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The African Diaspora, Migration and Writing: Johannes Anyuru’s *En civilisation utan båtar*

As a consequence of migration, national identities have been de-naturalised and boundaries of national belonging are becoming unsettled through representations shaped by multidirectional patterns and cross-appropriation of elements from diverse cultural traditions. New modes of perceiving imagined communities and home are emerging. ‘Migration throws objects, identities and ideas into flux’ is an observation which provides the vantage point for a collection of articles entitled *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*. The explored theme is the critical and creative role of estrangement and displacement of modern art (Mercer 2008, 7). This article will discuss intersections between migration, diaspora and the formation of new kinds of identities, belonging and aesthetics in a Swedish context by means of an analysis of Johannes Anyuru’s autobiographical book *En civilisation utan båtar* [A Civilisation Without Ships] published in 2011. The book is about Anyuru’s stay in Athens, where he waited with other activists to sail for Gaza as a manifestation of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Anyuru himself is both the narrator and focalizer and to a large extent the book consists of his reflections upon issues of identity and belonging, homelessness, solidarity, migration and writing.

When discussing transformations of present-day Europe related to migration, Gebauer and Schwarz Lausten (2010, 1) suggest that ‘the migrant has come to stand as the symbol of all that is disconcerting’. This is likely to be true in contexts where ‘the migrant’ is viewed from the vantage point of categories such as ethnic majorities, decision makers and xenophobic groups concerned with the erosion of welfare systems and/or transformations of national culture conceived of as threatened by alien influences. However, it is not true when ‘the migrant’ and migration are viewed from the perspective of migrants themselves or their descendants. Rather, literary writing in which the world is seen with the eyes of ‘the migrants’ may transform ideas

1 The category of ‘the migrant’ is quite problematic. There has always been a hierarchisation in the Nordic countries (as elsewhere) when it comes to the view on immigrants. People from various parts of the world have been seen as more, or less, different, ‘strange’ and desirable from the vantage point of the ethnic majority and majority culture.
of the nation and problematize aspects of majority cultures that may be disconcerting for migrants. It may also challenge the status of the ethnic majority as a tacit norm that minorities and migrants are expected to conform to. Ethnicity researchers Fenton and May emphasise that all groups, both minority and majority ones, ‘incorporate an ethnic dimension and the failure of the latter to recognise or acknowledge this has more to do with differential power relations between groups than with anything else’ (Fenton & May 2002, 10–11). As ethnicity and minority status matter for how the world is perceived and experienced, focalization in literary writing matters. It is of importance whose view of the world that is being represented.

**Johannes Anyuru: A Successful Afro-Swedish Author**

Already in Afro-Swedish Johannes Anyuru’s (b. 1979) first collection of poetry, *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* [Only the Gods are New] from 2003, the practice to mingle influences from diverse literary, geographical and historical traditions prevails. The poems juxtapose elements from Homer, the Swedish poet Göran Sonnevi, rock lyrics and hip hop; the latter by loans and allusions to the Swedish group, the Latin Kings, who received a great deal of media attention a decade ago. The theme of Anyuru’s second collection of poems, *Omega* (2005), is the death of a close friend in cancer. The third, *Städerna inuti Hall* (2009, [The Cities Inside Hall]) is more explicitly political than the previous ones. In December 2009, the political drama *Förvaret* [The Deposit] by Anyuru and the philosopher Aleksander Motturi had its premiere at Gothenburg City Theatre. The title refers to Detention Centres where refugees are kept as detainees while waiting to be deported out of the country as a result of the implementation of Swedish Immigration Law. Anyuru has performed live extensively. During 2003, he toured with the

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2 I choose to use the term ‘Afro-Swedish’ as it corresponds with the denomination used by Swedes of African descent themselves, for example in the name of the NGO ‘Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund,’ ‘The National Association of Afro-Swedes.’ I have also had the name of the series of conferences called ‘Afroeurope@ns: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe’ in mind. The term ‘Afro-Swedes’ is furthermore used in *Encyclopedia of Afroeuropean Studies* (McEachrane 2012, Heith 2012a). The term is discussed more in detail in the article ‘Displacement and Regeneration: Minorities, Migration and Postcolonial Literature’ (Heith 2016, 50–52). When writing an entry about Johannes Anyuru for *Encyclopedia of Afroeuropean Studies*, I asked Anyuru if he had any objections to being called an ‘Afro-Swedish’ author. The answer was negative. The debate in the USA has shown that many Americans prefer the term ‘black’ rather than ‘Afro-American’ or ‘African-American.’ One reason for this is that they do not see any reason for emphasising geographical affiliations to Africa. The backdrop is that the majority of blacks in the USA are descended from slaves (Piety 2013, Santarelli 2012). The situation is different in Sweden where the presence of people of African descent is related to recent migration. This means that there are connections to the African continent through writers, like Sami Said, who was born there, and Anyuru, whose parent was born there (Heith 2016).

3 ‘Hall’ is the name of a well-known Swedish prison.
National Theatre Company with a performance called Abstrakt rap. He is a member of the spoken word group Broken word, which released the album Anatomy of a Dying Star in 2005. In 2010, his first novel, Skulle jag dö under andra himlar [If I Were to Die Under Other Skies], was published. His second novel, based on the life of his refugee father, En storm kom från paradiset was published in 2012. An English translation, A Storm Blew in from Paradise, by Rachel Willson-Broyles was published in 2015.

In 2011, Anyuru went to Athens, Greece, in order to join the ‘Freedom Flotilla’, also called Ship to Gaza. The plan was that together with other activists he would go to Gaza on a ship carrying supplies that would be distributed to the Palestinian people. The aim of the manifestation was to protest against the Israeli blockade of Gaza and to support the Palestinian people. According to the plan, the ships were to leave Athens where the activists would embark. The participants of the project were counting on the support of international law, which if implemented properly would grant them the legal right to sail on international waters. After preparations and waiting, they finally received the news that the ships were not allowed to leave. The Greek authorities would not grant them the permission to leave for Gaza, and the participants had to leave Athens without having started the planned voyage. Later the same year, a short book by Anyuru, En civilisation utan båtar [A Civilisation Without Ships] was published.

**Diaspora, Aesthetics and Identity Formation**

The term ‘diaspora aesthetic’ is used by Stuart Hall in ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’; the theme of this article is the emergence of new cultural identities and artistic forms of representation related to ‘the diaspora experience’. Hall (1997, 58) connects the formation of a diaspora aesthetic with the post-colonial experience. With an example from the Caribbean, he concludes that it was not until the 1970s that an Afro-Caribbean identity became available as in that historical moment Jamaicans ‘discovered themselves to be “black” and to be the “sons and daughters of slavery”’ (Hall 1997, 55). Hall makes the point that artistic representations play a vital role for the formation of diasporic, hybrid identities. The theme of identity and difference in the African Diaspora is also elaborated upon by Paul Gilroy; he proposes that the concept of ‘diaspora’ should be cherished for ‘its ability to pose the relationship between ethnic sameness and differentiation: a changing same.’ (Gilroy 1993, xi).

