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From “Something in Between” to “Everything All at Once: Meditations:” Meditations on Liminality and Blackness in Afro-Finnish Hip-Hip and R &B

Jasmine Kelekay

Abstract: Since its global spread in the 1980s, hip-hop has been a crucial cultural sphere in which Europeans of color have engaged the experiences of race and racism, gender, and national belonging, with hip-hop music and culture often considered to function as the cultural lingua franca of the African diaspora. Given the continued dominance of Nordic exceptionalism and formal color-blindness in both the Finnish national imaginary and public discourses, hip-hop emerges as an important site for examining the production of counter-discourses and -narratives by Finns of color, and Afro-Finns in particular. This article approaches Afro-Finnish hip-hop as an alternative archive of Afro-Finnish experience and thought. It centers three works by the Afro-Finnish R&B singer Rosa Coste and Afro-Finnish rapper Yeboyah to examine articulations of liminality in relation to Blackness, mixedness, and Finnishness. Exploring the multiple readings of liminality discernible across these works, the article shows that they offer meaningful meditations on Afro-Finnish identity and experience. In raising the multiple forms of liminality that shape the Afro-Finnish experience, these works also raise questions about the potentials and limitations of multiraciality as a category of analysis in the Finnish context.

Keywords: African diaspora, music, racial identity, multiracial, Finland, Afro-Europe

Introduction

(Jotain siltä väliltä)	(Something in between)
Musta on mekko	Black is the dress
Mustat on moodit	Black is the mood
Musta on papa	Black is papa
Ja mustat on bootsit	And black are the boots
Minä jotain siltä väliltä	Me something in between
Minä ehkä jotain siltä väliltä	Me maybe something in between

In 2021, independent R&B singer Rosa Coste burst onto the Finnish popular music scene with her debut single “Musta” (Black).¹ The song was met with critical acclaim and Coste was hailed as the most promising R&B artist on the horizon. The public interest in Coste was also amplified by her being from Rovaniemi, a small northern city in Finnish Sápmi—the traditional homeland of the Indigenous Sámi communities—thereby challenging the tendency to associate both people of color and the culture they produce with the country’s capital. Against this backdrop, Coste was embraced as a breath of fresh air by music industry professionals and music journalists alike.² In Rovaniemi, Coste was praised for contributing to the diversification of the local cultural landscape and representing the

city on the national stage.³ However, for many people of color in the so-called second generation, and especially for Afro-Finnish and multiracial women, “Musta” represented something much deeper.

The song, as the title suggests, offers a meditation on the many meanings of Blackness and Coste’s relationship to it. As the repeated line “something in between” reflects, this relationship is marked by liminality. For young people of color, especially Afro-Finns, this articulation of liminality offered a point of recognition and identification that is not often, if ever, represented in the Finnish cultural landscape. Perhaps most saliently recognizable as an articulation of multiracial identity, the song and its accompanying music video, I argue, offer several different readings of both Blackness and liminality worthy of examination. Taking “Musta” and two additional songs—“Hiukset” (Hair) by Coste and “Musta Tyttö Magiaa” (Black girl magic) by Afro-Finnish rapper Yeboyah and Coste—as my data, I draw on semiotics and narrative hip-hop analysis to explore how they construct and engage with ideas of Blackness and liminality.⁴ In doing so, I approach Afro-Finnish hip-hop as an alternative archive of Afro-Finnish experience and thought. To contextualize my approach, I briefly situate my study within Black Europe and African diaspora studies, critical mixed race studies (CMRS), and hip-hop studies, after which I introduce the social and discursive context within which the artists at the center of this study operate.

In the past decade, the fields of Black studies and African diaspora studies have increasingly expanded beyond the Americas to include the interdisciplinary study of Black communities in Europe alongside other communities of color. As sociologist Stephen Small emphasizes, this development has been particularly important for advancing the conversation about so-called Black Europe on its own terms—that is, to develop knowledge that is grounded in and produced by and for the benefit of Black Europe, rather than relying on the translation of US-based concepts and logics about Blackness into the European context.⁵ At the same time, research placing Black people in Europe—and especially Black citizens—at the center within studies of race in Europe remains limited, often engaging Black Europeans only to the extent that they are subcategories of other groups, such as immigrants or refugees.⁶

Research on Black European communities has engaged questions of national belonging, racial and ethnic identity, religion, racism, and xenophobia from a range of disciplinary approaches in the humanities and social sciences. However, it has overwhelmingly focused on the histories and experiences of Black European communities within the national contexts with the largest African diasporic populations—the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Germany.⁷ Meanwhile, Nordic countries remain comparatively underexplored. The dearth of research on race in the Nordic context is often attributed to the dominance of “Nordic exceptionalism,” framed by critical scholars as the Nordic countries’ investment in portraying themselves as “global ‘good citizens’, peace-loving, conflict-resolution oriented and ‘rational,’” including a self-conception of themselves as color-blind bastions of equality and progressive social policy.⁸ This narrative, however, relies on the continued erasure of Nordic colonial and settler-colonial projects, Nordic participation in slavery and the transatlantic enslavement trade, and the eugenicist ideologies that lay at the foundation of Nordic welfare state formations. Facilitated by this erasure, Nordic countries, Finland among them, deploy Nordic exceptionalism to position race as not only an irrelevant but also an inappropriate category of

analysis and experience. Consequently, critical scholarship engaging with race and racism in Finland, much less Blackness and anti-Blackness specifically, remains scarce.

The African Diaspora in Finland

Unlike in Britain, France, and the Netherlands, most African descendants in Nordic countries do not come from the nations' former colonies.⁹ Instead, "African descendants in the Nordic countries are ... more likely shaped by the so-called 'New African Diaspora' experiences of being post-colonial African immigrants."¹⁰ Furthermore, most African migrants to Nordic countries have been refugees from the Horn of Africa, which has structured both the population dynamics and the local discourses around the presence of "racial Others." While this population represents a great degree of cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, they are likely to encounter similar experiences of racialization and, as a result, experience a similar host of issues in Finnish society.¹¹

Although non-European immigrants had settled in Finland in smaller numbers for several decades, it was not until the early 1990s that a consequential number of refugees began to arrive from Africa and the Middle East. During the first half of the 1990s, an unprecedented number of African asylum seekers—mostly from the Horn of Africa—arrived in Finland, overshadowing all other refugee populations.¹² The rapid change from a society perceived as untouched by non-European immigration to a society suddenly becoming home to growing communities of Black, Brown, and Muslim people caused a backlash, which journalist Esa Aallas termed "Somali shock."¹³ "Somali shock" was used to refer not only to Finnish society's inability to adjust to the sudden presence of an African, Black, and Muslim refugee population but also, consequently, to that population's struggles to integrate into Finnish society. It should be noted, however, that although Finnish society has undoubtedly experienced a rapid diversification over the past three decades, the historical struggles of the Sámi and the Roma communities remind us that the notion that Finland was a racially, ethnically, and culturally homogenous nation prior to the arrival of African refugees is more myth than reality. Yet, despite Finland's complex historical relationship with nation, ethnicity, and identity—or perhaps precisely because of it—Finnishness remains normatively defined as Whiteness in mainstream discourses.

Today, an estimated one in ten residents in Finland have a foreign background, with the number increasing to one in five in the greater Helsinki metropolitan area. Indeed, approximately half of all people in Finland with a foreign background reside in the greater Helsinki area. While the former Soviet Union and Estonia are the most common countries of origin among immigrants overall, Somalis make up the largest non-European minority group in the country and the largest immigrant population in the Helsinki area. Finns of African descent, or Afro-Finns, are also the largest group among second-generation immigrants, with Somalis making up the clear majority of people of African descent.¹⁴ Researchers have examined the experiences of Finland's African diasporic communities through studies of ethnic and transnational identities, African diasporic cultural production, and experiences of racism.¹⁵ Research reports have consistently highlighted the prevalence of anti-Black racism as an institutional phenomenon in Finland, including through "ethnic profiling" by police, discriminatory practices in education and the workplace, and the impact of racial discrimination on

health outcomes.¹⁶ In 2018, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a report, subtitled “Being Black in the EU,” that named Finland as one of the most hostile countries for people of African descent in Europe, highlighting that Afro-Finns reported experiencing racist discrimination (45 percent), harassment (63 percent), and violence (14 percent) at higher rates than other Europeans of African descent.¹⁷

Among the second generation, a significant number are multiracial, most often with one White Finnish parent and one Black African parent. Yet limited research has explored the racialized experiences and identifications of children and youth with mixed ethnic heritage, with most studies instead focusing on the experiences of White people with mixed European heritage.¹⁸ In the popular cultural sphere, however, multiracial Finns have over the past two years begun to mobilize around shared experiences as “mixed Finns” or “Third Culture Kids,” although these have not exclusively centered on the experiences and perspectives of mixed-race Finns as much as broader experiences of liminality shared by multiethnic, transracially adopted, and second-generation people of color in Finland.¹⁹

If we look to the cultural realm, the last decade has seen second-generation Black and Brown Finns increasingly carving out their own spaces in the national discourse. Perhaps most notably, in 2015 Yemeni-Finnish journalist and activist Koko Hubara launched the blog *Ruskeat Tytöt* (Brown girls), which in 2017 expanded into the first multimedia platform for “Brown” Finns by “Brown” Finns.²⁰ The establishment of *Ruskeat Tytöt* also ushered in a discursive shift when it came to questions of racism. Rather than only addressing questions of marginal belonging or contested citizenship, the blog explicitly addressed racialization and hegemonic Whiteness as products of White supremacy. As a result, *Ruskeat Tytöt* for the first time provided a popular cultural framework for rendering visible the racialized structures of Finnish society and culture. It also brought to the forefront a popular cultural understanding of intersectionality.

