

“Far Away from Home,” yet “Live and Direct from Nordvästra”: Expressions of (Non)Belonging in the Case of Rap Artist Yasin

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Abstract

Since the mid-2010s, *gangsterrap* – a new Swedish DIY scene rooted in the international gangsta rap subgenre – has gained massive commercial success, while also being highly problematised in the public debate in the Nordic countries. This article provides an empirical case of popular music’s intersection with the rise of gun violence and urban marginality within a Nordic welfare state, emphasising how the music and the artist can be understood in terms of taking part in communities of belonging beyond national borders. More specifically, the material analysed here includes interviews with, and songs by, Swedish rap artist Yasin.

The concept of digital diaspora (Ponzanesi 2020, 2021) enables a focus on how spatiality, belonging, and self-identification are created, and it can be seen as articulating new possibilities for affective, social, and political connections and rupture. Also, digital diaspora is understood as being constituted through practices reflective of intersecting power relations (Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi 2019: 34). By focusing on narratives of (non)belonging(s) and home, in this article we examine how practices of (non)belonging(s) create connections between past and present popular culture and can be perceived as a restorative and unifying tool among Somali diaspora youth, but also their parents. As a result, this article presents different sensibilities about the changing perceptions of closeness, home, and belonging in Sweden, a Nordic welfare state.

Introduction

You were born in a country that was never your parents’
I asked my dad why life was so hard

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He replied, “My son, we’re so far away from home”
 No one here wants to see you succeed
 So you better move in silence¹
 – Yasin, “Långt hemifrån” (“Far Away from Home”)

This is live and direct from the Northwest
 Families with kids here, they can’t afford to go on vacation
 The murder wave is rising
 Here you must arm yourself to protect the ones you love²
 – Yasin, “Nordvästra” (“Northwest”)

Hoodrich people, they want to murder me
 I’m sitting in a bulletproof car
 Handling weapons, would have easily survived war³
 – Yasin, “Hoodrich”

Rap and hip-hop music are an undisputed part of global popular music in the 2020s, including in the Nordic countries. During the mid-2010s, Sweden saw the development of a new DIY rap scene among teenagers in the so-called *utsatta områden* (“vulnerable neighbourhoods”)⁴ of Stockholm. In Swedish mainstream media discourse this rap scene has been named *gangsterrap* and it is characterised by depicting crime, hyper-masculinity, violence, and consumerism, which are typical topics in contemporary rap subgenres such as drill and trap (see Ilan 2015).⁵ By the late 2010s, gangsterrap was the most commercially successful rap subgenre in Sweden, where it had become incorporated into the pop music scene (Arvidson 2023), while also topping the charts in other Nordic countries. In the 2020s, Swedish gangsterrap and its practitioners came under the scrutiny of the Swedish public for their association with criminal networks. During this period, international criminal networks were widely discussed due to their links to the increase in firearm homicides throughout the country and among different groups. The lyrical excerpts presented at the outset of this article illustrate this societal context

¹ This is an English version of the Swedish lyrics: “Du föddes i ett land som aldrig var dina föräldrars / Jag frågade farsan varför livet var så hart / Han svarade ‘Min son vi är så långt hemifrån’ / Ingen här vill se dig lyckas so you better move in silence.” All song lyrics were transcribed and translated from Swedish by the authors of the article.

² This is an English version of the Swedish lyrics: “Det här är live and direct från Nordvästra / Barnfamiljer här dom har inte råd att semestral / Mordvågen stiger / Här du måste rusta upp för att kunna skydda dom du älskar.”

³ This is an English version of the Swedish lyrics: “Hoodrich folk de vill döda mig / Jag sitter i en skottsäker bil / Hanterar vapen hade lätt överlevt krig.”

⁴ A term coined by the Swedish police for areas “characterised by low socioeconomic status, where crime has a major impact on the local community” (Hradilova Selin et al. 2024: 2).

⁵ Even though the relationship between Swedish gangsterrap, drill and trap presents an under-researched area, we are, in this case, treating them as separate but intertwined contemporary rap subgenres of the 2020s.

by emphasising the notion of belonging in various ways – through descriptions of belonging, non-belonging, home, and violence, often told through a racialised, hyper-masculine, and violent persona.

This article focuses on the commercially acclaimed and publicly contested Swedish artist Yasin, who is considered one of the founders of Swedish gangsterrap. In Swedish media and public discourse, he is also regarded as a representative of this music scene. Rap artist and songwriter Yasin – born Yasin Abdullahi Mahamoud in 1998 in Stockholm to Somali parents – began rapping in 2016. In 2024, he was the third most-streamed artist on Spotify in Sweden. Having received the biggest musical awards in Sweden, Yasin stands out as a commercially successful artist who rarely does interviews. His social media presence is characterised by focusing on musical performances and releases. In addition to being known for his musical career, he is infamous for his alleged links to the kidnapping and, later, the murder of Swedish rap artist Einár in 2021. He was sentenced to ten months in prison for being involved in the plotting of Einár’s kidnapping.

Ideas of what constitutes “good” and “bad” hip-hop music are often used in both scholarship and among practitioners when discussing the genre. When applying various rap subgenre connotations, the former is often exemplified by *conscious rap*, characterised by “reflection on and intellectual engagement with pressing social issues (most often involving themes of racial and class struggle)” (Forman 2010). *Gangsta rap* is the most common example of the latter, characterised by narratives told through the perspective of a racialised hyper-aggressive and hyper-masculine persona linked to violent and criminal behaviour (Quinn 2005; Rose 2008). Such a persona is based on stereotypes, particularly regarding young Black men. The hip-hop binary of “good” and “bad” is often applied but seldom problematised in hip-hop scholarship (Potter 1995). In line with J. Griffith Rollefson (2017), we aim to move beyond this binary construction and the uncritical tendency to praise the former for its political awareness while dismissing the latter for its materialism and for challenging politically correct norms by exploring the narratives of (non)belonging by Yasin, an artist of the Swedish gangsterrap scene.