The presence of people of African descent in Sweden is related to migration. This has consequences for bordering practices on various levels. In our time, migration has become one of the most influential factors shaping the nature and effects of borders: ‘Constant border work is being carried out to try to separate the wanted from the unwanted, the imagined barbarians from the civilized, and the global rich from the global poor’ (van Houtum 2012, 405). In a discussion of mapping and (b)ordering, van Houtum emphasizes that migration ought not be represented as a unidirectional line in the shape of an arrow indicating the origin and destination of migrants. Instead of uniformity and fixation, he proposes the use of mapping which
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acknowledges ‘the human rhizomatic becomings, zig zag connections, traces, tracks and linkages, and the movements and (e)motions that cannot be universally rationalized, yet are felt, sensed and believed’ (van Houtum 2012, 413).4

The complexity and diversity of present-day migration is an important theme of Anyuru’s book. The narrator reflects upon the first African Diaspora related to slave trade, contemporary migration from Africa and migration related to the war in Bosnia. Migrants are depicted as groups whose movements are multidimensional, diverse and at times contingent. For some, as a group of Iranian refugees Anyuru encounters in Athens, migration takes on the shape of waiting for permission to stay. The mobility and migration of today and the emergence of transmobility and transmigrants are trends reflected in the book. Van Houtum describes the implications of this development for conceptualisations of borders and bordering.

The fact that many mobile people and migrants are crossing borders and have become transmobile and transmigrants – and thus find themselves neither only here nor only there, but mentally, virtually and digitally in several places at the same time – has therefore important consequences for the concepts of borders, nation and identities. It implies that geopolitical borders cannot be understood as discrete, fixed and dichotomous (van Houtum 2012, 406).

One effect of migration, exemplified by the status of some Iranian men Anyuru encounters in Athens, is that of being situated in-between: ‘somewhere between two extremes or recognized categories’ (The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English). The Iranians have left their country of origin, but they are not recognized as legitimate immigrants in Greece.5 Their situation may be described as that of people being at a halt, not knowing if they will get to the destination they hoped for and not being able to return to where they came from. Another instance of an in-between status is exemplified by the situation of Anyuru’s Ugandan father in Sweden, who waits for life to begin while the years pass by and he gets old and ill.

Eventually, he realizes that he will not return to Africa and that he has spent a large part of his life waiting for something that will not happen. These in-between situations experienced by the Iranian migrants and Anyuru’s refugee father depict the condition of living neither here nor there, an indeterminate status experienced like a limbo.

4 This conception of migration is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) and Escape Routes, Control and Subversion in the 21st Century by Papadopoulos et al. (Papadopoulos et al. 2008) whom van Houtum refers to.

5 This kind of in-between position is of course drastically different from Bhabha’s notion of the hybrid positions made available in in-between spaces, which he proposes may contest centres of power (Bhabha 2008, 199–244).
The Story of a Multifaceted Journey

On the surface level, *En civilisation utan båtar* [A Civilisation Without Ships] is a kind of diary about some days and nights spent in Athens told in the first person by the narrator and focalizer Anyuru. However, it is also a book about writing, as an open-ended process, the direction of which Anyuru is uncertain. Before it was published in book form, the text was available on a blog, which was published on the website of the publisher Glänta. The book contains a poem that consists of texts and fragments that people mailed to Anyuru. Thus, part of the text was co-authored by a number of people.6 The motif of collective action is varied throughout the text and the theme of writing and producing a new kind of text is interwoven with the

6 This was confirmed by Anyuru himself in an e-mail dated 25 July 2013: 'Ja, det finns en dikt i boken som består av texter och fragment som andra har skickat till mig. Den heter, har jag för mig, Utan namn. I övrigt är det jag som har skrivit. Boken är i stora drag (minus förord) en blogg som jag skrev under resan – den publicerades på Gläntas hemsida. Vet inte om den ligger kvar där.’ [Yes, there is a poem in the book that consists of texts and fragments that other people have mailed. Its title is, if I remember correctly, Without name. Apart from that, I have written the book. To a large extent, the book is (minus the preface) a blog I wrote during the journey – it was published at Glänta’s website. Don’t know if it is still there.]
narrative of the narrator-focalizer’s inner and outer journey. As the story is told in the first person, there is a strong focus upon the inner journey. This is conveyed by means of the narration of the main character’s reflections upon events, texts he reads and people he encounters. The concept of focalization is important as it takes into account the cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation, which gives the text specific moods and meanings (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 1999, 71). Anyuru exists in the text not only as a narrating voice, but also as a depiction of an embodied human, who filters subject matter through his mind, senses and psyche. Thus, the text presents a subjective, embodied way of seeing and experiencing the world.

The book opens with a section about Anyuru’s hesitation when he gets the request to join the voyage. While still at home in Gothenburg, he initially finds a number of reasons for not joining the activists who are going to Gaza. A number of thoughts run through his mind. He experiences fear at the thought of possible confrontations with Israeli soldiers. The voyage is to take place the year after some members of the first flotilla had been killed when attempting to defy the Israeli blockade. When mentally confronting his fear, Anyuru dwells upon the emotions he experiences vis-a-vis his Afro-Swedish descent, which makes him feel vulnerable, and potentially not being seen as a Swede: ‘I believe that my fear, which I had not been aware of, was related to not having an evident feeling of being protected by my Swedishness. Do I look like a Swede in the eyes of a foreigner? In the eyes of a foreign soldier?’
The African Diaspora, Migration and Writing: Johannes Anyuru’s *En civilisation utan båtar* (E97). As this reflection reveals, the narrator confronts the implications of the African Diaspora for his own sense of who he is and for how he is perceived by others. He is aware of the fact that it is visible that he is of African descent and that this might make him more vulnerable than participants whose appearance does not reveal a non-Swedish, non-European, non-White ancestry. By means of the reflection, Anyuru acknowledges that ‘Africa speaks’ through his skin colour. From a Jamaican context, Hall mentions brown or black skin as a sign of ‘Africa of the diaspora’ using the metaphor ‘Africa speaks’ (Hall 1997, 55). A major theme of Anyuru’s text is how, or if, the ‘old’ Africas of the first diaspora and the subsequent waves of migration of black people from Africa may be reconciled with the ‘new’ Africas emerging in Europe, and specifically in Sweden where he was born and where he has his home (cf. Hall 1997, 55). This implies a new construction of a hybrid form of ‘Swedishness’, which uses elements from ‘old’ Africa together with elements from Swedish and other cultural constellations, transforming ‘old’ Africa to something ‘new’ in the process (Heith 2012, Heith 2014).

