolonial approaches from recent literature on the BLM-movement, the study reveals how media outlets perpetuated stereotypes and marginalized Black activists—especially young Black women—through White framing and the dominance of Blue Lives Matter narratives. The research foregrounds the leadership of Black barrio women, who organized protests characterized by poetic and artistic speeches that transformed resistance into collective joy and healing. The article also examines the varied responses of Swedish police, highlighting instances of feminist policing strategies that disrupted entrenched racialized stereotypes and fostered dialogue rather than confrontation. By critiquing intersectional failures in media coverage and institutional practices, the study calls for systemic change to address the ongoing marginalization and racism faced by Afro-descendant communities. Situating the Swedish BLM movement within the broader context of global anti-racist struggles, the article underscores the vital role of decolonial perspectives and Black feminist leadership in advancing racial justice and challenging the prevailing structures of exclusion and misrepresentation.

KEY WORDS

BLACK WOMEN, RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION, CORPORATE MEDIA, SWEDEN, INTERSECTIONAL FAILURE

INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 quarantine overlapped with global anti-racist protests. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement organized countless protests in 2020 against police brutality and the killings of people of African descent in the U.S. and other countries with large Black populations. The widely shared video of George Floyd's death, filmed and posted on internet by 17-year-old Black Teenager Darnella Frazier (Lennox, 2022), sparked global outrage and challenged the mainstream media's control over how Black people are represented, leading to a major shift in their portrayal. During the pandemic, Black communities mobilized to fight both the virus and systemic racism, holding protests against police violence and structural discrimination. In Sweden, the pandemic overshadowed responses to police violence against Afro-descendants. Anders Tegnell, head of the Epidemiology Authority, attributed higher infection and death rates to "the high number of immigrants" from Somalia, Iraq, and Syria, stating these groups were "very driving" in the statistics and that authorities were working to inform them about the crisis (SvD, 2020).

When the Black diaspora protested the racist stereotypes prompted by Tegnell's remarks, far-right groups criticized the BLM movement for demonstrating during the pandemic. On June 7, 2020, the day after Sweden's National Day, BLM women organized a major protest in Gothenburg—likely the largest ever led by Afro-descendant women in Sweden. Black barrio women delivered speeches using poetic language to counter anti-Black stereotypes. This article analyzes how the press depicted this event through what Stuart Hall (1997) calls a "racialized regime of representation" (pp. 224-228), focusing on Black and youth barrio women. It asks how Swedish media, in a country known for gender equality, enacted this regime toward BLM leaders. My approach is both empirical and interpretive. My involvement began unexpectedly. First, I was swept up in the energy of Sweden's BLM online protests. Then I found myself helping draft solidarity statements with other scholars and, on June 7, 2020, while returning from a trip, I passed through Heden, a sports area in central Gothenburg, and observed people gathering for a BLM demonstration. With only a few minutes of battery left on my camera, I decided to record as much as possible. I joined the crowd, recording the demonstration and later sharing those moments online (in Femsusdev, 2022).

To explore how Sweden's racialized regime of representation operates, I gathered media coverage of the June 7 protest using a news database, then selected key articles from other demonstrations in Stockholm, Örebro, and Malmö for content analysis. For examining White-framing and racialized coding, I draw on Harris and Patton's (2019) framework for "undoing intersectionality" and Crenshaw et al.'s (2011) concept of intersectional failure. Listening to the powerful speeches of young BLM women in Gothenburg, I draw upon Harris and Patton's (2019) "doing intersectionality", and Hall's (1997) trans-coding strategies to see how organizers projected positive Black images and turned joy into resistance, following Ince's (2018) insights. Concretely, then, in the next section I construct an analytical framework that draws upon Hall's crucial insights regarding encoding, decoding, and trans-coding (Hall, 1980, 2003), but which I complement with feminist, decolonial, and recent BLM scholarship and name 'colonial encodings', 'decolonial decodings', and 'decolonial trans-codings'.

DECOLONIZING THE RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION

Hall (1997) argues that constructing the "Other" as different is key to a racialized regime of representation, which operates on the following levels: on a linguistic level, meaning relies on difference; "Black" is defined in opposition to "White," with whiteness as the dominant term. On the social level, meaning is created through interaction; the Other is essential for defining ourselves. On the cultural level, societies classify and exclude those seen as impure or abnormal, often making the marginalized symbolically

central. Finally, on the psychological level, the Other shapes our sense of self and identity, representing what we lack, what we do not have, and what we desire (Hall, 1997, p. 227).