The past several years have also seen the emergence of specifically Afro-Finnish spaces and platforms, both online and offline, in turn leading to the development of Afro-Finnish collective identity. Examples include the Facebook groups Afro-Suomi (Afro-Finland) and Afrofinlandssvensk (Afro-Finland-Swedish) and the collective Good Hair Day, which has since 2016 organized an annual festival for the celebration of Afro hair and Afro-Finnish community.²¹ Although African diasporic organizations and community spaces have long existed in Finland, the formation of increasingly pan-ethnic and specifically Afro-Finnish spaces has largely been driven by the second generation. While the first generation has often organized and congregated on the basis of particular ethnic and national backgrounds, it is the second generation that through shared upbringing but also shared experiences has come to articulate a common identity around shared African ancestry in the Finnish context. These spaces have also inspired increased public and cultural engagement with questions of Blackness, diaspora, identity, Finnishness, and belonging. The emergence of artists like Coste and Yeboyah is part of this cultural shift, within which hip-hop has played a major role.

As Hubara discusses in her 2017 essay collection, *Ruskeat Tytöt: Tunne-esseitä*, US hip-hop became almost universally embraced by the first generation of Finnish youth of color in the 1990s, providing them with what was often the only source of both the visual representation of Black and

Brown bodies and the discursive representation of narratives about and by members of racialized communities.²² This speaks to the relevance of African American cultural and political identities for the shaping of Finnish youth's understandings of Blackness, as well as to the political potential of hip-hop as a cultural form. Consequently, I follow Black European scholars, like Afro-German scholar Fatima El-Tayeb, who argue that it is imperative that we look beyond state-oriented definitions of racialized "Others" in Europe and instead center European racial minorities' experiences, perspectives, and forms of cultural production in our inquiries.²³ To do so, I approach hip-hop as an alternative archive of Black/Afro-Finnish culture and experience.

Hip-Hop as Alternative Archive

Since its global spread in the 1980s, hip-hop has been a crucial cultural sphere in which Europeans of color have engaged the experiences of race and racism, gender, and national belonging, with hip-hop music and culture often considered to function as the cultural lingua franca of the African diaspora.²⁴ As Awad El Karim M. Ibrahim's work with African immigrant youth in Canada suggests, hip-hop is also a tool through which African youth learn the language and contextual meaning of Blackness in a predominantly White society.²⁵ Indeed, hip-hop music and culture have historically served as tools for disrupting dominant discourses that often render racialized communities as simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible—hyper-visible in that they frequently become the subjects of discourse but invisible in that their own narratives are excluded from such discourses.²⁶ Since its inception in the housing projects of the Bronx in the 1970s, hip-hop has been used by African American and Latinx youth as a tool for both explicit political resistance and the creative reimagining and reclaiming of marginalized spaces.²⁷

El-Tayeb argues that hip-hop has been particularly important in the development of identities and collectivities of second-generation European youth of color. Indeed, El-Tayeb notes that the new generation of European youth of color and activists has "appropriated hip-hop as a tool of intervention that allows racialized communities across the continent to formulate an identity negated in dominant discourses; an identity that transcends mononational assignments through its multiethnic and translocal frame of reference, but that nonetheless, or arguably because of it, effectively challenges minorities' expulsion from national discourses."²⁸ As a result, I have previously argued that cultural production represents a particularly generative avenue through which to examine racialized identities and experiences in Finland, as hip-hop becomes one of the few public realms where questions of racialization, racism, and belonging are free to be engaged without being limited by White epistemologies.²⁹

Theoretical Framework

Within the broader development of critical race studies, the past three decades have also seen the emergence of the critical mixed race studies paradigm, which "places mixed race at the critical center of focus" and treats multiracial people as "subjects of historical, social, and cultural processes rather than simply objects of analysis."³⁰ In doing so, CMRS seeks to emphasize interlocking structures

of oppression in its interrogation of both racial essentialism and racial hierarchy.³¹ Critical engagements with multiracial positionality have paid particular attention to the constructions and experiences of “marginality” and “liminality.”³² Broadly conceptualized as in-betweenness, CMRS scholars treat liminality as generative rather than deficient, examining the interplay between structure and agency, as well as the “interactional, political, physical and institutional dimensions of liminality in relation to multiracial identity development.”³³

While the CMRS framework has also been extended to transnational and global analyses of multiraciality, including in Europe, most of this work has, like studies of Black Europe, focused on the United Kingdom.³⁴ In the Nordic context, engagement with multiraciality is particularly difficult given the general denial of race as a social category.³⁵ Given the multiple erasures of racialized lived experiences in both the national imaginary and public discourses, hip-hop emerges as an important site for examining the production of counter-discourses and -narratives by Finns of color, and Afro-Finns in particular.

In this article, I approach the works of Coste and Yeboyah as an avenue for examining Afro-Finnish experiences of liminality in relation to Blackness, mixedness, and Finnishness. In doing so, I draw on David L. Brunsma, Daniel Delgado, and Kerry Ann Rockquemore’s examination of different forms of liminality in relationship to the “identity matrix,” to explore how liminality is articulated as structural, cultural, social, embodied, and political.³⁶

Afro-Finnish Hip-Hop

Since its arrival in Finland in the late 1980s, hip-hop music and culture has, until recently, almost entirely been dominated by White Finnish men, with limited engagement with questions of cultural appropriation or discussion of its Black American roots. However, music scholar Antti-Ville Kärjä, for example, has analyzed the prevalence of humor and parody in early Finnish rap as a strategy for managing the tensions between the racialized origins of rap music and its adoption in the Finnish context.³⁷ Meri Tervo has also examined how White Finnish rappers have historically engaged in both cultural appropriation and the translation of elements of US hip-hop culture into their own localized expressions and narratives.³⁸ Some Finnish hip-hop scholars, especially Elina Westinen, have begun examining music produced and performed by Finnish rappers of color, engaging with how they navigate questions of belonging, Otherization, “ethnic” stereotypes, and authenticity.³⁹

I have in my previous work contributed to this growing body of literature by moving toward more explicit analyses of Blackness and anti-Blackness through the incorporation of critical race, Black feminist, and African diasporic frameworks to the analysis of Afro-Finnish hip-hop. In so doing, my analysis has been informed by my own lived experiences as an Afro-Finnish woman, leading me to examine how Afro-Finnish rappers engage with Blackness in relation to identity, racism, and the racial boundaries of national belonging in Finland and how they negotiate territorial stigmatization and the racialized politics of place.⁴⁰ In this article, I build on my previous work by examining Afro-Finnish musicians’ engagement with liminality in relation to Blackness, specifically as articulated through the mixed-race experience. In addition, I focus here on the musical production of Afro-Finnish women, in

contrast to the previous work on Afro-Finnish hip-hop, including my own, which has centered Black male rappers. Specifically, I analyze a selection of songs released by up-and-coming R&B singer Rosa Coste and rapper Rebekka Aili Kuukka, better known by her alias Yeboyah.

After becoming known in the local Helsinki music scene as one-third of the women of color DJ trio Mellow Yellow Collective, Kuukka propelled herself into the hip-hop scene with the release of her first single “Broflake” in 2017.⁴¹ Empowered by the intersectional feminist wave brought on by the launching of the Ruskeat Tytöt multimedia platform, Yeboyah stepped into the public sphere ready to take on racist and sexist societal structures as well as the hegemony of masculinity in hip-hop culture. As the title suggests, “Broflake” delivered a critique of masculine fragility, declaring “it’s time to wake up.” Following the positive reception of “Broflake,” Yeboyah released a visual EP titled *Elovena* in 2019, which earned her critical acclaim, awards nominations, and the nickname as “Finland’s most political rapper.”⁴² After signing with a major record label in 2021, Yeboyah released her first studio album titled *Perhosefekti* (The butterfly effect) in 2021, solidifying her place in the Finnish hip-hop scene.⁴³ Throughout her work, Yeboyah has continued to engage with intersecting structures of oppression as well as questions of identity, relationships, and space-taking. In doing so, Yeboyah has drawn inspiration from the work of US Black women artists but also from her own mixed Ghanaian and Karelian heritage and her vantage point as a Finnish woman of color.⁴⁴

Also released in 2021 was the independently produced song “Musta,” which catapulted previously unknown artist Coste into the Finnish popular music scene. From the perspective of the popular music industry, the debut was in part groundbreaking because it masterfully illustrated the potential for a Finnish R&B scene, which had largely been absent.⁴⁵ Music industry professionals and journalists alike were also impressed by the fact not only that Coste was an independent artist but also that she was from and remains living in the small northern city of Rovaniemi, shattering the tendency to associate both people of color and the music that they produce with the country’s capital. Indeed, much local and national media coverage about Coste has focused on her relationship to Rovaniemi, a fact that she describes as her “superpower.”⁴⁶ The question about being Black in Rovaniemi is brought up in her song lyrics, which have also received a great deal of attention from both media and the Afro-Finnish community for their heartfelt engagement with questions of identity and racism.