The notion of cross-influences between black intellectuals and artists within a transnational framework is central to Gilroy’s idea of the ‘Black Atlantic’ (Gilroy 1993). In the last chapter of *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* Gilroy presents a critical analysis of ‘Afrocentrism’ and the way it has understood tradition as invariant repetition instead of a stimulus for transformations and innovation (Gilroy op. cit., 187–223). Like Hall, Gilroy highlights ‘Africanness’ as a category which is invented and changed through cultural production related to African diasporas. Today the term ‘Black Atlantic’ has ‘become a shorthand reference to any and all projects which have a transcultural dimension across one or more sections of the black African diasporic cultures of the region’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, 22). One proposal of this article is that the notion of cultural cross-fertilization and interaction within a transnational global framework also provides a framework for conceptualizing the implications of Anyuru’s juxtaposition of elements from American popular culture, the Muslim tradition, and traditional African subject matter like the figure of the ‘Jali’. Such a framework might be an aid in exploring the coming into being of a new kind of text, which also integrates collective writing and elements

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7 All the translations of the book are mine.

8 In my reading of Anyuru’s literary texts, skin colour is an important theme already in the first collection of poems. So is religion (Heith 2008, Heith 2014). The concept of ‘migration literature’ is problematic as it tends to essentialise ‘the migrant’ and reduce differences between various writers. Behschnitt for example describes the early books of Khemiri, Anyuru, Bakhtiari and Wenger as the results of a shared vision of migrants, Sweden and the intended readership in a way that reduces the considerable differences between the respective authors. ‘In the unprecedented success of Khemiri’s, Anyuru’s, Bakhtiari’s and Wenger’s books, they are confirmed in their vision of the integrated migrant, they see a symbol of success for several decades of integration policy within the Swedish welfare state. From the perspective of the literary texts, the analysis has shown that the authors know exactly what they are talking about and whom they are talking to. They all engage in a play with reader expectations [. . .]’ (Behschnitt 2010, 89, my italics).
from a specific Swedish literary tradition. In a literal sense, this makes the text a flow of sections of words from various stylistic registers and cultural traditions. As such the text exemplifies a form of cross-cultural literary writing (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2009, 214). The term ‘cross-cultural writing’ has been proposed as being more adequate than the terms ‘diasporic literature’ or ‘post-colonial literature’ when it comes to denominating texts that blend elements from various traditions both from within and outside national borders.

**Becoming Black: Exclusion, Racism and Formation of Identity**

When analyzing the formation of black identity and subjectivity in Europe Michelle M. Wright emphasizes the contradictory nature of this process:

> Although there is no biological basis for racial categories (there is no such thing as a ‘black,’ ‘white,’ or ‘Asian’ gene, the amount of genetic disparity between persons of different races is the same as that between persons in the same racial category), Blacks in the West have nonetheless had their history shaped by the very concrete effects of Western racism (Wright 2004, 2).

The history, and still existing reality, of racism directed against black and brown-skinned people is conjured up by the narrator Anyuru’s reflections about how he himself might be seen and treated if he were to join Ship to Gaza. Wright depicts racist discourse as deeply embedded in European culture and modernity, legitimized by the works of philosophers like Hegel who posited that the ‘Negro’ stands outside the history of intellectual, technological, moral, and cultural progress ‘guided by the Absolute of reason’ (Wright 2004; 8, Heith 2012b; Hegel 1956). Although this is not always openly acknowledged, racism still exists also in modern ‘enlightened’ societies. Within the field of ethnic and racial studies, it has been highlighted that the fact that multiculturalism may be a cherished concept in modern liberal democracies does not guarantee that these societies are anti-racist in praxis. Gabrielle Berman and Yin Paradies for example emphasize that: ‘It is only through a clear understanding and inclusion of anti-racist praxis that the potential of multiculturalism to address the challenges of racial diversity in modern liberal democracies can be realized’ (Berman & Paradies 2010, 214).

Anyuru implicitly hints at the existence of history and philosophical tradition, which have posited blacks as the Others of White Europe. However, he does not engage in a mode of writing, which involves that he actively positions himself as the Other, producing a discourse in a binary, dichotomous relationship to the Hegelian tradition. Rather, Anyuru explores another option discussed by Wright, and Gilroy, namely that of blackness as ‘fluidity’, which may both harm and heal the black individual (Wright 2004, 2; Gilroy 1993). Wright herself proposes an understanding of black subjectivity, which implies that the category is seen as produced through negotiations between the abstract and the real, or in other terms ‘between the ideal and the material’ (Wright 2004, 3). Without going in detail into
Wright’s analysis, this article will discuss some aspects of how the real and ideal are negotiated in Anyuru’s text and how the fluid character of blackness contributes to shaping the narrator’s idea of who he is and what role he may shoulder as a writer.

Another theme connected to the African Diaspora, which the narrator-focalizer Anyuru grapples with, is his own feeling of homelessness, which initially gives him some problems in appreciating the Palestinian struggle for a Palestinian state: ‘Why did they [the Palestinians] have to live exactly on that piece of land? There wasn’t a place on earth which I had that feeling for, and I wondered what it meant’ (E 11). He also thinks of himself as a member of a transnational, community of homeless people: ‘We who are in search of a home’ (E 12). This feeling makes him sympathize with the Sionist movement too as he sees the affinities between the Sionist and his own quest: ‘I myself seeking a home which God shall grant me’ (E 16). One aspect of Anyuru’s identity formation involves a linking to post-Western Europe through religion.\textsuperscript{9} In 2007, he converted to Islam and there are frequent references to Islam and religious practices in the book (Heith 2012; Heith 2014).

The African Diaspora: Migration, Transnationalism and Hybridity

During the inner journey of the narrator-focalizer, analogies are created between groups of people in search of a home: Sionists, Palestinians, refugees and Africans scattered in Europe. Emotionally and intellectually, Anyuru establishes links between himself and groups of people that have been violently uprooted.

You are my cousins and I know like you what history is, that it does not pass without making an impact, that it is stuck in the bodies and the dreams, and that it is a waterfall of chains, and that you inherit something although you don’t want to. I have a father, I have my childhood, I have the history books with pictures of people, who look like me in chains (E 34).

The section exemplifies how Anyuru creates a transnational imagined community of people who share painful histories and memories that dwell in their bodies and minds. When discussing histories of traumatic ruptures and enforced separations from Africa, Hall (1997, 53) uses the metaphor ‘The past continues to speak to us’. While emphasizing the differences between peoples of the African diasporas, Hall also highlights sameness manifested in the construction of an imagined community of Africans of the diaspora. There is a common history of transportation, slavery and colonization shared by a large number of people, but this does not constitute a common origin (Hall 1997, 54).