Hall's theory is central to understanding how Swedish corporate media construct and reinforce images of Black people through the racialized regime of representation. This process defines social realities, politics, and national identity through the othering of Black and people of color. It is, however, not a static process. Indeed, before the pandemic, the image of Black people in Gothenburg shifted from being seen as an "inferior race" to a threat to daily city life through the media's activation of the Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse on Islamic terrorism. A salient example relevant to this article is a specific case where intersectional feminist solidarity among women connected to the documentary Burka Songs 2.0 became the main target of mediatized attacks (Jakku 2018, Nilsson 2019). The initial idea was for the film maker Hanna Högstedt to walk down the Champs Elysée wearing a burka while singing the Marseillaise to performatively critique the French burka ban. However, the movie developed into a discussion of privilege, the colonial gaze, Islamophobia and representation. (Diaz 2017, p. 20–21). In 2017, a particular screening of the film followed by a panel conversation between the film maker and human rights activists Maimuna Abdullahi and Fatima Doubakil was cancelled by Ann Sofie Hermansson, then local Social Democratic leader, claiming that Abdullahi and Doubakil are "extremists," and comparing them to Nazis, fascists, and ISIS members. The corporate media suppressed Abdullahi and Doubakil's responses (Abdullahi, 2024, p. 255), and the intersectional conversation between the two Black, Muslim human rights activists and the White, anti-racist and LGBTQ activist was effectively silenced. The media's linguistic framing systematically labelled Abdullahi and Doubakil as "matter out of place," accepting Hermanssons order of excluding them from public events and cultural spaces. This marginalization silenced them and exposed their families to job loss and economic instability while casting suspicion on all Muslims in the city. When the activists sued Hermansson for defamation, the court proceedings became a "spectacle of the Other" (Hall, 1997). The trial put the plaintiffs in the position of the accused, as academics debated whether they were "extremists." Ultimately, Hermansson's stereotypes about their "extremism" prevailed, and the court did not find the resulting harm punishable. This reinforced the racialized regime, turning the accusers into defendants.

The Gothenburg feminist movement, despite its diversity, failed to defend Abdullahi and Doubakil, and the film's intersectional-political potential. Hall (1981, 1997) notes that media texts can be read differently depending on the audience's social position and interpretive framework. He identifies three audience positions: The first is coding, in which the dominant-hegemonic position is used for accepting the intended meaning. The second is the negotiated position for partly accepting but adapting the message. The third position is the oppositional or trans-coding strategy for "rejecting the intended meaning and taking an existing meaning and reappropriating it for new meanings" (Hall 1997, p. 259).

Hall stresses that trans-coding/oppositional strategies have been used to contest racialized regimes of representation since the 1960s through three basic moves. The first consists of reversing stereotypes. Here, Black characters challenge White-imposed images by portraying themselves as neither superior nor inferior, but fully human, rejecting dependence on White norms (Hall, 1997, p. 260). The second move consists of introducing positive images to replace negative stereotypes with positive representations of Black people, life, and culture (Hall, 1997, p. 262). The third move consists of contesting representation from within, stressing that as meanings are unstable, we need to enter the struggle over representation to contest ambivalence and prevent fixed meanings (Hall, 1997, p. 263). While Burka Songs 2.0 exemplifies an instance of potential intersectional coalition-building, the film's narrative and framing are not at the hands of the Black Muslim women that became the main targets of the media's racialized

regime of representation. I argue that this power to take control over the framing, the narratives and coalition-building strategies was characteristic of the BLM women-led demonstrations. In order to reveal how this is so, the remaining parts of this section complements Hall's insights on oppositional strategies with decolonial perspectives advanced by Black scholars committed to the study of the BLM, namely; what I call 'colonial encodings', 'decolonial decodings', and 'decolonial trans-codings'. This framework provides insights into the intersectional trans-coding strategies used by the organizers of the June 7 Gothenburg demonstration and earlier protests in Stockholm, Malmö, and Örebro.