Encouraged by the public reception of the song, Coste proceeded to release her first EP titled *Ole Varovainen* (Be careful) in 2021, on which the song “Musta” is featured.⁴⁷ The second single from the EP, “Hiukset,” is a similarly poignant reflection on anti-Blackness, Afro hair, and the discrimination that Black people experience in Finland. The songs “Musta” and “Hiukset,” along with their respective music videos, are the primary subjects of this analysis. The third song I analyze, “Musta Tyttö Magiaa,” is the first collaboration between Yeboyah and Coste and was featured on Yeboyah’s *Perhosefekti* album. Drawing on a sociological approach to cultural semiotics and hip-hop feminist narrative analysis, I analyze the lyrical and visual constructions of liminality and Blackness within and across these songs and, in the case of the first two, their accompanying music videos.⁴⁸

Relying on translations of rap lyrics poses some analytical limitations. As a musical form that emphasizes playful lyricism, rhymes, double meanings, and layered cultural references, the analysis of rap lyrics is inherently a subjective project. Translating rap lyrics in a way that communicates both the

literal meaning of words and the culturally contextualized interpretations of them presents a significant added challenge. In fact, hip-hop scholars have noted the complex language ideologies displayed in the rap music of African diasporic populations around the world.⁴⁹ As a result, I pay particular attention to how the artists draw on both Finnish and African diasporic (and particularly Black US-American) cultural and political vernacular as resources for articulating Afro-Finnish experience. I similarly draw on Black studies and CMRS as analytic resources, in combination with my situated lens as an Afro-Finn, to examine these works within their cultural context(s).

“Musta”: On Liminal Blackness

An intimate and vulnerable R&B song, “Musta” opens with the chorus, introducing the theme of the song through its many applications of the term “black.”

(Jotain siltä väliltä)	(Something in between)
Musta on mekko	Black is the dress
Mustat on moodit	Black is the mood
Musta on papa	Black is papa
Ja mustat on bootsit	And black are the boots
Minä jotain siltä väliltä	Me something in between
Minä ehkä jotain siltä väliltä	Me maybe something in between

Coste lists things that are “black”—her dress, her moods, her dad, and her boots—deploying several different meanings of Blackness: black as color, black as affect, and Black as a social category. Finally, Coste questions her own relationship to the category, asserting that she is “maybe something in between.” These lines, repeated throughout the song, frame its exploration of the meanings of Blackness and her relationship to it. Indeed, the song and its accompanying music video investigate Coste’s relationship to Blackness both lyrically and visually.⁵⁰ The music video, which is shot in black and white, takes place inside what is depicted as Coste’s home. In the video, Coste is seen in four different ways: sitting on the living room floor looking through family photo albums; lying on her bed while contemplatively looking up at the ceiling; brushing her hair while examining her reflection in the mirror; and sitting on the floor wedged between her mother’s legs, who is sitting behind her braiding her hair. Together, the lyrics and video offer complementary readings of the multiple meanings of Blackness but also multiple forms of liminality: structural, cultural, social, affective, and temporal.

Structural Liminality

Liminality is most clearly referenced throughout the song in terms of Coste’s identity, as she distinguishes between her Black father (“Black is dad”) and herself (“me something in between”). However, rather than simply reflecting a liminal racial identity, Coste’s positionality is better understood in terms of *structural liminality*. While in the US or UK contexts, formal liminality has

been defined in terms of one's formal racial identification, the absence of formal racial categorizations in the Nordic context obscures (but does not erase) racial structures.⁵¹ This is evident, for example, in the context in which she refers to herself as “maybe something in between.” While she names the Blackness of her father, Whiteness remains unarticulated throughout the song. Whiteness can remain unspoken because it is hegemonic, Whiteness structures society, Whiteness is culturally normative. Therefore, it is only difference which departs from Whiteness that needs to be named, in this case, Blackness.

That Coste's questioning of whether she is “something in between” is readily understood as a reference to being in between Blackness and Whiteness without the latter needing mentioning is a testament to its hegemony. This is perhaps particularly the case in Finland, where Finnishness is articulated through Whiteness, therefore rendering anything or anyone non-White outside the bounds of the nation. The un-naming of Whiteness in her articulation of liminality is also indicative of the normative understanding of mixed-race experience as always in relation to Whiteness, through the presumption of part-White identities. Another way structural liminality is articulated is through Coste's analysis of her father's experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and her own relationship to him, and it as a matter of distance.

Musta on kitarani	Black is my guitar
Mutta missä on ne kaikki mun muistoni (hei)	But where are all my memories (hey)
Joissa papan kanssa lumienkeleitä	Where with papa we snow angels
Hiekkakakkuja tai papusoosia tehdään	Sandcastles or bean sauce make
Musta on papa	Black is papa
Musta oon minä	Black am I
Mustia aikoja Rovaniemellä	Black times in Rovaniemi
Ei musta mies saanut töitä	Black man could not get a job
Pomoraukat ne valvoivat öitä	Poor bosses, they stayed up at night
Ilmeisesti liian vaarallista olis ollu	Apparently, it would have been too dangerous
Eihän siitä mitään tosiaankaan olis tullu	Surely it would not have worked out
Päästää nyt musta mies rattiin	To let a Black man behind the wheel
Oh no, jälleen kerran tulee takkiin	Oh no, another rejection

In the first verse, Coste again invokes multiple meanings of Blackness: as color (“black is my guitar”), as an identity marker (“Black is papa / Black am I”), and as affect (“black times in Rovaniemi”). Importantly, in this verse, Coste also positions herself as Black, aligning herself with her father. This alignment is highlighted through the positioning of the proclamation of her identity in the line succeeding his (“Black is papa / Black am I”). Yet looking back on her childhood, Coste laments the loss of what could have been childhood memories of her father (“but where are all my memories”), taken away as a result of the discrimination he faced during “black times in Rovaniemi.” As she says,

the commonly held stereotype of the Black man as dangerous was repeatedly used by prospective employers to deny him jobs as a taxi driver.

In the Finnish context, this story speaks specifically to the conditions of Finland in the 1990s, when Finnish society not only was much more homogenous than it is now but was also reeling with racist backlash after the arrival of the first significant population of African refugees earlier in the decade. That the Coste family was living in Rovaniemi, which in the mid-90s only had a population of about thirty-five thousand and is 705 kilometers (approximately a ten-hour drive) away from the nation's capital where most immigrants and immigration services are located, signifies an added level of precarity. The pervasiveness of racism was such that her father eventually had to leave the family, settling closer to the capital region where he could find work to support his family. The second verse illustrates the severing of the family and the impact it had on her as a child to not understand why her father could not be present. Through linking references to experiences of liminality with her father's absence in the verse, she also links the two in the narrative of her identity formation.

Liian rap ollakseni vaalea	Too rap to be light
Liian hip ollakseni tumma	Too hip to be dark
Syylinen olo jos mun asiat on hyvin	Feel guilty if things are good
Alemmuuden kolo sillon kun ei mee hyvin	Lower than low when they are not
Mustat on kiharani	Black are my curls
Mutta tässä on kaikki mun muistoni (hei)	But these are all my memories (hey)
Äidin kanssa lumienkeleitä	With mom we snow angels
Hiekkakakkuja ja kärjistystä me tehtiin	Sandcastles and sautéed reindeer made
Lapsena ihmettelin	As a child I wondered
Miksei papa ole täällä	Why is papa not here
Vaikka minä olen täällä	Even though I am here
Ja sinä olet täällä	And you are here
Silti papa on etäällä	Still papa is far away
Äiti sanoi ettei tasa-arvo ole oletus	Mom said equality is not a given
Toisille ei ole juhlia kuin meille juhannus	No celebrations for others like midsummer for us
Ei ainakaan tän suomen maan päällä	At least not here on Finnish earth
Enkä tiedä että minkä maan päällä	And I do not know on what earth

The phrasing of the third stanza, in the form of her childhood questions, also illustrates the impact of the separation from her father on her identity. In asking “why is papa not here / *even though I am here / and you are here*” (emphasis added). Coste evokes the underlying question of whether her father being distant also means that she is more like her mother. To put it differently, if anti-Blackness is the reason that her father cannot be there, then her remaining with her mother illustrates her structural liminality, her position as somewhere in between her father and her mother. The two structural positions, however, are not only racial—the mother being White and the father being

Black—but also a question of the social capital related to one’s immigration status. Her mother, as the “native” parent is thus in the more structurally stable position, whereas her father faced structural exclusion as both an immigrant in Finland and as a Black man in a racist society. In the Finnish context, where the Finnish-born children of immigrants are granted citizenship, on the one hand, but where national belonging remains normatively defined by Whiteness, on the other, the so-called second generation finds itself in a structurally liminal position: Finnish by birth, by citizenship, at least in part by culture, and sometimes by ethnic heritage but also always deemed to be “outside” the boundaries of the nation.⁵² Coste’s question, then, of why she is there with her mother while “papa is far away” is illustrative of her liminal positional in the social structure of Finland.

