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# CREATING A “LATINO” ARTIST IDENTITY IN-BETWEEN SWEDEN AND LATIN AMERICA – A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

*This article engages in a close comparative reading of the creation of a “Latino” artist identity by two Swedish artists – Fredrik FreddeRico Ekelund and Rodrigo Rodde Bernal. By focusing on the theoretical concept of white Swedish masculinity, it aims to deepen the understanding of how such identities are created within and against the background of specific historical contexts and locations.*



This article traces the way in which Swedish R&B artist Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund, whose song “Don’t Go” was extremely successful on the Central American market in 2013, creates a “Latino” artist identity in-between Sweden and Latin America. It discusses such an identity as part of a bigger research project that focuses on the significance of representation and difference in Hip-hop culture in-between Chile and Sweden.<sup>1</sup> The article contrasts the construction of a “Latino” artist identity by Fredrik, who does not have any immediate familial ties to Latin America, with the “Chilean” or “Latino” identity claimed by Rod-

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1 Lindholm 2014, 2015.

rigo *Rodde* Bernal, whose family came to Sweden during the 1980s as part of a group of Chilean refugees who fled the country following a military coup led by Augusto Pinochet in 1973.

Elsewhere, I have discussed how Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal, a member of the Sweden-based group *Hermanos Bernal*, which performs its raps solely in Spanish and primarily directs its music at a Chilean diaspora, negotiates difference in what I have called the Hip-hop zone in-between Chile and Sweden.<sup>2</sup> I have argued that *Rodde's* definition of a "Chilean" or "Latino" identity through music can be read in three different ways: first, as a means to remind Swedish society of the 1970s, a time during which Chileans were warmly welcomed in Sweden; second, an attempt to become "Swedish" by defining his difference as specifically "Chilean" in the context of a multiculturalism debate stressing difference as desirable, which emerged during the 1990s; and third, as a means to represent a "Chilean" identity through music within a Chilean diaspora.

This article extends this discussion by contrasting Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal's "Chilean" identity with Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund's "Latino" artist identity. Based on an interview with Fredrik, it sets out to trace the construction of such an identity by outlining the way in which he first creates and draws upon stereotypes such as "Latino", "Swedish" and "U.S. American", as well as the backdrop against which such stereotypes are constructed; and second, the way in which he navigates in-between these stereotypes and thereby opens them up for negotiation.

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### Locating white Swedish masculinity

By asking how a "white" Swedish artist can create a "Latino" identity through music, this article contributes to earlier research on Swedish whiteness.<sup>3</sup> As sociologist Gurinder K Bhabra has pointed out, citizenship in Western nations has from the very beginning been marked by constructions of an image of "the Other".<sup>4</sup> The arrival of non-European migrants to Europe in greater numbers, starting with the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is therefore no unprecedented challenge to definitions of citizenship. Their presence has nevertheless fuelled an identity debate that, as sociologist Floya Anthias points out, is primarily concerned with ethnic markers and the construction of new frontiers along the lines

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2 Lindholm, 2015.

3 See amongst others: Hubinette and Mählck 2015; Lundström 2014; Mattsson 2010; Mählck 2013; Pallas 2011. Mattsson's article is part of a theme issue on whiteness issued by the Swedish journal for gender studies (*Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*). Historian Nell Irvin Painter's book "*The History of White People*" is an example of the study of whiteness in a US American context.

4 Bhabra 2015.

of which migrant identities are defined as "hostile", as their "culture" and "ways of life" are seen as incompatible with Western societies.<sup>5</sup>

Citizens of rich western countries, who are perceived as "white", tend not to be seen as migrants when they move across national borders, however. Sociologist Catrin Lundström who in her book "White migrations: Gender, whiteness and privilege in transnational migration" studies the negotiation of whiteness by Swedish women who define themselves as "white" in a transnational context, points out that "white" people "out of place" are seen as tourists, expatriates, mobile professionals or "just passing as a European or North American".<sup>6</sup> This article contributes to such earlier research by nuancing, locating and contextualizing the discussion on "white" Swedish masculinity; it traces it as an invisible background against which Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund constructs a "Latino" artist identity.

In his book, *The Image of Man, the Creation of Modern Masculinity*, historian Georg Mosse makes a connection between masculinity and early European nation building. Primarily focusing on Germany, France and Great Britain, Mosse claims that a specific masculine stereotype emerged in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century; a stereotype that was closely linked to the formation of European nation states and the emergence of a new bourgeois society.<sup>7</sup> It was at this specific moment in European history, Mosse argues, that the male body itself for the first time came to be seen as a symbol of society and nation. Tracing the connection between different forms of masculinities and modernization in Northern Europe during the same period of time, Jørgen Lorentzen and Claes Ekenstam argue that constructions of masculinities are dependent not only on maintaining a difference between the sexes but also on the dynamics between constructions of different masculinities and un-masculinities.<sup>8</sup> Mosse and Lorentzen & Ekenstam claim that such countertypes were often explicitly marked as homosexual, which means that heteronormativity was one of the defining features of such masculine stereotypes.<sup>9</sup>

Studies focusing on the negotiations of masculinity in Sweden have argued that a concept of the gender-equal "new man" emerged within the framework of a "Nordic model" of gender equality in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> The construction of such a framework defining gender equality as a uniquely Swedish or Nordic project can be traced back to a general modernization project that took hold in Sweden after the Second World War. The gradual emergence of a Swedish self-image that

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5 Anthias 2008, p. 6.