COLONIAL ENCODINGS: BLUE LIVES OVER BLACK LIVES

The waves of BLM demonstrations and the intense anger expressed by many protesters following the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman in 2013 and further after the murder of George Floyd have generated a unique media dynamic, updating the slogan "Black is Beautiful" for the contemporary demand of "Black Lives Matter." In the latter iterations of these protests, and drawing on Hall's (1980, 1997) concept of encoding, large segments of the press constructed a linguistic framework that refused to criticize racist police violence. Instead, the media frequently portrayed the police as victims of violence perpetrated by racialized groups seeking to voice their grievances through BLM mobilizations. Fekete (2022) has analysed this narrative, which she calls "Blue Lives Matter," noting how it both ignores police misconduct and elevates the police to a privileged status, thereby justifying their use of violence under the pretext of fulfilling their duties.

DECOLONIAL DECODINGS

Youth have become central agents in the BLM, engaging in decoding practices as described by Hall (1980). Since BLM's founding in 2013, a core goal has been protecting minors from police abuse. Baskin-Sommers et al. (2021) observe that many young demonstrators leveraged media platforms for rapid information sharing and viral protest dissemination. Hall's theory anticipated marginalized groups reclaiming discourse through social media decolonization. Indeed, Lee and Ahmed (2024) emphasize the pivotal role of social media in amplifying racialized participation in protests with significant political impact. Even before the major 2020 protests, Nummi et al. (2019) highlighted the innovative digital activism of young BLM activists, who strategically used online platforms. These authors also identify the persistent problem of "White framing" in media, which systematically discriminates against Black populations and reinforces Hall's (1980, 1997) encoding concept. Such framing is often militaristic and legalistic. Militaristic in the sense that violent imagery depicting Black communities as threats and/or police unions advocating militarized tactics are used, thereby legitimizing state violence. And legalistic in the sense that the predominantly White judicial systems and media perpetuate White-aligned narratives, and disproportionate law enforcement targeting non-White individuals through fines and arrests, deepening systemic inequalities is widely practiced (Davis & Shaylor, 2020).

DECOLONIAL TRANS-CODINGS

Arguably, the BLM movement has built a Black counter-frame that, echoing Hall's (1997) trans-coding, critiques racial violence, rejects negative stereotypes, affirms the humanity of people of African descent, and asserts rights to freedom, justice, and equality. Yet, the invisibility of Afro-descendant women in police violence debates remains a critical gap. As Davis notes, this erasure overlooks the foundational leadership of Black women in radical movements (Srikanth, 2025). Patton and Njoku argue that "the violence Black women have endured has been both physical and psychological. Physical violence occurred by guns, rape, and sheer force, while psychological violence was enacted through spirit murder, which is the killing of one's soul" (2019, p.

1166). Drawing on Patricia J. Williams and Kimberle Crenshaw, Patton & Njoku describe this 'spirit-murder' as an intersectional failure, where Black women's lives are devalued, blaming them for their own tragedies, and ignoring their deaths and suffering. The media, of course, plays an important role in this regard. Coherent with the critique of intersectional failure, Harris and Patton (2019) identify four ways in which intersectionality is "undone": when used as a buzzword, limited to feminist analysis, through exclusionary citation, and by reducing its complexity. To "do" intersectionality, Harris and Patton (2019) therefore recommend honouring original Black feminist theorists in citations, advocating for social justice and change, and creating knowledge that drives institutional transformation.

Resonating with Audre Lorde's theorization on anger, Ince (2018) stresses that rage from centuries of colonial racism, expressed in street protests, is crucial for confronting systemic oppression and structural violence. Complementing Harris and Patton, he contends that racism shapes society's response to non-White anger, and genuine Black emancipation requires an intersectional struggle that includes all racialized groups. Ince introduces four resistance tools that extend beyond Hall's (1980, 1997) trans-coding strategies: the first tool involves recognizing the limits of White institutions as inherently incapable of protecting non-White populations from racism. Second is the rejection of White guilt denial, which other authors have described as "White explanations" (Ahmed, 2011) and "White fragility syndrome" (DiAngelo, 2011). Third, identifying and naming expressions of racist oppression as essential acts of resistance and, finally, to embrace joy as a transformative and pedagogical form of resistance.

In the next section, I operationalize these analytical tools in the in-depth analysis of the intersectional trans-coding strategies used in the context of the Swedish BLM demonstrations.

THE RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION ON THE BLM DEMONSTRATIONS

In the days before the demonstrations, major streaming platforms and digital giants expressed support for the BLM movement, while Swedish media focused on protests in U.S. cities, often reinforcing stereotypes of violent protesters and echoing slogans like "The police have to stop murdering us." Similar demands were heard in Brazil, where police killed over 500 people in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in two months (TT, 2020b). As Ince (2018) argues, the press largely failed to represent Black and non-White populations, instead using colonial linguistic frames (Hall, 1997) to depict anti-racist protests as threats to the established order, leaving White framing unchallenged.