Cultural and Social Liminality

Another way Coste articulates liminality is through cultural and social identity. Coste communicates cultural liminality subtly in the chorus, which repeats the opening stanza twice, except for a slight difference between the two iterations.

Musta on mekko	Black is the dress
Mustat on moodit	Black are the moods
Musta on isä	Black is dad
Ja mustat on bootsit	And black are the boots
Minä jotain siitä väliltä	Me something in between
Taidan olla jotain siltä väliltä	I guess I am something in between
Musta on mekko	Black is the dress
Mustat on bootsit	Black are the boots
Musta on papa	Black is papa
Ja mustat on moodit	And Black are the moods
Minä jotain siltä väliltä	Me something in between
Taidan olla jotain siltä väliltä	I guess I am something in between

In the first stanza, she uses the Finnish term *isä* to produce the line “Black is dad,” whereas in the second stanza she reverts back to the original use of the French term “papa.” That she goes back and forth between her two native languages is illustrative of a kind of cultural liminality but also perhaps a liminality in her relationship to her father, whose physical distance has shaped her experience of cultural and social liminality. Another subtle distinction between the two stanzas is the wording of the last line, where in the first version she states, “I think I am something in between” and in the second verse “maybe I’m something in between,” indicating more certain liminality in the first instance than the second. In combination with the shift between languages, the subtle differences link racial liminality to cultural liminality.

The expression in the chorus of racial liminality is echoed in the first lines of the second verse: “too rap to be light / too hip to be dark.” The passive tone suggests a reference to external appraisals, a notion supported by the departure from her usual reference to Blackness with the term “Black” and, instead, taking on the language of skin tone typically used in Finnish race-evasive discourses. The phrase evokes another strategy of color-blind racism by encoding race in cultural terms, with “hip” signifying cultured and therefore White in contrast to “rap,” which is racialized and uncultured. The interlinking of skin tones with cultural inflections deemed to be incompatible also invokes the kind of social liminality a lot of mixed-race Black people experience in relation to external appraisals from White and non-Black peers.⁵³ The next two lines in the stanza—“feel guilty if things are good / lower than low when they are not”—tie the experience of cultural liminality to a kind of affective liminality, invoking the notion of black as affect. The line might even be seen as tying affective liminality to structural liminality through the experience of guilt “if things are good,” perhaps an analogy for the structural privileges one may be afforded for being part White.

Later in the verse, Coste more palpably interweaves the notion of grief with her racial identity development in the lines “black are my curls / but these are all my memories / with mom we snow angels / sandcastles and sautéed reindeer made.” In contrasting her black curls with her childhood memories, Coste signifies that although she is phenotypically Black, she lost the chance to develop a “Black” cultural identity. By contrasting the memories that she cannot find (“where are all my memories”) with the only memories she has (making sautéed reindeer with her mother), Coste laments the loss of Congolese cultural identity (making bean sauce with her father) as a result of being separated from her father. The mirroring of the structure of this cluster of lines in the two verses also illustrates a kind of affective temporality, whereby the first verse represents the childhood that could have been but was lost with the second verse illustrating what she was left with in the absence of her father. The last stanza of the second verse speaks to the fact that Coste’s White mother, in the absence of her father, was left with having to answer her daughter’s questions and teach her about racism (“mom said equality is not a given”).



Another way Coste signals her mother having been left with the task of raising a Black daughter is in the music video, where her mother braids her hair. Given her lyrical reference to hair as a

reflection of her heritage and Black identity, her mother doing her hair can be seen as a symbolic representation of how her mother became responsible for nurturing her Blackness in the absence of her father. In another scene, Coste is seen examining her reflection in the mirror while brushing her own hair, reflecting the transition from dependence to independence, and from childhood to adulthood, indicative of another kind of liminality in the song: temporal.

Blackness as Affect and Temporal Liminality

Whether looking at the African diaspora shaped by the transatlantic slave trade or the postcolonial “new diasporas,” or multiracial experiences of “betwixt and in between,” loss and mourning have been theorized as central experiences of the Black diasporic condition.⁵⁴ “Musta” echoes this condition through its evocation of both temporal and affective liminality. Temporal liminality appears throughout the song and video, both lyrically and visually. Lyrically, Coste flips between past and present tense as she reflects on her childhood but also invokes both past and future hypotheticals. Subtle visual elements enhance the theme of temporal liminality, such as the featuring of a clock next to a candle.



The song also invokes blackness as affect in its engagement with grief. Blackness appears as affect in her mood (“black are the moods”) and in describing dark times (“black times in Rovaniemi”). Blackness as affect can also be read in Coste’s treatment of blackness as color when it comes to fashion (“black is the dress”) in that black clothing is associated with mourning. Indeed, blackness as affect also appears in the visual themes of the music video. Both Coste and her mother, the only two characters appearing in the video, wear black clothing. Shot in black and white, the video plays with darkness and light. For example, the video recurrently features candles, which are associated with memorialization. Another element is the featuring of dead but preserved roses, again evoking both the loss of what once was and the care that was taken to preserve it. The rose is connected to memorialization in the scene where Coste is seen sitting on the living room floor and looking through a childhood photo album. Surrounded by candles, she sings the lyrics while looking at photos of her with her father, the opened page featuring a drawing of a rose next to her father’s image. In this way, the visual scene evokes both a

temporal and affective liminality as she engages in a ritual of mourning of what was lost and what could have been. Lyrically, the bridge of the song crystallizes the intertwining of temporal and affective liminality.



Eilen näin mustan miehen ratissa
Kukaan ei pelännyt
”Miksei se ollut papa,” kysyin
Eikä siihen tiennyt kukaan vastausta

Yesterday I saw a Black man behind the wheel
No one was afraid
“Why wasn’t it papa,” I asked
And no one had an answer to that

While in earlier verses, Coste reflects on her childhood and the existential questions raised by her father’s absence, in this stanza the question is turned around. Witnessing a Black man “behind the wheel,” and no one seeming to be afraid, she—as the adult narrator—asks why it could not have been her father. In a moment, time and space collapse, as she sees a glimpse of what could have been, what she was told could not be. On the one hand, the reality of the Black man behind the wheel represents progress, something that could not have been possible in her childhood. On the other hand, it

represents a childhood lost. The question “why wasn’t it papa” becomes an existential question, a question to which “no one had an answer.” The last line echoes the last stanza of the second verse, in which she asserts there is no equality “at least here on Finnish earth / and I don’t know on what earth.” The choice of the word “earth” rather than “land” deliberately indicates the question’s planetary scale, rendering the question an existential one: in what world is there equality?

The outro of the song consists of Coste’s father’s cautionary words to his daughter:

Rosa	Rosa
Ole varovainen	Be careful
Muista aina	Always remember

The words “always remember” again invoke temporality, urging Coste to remember her (his)story. Contextualized against the family’s separation, the cautionary words also illustrate her father’s efforts to guide her despite his distance. If her father’s story is read as a tale about the structural position of Blackness in Finnish society, then, his cautionary words remind Coste that she, too, needs to be careful, perhaps suggesting that she, may face the same challenges. The salience of his warning is captured by her naming her first EP after them. Indeed, when the *Ole Varovainen* EP was released, the second single addressed the challenge of navigating Finnish society while Black from her own perspective.

“Hiukset”: On Blackness as Liminality

If “Musta” was about liminality in relationship to Blackness, then Coste’s second single, “Hiukset,” tackles the relentlessness of anti-Blackness.