Drawing on recent sociological theorising on belonging and home (Yuval-Davis 2006; Hall 2009), urban marginalisation (Hall 2018), digital diaspora (Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi 2019; Ponzanesi 2020, 2021), as well as migration studies (Sayad 2004) and global hip-hop scholarship, this article explores how the theme of belonging/non-belonging is expressed in combination with the gangsterrap persona presented by the artist Yasin. Our empirical data consists of three media interviews with Yasin (*Dopest* 2023; Gustafsson Figueroa 2023; Nileskär 2019) as well as four songs from his album *Pistoler, poesi och sex* (“Pistols, Poetry, and Sex”) released in 2023. The selected songs are “Nånting i luften” (“Something in the Air”; see [Video 1: Yasin 2023c](#)), “Långt hemifrån” (see [Video 2: Yasin 2023b](#)), “Hoodrich” (see [Video 3: Yasin 2023a](#)), and “Nordvästra” (see [Video 4: Yasin 2023d](#)). Our empirical data additionally contains the music video to “Hoodrich” including its YouTube comments. When searching for the songs selected for analysis on YouTube – which, alongside Spotify, can be considered one of the main

platforms for music consumption, according to previous research (Beuscart, Coavoux, and Garrocq 2023) – only one of the songs, “Hoodrich,” has an official music video. The other three songs are available on YouTube as audio-only uploads featuring the album cover depicting Yasin as a child holding a goat on a leash in the stairwell of an apartment building. As of November 2025, “Nånting i luften” has 1,091,000 views, while “Långt hemifrån” has almost 119,000, and “Nordvästra” 94,000.

By focusing on expressions of (digital) diasporic practices and sentiments told through the stereotypical racialised hyper-masculine persona that characterises Swedish gangsterrap, the aim of this article is to examine how (non)belonging is constructed in the case of the artist Yasin by analysing media interviews and a selection of his songs. This focus offers insights into a growing body of scholarly literature on rap and hip-hop music as a site of constructing and negotiating identity in the Nordic countries by focusing on aspects of belonging (see, e.g., Joosten 2024; Kelekay 2019, 2022; Lindholm 2016; Leppänen and Westinen 2017). As the processes of belonging take place in the overlapping spheres of online and offline, we expand this existing interdisciplinary research field on the topic of rap and belonging by introducing the concept of “digital diaspora” (Ponzanesi 2021). This concept is useful because different migration waves and generations interact and coexist across various social media platforms, drawing on collective memory, nostalgia, and national imagination (ibid.: 10). In addition, the prominent role of social media in the making and consumption of Swedish gangsterrap makes it a particularly well-suited empirical field of study when analysing hip-hop music of the 2020s (cf. Stuart 2020).

We begin by introducing Swedish gangsterrap as a musical subgenre. Then, we reflect on our research positionality followed by the presentation of our theoretical framework, where we review literature related to belonging, digital diaspora, and home. After that we analyse music as a means of creating communities of belonging, with a specific focus on the digital, where diverse voices, experiences, and understandings of home are made visible. The discussion offers an empirical case of popular music’s intersection with the rise of gun violence within a Nordic welfare state emphasising how the music and the artist can be understood in terms of taking part in communities of belonging beyond national borders.

Swedish gangsterrap

The name “gangsterrap” can be understood as a reference to the 1980s/1990s LA rap subgenre with the same name – gangsta rap – which helped to globally spread and make “essential and authenticized black gangsta masculinity” (Rollefson 2017: 204) commercially available. Unlike other Nordic rap scenes such as Denmark, where localised gangsta rap has existed since the mid-2000s (Westinen and Ringsager 2023), Sweden’s first rap scene with clear connections to this subgenre developed in the 2010s, with the Chicago drill scene serving as one important influence. Besides sharing themes and sonic

elements from the subgenres drill and trap – its “musical cousins” – Swedish gangster-rap can, depending on the artist, sonically contain elements from various genres across the world, including the Middle East and different parts of Africa. Besides the emphasis on stories told through the stereotypical racialised hyper-masculine persona which characterises the gangsterrap subgenre, the music also contains stories of anxiety, heartbreak, and regret, linking it to contemporary pop music.

In the case of the Swedish gangsterrap scene, there is a complex connection between the “mainstream representations of hip-hop blackness and thug life” (Jeffries 2011: 126) and the lives of the artists in the scene. These connections have been highly problematised in the Swedish and Finnish public debate, due to some of the rappers’ either alleged and proven associations to real-life criminal networks (Åberg and Tyvelä 2024). During the first half of the 2020s, the issues of gun violence, shootings, and explosions in Sweden received increasing attention in the public debate, both in Sweden and internationally (see, e.g., Ahlander 2024; Duxbury 2023; Sunnemark 2023). The exceptionality of Sweden in this regard is also confirmed by recent studies stating that it is the only EU country of the 23 where a consistent increase of firearm homicides against young adults can be observed during the period from 2005 to 2019 (Hradilova Selin et al. 2024). This increase in gun violence has been connected to the popularity of gangsterrap by some Swedish right-wing politicians and police officers, with the argument that the music and social media have “brainwashed children with gangsterism” (Skogelin 2023). The assumed link between music and criminality can be compared to a similar development in the UK, where drill and grime have been linked to discussions of knife violence and crime among youth (see, e.g., Fatsis 2019). This has resulted in rap music and music videos being used as “evidence of gang affiliation, bad character, criminal intent, and complicity” (Young and Hulley 2024: 338) in court proceedings, dismissing the artistic creativity of rap and various genre conventions such as exaggeration and braggadocio (see, e.g., Fatsis 2019). Amid these societal developments in Sweden and beyond, the way that Swedish gangsterrap is portrayed in the media and societal debates can also be understood from the perspective of moral panic associated with youth and popular culture (cf. Cohen 1980).