6 Lundström 2014, p. 2.

7 Mosse 1996.

8 Lorentzen and Ekenstam 2006.

9 Mosse 1996, p. 57.

10 Farhani 2013; Jalmert 1984.



The Swedish R&B artist *FreddeRico*. Copyright: Isabella Söderdahl 2015.

defined Sweden as politically neutral and as an international voice of solidarity working against racism and for gender equality also included the perception that Sweden itself had more or less succeeded in establishing a non-racist society.<sup>11</sup> The stereotype of the gender-equal “new man” that was created within this framework has nevertheless also served to reinforce hegemonic aspects of masculinity by conflating Swedishness with whiteness, middle-classness and heteronormativity.<sup>12</sup>

Like any national or racial stereotype, such a construction of “white” Swedish masculinity draws on a notion of difference that claims a “radical and unbridge-

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11 Tolvhed 2008; Hübinette and Mählick 2015.

12 Pringle and Balkmar 2006; Farhani 2013, p. 154; Järvklo 2008.

able separation" between fixed and naturalized categories.<sup>13</sup> Such naturalized stereotypes are "continuously constructed in a (power) relation" to each other in specific historical contexts in which whiteness serves as the hegemonic, and therefore invisible background against which other racial or ethnic identities such as "Latino" or "black" are constructed.<sup>14</sup> Such a power relation is also marked by what sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls "the coloniality of power", which becomes visible as stereotypes are analysed within their specific historical contexts.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of a stereotype of "Latino" masculinity as machismo can, according to anthropologist Norma Fuller, for instance be traced back to Spanish colonial societies in Latin America in which "ethnic, racial and class domination was more pronounced, and in which much more accentuated forms of feminine repression and masculine dominance were promoted than in Spanish society or within native cultures."<sup>16</sup>

The process of identity construction in-between such stereotypes is based on a complex "play of identity and difference" that is marked by both fear and desire directed at "the Other" and the "internalization of the self-as-other" by those identified as "the Other".<sup>17</sup> This points towards a second notion of difference: a difference that is "positional, conditional and conjunctural" that acknowledges that identities are always open to negotiation and not "a possessive attribute of individuals or groups".<sup>18</sup> The negotiation of such identities along the lines of race and masculinity has a long tradition in the field of popular culture that, as Norman Mailer pointed out as early as 1957, has developed into a space in which "young white men negotiate the idea of how their masculinity can be lived".<sup>19</sup> In his book "From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: race, rap, and the performance of masculinity", cultural theorist Miles White outlines a history of such negotiations in a US American context.<sup>20</sup>

This is the context within which this article sets out to trace Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund's "Latino" identity as an artist by taking two aspects into account: first, the way in which he both creates, and draws upon stereotypes such as "Latino", "Swedish" and "U.S. American", as well as the backdrop against which he constructs such stereotypes; and second, the way in which he navigates

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13 Hall 2005, p. 448.

14 Farhani 2013, p. 156.

15 Quijano 2000.

16 "Ello se debería a que, en las sociedades coloniales ibéricas la dominación étnica, racial y de clase fue muy acentuada y propició formas de sojuzgamiento femenino y predominio masculino mucha más marcadas que en la sociedad española o en las culturas nativas." Fuller 2012, p. 120. For a discussion of the impact of the macho stereotype on the study of men and masculinities in South America see: Gutman and Vigoya 2005.

17 Hall 2005, p. 446.

18 Hall 2005, p. 448; Anthias 2008, p. 7.

19 Mailer 2007 [1957]; Neal 2005, p. 370.

20 White 2011.

in-between these stereotypes. Before engaging in such an analysis, I will briefly discuss the material used in this article.

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## Method, material and structure of the article

By engaging in a close and comparative reading of the creation of two specific artist identities, this article aims to deepen the understanding of how such identities are created within and against the background of specific historical contexts and locations. Both my earlier article on the negotiation of difference by Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal and the current article are the result of in-depth interviews. Based on the one and a half-hour long recording of an interview I conducted with Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund in September 2014 in Lund in the south of Sweden, and its subsequent transcription, this article aims to make visible the negotiations behind his creation of a “Latino” identity as a musician.

Drawing on Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue, historian Malin Thor Tureby points out that interviewers create an understanding of the past in dialogue with their interviewees, which is why their interpersonal relationship becomes central in the analysis of the resulting interview material.<sup>21</sup> Much in the same vein, both sociologists Amy L. Best and Paula Mählcck argue that whiteness can be described as an interactional accomplishment created during an interview, as both interviewer and interviewee(s) actively manage and negotiate their racial positionalities.<sup>22</sup> In the following analysis, I therefore make every effort to make visible the impact of the interpersonal relationship between Fredrik and myself on the outcome of the interview.

This article also draws on the lyrics, narrative and performance of the video of *FreddeRico*’s hit song “Don’t Go”, as well as images and interviews published on his official website. No structured textual or narrative analysis has been made of this material, however. It is mainly used to illustrate *FreddeRico*’s representation as an artist which he described and negotiated during our interview. I have translated all lyrics and interview quotes from Swedish and Spanish into English.