Hiukset voi olla sulle hiukset vaan	Hair might just be hair to you
Mulle ne on enemmän	To me it’s more
Sitä turha koittaa kitkee	No bother trying to eradicate it
Kiharat, suorat, erit ovat mahikset	Curly, straight, different are the chances
Ei siltä silmii pysty ummistaan	You can’t close your eyes to it
Ku vähän välii joku muistuttaa	When every once in a while someone will remind you
Jos et ole tätä kokenu	If you haven’t experienced this
Toivon ettet sä enempää sokeudu	I hope you won’t be more blinded
Sormet lipuu, kuin koskisin satiiriin	Fingers glide, like touching a satire
Hiukset ei silti samassa kastissa	Hair is still not in the same caste
Vaaleet pääsee bussin eturiviin	Light ones can get in the front row of the bus
Ai sullon afro? Ei sun sitte anneta	Oh you have an Afro? Then you won’t be allowed

As the title suggests, the lyrics deal with the politics of hair and texturism as a structure of discrimination. Unlike “Musta,” which was written as a therapeutic reflection for herself, “Hiukset” offers a political education. The first verse establishes two things: the intended audience and the thesis of the song’s political argument. From the first stanza, the lyrics establish the intended audience as the non-Black, presumably White, subject. The difference in positionality between the audience and the narrator is established by contrasting the audience’s experience (“hair might just be hair to you”) to her own (“to me it’s more”). Rather than simply a personal discrepancy, the difference is established as racial by reference to texturism as a discriminatory structure (“curly, straight, different are the chances”). The second stanza further emphasizes that the presumed listener is one who hasn’t experienced texturism (“if you haven’t experienced this / I hope you won’t be more blinded”). The double reference to sight, first as an active denial (“you can’t close your eyes to it”) and then as a condition (“I hope you won’t be more blinded”), also suggest that sight here functions as a metaphor for racial consciousness. Together with the first line’s built-in negation of the claim that “hair might just be hair,” the narrator is positioned in the second person, with the song formulating a rhetorical response to the (presumably White) color-blind first-person subject. In this way, the song rhetorically “talks back” to color-blind narratives that serve to deny and dismiss Black experiences of discrimination.

Indeed, the second thing that the first verse establishes is hair—and particularly the Afro—as a signifier of race. In addition to tying hair to differential opportunity structures in the first stanza, the third stanza more explicitly connects hair to Blackness and anti-Blackness. The first line, “fingers glide, like touching a satire,” makes explicit the song’s argument that hair is political. The phrase “fingers glide” suggests straightened hair, which is the Eurocentric standard of beauty. Connecting it to the second phrase, “like touching a satire,” not only evokes Black women’s long-standing practice of straightening their hair in attempts to navigate White supremacist society but also, in calling it a “satire,” explicitly invokes hair as a political statement. The next line, “hair is still not in the same caste,” amplifies the song’s treatment of hair as a proxy for race within the context of a racially structured society.

The use of the word “caste” particularly highlights the permanence of the racial structure. The reference to the racial segregation in the last two lines, in turn, invoke the US-American era of Jim Crow segregation and the civil rights movement that opposed it. The first line, “light ones can get in the front row of the bus,” like in “Musta,” uses the word “light” in reference to skin tone as a proxy for race. The echoing of normative “color-blind” Finnish discourses around race again signals the audience. The last line’s use of “Afro” as a proxy for Blackness reinforces the song’s analysis of texturism as racism. In doing so, the song not only offers an analysis of Blackness as embodied but, importantly, also departs from Finnish mainstream discourses’ focus on skin tone toward an analysis of hair as an important site of racial identification and texturism as a means of racial discrimination.

The bridge, which repeats several times throughout the song, recites some of the common hair-related microaggressions that Black women regularly endure.⁵⁵

Mikset pidä sun hiuksiasi auki?
 Saanko kokeilla miltä ne tuntuu?
 Joko tähtkämpään taika on rauki?
 Miksen saa koskea? Älä lähelle tuu

Why don't you keep your hair open?
 Can I try what it feels like?
 Has Rapunzel's magic lapsed yet?
 Why can't I touch it? Don't come near me

By using the first-person form, the questions are presented as echoes of transgressions past, without explicitly dissecting or answering them. The progression of the stanza captures the affective liminality often baked into such displays of curiosity, with the first line (“why don't you keep your hair open?”) indicating ignorance, the second line (“can I try what it feels like?”) indicating curiosity, and the third line (“has Rapunzel's magic faded?”) indicating mockery. Indeed, the reference to the fairytale character Rapunzel, defined by her impossibly long golden tresses, invokes the normative beauty ascribed to length, silky texture, and blond hair color. Furthermore, asking whether the magic, which gave her the long hair, has faded suggests Afro hair to be the opposite and therefore the lesser hair, characteristic of a kind of mockery that has previously been noted in popular culture.⁵⁶ The final line, “why can't I touch it? Don't come near me,” indicates an escalation of aggression from curiosity to entitlement to hostility. This escalation of aggression from microaggressions masked as curiosity to explicit expressions of rejection illustrates how Black hair becomes a site of transgression both in terms of being viewed as transgressive in a society dominated by Eurocentric norms and in the way non-Black people's fixation with touching Black hair is a transgression on the Black body.⁵⁷

Muistetaanpa että ollaan Suomessa
 Maassa tasa-arvoisessa
 Ei tuijoteta
 Eikä toisten hiuksia luvatta kosketa

Let's remember that we are in Finland
 An equal country
 We don't stare
 We don't touch others' hair without permission

Mutta uskallan väittää, jos uskallat kuulla:
 Nuori afro Suomessa, turha luulla
 Kihara on varas, sitä piti vahtia
 Kihara ei ollu hyvää seuraa, ei oo ahkera

But I dare to assert, if you dare to listen:
 Young Afro in Finland, don't bother thinking
 The curl is a thief, it has to be guarded
 The curl wasn't good company, it's not hardworking

Itse olin ahkera ja hyvää seuraa
 Ei tarvinnu mua äitin vahtia
 Jaksoin kunnes tajusin, ettei se riitä
 Jos sullon kihara, niin se on siinä

I was hardworking and good company
 My mother didn't need to watch me
 I pushed on until I realized it isn't enough
 If you got curls, then that's that

The second verse continues largely along the same theme. The first stanza again is written from a passive position, referring to a general or abstract sentiment. Formulated as a reminder, the lines are offered as a reminder, if not admonishment, to those who have forgotten. Indeed, the first two lines invoke the Finnish national self-image of an equal country. The last two lines (“we don't stare / and we

don't touch others' hair") in turn invoke examples of manners often taught to children. The organization of the stanza suggests that the first two lines are the premise that the latter two build on. If the basic principles of respect are not followed, then the premise is up for questioning.

Indeed, the second stanza refutes ("I dare to claim if you dare to hear") the notion that Finland is equal, instead claiming that anti-Black racism is pervasive. The phrasing "if you dare to hear" again invokes racial consciousness and the lack thereof as a function of the unwillingness on the part of Whites to hear the grievances of people of color. Indeed, the second line ("young Afro in Finland, don't bother thinking") positions Black consciousness in opposition to that presented in the previous stanza. The last two lines provide the rationale, delineating some of the anti-Black stereotypes that a young person in Finland will endure. Speaking from the perspective of a presumably White parent, the Black youth is constructed as a thief in need of watching, or as lazy and therefore bad company to be stayed away from. The use of past tense suggests these to be examples of discrimination Coste experienced in her youth.

Significantly, the use of "Afro" or simply "curl" as a proxy for Blackness clearly invokes an analysis of "hair as race."⁵⁸ Indeed, although questions of race and embodiment have typically focused on skin color, scholars have increasingly highlighted the need for the factoring in of hair as a significant site of racialization—and therefore of racial discrimination—for Black people. Continuing to use "curl" as a placeholder for "Black," the last stanza summons the relentlessness of anti-Blackness, with no efforts to refute stereotypes sufficing. Eventually tiring to attempt to prove otherwise, Coste finally arrives at a conclusion: if you are Black, that's that. The narrative arc, thus, affirms the song's analysis of race as an inescapable social structure in Finnish society and anti-Blackness as relentless.

In juxtaposing the notion of color-blindness and the espoused values of equality and respect with the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism, the song offers a reading of Black consciousness as double consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois proposed double consciousness as the way that Black people must navigate through the world constantly aware not only of themselves but also of how White society will see them. The hook of the song, which succeeds the bridge after each of the two verses, reflects on the internal negotiations that follow:

Kun mä kasvoin	When I grew up
Tai itseä katsoin	Or looked at myself
Jouduin opetteleen	I had to learn
Miten oon sitkee	How to be tough
Oon tehny töitä eteen	I have worked hard
Pehmeän luonteen	To be soft-natured
Etten pimeeksi mee	So that I don't go dark
Enkä ees mun kuoreen	Or even into my shell
Kumpa nuo tajuais sen	I wish they would realize it

The first stanza recounts how Coste has had to learn to be resilient in the face of racism. The reference to “looking at myself” suggests that this resilience not only needed to be outward facing but also applied to how she saw herself. Indeed, the second stanza recounts the self-work that has been required to preserve a “soft nature” rather than “going dark” or retreating into her shell. This affective liminality is brought forth in the music video to the song, which features Coste, alongside five other Afro-Finnish women.⁵⁹ Shot in black and white, the video shows the five women standing side by side, similarly dressed in plain white tank tops and jeans, and all wearing their differently textured hair in different styles. The video begins with a close-up shot of Coste looking straight into the camera. The camera then pans out, showing all six women with their heads tilted downward, their gazes toward the floor.