Yasin’s earlier musical works are focused mainly on depictions of crime and violence. These themes are present in his 2023 album *Pistoler, poesi och sex* alongside topics such as minority status, social segregation, parenthood, and feelings of belonging and non-belonging, related to his Somali-Swedish background.⁶ The connection to criminal networks is an important part of Yasin’s artistic persona and musical themes, which is something he has chosen not to comment on, referring to letting his music “speak for itself.” The artistic persona in rap can be understood as a performative identity that is shaped by genre conventions and grounded in discourses of authenticity (Dankić 2019; Åberg and Westinen 2025). In an interview (Nileskär 2019: 39:50–40:23),

⁶ Since we unfortunately do not know which term Yasin himself would prefer, we have decided to use the term “Somali-Swedish” when describing his background in terms of ethnicity, which seems to be in line with recent research in this field (e.g., Massa and Boccagni 2021).

Yasin states that he is being unfairly blamed as the cause of the problems he describes in his music: “I write about my reality to get away from it and to show young people that it’s possible to get away from it.” In the few interviews he has taken part in since, he has chosen not to comment on his possible connections to criminal networks, which can be viewed as an aspect of the stereotypical mainstream representations of hip-hop blackness. Yasin is able to personify these stereotypical representations in two ways: via his own experiences of being convicted and sentenced to jail for various actions deemed criminal, and by choosing to include narratives of these experiences in his music.

In this article, we use the term “gangsterrap” since this is the only known term for the debated Swedish scene and rap subgenre which remains largely under-researched. Despite its popularity and commercial success, it is still generally unknown how the artists in this scene refer to their music. The few existing examples of artists who have commented on the name gangsterrap are mainly negative, criticising the public for referring to their music as “gangster tales.” The ascribed meanings of this music scene have also resulted in an overall unwillingness among these artists to be interviewed by traditional media. Being associated with this music scene has led to significant career changes for some artists. In 2022, Swedish Grammy winner rap artist Dree Low, Sweden’s most-streamed Spotify artist in 2020, quit music and removed his songs from streaming platforms to focus on “better things” (Lindkvist and Källén 2022). In 2023, rap artist 1.Cuz told *Svenska Dagbladet* he no longer wants to be called a gangsta rapper, as he doesn’t want to influence children to use weapons or drop out of school (Lundblad-Joons 2023).

Research Positionality

Several factors have informed our understanding of the phenomenon of Swedish gangsterrap. The public debate connected to this rap subgenre taking place in Sweden and Finland during the time of writing was an important reference point. The fact that one of the authors resides in Sweden (Dankić) and the other in Finland (Åberg) provided us with nation-specific media narratives on this phenomenon. This has resulted in methodological and ethical challenges such as: How do we approach gangsterrap as a research topic while it is highly politicised and, in public debate, frequently linked to the increase of gun homicides, shootings, and explosions across Sweden, a Nordic welfare state? How do we as researchers avoid reproducing the much-debated connections between gangsterrap and public discussion on the increase of lethal violence in Sweden? Also, when approaching the topic from a Finnish perspective and mainly following developments through social media, how do we as researchers consider both the artistry present in this subgenre and the Swedish societal discourse on fear and uncertainty regarding organised crime?

The combination of our individual experiences and approaches to both Swedish gangsterrap as well as rap and hip-hop in general has also informed our understanding

of the phenomenon. Dankić self-identifies as a hip-hop scholar and a “hip-hop head”⁷ but she has not engaged in this particular rap scene from the perspective of a fan. Åberg has closely followed the Swedish gangsterrap scene in several ways: as a devoted listener including being active on various social media platforms where the scene has taken place, and by attending concerts and gigs by artists in the scene in Sweden and Finland, and by showing interest in visiting the locations depicted in the music videos. In fact, our combined knowledge of different insights into the empirical field and the scholarly literature resulted in the decision to focus on Swedish gangsterrap from the perspective of belonging.

Belonging and Digital Diaspora

Our framework for understanding belonging in this article is connected to ideas of culture and nation. In the definition of Nira Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) the sense of belonging is “about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’, and . . . about feeling ‘safe’,” often “articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way.” The individual and collective feeling of belonging is conditioned by who is identified as “us” and “them.” Yuval-Davis (2006: 204) refers to this as “the politics of belonging.” For example, it can be related to being a member of certain social collectivities, but at the same time it can affect how different people are valued and judged. These borders maintain perceptions of who is considered to belong to a community at a particular time and place. The social process of “being at home” is an interactive one, where social space, practice, and sociability collectively form and redefine what constitutes home (Hall 2009), and profound urban changes, such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and colonisation have shaped the perception of home, locality, and family. Suzanne M. Hall’s concept of “migrant margins” (Hall 2018) shows how different historical and geographical contexts of different groups of people are subject to structural discrimination and interventions in segregated urban spaces in the postcolonial present.

Relevant to our study is also the fact that we live in a society where the internet is “entangled and intertwined with the everyday” (Ponzanesi 2021: 5). Belonging and the politics of belonging take place in imaginary, historical, or even digital contexts, with the communication and consumption of popular culture commonly taking place in contemporary, highly digitalised societies. Sandra Ponzanesi (2020) defines diaspora as a post-national condition that raises questions about the connection between nation, territory, and identity. It involves the recognition of lesser-known traditions and cultures, as well as the re-evaluation of postcolonial discourses and the development of new concepts to incorporate diverse ideas of citizenship, nation-states, and hybrid identities.

⁷ A term that members of the global hip-hop community often use to refer to themselves based on an understanding of hip-hop culture as “an identity, a worldview, and a way of life” (Morgan and Bennett 2011: 177).