\textsuperscript{9} The concept of ’Post-Western Europe’ is explored by Delanty and Rumford who discuss various factors which contribute to a shifting understanding of what it means being European. They particularly mention migration, globalisation and an increasing awareness of the existence of different cultural heritages for the emergence of new ways of conceptualising Europe (Delanty & Rumford 2006).
In Anyuru’s personal case, the event of the first African Diaspora is evoked by memories of pictures in history books illustrating the slave trade. In the articulation of an identity, which transgresses Swedish national borders, the visual imprints of black people chained aboard slave ships contribute to the shaping of a transnational, global identity shared by people of African descent around the world. Anyuru was born in Sweden. His mother is Swedish and his father is from Uganda. As a result of Idi Amin coming to power, Anyuru’s father fled to Sweden in the 1970s. Although Anyuru has never lived in Africa, ideas of Africa and linking to Africa are recurring themes in his writing. The idea of Africa that is explored may be described as a ‘home in the heart’. This theme is connected to that of a black, ‘racial’ identity and the tensions between this form of identification and a Swedish national identity. As Wendy Walters (2005, xvii) points out the issue of ‘home’ may be quite complex in the writing of black authors who have experienced racial exclusion ‘at home’.

Although Anyuru creates links to Africa in his writing, he does not enact any return to Africa, or an African country of origin. The theme of return is touched upon in a section about his father, who Anyuru has left seriously ill in Gothenburg. While in Athens, Anyuru thinks about his father’s experience of the African Diaspora:

My father told me once: ‘My biggest mistake in life was that I waited for life to begin. I waited for Idi Amin to be overthrown so I could return home. Amin was overthrown, but another maniac came to power. I waited. Another man came to power, and then another’ (E 9).

While the father can think of Uganda as a home he wants to return to in a literal sense, Africa is not experienced in the same way by the son who never has lived there. Still Johannes Anyuru connects to Africa, the country of origin of his father and the continent of origin of people who look like himself, who were chained on slave ships (E 34). The sense of ‘belonging’ connoted by the concept of ‘Africa’ may be related both to ancestral ties and the ‘racial’ identification of a person of African descent in Europe where whiteness is the norm.

The issue of belonging is complex and it gains a specific character when related to second generation immigrants. Research on participation and belonging in ‘diverse’ European cities indicate ‘high degrees of local involvement in the second generation and the dwindling centrality of single ethnic belongings’ which is seen as ‘a reflection of the dramatically changing ethnic and (sub)cultural landscapes in cities in Europe’ (Crul & Schneider 2010, 1249). One effect of this development is the ‘remaking of the mainstream’. In their analysis, Crul and Schenider argue that mobility pathways ought to be in focus in investigations aiming at a better understanding of integration or assimilation as on-going processes (ibid.).

10 The expression ‘home in the heart’ is used in an analysis of the writing of the Black American author Richard Wright. Walters (2005, 5) highlights its shifting character describing it as ‘ambivalent, not definitive, shifting rather than fixed’.
In Anyuru’s text, ‘Africa’ functions as an emotional node and imaginary place; in the process of writing, he explores the implications of this for the formation of identity and belonging. This exploration also implies a deconstruction of ‘the centrality of single ethnic belonging’, which may be conceived of as an exploration of an identity beyond the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy. When analyzing the complexities of the formation of identity, Nira Yuval-Davis (2010, 263) proposes that dichotomous notions of identity and difference are more misleading than explanatory. Identities may connote core aspects of the self, but also ‘the development, processual and interactive, of collective self-understanding; or the evanescent products of multiple and competing discourses of self.’ (Yuval-Davis 2010, 262). One element of Anyuru’s journey is that it stages explorations on various levels and in various contexts. The text is ambivalent. Identities – individual, collective and textual – are evoked as fickle, processual and interactive, evanescent products of multiple and competing discourses, to paraphrase Yuval-Davis.

The Jali: The Use of Tradition in Diaspora Aesthetics

One example of linking to Africa through writing is the exploration of roles and models for the author. This is done in a discussion of the role of the Jali, a West-African traditional poet who knows the ancient songs but also sings about contemporary events and matters at hand in the present moment (E 91). Anyuru uses the term ‘Jali’, spelled with a capital ‘J’, but ‘griot’ is a term which is more common in English. The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms in Literature defines ‘griot’ as: ‘A kind of bard or itinerant minstrel found in western African societies, who usually sings of local legends, genealogies, or heroic deeds.’ However, there are also connections between the African tradition of griots and contemporary popular culture. In Sage’s online encyclopedia on black studies, parallels are drawn between the griot and the contemporary rapper in a characterisation of rap as:

[…] a continuation of African and Caribbean oral traditions with roots that stretch to West and Central Africa. Like their ancestors, African American male and female rappers – who are essentially contemporary griots, praise singers and poets – draw their energy from the combination of personal style, an innovative story, the skillful use of words, and a reading of the nation (Stephens).

This definition fits well with Anyuru’s use of the term ‘Jali’, which is integrated in an exploration of Swedishness, nationality and belonging. The section introducing the figure of the Jali is preceded by a section in which the narrator mentions that he started to write in order to remember. As the entire book is a narrative of contemporary events and phenomena that catch Anyuru’s attention, interspersed with retrospective elements, a metonymic connection between the Jali-figure and Anyuru’s own practice as a writer is established. Both the Jali and Anyuru are concerned with memories and the recording of what is going on. The choice of an African term and a traditional African poet, which has influenced today’s rap culture in the USA, as a model is one way of establishing connections with various traditions.
The text also mentions and quotes other models, such as the Swedish poet Göran Sonnevi, thus evoking multiple origins, models and directions for the literary text. This is one example of how diaspora aesthetics, combining elements from various cultural traditions may be shaped. In a section which ponders the question of why he started writing, Anyuru suggests that one reason probably was that he wanted oblivion: ‘Forget the world, forget my body which always was at the wrong place, which always had the wrong heart, wrong eyes, wrong religion, wrong mouth’ (E 93). The quote hints to the possibility that literature and imaginative writing may provide a more satisfying reality and ‘home’ than a reality where feelings of displacement, of being in the wrong place, of having the wrong kind of emotions, the wrong physical appearance, and religion dominate. This kind of view of literary writing, or artistic creation, as the production of alternative realities more satisfactory than the real world is known from Romantic and Modernist aesthetics as an embrace of the notions of the artist as an outsider, as well as from contemporary urban youth cultures (Heith 2004; Heith 2008).