They slowly raise their heads, looking straight into the camera. The camera focuses in on each of the women’s faces, beginning with Coste, as they gaze ahead with determination. Then suddenly the women break into laughter, the camera once again capturing each of them, one by one. The scene then resets to the wider shot of all women looking down at the floor, after which the thirty-second sequence previously described repeats, looping throughout the song. This repetition summons another dimension of affective liminality by mirroring the ways living in a body racialized as Black

means being continuously confronted with reminders of one's place in the social structure. Together, the music video and the lyrics of the hook also offer a reading of the affective dimensions of double consciousness, of having to be tough in the face of racism while also striving to preserve "softness" within. In the music video, this softness is represented as joy, positioning Black joy as a resource for surviving and healing from anti-Blackness.

"Musta Tyttö Magiaa": On Blackness as Abundance

Released in 2021 as the last track on Yeboyah's first studio album, "Musta Tyttö Magiaa" is, as the title suggests, an empowerment anthem for Black girls. In many ways, it is consistent with Yeboyah's body of work, which has emphasized both personal and collective empowerment. However, although Yeboyah has often engaged with Blackness as a resource in her work, "Musta Tyttö Magiaa" is the first song in which Blackness explicitly takes center stage. The song, which features Coste, opens with the hook:

Miks jäisin tuleen makaamaan	Why would I stay in the line of fire
Kun voin tehdä iha mitä vaan	When I can do anything
Vaikka mua pelottaa, en suostu lopettaa	Even though I'm scared, I won't quit
Mus on varmaan musta tyttö magiaa	I must have some Black Girl Magic

A declaration of empowerment, Black girl magic is framed as a source of resilience and tenacity, providing them with the realization that they can "do anything" even when under fire. The expression *jäädä tuleen makaamaan* (to lie down under fire) is a reference to a famous line from the 1954 novel *Tuntematon Sotilas* (*Unknown Soldiers*), by Väinö Linna, and the 1955 film adaptation by the same name, directed by Edvin Laine.⁶⁰ A story of the Continuation War between Finland and Russia told from the viewpoint of Finnish soldiers, the film is widely regarded as the most significant and most successful film in Finnish history. The line comes from a scene where a superior officer reminds soldiers to not lie down in the line of fire, under any circumstances, instead encouraging them to bravely push ahead.

The expression has since become common, used to encourage determination and resilience beyond the military context. The use of this phrase in "Musta Tyttö Magiaa" accomplishes two things: first, it firmly establishes the song—and therefore its message—within a Finnish cultural context. The war analogy summons the notion of "sisu," a Finnish cultural construct that lacks a comparable term in English but could be defined as a kind of "embodied fortitude." While the term has long been prominent in Finnish culture and folklore, it is most commonly associated with Finland's miraculous victory over the much larger Red Army during the Winter War.⁶¹ Second, the use of the reference here constructs Black Girl Magic as a source of resilience in the battle against racism and sexism, subtly evoking a parallel to *sisu*.

Kaikki mun frendit on supertähtii
Universumi on bläkki
Välil yksinäist mut yhes me bouncataan bäkkiin
Ollaan kaikki erilaisii, niinku tilkkutäkki
Se on lohdullist niinku dänkki
Jokases meist on maailman järki

Älä ikinä vähempään tyydy
Pyydä enemmän ettet sä hyydy
Myydään mielummin kalliil ja hommataan kaikille
Ikiomat silkkityyny
Itteäs ylpeydel kannaa, ownaa sun valta
Ain ei tarvii olla vahva
Näytä sun magic
Voit olla sassy, classy, kaikkee samaan aikaan

Kaikkee samaan aikaan
Se on musta tyttö taikaa
Ei oo meidän ongelma jos jengi ei pysty handlaa

Tääl me ollaan ja tullaan ain olee
Otetaan haltuun jokuunen lääni
Se on se plääni

All my friends are superstars
The universe is Black
At times lonely but together we'll bounce back
We're all different, like a patchwork quilt
It's comforting like pot
Within each of us, all the world's wisdom

Never settle for less
Ask for more so you don't freeze
We'd rather sell for a lot and get everyone
Their own silk pillows
Carry yourself with pride, own your power
You don't always have to be strong
Show your magic
You can be sassy, classy, everything all at once

Everything all at once
That's Black girl magic
It's not our problem if folks can't handle it

Here we are and will always be
We'll take over every province
That's the plan

The first verse, performed by Yeboyah, explicates the song's message. The first stanza invokes the importance of the collective as an important source of empowerment. The first lines point to this collective as Black by referring to her friends as "superstars" within a universe that is "black." With the collective as a foundation for empowerment, the second stanza offers words of empowerment to the individual Black woman, encouraging her to "never settle for less" and to "ask for more." A reference to the gender pay gap, the following two lines connect financial profit ("we'd rather sell for more") to the collective well-being ("get everyone / their very own silk pillows"). The reference to silk pillows, which is a tool for protecting Black hair, indicates that the collective being referred to is of Black women. Like the more explicit references in "Hiukset," this reference also establishes hair as a gendered racial formation.

Speaking to Black women, the last lines of the stanza encourage them to embrace their full, multidimensional selves. In the first instance, this is articulated through carrying oneself with pride and owning one's power while also realizing that "you don't always have to be strong," thereby negating the trope of the "strong Black woman." The last line takes on another harmful trope by encouraging Black women to be "sassy, classy, everything all at once." To "show your magic," then, is to refuse and defy the dehumanizing tropes of Black womanhood but also to refuse being placed in a

box altogether. Indeed, the last stanza doubles down on this message. In defining Black girl magic as being “everything all at once,” the liminality of Blackness is inverted and turned instead into abundance. First developed by Kiese Laymon in his 2018 memoir, *Heavy*, “Blackness as abundance” has been theorized as a means of subverting the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness by instead centering the vast potential of Blackness in all its abundance.⁶²

In the case of Yeboyah and Coste’s Black girl magic, then, the multiple liminalities of Afro-Finnish womanhood are instead transformed into abundance. The following lines speak precisely to the kind of unapologetic politic of Black abundance with reference to its power (“it’s not our problem if folks can’t handle it”), its ubiquity (“here we are and will always be”), and its vastness (“we’ll take over every province / that’s the plan”). In translating the English phrase “Black girl magic” to Finnish, the song is also illustrative of how Black American women’s political thought and lexicon are drawn from as a resource in the establishment of their own repertoire of empowerment. Indeed, when Yeboyah and Coste performed the song at the 2021 Cultural Gala (Kulttuurigaala), their performance amplified the song’s message with their stage design by performing in front of large screens with the words “thank Black women” and “stop stealing from Black people.”⁶³

Performing for the Finnish cultural elite in the studio audience and via television for the Finnish people, the performance also highlighted the liminality of Black women’s cultural production, wherein Black culture is readily appropriated and exploited but without material compensation or recognition. In doing so, the duo fortified that Black girl magic is not only a feel-good message but also a political statement. Similarly, the last two lines (“we’ll take over every province / that’s the plan”) is a nod to the song “Aito G” (Real G) released in 2018 by Afro-Finnish rapper Pastori Pike alongside several other Afro-Finnish male rappers. The first time a group of Black Finnish rappers had released a song together, the song became hugely popular, together with the phrase in question indicating that Afro-Finnish hip-hop was here to “take over every province.” By repeating the phrase here, Yeboyah mirrors the sentiment communicated by “Aito G,” with the distinction that at this time Black girl magic will be “taking over” the hip-hop landscape. Indeed, since Yeboyah landed on the hip-hop scene with her single “Broflake,” she has made it a point to highlight the need for Black women’s voices and perspectives not only in Finnish society writ large but also in the male-dominated hip-hop industry. The pre-chorus reinforces this sentiment:

Uskoin mahdollisuuksiin rajallisiin	I believed in limited opportunities
Luulin et oon huono	I thought I was bad
Nyt mua backuppaa koko hoodin kuoro	Now I’m backed up by the whole hood’s choir
Yeah	Yeah
Nyt on mun vuoro	Now it’s my turn

The earlier theme of the collective as a source of empowerment appears here again, as Yeboyah attributes her ability to transcend internalized doubt to being “backed up by the whole hood’s choir.”

Musta tyttö magiaa
Kerro meidän tarinaa
Jollekin ne tuntuu samalta vaik
Meit on hyvin paljon erilaisii
Et voi vertaa meitä keskenämme
Kaikki meistä omanlaisii

Black girl magic
Tell our story
To some they feel the same though
There are many different kinds of us
You can't compare us to one another
We are all unique

Tajusin etten oo yksin
Vaikka Rolles on vaan minä ja mun pikkusysteri
Emme ole yksin
Meil on kyllä lysti
Luulin että ollaan täällä kaksin
Yllätyin kyllä täysin

I realized I wasn't alone
Even though in Rolle it's just me and my little sis
We are not alone
We are surely having fun
I thought it was just the two of us
I was surely surprised

Jos oot meidän näkönen nii kato peiliin
Rokkaa täysil just sitä mitä oot eiks niin
Oot kauneinta päällä tämän maan
Haluun että sinä ja sun iho kimaltaa

If you look like us, look in the mirror
Rock exactly what you are to the fullest, right
You're the most beautiful thing on this earth
I want you and your skin to sparkle

The power of the collective is enhanced by a choir of voices emerging to sing the line, against the backdrop of which Yeboyah then confidently asserts “yeah / now it's my turn.” Coste's verse echoes several of the themes raised so far.