However, the digital age has multiplied the possibilities for negotiating different identifications and human relations. According to Ponzanesi (2020), “digital diaspora” is a concept that not only allows attention to geopolitical fluctuations, but also incorporates different ways of reconfiguring spatialities and questions of belonging. She sees it “as a relational term that operates on three levels – Internet-specific, network-oriented and embedded in wider social practices – while also accounting for political, geographical and historical specificities” (ibid: 978). Groups of people are interconnected by linking themselves – through birth, previous residence, or mere identification – to a physical or imagined “homeland.” This place is what community members have in common: their roots, their original home, a sense of belonging, and community. This place might not be a physical place at all, but the memory or imagination of a place that exists or has once existed in the minds of people.

The concept of digital diaspora makes it possible to perceive and understand the motivations and implications behind different migrant experiences and to see the possibilities of digitalisation for connectivity and self-negotiating multiple affiliations, histories, and geographies. Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi (2019: 34) state that “digital diasporas are mutually constituted here and there, through bodies and data, across borders and networks, online and offline, by users and platforms, through material, symbolic, and emotional practices that are all reflective of intersecting power relations.” This can be understood as the concept of the digital diaspora consisting of many parallel processes, which are all based on the access to and the ability to use the chosen technology, but also how and why people in the diaspora use digital media to express themselves and make sense of the world around them.

In the case of Yasin, the concept of digital diaspora is relevant when exploring the role that various digital and diasporic practices and sentiments play in his artistry and music. References to his family’s Somali roots are prevalent in the music (through the usage of samples, Somali lyrics, and collaborations with artists such as Somali rap artist Sharma Boy in May 2025), in the imagery connected to his music (such as the album cover to *Pistoler, poesi och sex*), and interviews about his childhood. His entire existence as an artist and his music is digital. His music is released exclusively in digital format, and is therefore consumed only digitally. The communication between Yasin and his audience also takes place digitally. The music is never consumed live since it is not played live. Yasin who has expressed frustration for not being given the chance to perform live because of the threat of violence associated with the music (i.e., the live performance being viewed as instances for the artists – and their audience – to risk exposure to violence from potential rivals). He has, at the time of writing, performed live on a few occasions, Oslo in 2022 being his latest concert. At the time of writing this article he was scheduled to perform at a music festival in Umeå (Sweden) in May 2025, which both of us authors had been planning to attend, but the show was cancelled a few hours before it was due to start for security reasons.⁸

⁸ Shortly following this cancellation, Yasin’s two scheduled festival gigs in Sweden during summer 2025 were cancelled for the same reason. However, in April 2025, introduced as “The King

Home Far Away from Home

The emphasis on place and locality in Yasin's artistic image and music can be framed in the context of being a common aesthetic convention and practice in rap and hip-hop music. More specifically, the concept of the "extreme local" is used by Murray Forman (2002: xvii) to point out the geographical closeness that rap artists use to make sense of their ideas of space and place. In the case of Yasin, this is mainly illustrated with Rinkeby. His first stage name was Yasin Byn (Byn being a shortening of Rinkeby), and his music often focuses on Rinkeby, a suburb of northwest Stockholm where he was born and raised. Like many other parts of Stockholm, the neighbourhood is a product of the national *miljonprogrammet* ("Million [Homes] Programme") which amounted to 100,000 housing units being built nation-wide in the period between 1965 and 1974, with the goal of solving the housing crisis and advancing the universal welfare system in Sweden (Hall and Vidén 2005). The centre of Rinkeby is a market square surrounded by housing, parks, playgrounds, and schools. Today, Rinkeby is one of the most multi-cultural areas of Stockholm, with Somali migrants having arrived after the civil war in the early 1990s. With nearly 70,000 people, Somali-born Swedes made up the largest group of foreign-born citizens from Africa in 2023, making Sweden the largest Somali hub in Scandinavia (Massa and Boccagni 2021).⁹

Miljonprogrammet was a project connected to a dream of modernity – more of the Swedish population were to get the chance to live in modern housing with a high standard of living. This positive image of modernity started to shift with the construction of the housing and the arrival of its inhabitants (Ericsson, Molina, and Ristilammi 2000). The housing in Rinkeby was among the first to be finalised while it was still a construction site – a process that was thoroughly covered by a large number of journalistic reports focusing on the impact on the inhabitants. The stigmatisation continued with depictions of the neighbourhoods as dirty and untidy, which the politicians were blamed for. By the end of the 1970s, the media reports shifted their focus to criminality and various social problems when describing Rinkeby and similar neighbourhoods from the miljonprogrammet. During the 1980s this media stigmatisation shifted its focus to the "immigrants" who supposedly personified the "problem" with the miljonprogrammet housing (ibid.). The ongoing stigmatisation of these neighbourhoods resurfaced in the 2010s and 2020s through media attention towards Rinkeby and similar neighbourhoods regarding crime and social problems – with Swedish gangsterrap being seen as one central issue.

of Stockholm," Yasin made a guest-appearance at a live show by Mustafa, a Canadian-Sudanese folk-artist, in Stockholm. One of the authors attended the show and was therefore given the chance to see Yasin perform live.

⁹ Most of their children are Swedish-born and are therefore not included in this number. For the detailed statistics, provided by Statistiska centralbyrån, see www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START_BE_BE0101_BE0101E/FodelselandArK/ (accessed 4 February 2026).