The article is structured in three main sections that will trace Fredrik’s creation of a “Latino” identity as a musician. They consider: first, the way in which during our interview Fredrik described his career as “Latino” artist *FreddeRico*, particularly in Central America; second, the construction of his “Latino” identity as an R&B artist viewed in the context of “black” pop music; and third, the way in which Fredrik creates a connection to Central, or Latin America outside of a

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21 Thor Tureby 2001, p. 335.

22 Best 2003, p. 895; Mählcck 2013, p. 68.

music context by creating and negotiating in-between different stereotypes.<sup>23</sup> At the end of every section, the article briefly contrasts Fredrik's "Latino" identity as a musician with my earlier work on Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal's negotiation of difference in the Hip-hop zone in-between Chile and Sweden.

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### **Being *FreddeRico* in-between Sweden and Central America**

This first section discusses how Fredrik sets out to create an identity as a musician in general, and in a Central American context in particular. During our interview Fredrik told me that he grew up listening to his father's large music collection, and that his aunt, who is a vocal coach, started to give him singing lessons at an early age. In the late 1990s, at the age of fifteen, Fredrik came into contact with other young male musicians in Lund, most of whom were rappers or beatmakers. This meant that there were only few openings for singers like himself, which is why he:

[...] eventually got tired of this [...] focus on rap [...] you could sing a refrain in some songs but [...] there was more focus on rap during that time.

Thus, Fredrik did not become part of what he describes as a growing Hip-hop scene in Lund during the 1990s. Instead, he decided to withdraw from the other musicians in order to deepen his musical knowledge and find his own sound. That means that Fredrik claimed that he did not create his identity as a musician through a connection to or communication with other musicians. At a later stage, he further stressed such an individual approach by telling me that he was not in contact with and did not plan to contact other musicians or producers such as The Salazar Brothers, who inter alia also produce artists in Chile. Such a description of the creation of an artistic identity differs fundamentally from a Hip-hop tradition that stresses collective learning and creation and the membership of different "crews".<sup>24</sup>

Fredrik also chose his stage name *FreddeRico* early on:

I chose [the name] in school. Me and two other guys often skipped classes. But we had a nice music teacher who always opened the mu-

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23 During our interview, Fredrik spoke of both Central America and Latin America. While Central America is the geographical location in which Fredrik became successful as an R&B artist, he used the name Latin America primarily when he was referring to cultural or linguistic differences between Sweden and Latin America.

24 Söderman 2007.

sic room for us and we hung out there and one of them was rapping and I was the singer and the other guy put on some beats [...] and then there was this Spanish teacher who, on his way to the teacher's lounge, used to call out "Frederico! You have to attend my lesson now!" So the guys also started to call me Frederico. And then... and then it just turned out that way. So ever since I was at school people have been calling me Frederico as a musician [...] and that turned out to be suitable for Latin America.

It should be noted, however, that the spelling of his stage name differs from the simple Spanish version of his first name: Fredrik. *FreddeRico* is a combination of Frederico, the name he refers to in the above quote, and the Spanish word "rico", that can simply mean "rich", but is also used in the very common expression "Que rico!" which can be translated as "cool" or "sexually attractive". He also added a second "d" to his artist name in order to create a "mix between Swedish and Latin American contexts." As an artist, Fredrik thus describes himself as an individual who chooses his own sound and name, without being determined by any form of group identity.

In 2012, Fredrik signed a deal with the Swedish production company Pitbull Productions Inc. The first single that they produced together was released in Sweden and was called "I Will". With the second single "Don't Go", they then decided to target the Central American market:

We started off thinking that we would apply the same strategy as everyone else here in Sweden. We started with the local radio station *Din Gata* [a local radio station in Malmö] and thought that if we were lucky some of the bigger radio stations would become interested and that we could get some gigs here in Sweden. But as we sat talking one night, [his production company told him] "you have contacts in Central America, why don't you try to [launch your music] there? It is actually a much smarter thing to do. There are so many people [...] Our aim is to reach the [U.S.] American market. And it is much easier to go through Latin America than to go through Sweden.

His girlfriend, who is from El Salvador, created the contacts to Central America that Fredrik refers to in this quote. With her help, Fredrik and his production company started to send "Don't Go" to radio and TV stations and other musicians, primarily in El Salvador. The song spread quickly from one radio station to the other and ended up being played in El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and other countries in Central America. "Don't Go" became a huge hit, and its video, which was aired on numerous TV-stations throughout the region,



received over one million views on the Internet platform YouTube. Although *FreddeRico* did not travel to Central America at that time, he was featured in over twenty TV and radio interviews that were all conducted in Spanish. During our interview, Fredrik claimed that these stations reach 7 to 8 million viewers per show, whereas a Swedish TV show only reaches one million viewers on a Friday evening. His primary motivation for launching his career on the Central American market is thus to reach a bigger audience through his music.

A few of the interviews in which Fredrik was featured can be found on his website. During one of them, an interview with Central American TV-Channel Canal 33's entertainment show Alo33, the female TV host asked Fredrik why he claimed to have "a strong connection to Central America" although he is not from the region himself. To this question Fredrik answered that his girlfriend is from El Salvador, which is why his "heart is in El Salvador". As an artist, Fredrik thus creates a connection to Latin America through his girlfriend, the person who made it possible for him to launch his music on the Central American market.

As the success of "Don't Go" on the Central American market came very quickly, Fredrik did not have an official website as *FreddeRico* when the song hit the charts. Together with his production company he therefore created an official artist narrative based on the questions he received during these interviews. He told me that they:

[...] had done some research on what I had been doing before [the success of his song "Don't Go"], so they had gone back, way back [and they brought up] things that I almost had forgotten [...] So they had kept pretty good track of my background, almost better than I did myself!