In the first two lines, Coste urges Black girls to “tell our story,” referring to this story in the singular. Yet in the following lines, Coste raises the diversity of experience within the category “Black girl,” adding that even though their experiences “to some they feel the same,” they cannot be compared (“you can't compare us to one another”). While in the first instance referring to a unified collective experience, in the second Coste speaks directly to others to remind them not to paint all Black women with the same broad brush. Speaking to different audiences, the tensions between the two positions again invokes double consciousness as a form of liminality wherein emphasizing a unified story helps to build collective identity *within* the community, while the tendency by people *outside* the community to presume all Black people to be the same is harmful.

In the second stanza, Coste responds to her own call for Black girls to tell their story by telling her own version of the story. She recounts discovering that she “wasn't alone” as she had thought. Coste attributes the pleasant surprise to having grown up in the White landscape of Rovaniemi (“Rolle”) where “it's just me and my little sister.” The experience prior to discovering community is characterized by loneliness (“I thought it was just the two of us”), which is contrasted against the joy of the collective (“we are not alone / we are surely having fun”). In engaging with her biography, Coste's verse summons the coming-of-age story she tells in the song “Musta,” whereby the experiences of loss and liminality begin to be healed by the discovery of community.

In the last stanza, Coste offers words of encouragement to the Black girls out there. Her encouragement to look in the mirror summons the imagery of the “Musta” music video in which she melancholically examines her own reflection in the mirror as she ponders her liminality. From this vantage point, the encouragement to “rock exactly what you are to the fullest” speaks not only to other girls but also to her past self. Affirming “you’re the most beautiful thing on this earth / I want you and your skin to sparkle,” the melancholy of liminality is eased by the embracing of the abundance of “Black girl magic.”

Conclusion

I have analyzed the songs “Musta,” “Hiukset,” and “Musta Tyttö Magiaa,” by Coste and Yeboyah, as meditations on the meanings of Blackness and experiences of liminality that are familiar to many second-generation Afro-Finns. I have argued that each of these offer multiple ways of reading liminality in relation to Blackness but also of Blackness itself as an experience of liminality, particularly in relation to Finnishness. Throughout these songs, “Blackness” is deployed as a color, as a social category, as affect, as embodiment, and as political notion. In relation to Blackness, then, liminality is articulated as a structural position, as social and cultural, as temporal, and as emotional. In “Musta,” liminality is most explicitly articulated through the recurring notion of being “something in between,” exploring multiple forms of liminality in relation to Blackness. In addition to eloquently interweaving analyses of liminality in terms of social structure, family, and identity, “Musta” also offers an exploration of temporality and grief as a part of the affective liminality of the diasporic experience, and perhaps especially the second-generation experience.

In the US context, structural liminality is most often articulated and experienced with regard to formal racial categorization. In the Finnish context, however, where race is not formally recognized as a category of experience or analysis, structural liminality is most readily experienced in terms of national belonging, wherein Whiteness is unspoken but hegemonically articulated through Finnishness. In “Musta,” structural liminality is articulated through Coste’s positioning between her father and mother, summed up in her question “why is papa not here / even though I am here?” In other words, how come life in Rovaniemi was unlivable for him while livable for her? Coste’s portrayal of being separated from her father struck a particular chord for many Finns of color, particularly those who grew up in the ’90s and saw their parents (often fathers) struggle to make a dignified living in the harsh climate of Finland, sometimes leading to family separation.⁶⁴ In terms of liminality as a social and cultural position, the songs engage with the influence of both internal and external appraisals of belonging. In “Musta,” Coste connects her cultural liminality to the structural, lamenting what her cultural upbringing could have been had she not been separated from her father. In this way, liminality is once again articulated through the experience of loss.

In “Hiukset,” it is Blackness itself that is in turn articulated as liminality. Whereas “Musta” looks back to Coste’s childhood to explore her structural and cultural liminality as somewhere in between Whiteness and Blackness, “Hiukset” illustrates the salience of anti-Blackness in structuring the lives of people of African descent in Finland, offering a different reading of liminality in relation to Finnishness and Whiteness. By using hair as a metaphor for Black, “Hiukset” deploys an analysis of

Blackness as embodied. This linkage appears also in “Musta” where Coste’s ruminations on her relationship to Blackness are in part articulated through her curly hair as the embodiment of her heritage in the absence of her father. In referencing curly hair as a marker through which anti-Blackness is experienced, the song also evokes hypodescent as an externally imposed yet lived reality.⁶⁵ Through the song’s narration of anti-Blackness in Finland, Blackness also emerges as a structural position defined by oppression.

Finally, I argue that in “Musta Tyttö Magiaa,” Yeboyah and Coste move toward a theory of liminality as abundance rather than deficit. Articulated through the positionality of Black girlhood, the song proposes the embracing of being “everything all at once.” In this instance, Blackness is not strictly approached as a question of cultural identity or structural position but as a political resource. Reflecting on their past experiences of isolation and internalization of racism, Yeboyah and Coste deploy “Black girl magic” as a mantra for self-assertion and self-actualization. Loss and loneliness are turned into community and empowerment, and liminality is turned into a source of pride and strength.

Across these three songs, liminality is evoked in different ways and with different inflections. Liminality is experienced through multiracial positionality but not exclusively so. As I show, liminality is experienced both *in relation to Blackness* and *as Blackness*. While often experienced as loss or exclusion, liminality is also experienced as abundance. In any case, these experiences of liminality are mediated through Blackness. In addition to offering generative meditations on Blackness and liminality, these songs also raise questions about the limitations of multiraciality as a category of analysis in the Finnish context.

Many aspects of liminality raised in this data are shared with monoracial second-generation Finns of color, who by virtue of their structural position as the first generation of Finns of color experience structural and social liminality both vis-à-vis their White Finnish peers and their immigrant parents of color. Although some multiracial Finns may experience a greater degree of dual cultural affinity, this too is not exclusively a function of mixed heritage. Many monoracial second-generation Finns of color have a strong relationship to Finnish culture while some multiracial people may not. Yet those transracially adopted may very well experience stronger affinity with Finnish culture and possess greater cultural capital than either of the aforementioned groups. While those of part-White heritage undoubtedly benefit from colorism and White adjacency, that is, the rewards that can come with perceived closer phenotypical (and cultural) approximation to Whites, anti-Blackness readily structures the life chances and experiences of even multiracial Finns of African descent. Indeed, precisely because in Finland there is no formal recognition of race as a social category, and therefore no explicit engagement with racial identification, Whiteness readily acts as the boundary of the nation and therefore of belonging. In this context, the embracing of Blackness serves not only as resistance to racism but also as a means for engendering spaces of community, joy, and possibility.

Notes

¹ Song written by Rosa Coste, produced by ROZVO and KähinäPate, 2021. Finnish-language lyrics derived from Genius.com (“Rosa Coste - Musta Lyrics”), 2022. English-language translations of lyrics are by author, which are presented alongside original lyrics. Lyrics are reproduced with the permission of the songwriter.

² Rantanen, “Rosa Costen debyytti-EP.”

³ Vasara, “Rosa Costen esikoissingle Musta kuvaa suorasanaisesti”; Hekkala, “Rakkaudesta Rovaniemeen ja R&B”; Savonen, “Rovaniemeläinen huippulupaus Rosa Coste julkaisi ensimmäisen ep-levynsä.”

⁴ “Hiukset” written by Rosa Coste, produced by KähinäPate and ROZVO, 2022. Finnish-language lyrics derived from Genius.com (“Rosa Coste – Hiukset”). “Musta Tyttö Magiaa” written by Rebekka Aili Kuukka, Rosa Coste, and Alvar Yrjänä Escartin, produced by Yrjänä and Olli Palmunen, 2021. Released by Sony Music Entertainment Finland. Original lyrics retrieved from Genius.com (“Yeboyah [Ft. Rosa Coste] – Musta Tyttö Magiaa”). Lyrics are reproduced with permission of the songwriters.

⁵ Small, “Introduction: The Empire Strikes Back,” xxix–xxx.

⁶ Small, “Theorizing Visibility and Vulnerability,” 4.

⁷ Blakely, “Emergence of Afro-Europe,” 4.

⁸ Loftsdóttir and Jensen, “Introduction: Nordic Exceptionalism,” 2; Sawyer and Habel, “Refracting African and Black Diaspora,” 4; McEachrane, introduction to *Afro-Nordic Landscapes*, 1.