In our analysis of Yasin’s music and his statements, ideas of Sweden and Somalia are important but even more significant is the in-betweenness that is described from his perspective as a resident of Rinkeby. In an interview with Swedish radio host and journalist Mats Nileskär (2019: 46:51–48:16), Yasin speaks of his experience of growing up as a Somali-Swede in Rinkeby:

It was difficult for sure, because we [his parents] are the first generation of immigrants. This meant that I lived in a family home where one kind of culture existed, and outside of that I met young people from other cultures. This often led to clashes. It wasn’t that I only clashed with Swedish culture, I clashed with Turkish culture, Arab culture, Eritrean culture, and many other kinds of culture. During my upbringing it was initially confusing to come from a home where I felt that things were a certain way, and things were viewed differently by someone coming from another home. It is confusing because in the end you don’t know what’s right or wrong. But then you grow up and realise why he or she feels a certain way and then you gain a better understanding. You learn from my culture and I learn from your culture, which in the end becomes one culture for all of us who are born here [in Rinkeby] or have been raised here. We have developed our own culture and that is the culture that you see in Swedish hip-hop today.

In the excerpt above, Yasin reflects on growing up among diverse cultures in Rinkeby, framing this experience as foundational not only to his personal identity, but also to the emergence of contemporary Swedish hip-hop. Similar in-betweenness is discussed by Susan Lindholm (2016): In her study about the children of Chilean refugees in Sweden who became hip-hop artists, and their connections to hip-hop artists in Chile during the 2010s, she argues that these artists use the particular historical continuity between the two countries based on solidarity, gender-equality, and a positive understanding of multiculturalism to create a sense of belonging to Sweden and to legitimise their identity as Swedes. Belonging here, according to Lindholm, is created *in situ*, in the sense that the hip-hop artists’ Chilean identity creates belonging to Sweden where they, instead of creating an identity which defines itself as different from Swedish identity, rather include their Chilean identity as part of identifying as Swedish. Hence, when they rap or say that they are Chilean, they are actually saying that they are Swedish.

In his interview with Yasin, Nileskär (2019: 48:24–48:35) compares Somali influences in Swedish rap and hip-hop at the end of the 2010s with Chilean influences in the 1990s and 2000s, which can be understood as a continuation of diasporic influences on the music and art developed in Sweden. The topic of the long-standing historical role of poetry in Somalia has recently been emphasised in a journalistic book focusing on Yasin, who is related to other contemporary Somali-Swedish R&B/rap artists such as Cherrie, Imenella, 1.Cuz, and K27 (Yussuf 2025). Somali influences have also been found in other contexts, where they have shaped local youth cultures, particularly through language, identity, and cultural expression. In Canada, for instance, Somali culture is particularly visible in urban linguistic practices (Denis 2021) and local music scenes (Abdigir 2016).

In the case of Yasin, Rinkeby can be viewed as a symbol of home and belonging. The relationship between Rinkeby, Somalia, and Sweden, as expressed by Yasin in the

abovementioned quote, is further touched upon in an interview with a local newspaper: “The closest I can get to a homeland is Rinkeby, where I feel like I’m in my country. When I’m outside of Rinkeby, I’m in Sweden. I was born there [Rinkeby], it’s like a nationality, you see, I’ve never been to Somalia” (Gustafsson Figueroa 2023). Yasin, who is of Swedish nationality, describes Rinkeby as being “near” to him and as his “home”, yet still “far away” and “not home” for his parents. This resonates with the findings of Nira Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) where “being at home” is emotionally linked to feelings of safety and belonging. In the interview cited above, Rinkeby is identified by Yasin as a safe place and the closest thing to a homeland. Similarly, in their study focusing on the everyday negotiations of a sense of home among residents of Somali origin in Rinkeby, Massa and Boccagni (2021) argue that one way of creating a sense of home is by internal diversity, resulting in a feeling of normality and invisibility that overrides the persistent sense of difference found elsewhere in Swedish society. In addition, local ways of socialising are seen as a counterpoint to the cold and reserved sociality of the Swedes. However, even though most of the participants accentuate the homely aspects of their place of residence, the construction of home in a stigmatised neighbourhood like Rinkeby is not something wholly positive. Some participants shared thoughts on improving it, while others wanted to leave it behind or highlighted its dangers in certain life circumstances, for example being a parent.

Spatial rights such as the right to enter a state and to remain there (Yuval-Davis 2006: 208) are relevant in the case of Yasin, considering that at the time of writing this article he resides in Germany. This could be interpreted as a sign of not feeling safe in either Rinkeby or Sweden in general. It is important to mention that several artists in the Swedish gangsterrap scene have been killed; the most commercially established victims were Einár, who died in 2021, and C.Gambino, who died in 2024.¹⁰ Yasin’s dual role in this context can be understood as highly relevant. He is considered one of the founders of this rap scene and one of its best-known artists, while at the same time being linked to a particular criminal network in Stockholm which has resulted in several prison sentences. In the context of Swedish gangsterrap, the fact that Rinkeby is a part of Sweden becomes relevant, since the country’s borders are not necessarily associated with safety for all its artists.

Communities of Belonging

Analysing Yasin’s lyrics and statements through the concept of digital diaspora enables a perspective of music as shaping “communities of belonging” (Candidatu and Ponza-nesi 2022: 266) beyond national borders. These communities reaffirm connections with

¹⁰ C.Gambino was shot dead in a parking garage only weeks after receiving a Grammy for his music, the most prestigious music prize in Sweden. According to Swedish police, criminal networks are linked to both deaths.

(real or imaginary) homelands but also manage to “establish new relations and networks of solidarity in the host countries and translocally” (ibid.). Even though Yasin states that he has never been to Somalia, a connection to his parents’ country of origin is reestablished in musical communities and through his songs. One such example is incorporating samples of songs popular with, and composed by, the Somali diaspora into his own music – a musical practice which in the case of Yasin includes the involvement of his audience, some of whom he communicates with digitally, and others he meets in everyday life in various physical spaces. The audience’s approval of sample choice can have a big impact on whether it is included in a song, which is discussed in the following section.