This official artist narrative that can be found on *FreddeRico's* website starts in 2003. It mentions, among other things, that he produced and recorded the theme song for Britney.com, the "biggest Britney Spears page created on the Internet", and that one of his songs was featured on a mixtape that included songs by well-known Hip-hop artists such as Kanye West, Lil Wayne, and Ice Cube in 2008.<sup>25</sup> Thereby, it situates *FreddeRico* in the context of popular U.S. American artists. Combined with the fact that, as I have mentioned above, Fredrik's final aim as a musician is to become successful on the U.S. American market, I argue that the narrative adds up to a conscious attempt to create a U.S. American artist image. Fredrik and Pitbull Productions Inc. nevertheless also produced a Spanish version of "Don't Go" in cooperation with the El Salvadorian Hip-hop artist César Díaz

25 A mixtape is a compilation of different songs that has a special history in a Hip-hop context.

Today, it refers to full-length albums released for free that can feature original music, freestyles or remixes of popular songs.

Alvarenga, also known as *Debil Estar*. In this version, *FreddeRico* sings a Spanish translation of the refrain while *Debil Estar* raps. By using a Spanish-sounding artist name and producing a Spanish version of "Don't Go", Fredrik thus also places himself in a Central or Latin American context as an artist. Therefore, I argue that Fredrik creates a "U.S.-Latino" artist identity in-between a U.S. American and a Central or Latin American context. As literary scholar Patricia M. Montilla points out, Latinos are "the fastest-growing group in the United States today", and while "not all Hispanic Americans are bilingual, Spanish is a very significant cultural marker among Latinos."<sup>26</sup>

I claim that the construction of such a "U.S.-Latino" image also becomes evident in the aesthetics of the video of "Don't Go", as well as *FreddeRico's* official website. The first frame clearly states the name of his production company – Pitbull Productions Inc. While this company is not in any way associated with the hugely successful U.S.-Cuban rapper, producer and songwriter Armando Christian Pérez, also known as *Pitbull*, Fredrik admitted that many Central American interviewers at first assumed that he was associated with *Pitbull* due to the name of his production company.<sup>27</sup> I also argue that in this video and on his website, *FreddeRico* draws on or refers to an artist identity that is very similar to the artist identity created by *Pitbull*: both have very short hair, both wear suits without a tie and a partially unbuttoned shirt. Their songs also have similar lyrical content: both artists mainly focus their lyrics on heterosexual relationships with women.

When comparing those aspects of *FreddeRico's* "U.S.-Latino" artist identity discussed in this first section to *Rodde's* construction of a "Chilean" identity, some fundamental differences become visible. While *Rodde* was also quick to point out that his group Hermanos Bernal is not part of a bigger group of Swedish-Chilean Hip-hop artists, he claimed a close connection to other artists such as the production company The Salazar Brothers as well as a number of other musicians from Chile. While *Rodde* does have a family background in South America, he claims a "Swedish" artist identity in Chile, as he argues that as such he has a higher status and receives a higher salary.<sup>28</sup> He only claims a "Chilean" artist identity in the context of a Chilean diaspora *outside* of Chile. *FreddeRico*, on the other hand, does not make a difference between his artist identity in Sweden, Latin America or the United States. While he thus solely represents himself as an individual "U.S.-Latino" artist, the music of Hermanos Bernal aims to "speak for" all those Chileans who do not live in Chile.

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26 Montilla p. xii.

27 Cepeda 2010, p. 36.

28 The debut album of Hermanos Bernal is, in fact, called "Directo de Suecia", that is, "Direct from Sweden."

## Being *FreddeRico* in the context of “black” pop music

In this second section I set out to discuss Fredrik’s artist identity in the context of “black” pop music. As Johan Söderman has argued in his study on the artistic strategies of Hip-hop artists in Sweden, rappers are often torn between commercial and non-commercial discourses in their construction of professional identities.<sup>29</sup> Much in the same vein, during our interview Fredrik shifted between describing an identity as a professional musician, on the one hand, and following his sensibility or feeling (in Swedish: *känsla*), on the other.<sup>30</sup> He claimed that his quest for “feeling”, can be used to explain his success on the Central American market by stating:

I am happy that my music has been able to [reach Latin America]! That feels incredible! . [...] When we tried [to launch his single “Don’t Go” on the Central American market] I thought [...] why should [people in Latin America] like music that is so far from what I believed, but it is much closer with this R&B and soul genre . [...] It is built on feeling [in Swedish: *känsla*], it is built on openness, it is built on warmth. And all of that exists down there. And that is what we do not have here. [...] We are not created in that culture and we do not have that view of life.

*But R&B is not originally from Latin America?*

No, but I mean [...] all that lies behind that type of music: sensibility, warmth, openness that they have [...] that we do not have here [...] I believe that that which worked with “Don’t Go” with [...] the Latin American people was that it is – salsa and Latino music is also very much based on feeling – it is a music genre that is based on feeling, and R&B and soul are also very similar.