The national *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that, instead of street protests, public support for BLM took the form of a massive digital demonstration aimed at the U.S. embassy (Grönvik, 2020). Early June Swedish press coverage of BLM was limited and avoided addressing police racial brutality in Sweden. This denial of White guilt (Ince, 2018; Ahmed, 2011; DiAngelo, 2011) was interrupted by two acts of opposition, or trans-coding (Hall, 1997). The first was an op-ed by Teysir Subhi (2020), published in the local *Göteborgs-Posten*. Subhi, an Afro-Swedish city council member for the Feminist Initiative Party, called for urgent action against discrimination targeting Black and other racialized communities in city suburbs, highlighting routine harassment by police and private security. She criticized politicians for claiming "reverse racism" was the response police received from racialized residents. By engaging in the struggle over representation from within (Hall, 2003), Subhi's article exposed what Fekete (2022) has described as the *Blue Lives Matter* syndrome dominating perceptions among politicians in the city hall.

DECOLONIAL TRANS-CODINGS AT BLM DEMONSTRATIONS IN STOCKHOLM, MALMÖ, AND ÖREBRO

Beyond Teysir Subhi's article in *Göteborgs-Posten*, a second oppositional scenario unfolded in the streets, led by young women from the BLM movement. The first of these demonstrations began in Stockholm on June 3. Due to restrictions imposed to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, public gatherings were limited to no more than 50 people. Although the police initially granted a permit, they later revoked it when the number of attendees exceeded this limit. The organizers—young BLM women—accepted the police's decision to suspend the permit. However, this decision angered many protesters, who, numbering in the thousands, continued the demonstration independently.

Police responded by using pepper spray, as well as hitting and pushing demonstrators. The situation escalated in several streets throughout the city center. At one point, a police patrol equipped with batons was moving through the area but was quickly surrounded by protesters. Until then, press descriptions continued to maintain a linguistic frame intended to mute the Other (Hall, 1997), thereby perpetuating the racializing regime of representation.

Tensions rose, and when a confrontation seemed imminent, a female police officer separated herself from her colleagues and knelt in front of the protesters, raising her fist in the air. Interpreted as a symbolic gesture of anti-racism, the officer then displayed a small banner borrowed from one of the demonstrators, which read, "White silence is violence." This performance had been used by other police officers in different demonstrations in US (Lennox, 2022) and calmed many of the protesters, who responded by celebrating the officer's gesture (Fernstedt & Svensson, 2020).

The moment sparked debate in leading liberal media. By seeking reconciliation instead of fuelling the "Blue Lives" versus "Black Lives" divide, the police chief intervened from within (Hall, 1997), disrupting the racialized regime of representation.

The far-right press labelled the BLM demonstration as left-wing extremism, following a racializing encoding strategy (Hall, 1981) now used by legal and political elites to frame Afro-Swedes' political actions as "extremization" (Abdullahi, 2024). The corporate press reserved its strongest criticism for the police chief, who refused to reinforce the racializing stereotype. Through trans-coding (Hall, 1997), the chief stated that "the police were on the side of the demonstrators." The far-right press argued that this sympathy aligned the police with left-wing extremists (Fria Tider, 2020). Thus, a trans-coding strategy was used to openly contest the racialized regime prescribed by far-right parties.

Conversely, a liberal editorial supported *Blue* Lives Matter (Fekete, 2022), criticizing the demonstrators' banners in Stockholm—especially those targeting the police. Attempting to sanction these as "a matter out of place" (Hall, 1997), the editorial claimed BLM was importing a U.S. problem absent in Sweden. It contrasted the heavy U.S. police presence in Afro-descendant neighbourhoods with Sweden's minimal presence in segregated areas, finding it intolerable that police in these Swedish areas faced both attacks and "insulting banners" at the BLM protest (Expressen, 2020). These editorials reveal a form of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), where criticism of institutional racism is seen as betrayal of a system viewed as "benevolent" and "tolerant" toward racialized individuals—a shared form of exceptionalism in the Nordics (Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023)

A review of banners at the demonstration reveals inconsistencies in Expressen's racializing discourse. An SVT photographer documented banners with messages like "Black Lives Matter!", "No justice, no peace," "No freedom until we are equal," "Never will they crush us," and "Defund the police" (SVT Ny-

heter, 2020). These slogans expressed resistance and demands for justice, not "insulting" content. Through a process of trans-coding, the banners challenged dominant representations.