The song “Nånting i luften” begins with a drum beat which pauses intermittently. This start/stop character causes the song to momentarily lose its energy and propulsion, making it feel hesitant or cautious. The main melodic phrase is very simple, rotating on three minor chords that add to the suspended and hesitant feel. The chords have a bell-like piano sound, but the individual notes themselves sound strummed. In the intro section and the chorus, some very short, modulated phrases appear, echoing 1970s funk and rock. The chorus in “Nånting i luften” consists of Yasin singing the chorus of the song “Dhadar” by Somali-American artist Gulled Ahmed from 2008, a Somali pop song using the same melodic foundation. According to Yasin, this song is very well-known in the Somali diaspora. When talking about the song in his interview with Swedish music blog *Dopest* (2023: 3:02–5:17), he described it as a Somali classic, a “banger,” supposedly filling the Somali community with nostalgia. “In our Somali community everyone is in contact. My mother managed to get a hold of the artist, who gave his blessing for me to use his song. I sent the song to him afterwards and he liked it,” Yasin says with a big smile on his face, after which he and his producer Amr Badr search for the music video of “Dhadar” on YouTube. They sing along to the song while continuing to praise it. The chorus was posted early on different social media platforms to test audience responses. After seeing the positive feedback and its importance for the whole Somali community, Yasin and his producer immediately decided to make it an album track (*Dopest* 2023). “It seems to be important for the entire Somali community, and they begged us to release it. If it wasn’t for their response, I don’t think this song would have ended up on the album,” Yasin claims (*Dopest* 2023: 5:18–5:22).

Yasin states that although his work may have been criticised in previous years, this particular song was well-received by the community, and he feels that it was widely accepted (*Dopest* 2023). He describes in the interview how friends of the family, his friends’ parents, relatives, and others from the Somali community have been highly supportive of his success as an artist, but that they haven’t always been able to stand by the lyrical content of the music. The song “Nånting i luften” enabled his supportive community to finally completely stand behind the music and show its support. In the interview, Yasin doesn’t comment on what it was exactly about his music that the Somali community previously could not fully support, but, considering the context, it is assumed to be the themes of violence and descriptions of criminal lifestyles. This new kind of support among different generations of the Somali community enables the

emergence of new relationships and solidarity, both within one's (several) homeland(s) and, translocally, among one's diasporic group – but also through emotional language and affect across local borders and time. When analysing Yasin's interview, the song and its audience reaction online, Ponzanesi's (2021: 10) statement concerning the interaction and coexistence of different waves of migration and generations – which often use “global youth media” to practise “memory, nostalgia and national imaginary that are specific yet similar across generations, from parents to offspring” – becomes particularly useful. While speaking of his family and the Somali diaspora, Yasin describes his mother as a poet who recites Somali poetry, her losses and other sorrows in her life (explicitly mentioning the loss of two husbands and a son). Even though he has never discussed these things with his mother, he chose to embed her sorrows and losses in his lyrics. In the same interview he mentions that growing up, he was surrounded by Somali culture: The music played in his family home included artists such as Gulled Ahmed. In his youth, he was not always interested in it, but now, as an adult, he wants to learn more (*Dopest* 2023).

Furthermore, his recent experience of becoming a father may partly be the reason he reflects on a young man's discussions with his father in the song “Långt hemifrån”:

Jag lärde mig på gatan hur man överkommer hinder	I learned on the street how to climb over obstacles
Såg på TV men det var inte många svarta förebilder	Watched TV but I didn't see many Black role models
Om du tar och tittar upp lite har förändrats	If you look up, little has changed
Du föddes i ett land som aldrig var dina föräldrars	You were born in a country that was never your parents'
Jag frågade farsan varför livet var så hårt	I asked my dad why life was so hard
Han svarade “Min son vi är så långt hemifrån”	He replied, “My son, we're so far away from home”
Ingen här vill se dig lyckas So you better move in silence	No one here wants to see you succeed So you better move in silence
Läser Aftonbladet allt jag ser är black on black violence	Reading Aftonbladet, all I see is Black-on- Black violence
Om det gick att göra om och göra rätt Men det går inte att göra ägg av en färdig omelett	If it was possible to redo and do it right But you can't make eggs out of a ready- made omelette ¹¹

The melancholic soundscape of “Långt hemifrån” opens with two Spanish-type acoustic guitars. Once introduced, the drumbeat mainly consists of heavy, nightclub-type bass drums and various percussion spread widely across the stereo field. From about 40 seconds in until just about the one-minute-mark the guitars are heavily dampened, meaning the high end is cut, making them sound dull and muffled. The dialogue between two generations found in the lyrics above illustrate what Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2021) understand as differences between the first and second generation, such as that social

¹¹ This excerpt is from the song's first verse.

group dynamics are negotiated within and between the diaspora and the wider population in their host countries. Diasporic sub-groups diverge from one another, relate to one another, and offer different experiences of diasporic cultural belonging within each context. Local contexts and events affect how diasporic everyday practices relate to making and reproducing generational and intergenerational boundaries while also creating new imaginaries and experiences of “homeland.” Additionally, the dialogue in the lyrics above between father and son can be seen as an example of how the parents’ generations might have a more rigid idea of home. To them, home refers to their homeland, or they are describing their local neighbourhood as a “home away from home” (Massa and Boccagni 2021) or as a “double absence” (Sayad 2004): not feeling at home in their former homeland, yet neither in the “host” country (ibid.: 58, 74). The younger generations, often born and raised in the new home country, can more easily navigate between different concepts of home. The gloominess of the song’s sonic environment further conveys the wariness or uneasiness of its lyrics.