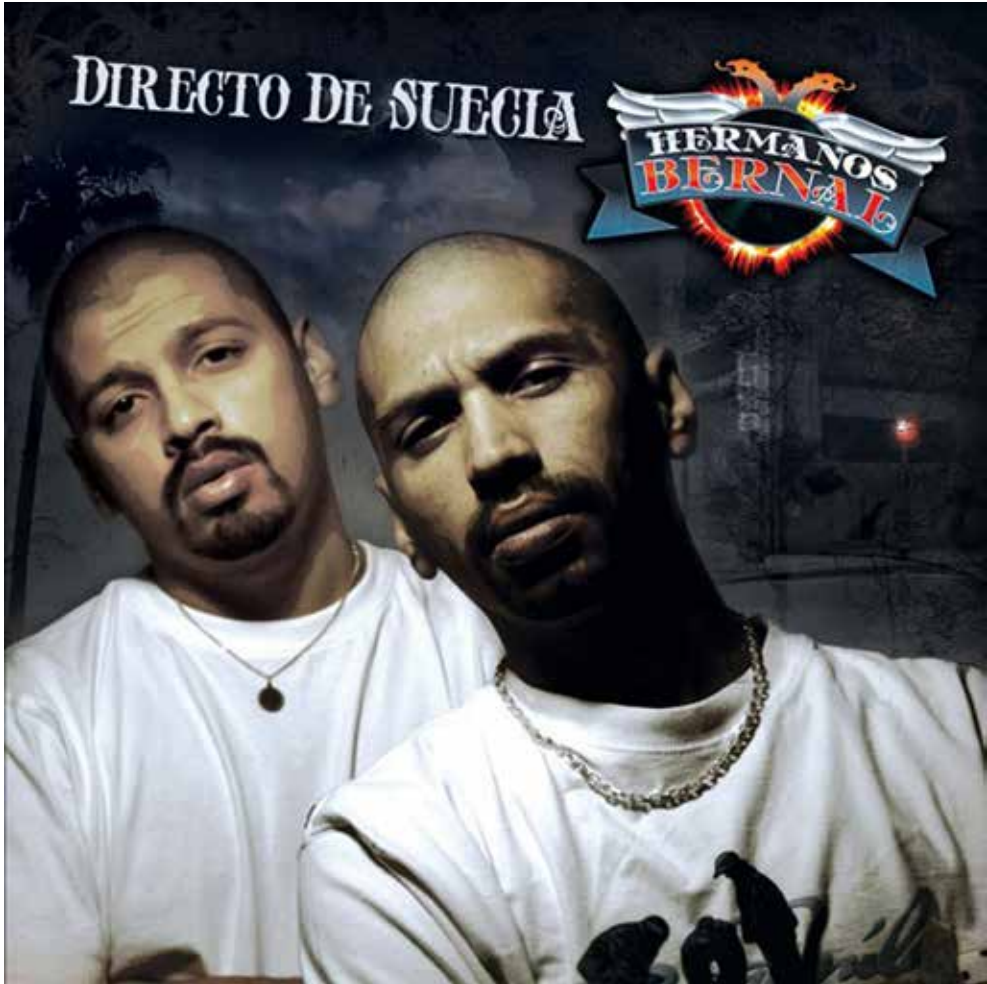
This quote represents one of the repeated instances during our interview in which Fredrik drew on a stereotype of a warm and open Latin America filled with “feeling”, or, in Swedish “*känsla*”. In an attempt to make sense of his success, Fredrik claims that both R&B and “Latino” music are based on “feeling”, which is why his own sound, which he also describes as based on “feeling”, could become successful in Latin America. Music thereby becomes the means to create a connection to Latin America by creating a “U.S.-Latino” identity as an R&B artist.

*FreddeRico*’s official website nevertheless also describes his sound as a “fresh mix of R&B, Hip-hop and pop”. In her book “*New York Ricans from the Hip-*

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<sup>29</sup> Söderman 2007.

<sup>30</sup> The notion of “feeling” is here used only as an empirical category, mainly as the antithesis of rationality.



Rodrigo Rodde Bernal and Cristian Soyloco Bernal on the cover of the Hermanos Bernal debut album “Directo de Suecia”. Copyright: Hermanos Bernal 2015

*hop zone*” Raquel Rivera outlines the influence of Puerto Rican migrants on the emergence of Hip-hop in New York.<sup>31</sup> Rivera thereby addresses what María Elena Cepeda calls the “intimate historical, racial and artistic relationships between Latinos and African Americans” that becomes visible through the participation of “Latinos” in what has been labelled “black” pop music.<sup>32</sup> As cultural theorist Mark Anthony Neal argues, genres such as R&B and Hip-hop can be discussed under the umbrella term of “black” pop music in a U.S. American context, a genre that, as I have mentioned above, has developed into a space in which “young white men negotiate the idea of how their masculinity can be lived”.<sup>33</sup> In the words of bell hooks, such a negotiation becomes possible:

31 Rivera 2003.

32 Cepeda 2010, p. 37.

33 Mailer 2007 [1957]; Neal 2005, p. 370.

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure [that means that] the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, I will briefly discuss *FreddeRico's* creation of a "U.S.-Latino" artist identity against a stereotype of "black" masculinity in pop music. Cultural theorist Todd Boyd claims that in a Hip-hop context a "black" masculinity can be seen as the "antithesis of what could be described as White masculinity" that he in turn defines as "upright, stiff, and mechanical".<sup>35</sup> In Boyd's words such a "black" masculinity is defined by a:

Cool [...] detached, removed, nonchalant sense of being. An Aloofness that suggests one is above it all. A Pride, an arrogance even, that is at once laid back, unconcerned, perceived to be highly sexual and potentially violent.<sup>36</sup>

Boyd's description of a "white" masculinity largely corresponds with Fredrik's definition of Sweden as cold, stiff and mechanical in this quote from our interview:

They [Latin Americans] are so very much different than we are. They are so incredibly much warmer; they are so incredibly more spontaneous than we are.