In response to the Stockholm demonstration, Gothenburg organizers were required to explain how they would manage crowds exceeding 50 people (SVT Nyheter, 2020). An epidemiology professor criticized the BLM movement's insistence on protesting, calling it a "fuck you" to pandemic containment efforts (Malmqvist, 2020). Such coverage constructed a stereotype of BLM as "matter out of place", alien to the national community.

Furthering this stereotype, *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) published an interview on the upcoming BLM demonstrations in Gothenburg and Malmö, framing organizers as "disrespectful" of the national community—a view echoed by national epidemiologist Anders Tegnell. While sympathetic to the cause, Tegnell argued that police should not risk public health by allowing gatherings beyond official limits (Holmgren, 2020). Both SVT and DN thus imposed a cultural sanction, labelling the demonstration as "illegal" (Hall, 1997) and reinforcing the image of BLM as a threat to public health.

A BLM demonstration in Malmö saw police forced to disperse the crowd as participants quickly exceeded 300, eventually surpassing a thousand. According to *Skånska Dagbladet*, the female police chief responded by engaging in dialogue with organizers (Eriksson, 2020), balancing the right to protest with COVID-19 restrictions—directly countering the silencing of dissent described by Hall (1997) and perpetuated by politicians, the press, and leading male epidemiologists.

On Sweden's National Day, the regional newspaper *Nerikes Allehanda* reported that a BLM protest in Örebro, organized by youth mobilized via social media, also defied official health regulations and police expectations. Initially prepared to break up the rally, police instead saw around 400 young demonstrators begin to march. As in Malmö, the female police chief chose dialogue and accompaniment over confrontation, again resisting the "muting the Other" described by Hall (1997) and reinforced by mainstream media. These feminist policing strategies set the stage for the subsequent Gothenburg demonstration.

THE BLM DEMONSTRATION IN GOTHENBURG

Calls from left-wing organizations, echoing leading epidemiologists and public health authorities, urged the postponement of the Gothenburg protest. These appeals reinforced the prevailing racialized regime of representation and sought to silence the Other in constructing White identity (Hall, 1997). Despite these pressures, 2,300 people had already committed to attending two days before the event (Aktuellt i Fokus, 2020). The BLM movement's defiance exposed the fragility of the White democratic system, as Black activists anticipated and challenged dominant discourses from right-wing politicians, epidemiologists, and the corporate press.

Traditional left-wing movements, including the (White) feminist movement, distanced themselves, further illustrating the White framing that BLM organizers confronted (Nummi et al., 2019). In response, women from Gothenburg's suburbs adopted a Black counter-framing (Nummi et al., 2019), encouraging poetic, artistic speeches over conventional union leader addresses. This approach, embracing joy as resistance (Ince, 2018), transformed each speech into a celebration of resistance against police brutality targeting Afro-descendant communities, countering entrenched racist stereotypes (Hall, 1997).

The BLM demonstration unfolded then in three stages. The first stage was the gathering at Heden, where organizers carefully implemented biosecurity measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. The second stage was the core event, with speeches and artistic performances at Heden. The final stage was the march, during which participants walked through the city's main streets before returning to Heden for the demonstration's conclusion.

THE DECOLONIAL GATHERING AND SPEECHES AT HEDEN

During the gathering, the field—approximately half the size of a football pitch—was divided into marked rectangles, each designed to accommodate 10 to 15 people. Hygienic measures were mandatory, with hand soap and face masks provided at the entrance. Thanks to the organizers' detailed biosecurity planning, the police allowed the protest to proceed, even though the crowd exceeded a thousand people. This approach countered the stereotype of BLM as a group defiantly disregarding public health regulations.

I was particularly struck by what occurred during the second act, as the speeches began. The scene was filled with photojournalists and elite members of major media outlets, who positioned themselves behind the speakers, seemingly disengaged. The group of speakers and organizers comprised about ten young individuals, underscoring what Baskin-Sommers et al. (2021) have emphasized regarding the cardinal role of Black activists in sustaining the BLM movement. Notably, eight of these young activists were women, confirming the Black feminist character of the demonstration.