After the introduction of the Jali-figure, there is a movement in the text as existential dimensions of writing are evoked. The narrator Anyuru identifies with the figure of the Jali by ruminating over his own role as that of a Jali. He poses the question of whose Jali he is. For whom does he sing? To whom does his voice belong? The answer proposed is that he doesn’t know yet, but he knows that his voice as a writer no longer belongs solely to himself: ‘I am writing about this journey which is taking a direction that does not yet exist, a direction we will all create together, if our bodies and ships are not broken’ (E 92). The use of the term ‘broken’ contributes to the creation of complex (e)motions. The text presents perceptions, sensations and psychic realities in motion and on a metatextual level writing as an ongoing process. Anyuru’s oscillation between diverse emotions and contexts is one way of creating movement and moods. The term ‘broken’, connected to ships and bodies in the quoted passage, exemplifies how complexity is created through a detail which activates motion. It is hardly a coincidence that Anyuru has shown an interest in the theme of ‘broken words’ as a rapper and writer and that the term is combined here with ‘ships’ and ‘bodies’. Both terms are possible to relate to multiple contexts, for example that of the slave trade of the first African Diaspora and to that of the Ship to Gaza project the previous year when some of the participants were killed.

One theme of Anyuru’s narration of a multifaceted journey is the narrator-focalizer’s grappling with the role of the writer and of the production of a new kind of text. As mentioned above, an option highlighted by the discussion of the Jali is that the role of this traditional West-African figure might be of bearing for Anyuru’s own Bildung as an author. The narrator mentions that the word ‘Jali’ comes from the Mandinga word for blood (E 93). It is left to the reader to ponder what this means for the interpretation of the text. The text integrates an element linking Anyuru to his ancestral African origin in a vision of the role of the author in a world of flux, migration, diaspora and diversity. One effect of the use of the Jali as a model for the contemporary Swedish writer is that an element from the African
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tradition, dismissed and excluded for being incompatible with progress and modernity by Hegel (Wright 2004, 8), is integrated in present-day Afro-Swedish cultural production. This involves a re-imagination of space ‘both in the language of memory and in the politics of the future’, characteristic of contemporary ‘migrant literatures’ (Merolla & Ponzanesi 2005, 15). As Bhabha has suggested, emergent minority communities contribute to symbolic re-mapping, they ‘revise our sense of symbolic citizenship, our myths of belonging, by identifying ourselves with the starting-points of other national and international histories and geographies’ (Bhabha 2008, xx). This may involve that nation state-centred and Eurocentric cartographies, based on notions of white racial purity, are replaced by migrant cartographies celebrating diversity and hybridity as in Anyuru’s text.

**Islam: Deconstructing Orientalism and Constructing New Forms of Community**

Another form of linking and hybridization is exemplified by depictions of the narrator Anyuru’s spiritual practices as a Muslim. Actively and openly practising Islam in Sweden and other European countries involves a form of self-definition and identification opposed to that of the ideologies of secular and traditionally Christian white Europe (cf. Ballard 1996). When creating the figure of an Afro-Swedish Muslim, content with practicing Islam in Sweden and other parts of Europe, Anyuru performs a hybridization, which undermines prevailing Orientalist constructions of Muslims as alien, threatening and potentially dangerous (Heith 2012; Heith 2014). In Anyuru’s text, Islam is presented as a positive element providing opportunities for communion and belonging in the lives of immigrants and converts in Sweden, as well as among Muslims in a transnational global space. For the narrator Anyuru, the reading of the Quran is part of his self-examination and coming into being as a new kind of Swede and European. The narrator’s awareness that it involves a risk to confess being a Muslim in contemporary white Europe is revealed in a passage in which Anyuru explicitly disavows the message propagated by *Nation of Islam* which is characterized as a ‘racist, distorted version of Islam’ (*E* 54).

From the vantage point of Swedish mainstream culture the conversion to Islam represents a move away from what is conceived of as normality (Månsson 2000, 259). According to the dominant media image of Islam and Muslims in Sweden, these are ‘strange’ and ‘different’. It is not unusual that dichotomies are established between Swedish, and Western culture, on the one hand, and Muslim culture on the other.11 But this is not the ‘truth’ depicted in the writings of Anyuru where religious rituals and practices provide the basis for a transnational, global community where he belongs and feels at home. This involves the creation of a positive, new, hybrid

11 Anna Månsson (2000, 259–288) discusses this theme in an article about women who have converted to Islam in Sweden.
form of Afro-Swedish identity. Evoking the structure of the traditional Bildungsroman hybridization is exemplified on the levels of genre and content as the identity formation of a new kind of European, in which ‘the Muslim world’ and ‘Africa ‘speaks’ is the major theme. When in Athens, Anyuru is invited to dinner in the home of an Egyptian man, who was the cook on the Swedish ship that sailed for Gaza the previous year. While the other guests are talking, he joins the Egyptian in a Muslim evening prayer in the living-room (E 123). The episode is described in a way which conjures up a warm and friendly atmosphere. This is one example of a depiction of community and belonging across religious and ethnic borders. While being a recognition of Islam and the Islamic presence in Europe and Sweden, Anyuru’s text also provides a response to a historical and still ongoing marginalisation of Muslims. When discussing this theme in an article about politics and Islam in Western Europe, Shadid and van Koningsveld conclude that: ‘Europe has had the Islamic world as its neighbour for more than a millennium, but it has never succeeded either to acknowledge it as an equal, or to take its cultural or religious traditions seriously’ (Shadid & van Koningsveld 1996, 3).

Self-Definition, Self-Knowledge and the Spectacle of Disempowered Africans

During his stay in Athens, Anyuru encounters Africans living on the margins of society. Shortly after his arrival, he walks to the Syntagma square where he watches the demonstrators and African street vendors (E 42). One day he sees a Nigerian man in worn clothes selling old magnifying glasses. The man is standing at a street corner holding the magnifying glasses as if they were a bouquet of flowers (E 79). On another occasion, he registers the sight of a large number of African, prostitute women. The narrator makes the remark that these women are found in Athens, everywhere in Europe, even in Gothenburg. They usually stand along the walls outside the hotel and at the traffic lights, as if waiting for nothing (E 86). One afternoon, he sees a Greek motor-cycle policeman robbing one of the prostitutes: ‘Another of the women is hiding behind a parked car. When I walk by her she looks up at me in horror – her eyes are gleaming in her dark face, in the darkness’ (E 97). In another section, a square is described as the square of the African pedlars of pirate DVD films (E 109).

The Africans are mentioned in a matter of fact way, but there are details revealing feelings of sympathy with the destitute Africans and critique of European politics. It is significant that the Africans are mentioned, and that the presence of the African Diaspora is so conscientiously, even compulsively, registered by the narrator-focalizer. This points to the selection of material. Apparently, the presence of the Africans means something to him. Since they are strangers, it must be their appearance that makes him take notice of them and conclude that they are African. This is another version of the motif ‘people who look like me’ (cf. E 34), of how ‘Africa speaks’ through skin colour, this time in the form of Africans scattered in present-day Europe. Like Anyuru himself, the Africans he encounters are ‘visible minorities’ in
predominantly white societies. Although the presence of the Africans is registered with few words, there are details revealing a critical view of the Europe of white ‘normality’. The depiction of the brutality and inhumanity of the Law, in the person of the robbing policeman, particularly conjures up the image of Athens, and Europe, as a dark place where greedy and morally corrupt representatives of state authorities strike against black migrants with no possibility of raising their voices. The kind of subaltern position held by the prostitute women literally means that they cannot speak, as there is no position from where they can give voice to their stories. There is no position of theirs which will be acknowledged and thus make a dialogue with representatives of white European society possible.