Non-Belonging as Resistance

Since hip-hop culture and music began to spread from the United States to the rest of the world in the 1980s, the African American political struggle has had a symbolic function for young people’s political struggles and the pursuit of social change in different parts of the world (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycock 2009; Clark 2018; Helbig 2014; Nietzsche and Grünzweig 2013; Terkourafi 2010; see also Dankić 2026: 183). Various social positions based on experiences of gender, ethnicity, race, class, generation, and place are often stressed in the political movements that hip-hop has accompanied and taken part in (Clay 2012). With regards to race and racialisation among practitioners, scholars such as Cutler (2014) have argued that rap and hip-hop music can be viewed as contexts where experiences of being positioned as non-white are normalised. Similarly, Morgan (2009: 14) has argued that hip-hop creates a context where something usually considered as stigmatised is highly valued. This can be understood as part of the individual experience but also as (non)belonging to different generations of people living in diaspora. Where the experience of being on the margins of society is globally shared, it is also “the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (hooks 1989: 20), where the human experience is central.

The music video – subtitled in English – for “Hoodrich” (2.3 million views, 397 comments, 7 July 2025) features a dark, nighttime scene in Stockholm, where a police officer stops a car in which Yasin is sitting in the back seat. The visuals show Yasin in different locations, mainly on his own, taking part in various illegal activities: driving away from the police or walking alone in a clothing store during nighttime depicted from the perspective of a surveillance camera, as if he is caught breaking in. There is a playful atmosphere in the visuals caused by Yasin smiling in many of the scenes, such as when he attempts to escape the police. This playfulness is emphasised by the song’s soundscape. Alongside the drum beat of “Hoodrich” there is a short melodic minor-key figure

with a melancholic and somewhat naïve character. It is processed in such a way that it resembles the stumbling, plucky sounds of a vintage music box. This creates some tension and/or anticipation as the sound and connotations of music boxes (childhood, innocence, passing of time etc.) are contrasted by the overall imagery and lyrical content of the song. In combination with Yasin humming, this can be interpreted as the story of a person who once was a child and is now dealing with the criminal image of himself. In the comments, a sense of solidarity is expressed through Somali flags and references to “Mali brothers,” with praise for how, despite the foreign language, the music conveys “connection and energy” and “the struggle,” which can mean many things in this context. The discussions revolve around the music itself but also touch on personal backgrounds and the emotions – both positive and negative – that the music evokes, whether expressed through text, or symbolically with flag emojis.

The lyrics to “Hoodrich” tell the story of a fearless person who is willing to use violence for gaining respect and wealth. The lyrics below speak from the position of both the perpetrator of violence and as a victim of (state) violence in a stigmatised neighbourhood:

Lagförd jag har varit i över hundra rättegångssalar	Prosecuted I've been in over a hundred courtrooms
...	...
Socialt nedbrytande beteende	Socially degrading behaviour
Sa att det var jag och du men inte för jag mena det	Said it was me and you but not because I meant it
Begår våldshandlingar utan att vara nånting här	Committing acts of violence like it was nothing here
Deep in this war vi är långt in här	Deep in this war, we are deep in this
Bitch boy du har inte gjort nånting här	Bitch boy, you haven't done anything here
Clap backs från en c63 se till att passa din mun	Clapback from a C63, make sure to watch your mouth
Smutsigt rik jag är tjugofyra år ung	Filthy rich, I'm 24 years young
What goes around comes around, allt kommer runt	What goes around comes around, every- thing comes around
<i>Chorus</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Framgång har en melodi	Success has its melody
Hoodrich folk de vill döda mig	Hoodrich people, they want to murder me
Jag sitter i en skottsäker bil	I'm sitting in a bulletproof car
Hanterar vapen hade lätt överlevt i krig	Handling weapons, would've easily sur- vived war ¹²

The term “hoodrich” refers to a popular cultural trope of a young man from the “hood” taking pride in his money-making skills and becoming rich through (mainly) illegal activities.¹³ It is also linked to the stereotypical identification of a racialised hyper-aggres-

¹² These lyrics appear at the very beginning of the song.

¹³ Hoodrich is also a UK-based street-fashion youth brand with the motto “from nothing to something.”

sive and hyper-masculine persona (Quinn 2005) which dominates “mainstream representations of hip-hop blackness” (Jeffries 2011: 126). The lyrics speak of the price of acquiring material wealth as a sign of success as well as recalling the acts of violence the storyteller has committed and the courtrooms he has been in for his socially undesirable behaviour. He also shares the feeling of worthlessness while being left alone to deal with what is depicted as war and alienation. The lyrics can further be viewed as an expression of life at the margins of society, and violence as a response to limited opportunities (Ilan 2015).

Even though the lyrics in “Nordvästra” and “Hoodrich” both depict crime, hyper-masculinity, violence, and consumerism, the lyrical narration is different in the former when compared to the latter. The affectionate and personal narrative in “Nordvästra” resembles a letter or a message to a lost friend who has been killed. The chorus places the story of this killed close friend within the ongoing societal development in Rinkeby and Sweden:

Du var fresh out, jag minns vi plocka upp dig	You were fresh out, I remember we picked you up
Du var knappt stressed out	You were barely stressed out
Du sa ba “Ge mig gunnen, fuck en väst, vi kör nu”	You said “Give me the gun, fuck a vest, let’s go”
Precis begravt en bro så en opp måste dö nu	Just buried a bro, so an enemy must die now
Det här är live and direct från Nordvästra Barnfamiljer här, dom har inte råd att semestra	This is live and direct from the Northwest Families with kids here, they can’t afford to take a vacation
Mordvågen stiger	The murder wave is rising
Här du måste rusta upp för att kunna skydda dom du älskar	Here you have to arm yourself to protect the ones you love
Live and direct från Nordvästra	Live and direct from the Northwest ¹⁴