However, when the first young man took the floor, a group of male photographers suddenly rushed to the front, throwing themselves on the ground and contorting themselves to capture dramatic angles—from below, from the side, or any other eye-catching perspective. In stark contrast, when the young Black barrio women stepped up to speak, the photographers returned to a state of lethargy and disinterest. Journalists, identifiable by vests emblazoned with their company logos, chatted on their phones or idly waited, showing little interest in the content of the women's speeches.

This selective attention by photographers—aggressively documenting the male participant while ignoring the Black women speakers—constituted a visual erasure, deliberately muting and Othering Black female activists. Such blatant invisibilization of the young barrio women, who were instrumental in organizing the event, metaphorically attempted to "kill the souls" of the women (Harris & Njoku, 2019) on stage. As a pattern of intersectional failure (Crenshaw et al., 2015), this ostracism could also be perceived as an expression of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), reflecting an unwillingness to listen to the Other and confront anti-Black racism.

At the start of their speeches, one of the female organizers briefly explained the original goal of the demonstration. In a calm and sincere tone, she opened by saying:

> "The question we have asked ourselves, which we want you to reflect on as well, is: Why are we here? Because as everyone knows, these traumatic images circulate on the internet, and we have asked this question to ourselves individually, as organizers." (Femsusdev, 2020)

Within this framework of collective healing, the speeches were both poetic and political, each one concise and impactful. One by one, the speakers were invited to the microphone. The audience embraced this approach, listening attentively and responding with respect and admiration, applauding each intervention. Beyond projecting a positive image to counteract stereotypes of Blackness (Hall, 1997), the speakers and audience were united in a performance where joy was intentionally embraced as a form of resistance (Ince, 2018) against the dominant racialized regime of representation perpetuated by the press.

Following this strategy, the first female speaker delivered a deeply emotional account of her lived experience, expressing transgenerational anguish that she felt compelled to share with the audience. Her speech offered a powerful critique of the consequences of racial violence and asserted the full humanity of people of African descent (Ince, 2019).

Next, the young Black barrio woman serving as Toastmaster delivered her main speech, reading from her phone. Her remarks were primarily anti-colonial, emphasizing the humanity of Black lives: "—I am here because the colonial legacy must end! Be-

cause I'm tired of being a projection surface for the inhumanity of whiteness! An idea that has devoured Black lives for generations!" (Femsusdev, 2020) Her talk clearly articulated what Hall (1997) identifies as the psychological function of using Black Otherness to construct one's (whiteness) own identity. The next speaker, a Muslim woman wearing the hijab, stepped forward and offered a vivid account of the everyday realities of racism in both the United States and Sweden. She declared: "—Here we stand again, several men later, several souls less, in solidarity with our African-American siblings. In obligation to influence internationally, in obligation to influence nationally." (Femsusdev, 2020) By embracing the global character of the protest, she further emphasized how the scientific genealogy of racism also materialized in colonial landmarks: "—In the country with theories that only weigh for racism, in the city where we pass colonial heritage on the way to work or on the way home..." (Femsusdev, 2020) She referenced sites such as Iron Square, a location where political demonstrations for justice and equality convene and depart almost weekly—spaces that have been analyzed by Sawyer and Osei-Kofi (2020) in their studies of colonial history. In her passionate speech, she also challenged the glorification of academic figures like Carl Linnaeus, who was being questioned by the BLM movement in Sweden at that time (Hübinette et al., 2022), and after whom one of the city's grandest avenues and busiest squares is named.

Her criticism extended to the corporate media, whose representatives stood conspicuously behind her, neither photographing her nor showing any interest in her words. Their presence seemed aimed at both "killing her soul" (Harris & Patton, 2019) and concealing the pervasive racism ingrained in police practices, media narratives, epidemiological discourse, and political structures. She was explicit in highlighting the persistence of racism that the media continues to deny within Swedish society. The speaker continued her address with a powerful critique of the illusion that racism has been eradicated, directly challenging the audience:

> "But I must ask—racism is gone, for whom? For the perpetrators, of course. We are accepted and respected only when we conform to the education you provide us. We write report after report showing the injustices we face—the way police target those of us with more melanin, the way White officers tackle pregnant women in front of their children, and how they criminalize our youth. These reports show how we are denied care, how we are excluded from fair opportunities in the workplace, and how the statistics reveal our shortened lifespans. They also highlight the anguish of mothers living in communities marked by systemic neglect and discrimination." (Femsusdev, 2020)

Rather than merely describing a racialized regime of representation, she depicted an apartheid-like system. To conclude her powerful antiracist address, she unequivocally emphasized the accountability of the police, highlighting the terror experienced by residents of Gothenburg's suburbs—particularly within the Afro-Muslim diaspora—during encounters with law enforcement.