Another aspect of the narrative of the presence of Africans in Athens is that it is a parallel to the story of Anyuru’s father, who lived there when he was training to become a fighter pilot in the Ugandan army in the late 1960s. As a result of the political disruption in Uganda, the father’s training was interrupted and the planned career came to a halt. This is the theme of Anyuru’s second novel, published in 2012. The details about the father are told in the 2011 book accounting for the father’s personal reasons for migrating. Although the African Diaspora is a diverse, multifaceted phenomenon, experiences of being scattered, uprooted and homeless are shared by large numbers of people living in the diaspora. Migratory waves are connected with various historical contexts and political, economical and social catalysts, such as the slave trade and contemporary political instability, genocide, poverty and lack of opportunities. The narrator Anyuru specifically draws attention to the slave trade, his father’s escape from Uganda, which was the reason why he came to Sweden, and the present-day scattering of Africans struggling as street vendors and prostitutes in European cities.

In an analysis of connections between international migration and the emergence of diasporic communities, Jana Evans Braziel emphasises that migration often is the effect of a crisis, which has a negative impact on the migrants. ‘International migrants, uprooted from family, friends and nation-state, dispersed from their homelands, and scattered around the globe in

12 The term ‘visible minority’ is discussed in a Swedish introduction to critical race and whiteness studies. It refers to groups whose physical appearance differs from that of the white majority population. Black people and people who look Asian are mentioned in particular (Hübinette et al. 2012, 67, 69).

13 The idea of the African prostitutes as subalterns who cannot speak is of course inspired by Spivak’s analysis of the subaltern and why this category is not listened to and acknowledged as a partner in a dialogue. One form of ultimate disempowerment consists of not being acknowledged and respected as somebody with a voice of ones own. See Morris’ introduction to Spivak’s Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea where she discusses misinterpretations of Spivak’s seminal text. Her major point is that Spivak does not write that the subaltern cannot speak, but that she analyses how subaltern women in India have been posited outside discourse and dialogue, thus there have been no position from where they have been able to ‘speak.’ (Morris 2010.) It seems to me that this idea may be applied to the situation of the African prostitutes in Europe many of whom are illegal immigrants.
one or more countries of adoption, form vibrant diasporic communities’ (Braziel 2006, 1). She draws attention to the global refugee crisis of the 1990s, which coincided with increasingly restrictive refugee policies. ‘As the number of refugees (blacker, browner, poorer, and Muslim) increased worldwide, so too did the doors to asylum seem to slam shut’ (Braziel 2006, 5). Her conclusion is that international migrants and scattered diaspora communities ‘remain negatively inflected’ and she warns against ‘premature celebrations of poly-scape transnational exchanges, the presumed death of nationalism, and hybrid forms of diasporic productions’ (Braziel 2006, 6).

There are also Swedish studies, which highlight immigration and immigrants as a problem (Rystad & Lundberg 2000). During the last years, the political landscapes of the Nordic countries have shown an increase in open support of xenophobic populist parties. In Sweden, Sverigedemokraterna, whose supporters are particularly hostile to Islam and Muslims, have gained seats in the Parliament.14 This party is mentioned in Anyuru’s book, implicitly drawing attention to hostility ‘at home’ in the social reality experienced by Muslims and black and dark-skinned people.

As a contrast and alternative to racist and excluding discourses, the text also thematises transgressions of binaries, and emancipatory options. The vision of community among migrants and diasporic groups evoked by Anyuru’s text has resemblances with the vision of Fanon, who emphasised the need for disempowered groups, who shared similar experiences, to mobilise (Fanon 1968, Fanon 2000). However, there are also examples of present-day diaspora research and fiction, which negate visions of African community and solidarity. The academic, Okpewho, for example, who has migrated to the USA, emphasises problematic aspects of ethnic rivalry and bad leadership in Africa, which cause antagonism between various diasporic groups. When discussing the relationship between the old and the new diaspora, he emphasises that one of the reasons why so many Africans were captured and sold as slaves during the era of slave trade was that they were sold by other Africans: ‘Africans in the homeland sold other Africans to white traders’ (Okpewho 2009, 11). The backdrop of the present-day diaspora is presented as no less problematic for the formation of a communal African, black identity.

[T]he resources of Africa continued to be appropriated by the former colonizers working in corrupt collusion with the indigenous political leadership. The

14 The collection of articles, Att möta främlingar [Encountering Strangers], which is the outcome of a research project with the same name, has the subtitle ‘Problem kring flyktningmottagande och kulturkonfrontationer’ [Problems related to the Reception of Refugees and Cultural Confrontations]. This focus posing refugees and multiculturalism as problems is opposed to Anyuru’s depiction of the same phenomena in the text discussed in this article. The dominant vision, which pervades En civilisation utan båtar, is that of a civilisation where people of different origins, ethnic ancestry, nationality and religious convictions can co-exist and work together for a common purpose. This vision is realised in the project of the Freedom Flotilla, Ship to Gaza, which stands as a positive alternative to inertia and division based on ethnicity and religion, as well as misuse of power.
result has been an abysmal lack of commitment to a unified political vision and a perennial crisis of leadership in many African nations, culminating in military coups and, not in a few cases, civil wars and genocidal conflicts. Those who have been lucky enough to escape with their lives, or have simply decided that they needed to carry on their careers in less threatening conditions, have opted to flee the land and live in exile (Okpewho 2009, 7).

Ethnic rivalry, war and oppression are themes that are prominent in literature by black African writers. One Swedish example is Sakina Ntibanyitesha, engaged in writing a trilogy based on her own experiences of abuse, torture, imprisonment and the killing of innocent people in Congo during the war. The first part, *Ormbar* (2012, [Snake children]) depicts the childhood of the female protagonist, while the second *Farligare än djur* (2012, [More dangerous than animals]) depicts adolescence and the outbreak of the war. The third part will be about her new life as a refugee in Sweden. Another example is the more well-known Ivorian novelist Ahmadou Kourouma (1972–2003), whose *Les soleils des indépendances* (1970) critically depicts post-colonial governments in Africa, and *Allah n’est pas obligé* (2000), about a boy who is forced to become a child soldier. These have both been published in Swedish (*Allah gör som han vill* 2002; *Den siste Doumbouya* 2003). Ntibanyitesha, who lives in the north of Sweden, does not know what year she was born. She grew up with her maternal grandmother who had been a slave and she hardly had the opportunity to go to school as a child and adolescent. Kourouma, on the other hand, was born into a well-established family in Côte d’Ivoire, where he studied before he went to France to study mathematics.