⁹ Small, *20 Questions and Answers on Black Europe*, 79–80.

¹⁰ McEachrane, introduction to *Afro-Nordic Landscapes*, 6.

¹¹ Rastas, “Talking Back,” 187.

¹² Korkisaari and Söderling, “Finnish Emigration and Immigration after World War II,” 8.

¹³ Aallas, *Somalishokki*, 1.

¹⁴ City of Helsinki, “Ulkomaalaistaustaiset Helsingissä,” Ulkomaalaistaustaiset Helsingissä, 2019, <https://ulkomaalaistaustaiset helsingissa.fi/#>.

¹⁵ On ethnic and transnational identities, see Rastas, “Ethnic Identities and Transnational Subjectivities,” 41–60. On African diasporic cultural production, see Kelekay, “Too Dark to Support the Lions,” 386–401; Rastas and Seye, “Music as a Site for Africanness and Diaspora Cultures,” 82–95; Westinen and Lehtonen, “Mustan Miehen Etninen Toiseus Ja Vastapuhe Suomalaisessa Populaarimusiikissa,” 3–4. On experiences of racism, see Zacheus et al., “Discrimination, Harassment and Racism,” 81–98; Rastas, “Racism in the Everyday Life,” 29–43.

¹⁶ On police profiling, see Keskinen et al., “Stopped-Ethnic Profiling.” On education and workplace discrimination, see Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu, “Selvitys afrikkalaistaustaisten henkilöiden kokemasta syrjinnästä.” On health-related racial discrimination, see Rask et al., “Association between Discrimination and Health,” 898–903.

¹⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey,” 12, 38.

¹⁸ On mixed ethnic heritage, see Rastas, “Racializing Categorization,” 147–66. On mixed European heritage, see, for example, Lapila-Marcus, “Monietnisten ihmisten etninen identiteetti suomalaisessa viitekehyksessä”; Obućina and Saarela, “Intergenerational Transmission of Ethnic Identity,” 103–23.

¹⁹ For mobilization of mixed Finns, go to @mixedfinns profile on Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/mixedfinns/>. On “Third Culture Kids,” see Beilinson et al., *Third Culture Kids*.

²⁰ See <https://www.ruskeattytot.fi/>.

²¹ On the collective, see its website at <https://goodhairday.fi/>.

²² Hubara, *Ruskeat Tytöt*, 77.

²³ El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xix.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵ Ibrahim, “Becoming Black,” 353.

²⁶ Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 7.

²⁷ On the racialized cultural politics of hip-hop, see Rose, *Black Noise*; Rose, “Fear of a Black Planet,” 276–90.

- ²⁸ El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 19, 11.
- ²⁹ Kelekay, “Too Dark to Support the Lions,” 397–98.
- ³⁰ Daniel et al., “Emerging Paradigms,” 8.
- ³¹ Daniel et al., “Emerging Paradigms,” 12–15. The relationship between CMRS and Black studies has been ambivalent given the tensions between the “strategic essentialism” employed by Black communities in resistance to anti-Blackness and the rejection of monoracial Blackness by multiracials of African descent. As Daniel has highlighted, this tension is rooted in the history of legally enforced hypodescent in the form of “the one drop rule,” on the one hand, and the internalization of colorism, on the other. Indeed, although multiraciality has historically been deployed to interrogate and perhaps subvert racial structures, it has also been wielded to reinforce anti-Blackness and, consequently, the racial order. A modern articulation of a CMRS framework, however, according to Daniel, seeks to deploy a critical multiracial positionality as a tool for dismantling rather than simply subverting the racial order.
- ³² Daniel, “Sociology of Multiracial Identity,” 112–13.
- ³³ Brunnsma, Delgado, and Rockquemore, “Liminality in the Multiracial Experience,” 482–83; Newman, “Revisiting the Marginal Man,” 30. On liminality treated as generative rather than as deficient, see Daniel et al., “Emerging Paradigms,” 16–17; Daniel, “Sociology of Multiracial Identity,” 112–13.
- ³⁴ King-O’Riain et al., *Global Mixed Race*, xiii–xiv.
- ³⁵ Adeniji, “Searching for Words,” 149–50.
- ³⁶ Brunnsma, Delgado, and Rockquemore, “Liminality in the Multiracial Experience,” 484.
- ³⁷ Kärjä, “Ridiculing Rap, Funlandizing Finns?” 86–89.
- ³⁸ Tervo, “From Appropriation to Translation,” 183.
- ³⁹ On questions of belonging, see Leppänen and Westinen, “Migrant Rap in the Periphery,” 1–26. On Otherization, see Westinen, “Still Alive, Nigga,” 335–60. On stereotypes, see Westinen, “Who’s Afraid of the Dark?,” 131–61. On authenticity, see Malmberg, “Rap and Cultural Change,” 5–22.
- ⁴⁰ On negotiating identity and national belonging, see Kelekay, “Too Dark to Support the Lions,” 386–401. On negotiating the racial politics of place, see Kelekay, “We’re Not All Thugs in the East,” 207–37.
- ⁴¹ “Broflake” is a slang term developed by feminists as a gendered reappropriation of the slang insult “snowflake” commonly deployed by the alt-right against those on the political left. Rather than referring to the fragility of liberals, “broflake” refers to the fragility of masculinity. For a popular cultural discussion of the term, see, for example, Alexander, “What Is a Broflake and Should You Avoid Them?”
- ⁴² Honka, “Rap-artisti Yebayah kaipaa alalleen Suomessa kantaottavuutta.”
- ⁴³ © 2021 Abenayo under exclusive license to Sony Music Entertainment Finland Oy.
- ⁴⁴ Hakamo, “Räppäri Yebayah.”
- ⁴⁵ Aflecht, “Ole varovainen”; Rantanen, “Rosa Costen debyytti-EP.”
- ⁴⁶ Hekkala, “Rakkaudesta Rovaniemeen ja R&B”; Vasara, “Rosa Costen esikoissingle Musta kuvaa suorasanaisesti.”
- ⁴⁷ EP produced by KähinäPate and R0ZV0 and released by indie record label PME.
- ⁴⁸ On cultural semiotics, see Binder, “Semiotics of Social Life,” 401–16. On hip-hop feminist analysis, see Halliday and Payne, “Twenty-First Century B.I.T.C.H. Frameworks,” 4–7.
- ⁴⁹ On language, localization, and authenticity, see Pennycook, “Language, Localization, and the Real,” 101–15. On translocal remixing of language, see Alim, “Translocal Style Communities,” 112–18.
- ⁵⁰ Paulus Kiviniemi, *Rosa Coste - Musta (Virallinen Musiikkivideo)*, ©EJK Collective, 2021. Screenshots from music video and all lyrics published with copyright permission.
- ⁵¹ Brunnsma, Delgado, and Rockquemore, “Liminality in the Multiracial Experience,” 486.
- ⁵² Kelekay, “Too Dark to Support the Lions,” 392–95.
- ⁵³ Brunnsma, Delgado, and Rockquemore, “Liminality in the Multiracial Experience,” 487–88.
- ⁵⁴ See, for example, Sharpe, *Immaterial Archives*, 3–18, Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 227–37.
- ⁵⁵ Brown, “Don’t Touch My Hair,” 64–85; Collier, “Don’t Touch My Hair,” 1–19; DeLongoria, “Misogynoir,” 39–49.
- ⁵⁶ Lester, “Nappy Edges and Goldy Locks,” 201–4.

⁵⁷ On Black hairstyles and White hegemony, see Brown, “Don’t Touch My Hair,” 66–69. On Black women’s experiences of touching hair, see Collier, “Don’t Touch My Hair,” 4–8.

⁵⁸ Robinson, “Hair as Race,” 358–76.

⁵⁹ Paulus Kiviniemi, *Rosa Coste - Hiukset (official video)*, ©PME Records, 2021. Screenshots from music video and all lyrics published with copyright permission.

⁶⁰ Linna, *Unknown Soldiers*, 54.

⁶¹ Lahti, “Embodied Fortitude,” 61–63.

⁶² Coles, “It’s Really Geniuses That Live in the Hood,” 43.

⁶³ “Yeboyah: Musta tyttö magiaa.”

⁶⁴ See, for example, the discussion in the podcast episode Renaz and Wekesa, “Cardi B, Rosa Coste & Madboial! Musta!”

⁶⁵ Hypodescent is a social mechanism determining racial group membership of the children of interracial unions between Whites and people of color, particularly in the United States, based exclusively on the background of color, in order to preserve White racial “purity.” See Daniel, “Sociology of Multiracial Identity,” 108–10. In the United States, it has also helped maintain White racial privilege by supporting legal and informal barriers to racial equality in most aspects of social life, such as through the institutionalization of Jim Crow segregation at the turn of the twentieth century. Given the significance and uniqueness of Blackness in US law and racial common sense, the concept has been understood as referring to the one-drop rule of hypodescent, which designates as Black anyone with “one-drop of African blood” (Harris, *Patterns of Race*, 56–57).

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