> Here we are, in the midst of a pandemic. Yet, it is us who are hit the hardest! We demand justice—to dismantle the racist structures that perpetually target us. Here we are, in a pandemic once again. And still, we bear the brunt of its impact. For generations, we have spoken out about the racism we endure. But who do you call when it's the police who are doing the beating? I've personally tended to the wounds of our brothers, injured by police gunfire. Who do you turn to when it's the police who are harassing you?" (Femsusdev, 2020)

Echoing global BLM demands to defund the police and dismantle racist structures, she reminded the audience that the police have consistently failed to protect Black lives (Ince, 2019). Her speech also dismantled the glorification of "*Blue Lives Matter*" (Fekete, 2022), often advocated for the suburbs in the corporate media. Instead, she asserted the full humanity of people of African descent (Ince, 2019) in the multicultural suburbs, which, during the pandemic,

lost many social leaders—a devastating blow for both African diasporas and their broader communities.

Her poetic speech was a vivid expression of "doing intersectionality" (Harris & Patton, 2019), referencing decades of research documenting the persistent ethnic and racial segregation in the city. She warned that in a city divided along lines of class, race, and gender, racism within the police force remains rampant.

THE DECOLONIZING WALK THROUGH THE CITY

In keeping with the goal of projecting a positive image and countering stereotypes perpetuated by the corporate press, the demonstration entered its third phase after the speeches: a march through the city. The route began at Heden, continued along Vasagatan and Victoriagatan, and proceeded to Grönsakstorget. From there, participants followed the street to its end, turned right toward Brunnsparken, and eventually looped back through the Ullevi area, returning to Heden.

A particularly notable aspect of this march was the unexpectedly friendly demeanor of the police toward the demonstrators. Officers wore standard patrol uniforms, service caps, and soft-soled shoes—there were no riot helmets, combat fatigues, or shields in sight. Even more striking was the police's decision to actively join the demonstrators, rather than standing aside. This can be interpreted as a clear act of trans-coding (Hall, 1997) by the police, aiming to challenge and regress the stereotypes promoted by right-wing forces among epidemiologists, politicians, and the corporate press.

Police officers walked in pairs, engaging freely in conversations and blending in with the crowd, much like any other participant. The atmosphere evoked what Bloch (2000) describes as a "utopian surplus"—a fleeting moment in which protesters and police walked shoulder to shoulder, symbolically advancing toward a shared vision of a city and a Swedish society free from racism and police brutality, embodying the ideals of BLM.

As the march concluded, my camera battery had died, so I took a shortcut back to Heden, where the demonstration was set to end. Upon arrival, I saw the marchers reaching their intended destination around 15:30. However, rather than dispersing, the demonstrators decided to take another lap around the circuit. The police continued to accompany the group, showing no intention of leaving. While I found this unexpected, I was too exhausted to continue and decided to head home to rest.

THE RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION STRIKES BACK

When I later reviewed the news coverage of this BLM demonstration, I found a series of stories focusing exclusively on the vandalism that occurred several hours after the march, between 17:00 and 18:30, upon returning to Heden. There was no mention of the initial gathering at Heden, where young Black barrio women successfully brought together thousands of people while adhering to biosecurity measures. Nor was there any coverage of how participants marched peacefully through the city, transforming the demonstration into what felt like an anti-racist celebration.

This media narrative reveals a persistent White framing (Nummi et al., 2019) intent on reestablishing the racialized regime of representation by labeling BLM as an "extremist movement." On one hand, this stereotype is rooted in denying the intellectual and political agency of the BLM movement. On the other hand, the White framing shifted to a *Blue* Lives Matter perspective (Fekete, 2022), focusing on a limited group of "violent individuals known by the police"—even though the police, in an act of trans-coding (Hall, 1997), emphasized that these individuals "have nothing to do with the demonstration itself" (Börjesson & Rogsten, 2020).

Through this lens, the corporate press weaponized stereotypes to blame the BLM movement for post-demonstration events, while refusing to document the presence of women at Heden and instead

amplifying images of Black men confronting police. Media coverage fixated on the Nordstan riots, casting Black people as "matter out of place" in Sweden and erasing the voices of young Black barrio women who spoke out against Sweden's racial regime and the police as its enforcers. No participants were interviewed; instead, the media silenced Black perspectives (Hall, 1997) and relied exclusively on police narratives, privileging Blue lives over Black lives (Fekete, 2022).