In contrast to narratives of conflicts and disintegration among black Africans, Anyuru’s book reflects upon the role of Africa and ancestral ties, tentatively explored by an Afro-Swedish author whose major links to the continent are his own physical appearance, his refugee father and the stories told by the father, which repeatedly are processed in the mind of Anyuru. This also involves confronting emotions conjured up by the vision of diasporic Africans in Athens. One interesting question is what the narrator’s comments about the Africans, whose existence he registers while in Athens, mean for the theme of the text. One proposal of this article is that they contribute to the main character, Anyuru’s tentative exploration of a black identity across class lines and national borders. As elements of Anyuru’s inner journey, they take part in the exploration of group affiliations, which contributes to processes of self-definition and the gaining of self-knowledge. The self-definition and gaining of self-knowledge need not be explicitly formulated. Still the text evokes these themes through the references to ‘Africanness’ as the element which triggers Anyuru’s interest in the vendors and prostitutes as part of the exploration of his ancestral African origin and desire for Africa as a ‘home of the heart’, as a symbolic imagined community.

There is no way people of the diaspora can go home to Africa literally, but Hall underlines that circular symbolic journeys which bring Africa to the ‘New World’ are vital: ‘These symbolic journeys are necessary for us all – and necessarily circular. This is the Africa we must return to – but ‘by another route.’ This is what Africa has become in the New World, what we have made
of ‘Africa’: ‘Africa’ – as we re-tell it through politics, memory and desire’ (Hall 1997, 56). Anyuru’s quest is problematised as the conflict between elements, which construct Africa as a place of desire that is being destabilised and threatened by the un-resolvable problem posed by the existence of destitute, vulnerable people who have escaped from the horrors of their African homelands. Hall makes the point that Africans of the diaspora experience both sameness and difference and that ‘boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference’ (Hall 1997, 55; also see Gilroy 1993, xi). In Anyuru's text, ‘Africa’ is constructed as a complex site of difference and sameness, as well as a symbolic site for an imagined community (cf. Hall 1997, 56).

Migration: Transnationalism, Contingency, Despair

When depicting the departure for Athens, Anyuru mentions that he is talking to a woman on her way to Sarajevo, while standing in a queue at the airport (E 25). Her family was banished from Mostar during the war. Anyuru learns that the inhabitants of the city had fifteen minutes to pack their belongings. Then they were put on buses that drove them to Poland, where they were given the advice that they should continue to Scandinavia. The woman and her husband went aboard the first ferry that departed. That was how they ended up in Sweden. The details mentioned by the narrator concisely summarises the experiences of great numbers of migrants forced to leave their old home-countries due to war. Lack of time for preparations, lack of choice whether to go and where to go when forced to leave, the necessity to rely on unknown advisors, and the randomness of the final destination are experiences reflected in numerous accounts of migration.

The text also describes European asylum politics and the effect it has on desperate people seeking asylum without success. This theme is set in focus in the narration of when Anyuru notices Iranian refugees demonstrating outside a Greek immigration office in Athens (E 73–75). The refugees are staying in a tent, which Anyuru walks by every day. One day he notices that the men have blood around their lips. He asks in English if they need help, but they mumble something, not being able to speak. Suddenly he realises that the men have stitched their lips. A man who has fainted is filmed by another man with a mobile phone. A passer-by, a Spanish participant of Ship to Gaza, remarks that the film will probably be published on a website via live-stream. Anyuru is shocked: ‘It is crazy, grotesque, like a nightmare’ (E 74). It is obvious that the men are desperate, but the reader is left just as bewildered as the narrator Anyuru himself of what is going on. The story of the Iranian men remains unknown, untold. They are present in the text as signifiers of despair, contributing to the characterisation of the political and social setting of contemporary Europe. While Anyuru is represented as an individual seeking ways of expressing himself as a writer and as a politically committed person, the Iranians are literally depicted as bodies without voices.
**Words that Matter**

For the narrator Johannes Anyuru, Ship to Gaza and the weeks spent in Athens, where popular protest mobilises people to fight for a decent future, function as examples of resistance to political inertia and lack of engagement and solidarity. One of the themes of the story line deals with the coming to insight of the narrator and focalizer about the meaningfulness of trying, at least, to act to change the world, and the role of the written and spoken word for doing this. In this respect, the plot resembles the version of the *Bildungsroman* which thematizes an author-protagonist’s inner and outer journey aiming at finding his, or her, role as an author and individual. The motives of ‘learning’ and ‘gaining insight’ are mentioned throughout the text. The narrator Anyuru himself points out that the reason for joining Ship to Gaza and going to Athens is that he wants to learn. As Anyuru is the focalizer, the reader gets to know that he learns and experiences a great deal of things. With the theme of the *Bildung* of the author in mind the most important insight is that writing and using words matters: ‘I came here to Athens also to see what the words are worth, and this day I learn that the activity of pronouncing them, of writing them down, still is . . . something, in its insufficiency. I will never more be alone’ (E 122). On the final page of the book, the narrator concludes: ‘The person I was when I left will never more return home’ (E 150).

The inner journey of the narrator is depicted as a deeply transformative process. Yet, the juxtaposition of blocks of words from various stylistic registers and traditions make the text ambivalent. So does the depiction of the focalizer’s oscillations between contradictory feelings. The possibilities of collective action, of expressing oneself aesthetically in new, unprecedented ways, and of acting as a social being in political contexts, are presented as positive possibilities, albeit threatened by sensations of despair, chock and lack of belonging and meaning. The narrator-focalizer Anyuru has a body, the colour of which ‘speaks’ of his African ancestry, and a voice that he ruminates upon how to use. The African prostitutes he registers in Athens are black bodies for sale, without possibilities to voice their experiences. The Iranian men with stitched lips have injured their own bodies in a desperate attempt to draw attention to their lack of voice. The text shows that embodied experiences related to race, ethnicity and outsider-positions in white Europe might constitute some degree of sameness, but also an enormous difference when it comes to the issue of having a voice and being able to express oneself.

**At Home in Diaspora**

The concept of *diaspora* has been related to processes of de-territorialization, transnational migration and cultural hybridity. ‘These notions, as opposed to more “rooted” forms of identification such as “regions” or “nations”, seemed to imply a decline of “locality” as a point of reference for collective identities’ (Kokot, Tölöyan & Alfonso 2004, 1). Anyuru and some of the migrants mentioned in the text experience multiple belonging. The negative side of this
experience is the feeling of homelessness. However, the migrants of the text are not a homogenous group. There is a huge difference between the situation of the immigrants in Sweden, who can go on holiday to their old home-countries, and the African prostitutes and Iranian men with stitched lips in Athens. The vulnerable situation of migrants not protected by citizenship is part of the social reality that the text depicts. The homelessness of these people, and what it means for their lives, is drastically different from the homelessness experienced by the narrator Anyuru, which has the character of an oscillation between feelings of homelessness and not belonging, on the one hand, and being part of communities and social constellations, on the other. In a literal sense, Anyuru has a home in Gothenburg which he will return to. In the same town, he has a father and friends who he will see again. One of the experiences Anyuru has during his journey is that there actually is a place on earth which he feels is his home.