Sonically, “Nordvästra” begins with a sombre-sounding sequence of notes, which span two full bars. The sound is some sort of synthesiser string imitation, similar to presets on children’s toy keyboards popular in the 1980s. In a few random places cowbell sounds from a Roland TR-808 drum machine are sprinkled. These are not in time with the rest of the beat and do not blend sonically, potentially causing a confusing effect on the listener. The drums are programmed in a trap style, with a loose-feeling bass drum and hi-hat-triplets. The song’s nostalgic melancholia further echoes the depiction of the close friend in the chorus. After being released from prison, the persona is focused on revenge for their killed friend, contextualising and possibly even humanising the so-called “murder wave” – a term used in the public debate that took place in Sweden during the mid-2010s and later concerning the increase of gun homicides, shootings, and explosions across Sweden. While the narrative of the “hood” can at times be viewed as representing a source of pride, belonging, and care (Waller 2023: 115), it is also im-

¹⁴ These lyrics are the song’s chorus.

portant to acknowledge that its community members are often tied together by experiences of exclusion and marginalisation (Reid 2017: 94). Thus, it may limit opportunities and enforce a very narrow ideal of gendered and racialised representation that the resident population internalises while living in the area. This relational deprivation gives rise to a survivalist mentality where illicit means are used to stabilise adversity through short-sighted means – such as acquiring money and respect through violence (ibid.: 96–97).

The hypermasculine and violent persona emphasising survival at all costs discussed above is depicted in relation to violent retaliation, which can be seen as a way of performing socially appropriate masculinity and defending the honour of friends and their social territory. This is depicted as something that is impossible to escape from, and may even be expected through media representations connecting Somali-Swedes “with marginalisation and unemployment,” as well as associating Rinkeby “with youth gangs, welfare abusers” (Massa and Boccagni 2021: 7), and other negative images.

Concluding Discussion: Digital Diasporic Practices Enabling Communities of Belonging

This article’s focus on an artist in a specific music scene – Swedish gangsterrap in the 2020s – offers an empirical case of popular music’s intersection with the rise of gun violence and explosions in a Nordic welfare state. In this current period of societal transformation, Stockholm is dubbed “Europe’s gun crime capital” (Ahlander 2024) and serves as the birthplace of the music scene under scrutiny. Even if this article is not focused on the relationship between music and crime per se, it functions as an important part of contextualising this music scene.

By focusing on Yasin’s practices of belonging/non-belonging, we have explored how the local, global, and digital are intertwined in today’s musical cultures, and how personal and shared negotiations of diasporic life experiences take place within these settings. The discussion illustrates how diasporas and digital diasporas become sites of solidarity: unique places where shared positions of loss and homemaking are negotiated. Yasin’s music and musicianship exemplify how digital diasporic practices are negotiated through popular music in contemporary Sweden. His work engages with narratives of (non)belonging, particularly among racialised youth, and is shaped by transnational and intergenerational Somali networks. Incorporating a Somali pop song as a part of his album after gaining permission via his parents’ diasporic ties and testing audience reception within the community highlight the active role of digital diasporic audiences in shaping musical production. This interplay of authorship, community, and digital circulation reflects what Sandra Ponzanesi (2020: 982) calls the “coexistence of virtual and embodied selves.” Drawing on Appadurai, she describes how online and offline worlds intertwine, creating new forms of diasporic selfhood through “mutations and renegotiations” (ibid.: 988). Yasin’s media presence and diasporic outreach reveal

how popular music becomes a space for constructing and contesting identity across physical and digital terrains.

Power relations are essential when trying to understand belonging due to its nature of being a dynamic process (Yuval-Davis 2006). Being ascribed specific social locations, such as gender, race, and class at a particular time and place, results in specific power relations in society being activated. Taking part in society as – for example – a young Black man at a particular time and place enables different agencies, but also roles, in society: Age, race, ethnicity, gender, time, and place constitute each other and create a particular social position. As an artist whose music draws on the stereotypical, racialised, and hyper-violent persona embedded in the Swedish gangsterrap subgenre, Yasin voices the experiences of the Other – the marginalised and stigmatised young (Swedish) Black man. From this perspective, Swedish gangsterrap can be understood as a site for expressing different ambivalent feelings including the sharing of forms of vulnerability and hardships such as the depiction of “mundane pain” (Bakkali 2019) in the community directed to a deceased friend in “Nordvästra.” The music can also function as an approach to explain the generational differences depicted in “Långt hemifrån,” by including the parents’ feelings. This is further developed by the mixing of the popular Somali chorus in “Nånting i luften” which can be interpreted as a tribute to Somali culture, consequently portraying it as a positive, unifying force in the lives of young people and their parents. Furthermore, the emphasis on the inequalities experienced by the urban poor (Fatsis 2019) in “Hoodrich” facilitates bonds of solidarity to take place also with those outside the diaspora.

Yasin’s music can be viewed as a way of channelling feelings of anger and disappointment about growing up without being treated as part of Swedish welfare state, while it is obvious that other Swedish inhabitants are. This echoes scholarship on the 1980s–1990s Los Angeles subgenre of gangsta rap, which has discussed the music as a form of political protest during a period of intense public debate in the United States, when gangsta rap was criticised for promoting anti-police and sexist sentiments as well as the romanticisation of criminal imagery (see, e.g. Quinn 2005). Also, these feelings of anger and disappointment can be understood as being intertwined in the narratives of (non)belonging in Yasin’s music. The fact that he includes different perspectives or positions in the selected songs (the son, the father, a friend, a victim, and a perpetrator of crime) can be seen as explicating the possible experiences that shape, for example, Rinkeby as an example of a local community of belonging (Candidatu and Ponzanesi 2022), rather than belonging to Sweden. Music enables the possibility to go beyond one’s own personal experiences and to tell stories that can, but not necessarily do, echo different voices in the society you live in.

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Authors' Contribution Statement

Both Andrea Dankić and Erica Åberg have contributed equally to the research underlying the article and to drafting, reviewing, and revising the manuscript. They both approve of the published version and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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