The biased descriptions adopted by the media perpetuate a narrative that linked the BLM movement to violence. Headlines consistently emphasized BLM's involvement at the outset of the events, often accompanied by selective statistics and descriptions of the movement's origins, thereby framing the riots in central Gothenburg within this skewed context (Börjesson & Rogsten, 2020, p. 8). Meanwhile, the true architects of the remarkable demonstration—where police and protesters marched shoulder to shoulder against racism—remained unnoticed and unacknowledged by the corporate media.

In response to criticism, some media outlets attempted to adjust their reporting by offering a different perspective on the BLM movement. Seeking to regain lost audiences and to mitigate their own stereotyping narratives—and intersectional failures (Crenshaw et al., 2015)—the media shifted their focus to Murphy Alex, a Nigerian-born Black man who had recently moved to Gothenburg from London. Alex happened to be passing through the Nordstan shopping mall when a group of young Afro-Swedes broke windows and looted items. The predominantly White press highlighted Alex's intervention in stopping the looting as an act of heroism, framing him as evidence that not all Afro-Swedes should be viewed as socially resentful. Instead, Alex was celebrated as an "exemplary Black citizen." For example, *Dagens Nyheter* emphasized that even Jan Eliasson, the former Swedish Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, publicly praised Alex's actions, stating, "He (Alex) was alone, but in any case, he did more alone than all the others combined in the fight against racism" (Hedberg, 2020).

This effusive praise for a Black man who did not participate in expressing discontent at Heden represents another form of White framing (Nummi et al., 2019), effectively "killing the soul" of Black women (Patton & Njoku, 2019) by sidelining their leadership and activism. As an expression of intersectional failure (Crenshaw et al., 2015), it is particularly telling that Alex himself, after weeks of being lauded by the media, was finally allowed to express his discomfort. He emphasized that the focus on his actions detracted from the real purpose of the BLM demonstration: the urgent demand for racial justice and the recognition that Black Lives Matter (P4, 2020).

THE SWEDISH RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION AGAINST BLM WOMEN

This article has tried to update Hall's frame for racialized regime of representation with colonial encoding, decolonial decoding and decolonial trans-coding in two directions. First to outline intersectional failure, and second to move closer to an understanding of how BLM with its demonstrations pushed Swedish society toward new utopian futures. Regarding intersectional failure, corporate press stereotypes became bricks in the White wall constructed by elites—politicians, epidemiologists, and press editorials. During the days around the nation day celebration on June 6, 2020, the social elites, under the guise of COVID-19 protection, reinforced one more time the existing racial regime shaping public opinion, culture, and the White identity of Sweden, marginalizing Afro-Swedish rights. Yet another example of White framing, the COVID-19 emergency neglected the full humanity of people of African descent in three significant ways. First, by denying them unconditional access to healthcare. Second, by heightening health requirements on the BLM movement for organizing their anti-racist protests during the emergency. Third, by once again failing to protect the Black population from racism embedded among epidemiologists, politicians, and in the reporting of the corporate press, before, during and after the protests.

In terms of utopian futures, following Harris and Patton's (2019) recommendations on "doing intersectionality" female police chiefs adopted a more dialogical, feminist approach, engaging with demonstrators to ensure the protests continued peacefully. It appears that this shift in police behavior was significantly influenced by the involvement of women in managing the demonstrations on both sides. It is still premature to conclude whether this police conduct corresponds to a feminist turn resulting from the policy of gender equality adopted in Sweden by this authority. What is new is that this conduct represented a refreshing expression of opposing racism from within (Hall, 1997). However, the press overlooked all these expressions of a utopian future, instead ostracizing women in general in a further exercise of intersectional failure, thereby keeping the racialized regime of representation unchallenged.

Finally, in line with alternative citation practices for "doing intersectionality" (Harris & Patton, 2019), and to enter the struggle over representation (Hall, 1997), the young barrio women leading Gothenburg's BLM movement staged a decolonial demonstration, disrupting the dominant White framing that upholds the racialized regime of representation in the press. Their joyful, empowering resistance enacted a Black counter-framing, contributing to the "utopian surplus" in the ongoing struggle for a society where Black Lives truly Matter.

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