I want to get home soon. I want to walk under the trees of Linnégatan [a street in Gothenburg]. No, I never want to come home again. I never want to leave this city [Athens]. But I long for home today. I don't know. I long for the people I know, my father, the trees (E 102).

This motif is repeated in a later section in which the narrator continues to enumerate things he misses and things he will do when he comes home. ‘I will cycle through the night and sit on the bench opposite to 7Eleven [a store] with all the brothers ['alla brorsorna'], and we will go to the new mosque, perhaps’ (E 106). This everyday description of what home connotes is one form of exploration of what belonging means. The theme is varied in the conclusion of the text. The final sentences describe how Anyuru is sitting by the sea in Athens before leaving for Sweden and how he is overwhelmed by the sudden insight that this world is the home he shares with the rest of humanity.

We share this world with one another – I feel it so strongly, suddenly, and then, unexpectedly, something appears that I had not known that I had been missing: the insight that I belong on this planet, that I am a part of the life of this age, that this is my home (E 150).

This rather grandiose account of the outcome of the inner and outer journey of the narrator is accompanied by a final sentence about waves hitting rocks, and drawing back to the open sea in a ‘white, foaming roar –’ (ibid.). The climax, depicting fulfilment through an epiphanic experience of human community and belonging closes the story-line of the text. At this inconclusive end, a number of significant themes, which previously concerned the traveller Anyuru, have not been resolved. It is significant that the text ends with a dash, and not a full stop, making apparent the inconclusive character of the ending. When the text ends, the outer journey has literally come to a halt in the sense that there will be no voyage to Gaza and the people who have gathered in Athens will return to their homes. As the outer journey is interrupted, the end of the inner journey is synchronized to that.
Broken Words

The African Diaspora and migration both affect the narrator-focalizer’s quest for meaning and belonging; there is an oscillation in the book between diaspora and migration as private experiences on the one hand, and as a transnational global reality experienced by large groups of people, on the other. Through the depiction of the sudden insight and experience of belonging at the end, the text stages a gratifying fulfilment of Anyuru’s inner quest. This fulfilment implies feeling at home as a socially engaged writer in the process of exploring his own ‘Africanness’ in a world of migration and diasporas. The traveller Anyuru experiences both homelessness and multiple belongings. This turns out to be a constructive potential on occasions when he manages to reconcile negative and positive aspects of the reality he encounters with visions of community and belonging.

However, the text is ambivalent, an effect achieved through the depiction of the focalizer’s oscillations between feelings of lack of meaning, despair and chock, on the one hand, and hope, contentment and belonging, on the other. While this may be described as an oscillation between emotional extremes, the text is also ambivalent through the ‘breaks’ in its verbal discourse which juxtaposes elements from various traditions and media. Greek graffiti (E39), the Swedish high culture poetry of Göran Sonnevi (E49), and a multi-authored poem (E132–141) are examples of verbal discourses, which constitute a textual movement of broken words.

The depiction of an epiphany and breaking waves at the end is extremely ambivalent and potentially undermining also when considered from the vantage point of a Swedish literary tradition in which literary presentations and perceptions of the sea became a prominent theme in the reception of a stanza of a poem by Göran Palm frequently called ‘Havet’ [The Sea]. The stanza which is about the lack of an emotional response from a viewer watching the sea is included in the collection Världen ser dig [The world sees you] from 1964. The indifference of the viewer depicted by Palm is in stark contrast to classical and modernist representations of the sea as a mythic, symbolic, overwhelming entity, which profoundly affects the human mind and senses. The final two lines of the poem read: ‘The sea. So what./ It is like in the Louvre’. Palm’s poem was much discussed and analysed in Sweden; anybody the least familiar with contemporary Swedish poetry is likely to associate to it when encountering lyrical depictions of the sea. Does this make Anyuru’s depiction ironical? Or, does Anyuru’s grand finale with foaming, roaring waves, which accompany an epiphanic experience, exemplify the deployment of a poetical discourse that has become marginalized in contemporary Swedish literature? Or, is it an example of how a poetics of broken words may be activated?

The outer journey described in the text is circular. Anyuru will return to where he started his journey. But the inner journey and the aesthetic experiment of writing a new kind of text have brought about change: ‘The person I was when I left will never return home’ (E150). The literary text and the development of the protagonist appear as processes shaped by oscillations between incoherent, sometimes contradictory, material. The cultural identity
of the protagonist as well as the generic and stylistic ‘identity’ of the text are hybrid and fickle. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy (1993) discusses the significance of the travels of African-American writers. He re-interprets their work against the background of a trans-Atlantic context, proposing that there is a double consciousness, which involves that the Black Atlantic strives to be both Black and European. This provides a model for cultural hybridity that refutes ethnic absolutism, essentialism and contemporary forms of cultural nationalism involving exclusion and othering of minorities and racialised others.

Anyuru’s book about a journey made in 2011 is a Swedish example of a text extending the waves of the Black Atlantic to the Nordic region. The protagonist recognizes that Africa ‘speaks’ through him, through his ancestry and skin colour. He has chosen to become a practicing Muslim, and he is at home in various social constellations in Sweden and on a transnational arena. Apart from presenting a text combining elements from various stylistic registers and cultural traditions, the text also describes the becoming of a new kind of hybrid cultural identity, which embraces a symbolic Africa as a ‘home of the heart’ and locus of desire, as well as being a European and Swede. The performative construction of this new European and Swede in writing involves a deconstruction of absolutist and essentialist notions of cultural identity and the European Enlightenment tradition that posited the ‘Negro’ as standing outside the history of intellectual, technological, moral, and cultural progress ‘guided by the Absolute of reason’ (cf. Wright 2004, 8). Anyuru’s book about the formation of a hybrid, black, Swedish identity transcends the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. The text juxtaposes sections of writing that enact how styles and modes for artistic representation travel and interact; it depicts the impact of migration and diaspora for both identity formation and aesthetics. The conclusion of this article is that Anyuru’s text is both an exploration of the African diasporas and a form of cross-cultural literary writing, which blends elements from various Swedish literary repertoires and transnational traditions. In order to highlight the blending of elements from national traditions and traditions originating from locations outside the nation, the term ‘entangled literatures’ has been proposed (Pollari et al. 2015). This is a perspective which is also relevant for the reading of Anyuru’s text if the poetics of hybridisation and the transformation of national narrative modes are themes that are studied. Depending upon what theme is in focus, the text represents an exploration of the African diasporas, transnational literatures and/or entangled literatures.
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