Yet, the description of "black" masculinity outlined by Boyd is not the warm, communicative identity filled with feeling that Fredrik aspires to as an artist; it could even be seen as the complete antithesis to such a description. I nevertheless claim that a closer look at *FreddeRico's* performed identity and the narrative of the song "Don't Go" reveals a masculinity that corresponds with Boyd's definition of a "black" masculinity in a Hip-hop context. *FreddeRico's* performance in the video is marked by expressive angular gestures, typically associated with Hip-hop culture and thereby with a type of "black" performance that has been repeatedly "appropriated and (re)presented in [...] expressions of powerful masculinity for white males in popular culture".<sup>37</sup> I argue that by adopting such a "black" performance in mannerism and attitude and by referring to a "U.S.-Lati-

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34 hooks 2015[1992], p. 47.

35 Boyd 2003, p. 118.

36 *ibid.*

37 White 2011, p. 89.

no" image through his style and dress, *FreddeRico* makes claims on becoming "part of a community of practice" that persists through repetition of such performances.

As an artist, Fredrik thus not only refers to the "cool, detached, removed" sense of being that characterizes the stereotype of a Hip-hop masculinity outlined by Boyd; his performance also marks him as a member of a "community of practice" in a musical context. The video of "Don't Go" can thus be seen as an example of what *FreddeRico's* website promises: a "fresh mix of Hip-hop, R&B and pop". Elements of Hip-hop become visible and audible in his angular gestures and performance, as well as in the fact that *FreddeRico* raps parts of the lyrics. Elements of R&B and pop, on the other hand, become evident in the higher timbre in which he sings the refrain, as well as the content of the lyrics that mainly address heterosexual desire and relationships. In his book *The death of rhythm and blues*, cultural critic Nelson George somewhat provocatively argues that such a contemporary commercialized and therefore popular version of rhythm and blues profoundly differs from the original, more political orientation of the genre.<sup>38</sup>

Hip-hop artist Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal, on the other hand, defines the "Chilean" identity that he constructs outside of Chile as "cultural". As I have briefly mentioned above, this identity can be seen as a representation created both within and for a Chilean diaspora. It can nevertheless also be read as a means of reminding Swedish society of the 1970s, that is, of a time in which "Chileans" were warmly welcomed in Sweden. As such, it is an attempt to become "Swedish" by defining his difference as specifically "Chilean" in the context of a multiculturalism debate that stressed difference as desirable which emerged during the 1990s. The songs and videos produced by his group Hermanos Bernal are based on a sound and style of performance that can clearly be seen as part of the Hip-hop genre: the songs mainly consist of raps and sampled beats and the videos contain the same angular gestures that can be seen in *FreddeRico's* video discussed above. As opposed to *FreddeRico's* lyrics, the lyrics of Hermanos Bernal nevertheless often address political issues.

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### Creating a connection

This third and last section takes a closer look at the way in which Fredrik constructs "Sweden" and "Latin America" as opposed categories outside of a musical context and the way in which he creates a connection between the two. As briefly mentioned above, Fredrik contrasted a warm, spontaneous, communica-

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38 George 2003.

tive Latin America with a cold and materialistic Sweden during our interview, amongst others by stating:

I have always been interested in different cultures, I have always been drawn to what we in Sweden find exotic, and always had girlfriends with an immigration background and always had friends with an immigration background, and like, always been out a lot and travelled in the world, and [I] like this cultural thing, experience different cultures, understand different people and that whole part. [...] They [Latin Americans] are so different from us. They are so incredibly much warmer; they are so much more spontaneous than we are. They live more in the now, of course, due to the situation [...] how it looks down there, so they are probably sometimes forced to live in the now, but that also makes them less dependent [...] on things than we are [...].

I argue that by outlining his own definition of a Swedish "we" and a Latin American "they", in this quote also Fredrik states the reason why he wants to connect to a "Latino" identity: he deems a "Swedish" identity as lacking certain aspects that can be found in Latin America. While he thereby directly addresses his "Swedishness", I claim that there are two further aspects in this quote that can be discussed in terms of "whiteness", on the one hand, and "Swedishness", on the other: their connection through desire, as well as the "we" of shared "Swedishness".

According to Stuart Hall, a desire directed towards "the Other" serves to displace "many of our hitherto stable political categories, since it implies a process of identification and otherness, which is more complex than we had hitherto imagined".<sup>39</sup> As cultural geographer Katarina Mattsson notes, constructions of hegemonic whiteness often entail a colonial desire that not only creates segregation but also the desire to cross ethnic or racially defined borders.<sup>40</sup> The "culture of the Other" thereby becomes "spice, seasoning, that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture", whereby crossing the boundary toward it turns into a "ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference".<sup>41</sup> Tracing Fredrik's creation of a "Latino" identity thereby also becomes a way of exploring how white desire is "expressed, manipulated, and transformed by encounters with difference and the different".<sup>42</sup>

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39 Hall 2005, p. 446.

40 Mattsson 2010, p. 13.

41 hooks 2015[1992], p. 48.

42 *ibid.*



I here argue that during our interview, "Swedishness" also became visible in the interpersonal relationship between Fredrik and myself. As sociologist Paula Mählck remarks, "the position of whiteness [or here: "Swedishness"] reveals itself [...] through the process and assumption of a shared position of whiteness between the interviewer and the interviewed". That means that by referring to a "we" in his description of Sweden, Fredrik assumed a shared "Swedishness" between him and myself.<sup>43</sup> His preconceived assumption became visible at a later stage as he asked me whether I remembered a rapper who was popular in Sweden during the 1990s. I responded that I did not live in Sweden during that time; although I perceive myself as being "white", have a Swedish last name and speak Swedish fluently, I only moved to Sweden in 2008.<sup>44</sup> Thereby, I disrupted the assumption of a shared "Swedishness" based on language proficiency and shared cultural references of the earlier stages of the interview.

I further claim that Fredrik's constructions of stereotypes of Sweden and Latin America are connected through desire, and that the physical movement of traveling to Latin America can be defined as an enactment of such a desire. During our interview, Fredrik told me that although he had not travelled to Latin America as an artist, he had visited the region on several occasions and that he had learned to speak Spanish fluently by speaking with his girlfriend from El Salvador. During his travels to Central America, his language skills came in handy as he:

[...] got into many situations [that] I think that would have ended differently if I had not been able to speak Spanish. [Being able to speak] Spanish helped me a lot, I [...] could have a conversation, and solve [...] all kinds of conflicts [At times I was met by comments such as] 'Why the hell do you come here and take our girls? Why the hell do you come here and flash?' [...] "Are you a gringo? Aaaj! Get back to your stupid country!" [...]. But then I immediately start[ed] speaking Spanish, so that [...] Above all Europeans have a higher status than people from the United States. They don't like Americans *at all* in Central America [...] they have had lots of problems with [...] America. Europeans have it much easier, and [...] when I was travelling [...] a lot of people said "Ah" But you are from the United States!" [to which I responded] "No, from Europe." [...] So then we could start talking. That means that it was an advantage that I was from Europe and not from the United States.

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43 Mählck 2013, p. 69.

44 I was born in Finland and moved to Germany with my family when I was seven years old, where I stayed for twenty-one years until I moved to Sweden in 2008. I speak Spanish fluently as I studied it at the university in Munich, Germany.



By speaking Spanish, Fredrik in other words avoided being identified as a "gringo" or U.S.-American, which is important, as "they do not like the United States at all in Latin America". I argue that he in this quote draws on a stereotype of U.S.-Americans who do not speak any other languages than English. Speaking Spanish thus also means not speaking English, the predominant language in the United States which has become a "powerful hegemonic symbol" on a global scale.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, he also addresses a historical dimension: Fredrik's claim that Latin Americans "have had lots of problems with America" most probably refers to the history of repeated political, economic and military involvement of the United States in Latin America, and the devastating effects of different US policies on the economies and political landscapes of many Latin American countries.<sup>46</sup> By claiming a European rather than a U.S.-American identity, Fredrik also avoids being associated with such a historical background. It is interesting to note that he did not mention such reservations in a musical context in which he, as I have argued above, is actively creating a "U.S.-Latino" artist identity.

I further claim that in addition to a U.S.-American stereotype, this quote also draws upon the stereotype of Latin American masculinity as defined through machismo. Fredrik here points out his assumption that Latin American men police the sexuality of local "girls" who run the risk of being "taken" by outsiders if they are not protected by local male guardians. By signalling that he is not there to "take" these girls, he additionally also alludes to a shared heterosexual masculinity. While it could be argued that this proves sociologist Kalle Berggren's point that "normative notions of gender and sexuality are often shared across racial (and class) divides," it has to be noted that in this case a shared heterosexual masculinity cannot be proven as there is no way of knowing the actual intentions of the Latin American men that Fredrik encountered during his travels.<sup>47</sup> Following this assumption, Fredrik is nevertheless able to use normative heterosexual masculinity and desire to overcome difference and to keep the violence he associates with such masculinity at bay.

I also argue that such a "Latino" macho stereotype is constructed against the invisible backdrop of the Swedish gender-equal "new man." During our entire interview, Fredrik described his relationship with his girlfriend as equal: he pointed out, that they were making important life decisions together. He also stressed that it was important to him that they were "giving each other space" to focus on interests that they do not share with each other. At a later stage he added

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45 For the contrasting use of English by Muslim women in Britain as an embodied act of resistance see Heidi Safia Mirza. This is another situation in which "white" privilege becomes visible, as it is contrasted to contexts in which individuals who are identified as "non-white" negotiate difference.

46 Galeano 1973.

47 Berggren 2013, p. 206.

that, although they have talked about moving to Latin America, they ultimately decided against it due to the criminality and poverty that is prevalent in the region. While, as I have pointed out above, he contrasted Latin America as warm, communicative and open and Sweden as cold and closed, I claim that this latter description of Latin America as marked by criminality and poverty works against the backdrop of Sweden as a middle-class and anti-racist country.<sup>48</sup>

When comparing the way in which Fredrik creates a connection between Sweden and Latin America with the way in which *Rodde* negotiates difference in-between Sweden and Latin America, it becomes evident that there are no big differences between their approaches. During our interview, *Rodde* also described Chile as warm and communicative and Sweden as cold and closed, and added that neither he nor his family have any plans to move to Chile. He also stressed the importance of speaking “correct Chilean Spanish” in order to create a connection to Chile as an artist, and described Chilean society as having a greater problem with sexism than Swedish society. It can thus be argued that during our interviews, both Fredrik and *Rodde* spoke from the same positionality.

The reason why they set out to create a connection between Sweden and Latin America marks a fundamental difference, however. While Fredrik sets out to create such a connection as he perceives Sweden as lacking, *Rodde* bases it on three aspects: first, his familial connection to Chile; second, his connection to the production company The Salazar Brothers; and third, the fact that he experiences being identified as different in Sweden, an experience that W.E.B. Du Bois has described as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”.<sup>49</sup>

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### Creating a “Latino” artist identity in-between Sweden and Latin America

This article has traced the way in which Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund, a Swedish R&B artist without any immediate familial ties to Latin America creates a “Latino” identity in-between Sweden and Latin America. It has contrasted such a construction with my earlier work on the negotiation of difference in the Hip-hop zone in-between Sweden and Chile by Swedish artist Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal. It has argued that there are a number of similarities between their negotiations: both create a connection to Latin America or Chile through their music; both describe Latin America or Chile as warm, open and communicative and Sweden as cold; both acknowledge class differences between Sweden and Latin America and claim that Sweden is more gender equal than Latin America or Chile. While

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48 Hübinette and Mählck 2015.

49 Du Bois 1994, p. 2.

neither of them wants to move to Latin America or succeeds in claiming a "Latino" or "Chilean" identity outside of music in Central America or Chile, both claim that language is important in creating a connection to the region. In these negotiations, both Fredrik and *Rodde* thus draw on a form of difference that is "positional, conditional and conjunctural" and which acknowledges that identities are always open to negotiation.<sup>50</sup> In this respect, it can be argued that they both speak from the same positionality.

There are nevertheless also some fundamental differences in their negotiations. While Fredrik sets out to create a connection to Latin America based on a desire directed towards "the Other" that is rooted in what he describes as lacking in Swedish society, *Rodde* reaches out to Chile because of his familial connection and because he wants to create a connection to other artists, but also because he is identified as "different" in Sweden. Fredrik claims a "U.S.-Latino" artist identity that is based on an individual decision and not a group identity that he "speaks for" through his music. Yet, outside of a music context, he claims a European identity over a U.S. American one in order to distance himself from the problematic history between Latin America and the United States. *Rodde*, on the other hand, claims different artist identities in different contexts: in Chile, he claims a "Swedish" artist identity that results in a higher social status; outside of Chile he claims a "Chilean" artist identity that represents "Chile" in the Chilean diaspora; and in Sweden, he defines his difference as specifically "Chilean" in the context of a multiculturalism debate that defines difference as desirable, whereby "being Chilean" becomes "being Swedish." Such a definition has a historical dimension as it serves to remind Swedes of a time in which Chileans were warmly welcomed in Sweden.

I argue that these differences can be explained against the backdrop of a form of difference that creates naturalized categories along the lines of "culture", "ethnicity" and "race." Fredrik's whiteness makes it possible for him to freely choose a "Latino" artist identity without having to refer to or represent a group identity. For him, history disappears in the context of pop music in which "race and ethnicity [are] commodified as resources for pleasure".<sup>51</sup> As his whiteness, for the most part, cannot be traced as specifically "Swedish", I further argue that it has to be seen as a universal rather than a specific marker of power. *Rodde*, on the other hand, who does not share such a positionality of whiteness, refers to a group identity as an artist, and thereby, at the same time, to the specific historical context of a Chilean diaspora in Sweden. Being identified as "different" in Sweden, he uses Hip-hop in order to face what Stuart Hall calls the "internalization of the self-as other."<sup>52</sup> A close comparative reading of these two artist identities

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50 Hall 2005, p. 448; Anthias 2008, p. 7.

51 hooks 2015[1992], p. 47.

52 Hall 2005, p. 446.

within and against the background of specific historical contexts and locations thus serves to make visible that both artists speak from racialized positionalities.

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## Summary

This article traces the way in which Fredrik *FreddeRico* Ekelund, a Swedish R&B artist who had a huge success with his song "Don't Go" on the Latin American market in 2013, creates an artist identity as "Latino" in-between Sweden and Latin America. It discusses such a construction as part of a bigger research project that focuses on the significance of representation and difference in Hip-hop culture in-between Chile and Sweden. The article contrasts the construction of a "Latino" identity through music by Fredrik, who does not have any immediate familial ties to Latin America with the "Chilean" or "Latino" identity claimed by Hip-hop artist Rodrigo *Rodde* Bernal, whose family came to Sweden from Chile during the 1980s. It argues that while there are similarities between the positionalities of these two artists, there is a fundamental difference regarding the reason why they set out to create a connection to Latin America or Chile: Fredrik's whiteness makes it possible for him to freely choose a "Latino" artist identity without having to refer to, or represent a group identity or a specific historical context. *Rodde* on the other hand, who does not share such a positionality of whiteness, refers to a group identity as an artist, and thereby, at the same time, to the specific historical context of a Chilean diaspora in Sweden. By engaging in a close and comparative reading of the creation of these two artist identities within and against the background of specific historical contexts and locations this article argues that both artists speak from racialized positionalities.