

## BLACKNESS, RELIGION, AESTHETICS: JOHANNES ANYURU'S LITERARY EXPLORATIONS OF MIGRATION AND DIASPORA

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When discussing “the arbitrary character of the European construct” Roger Ballard highlights the construction of borders which distinguish Western Europe from other parts of the world. As examples of bordering devices that have been activated in order to demarcate Western Europe he particularly mentions skin colour, physical appearance and religion. Through biological and religious categorizations Europeans have identified themselves as white and Christian (Ballard 1996). Ballard emphasizes the role of religion for constructions of Europe claiming that: “Europe’s distinctiveness is best understood in *religious* terms, on the grounds that its contemporary boundaries are largely congruent with the disjunction between Christianity and Islam” (Ballard, 1996, 20). Ballard is preoccupied with the presence of Islam in Western Europe, which implies that the major branches of the Christian Church he has in mind are those of the Lutheran and Catholic Church. It is important to recognize that there is an Eastern branch as well. This branch, with roots in the Byzantine legacy, is the dominant form of Christianity in Russia. In a Swedish nation-state context Protestantism has played a major role for defining the nation as white, Christian and Western. When the Swedish Tornedalian cultural mobiliser Bengt Pohjanen uses elements from the Eastern Orthodox tradition in his writing this involves a conscious challenge of bordering practices that have been used to define Swedishness (Heith 2010). The traditional homeland of the Tornedalians, Meänmaa, on both sides of the rivers marking the border between Sweden and Finland is a transnational area. Pohjanen’s use of elements from Orthodox Christianity may be related both to explorations of cultural connections with Russia, but also with Finland. Although Sweden’s close neighbour, the religious traditions of Finland are quite different from those of Sweden. One difference is that Finland has two National Churches (“folkkyrkor”), one Lutheran and one Eastern Orthodox. When borders have been established between Western Europe and its others, mainstream Western Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism) has been used as a marker of difference. Of course this does not imply that states that define themselves as Western, European and Christian have been homogeneous when it comes to religion. In the Nordic countries, for example, there have been numerous popular revivalist movements critical of the establishment. But, it means that the established Churches became symbols of the nation. In a Swedish context the established Church has played a role in the construction of a national identity, a “we” (Swedish Lutherans) that is conceived of as different from “them” (Catholics, Reformed Protestants, Eastern Orthodoxies, Muslims etc). Today, widespread secularism and the disestablishment of the Church of Sweden has problematized the role of the Lutheran heritage, but Lutheranism has played, and still plays, a role for definitions of national culture and identities.

The role of racial categorization for organizing the modern world is a theme in focus also within the field of whiteness studies (Dyer 1997). Richard Dyer points out in *White* that “whites take up the position of ordinariness, not a particular race, just

the human race” in Western media (Dyer, 1997, i). This view of whiteness is deeply embedded in prevailing racist discourses in European culture and modernity (Wright, 2004, 8). The philosopher Hegel is one prominent European thinker who contributed to legitimizing racist discourses by positing that the “Negro” stands outside the history of intellectual, technological, moral and cultural progress which he saw as “guided by the Absolute of reason” (ibid., Hegel 1956, Heith 2012). This is one reason for African scholars’ preoccupation with the philosophical legacy of Hegel (Taiwo 1998).

### **Racial Differentiation: History of Racism and Present-Day Challenges**

Racial differentiation and the placing of various peoples on different levels in hierarchies has a long tradition. Swedish 18<sup>th</sup> century scientist Carl von Linné became famous for his system that placed all beings of the creation in a hierarchy. Linné believed that due to shifting circumstances and geographical variation some peoples had developed positively while others had stagnated or degenerated. When Linné’s disciple Carl Petter Thunberg visited South Africa in 1790 he pitied the unfortunate ‘hotentotts’, whom he described as lazy and stupid, at times “not above soul-less animals” (Thunberg quoted from Lindquist 1991, 34, my translation). During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Western European philosophy, natural sciences, and anthropology contributed to a racist discourse based on binaries that defined white Europeans as radically different compared to black Africans (see JanMohamed 2003). While this mode of thinking still prevails, it has also been challenged by anti- and postcolonialism. Constructions of dichotomies between Europe and its others are increasingly being challenged under the pressure of present-day cultural production characterized by hybridity and the mixture of elements from various locations within and outside Europe.

This article will examine hybridizations of identities and culture from the vantage point of Johannes Anyuru’s literary writing. The focus will be on Afro-Swedish identity formation in which Swedishness, dark skin-colour and Islam are vital elements for the formation of a new kind of Swede: an Afro-Swedish Muslim. This implies a deconstruction of Hegelian dichotomies which have posited the “Negro” as the other of European modernity and the coming into being of a new hybrid identity which brings Africa and the Muslim worlds to Sweden, thus contributing to the transformation of notions of Swedishness. This development is closely connected with migration which has brought Africa to Sweden. One reason for the African presence in present-day Sweden is the arrival of refugees from African countries afflicted by war, genocide and ethnic rivalry. Anyuru’s own father ended up in Sweden in the 1970s after an escape from Uganda. This makes Anyuru, who has a Swedish mother, a second generation migrant with a double ethnic ancestry.

### **Migrant Cartographies**

Migration has had a deep impact on national identities, notions of home and belonging and aesthetic representation. As an effect of migration, national identities

have been de-naturalized and new forms of artistic representation shaped by multidirectional patterns and cross-appropriation of elements from diverse cultural traditions are emerging (see Mercer, 2008, 7). Literary writing by immigrants, migrants and their descendants deploys estrangement and displacement as strategies which evoke migrant cartographies, thus introducing new modes of perceiving imagined communities, home and belonging (Merolla & Ponzanezi, 2005; Heith, 2004). Johannes Anyuru's first novel from 2010 and a short book from 2011 which is a piece of autobiographical writing, both depict migrant cartographies as locations of culture where new identities and forms of artistic representation are shaped. Johannes Anyuru (b. 1979), a Swedish citizen born in Sweden, exemplifies a new kind of author persona in a Swedish nation-state context. As in other countries the coming into being of this new kind of author reflects the "dramatically changing ethnic and (sub)cultural landscapes" in today's European cities (Crul & Schneider, 2010, 1249). Migration has unsettled boundaries activated in the phase of the building of the modern nation-state, in Sweden not least in the building of the People's Home ("folkhemmet"). The term "folkhemmet" was not invented by the Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson, but it became connected with Swedish Social Democracy after he had used it in a Parliament debate in 1928. The 1920s was a decade when the health of the nation was discussed extensively. There was a fear that the population would degenerate if steps were not taken to prevent people who were thought of as inferior to reproduce. When the State Institute for Race Biology was founded in Uppsala in 1921 there was a consensus among all political parties of the Parliament that race biology was important and that degeneration posed a threat to the nation (Lundborg 1921, Lundborg 1922, Lindquist 1991). The first director of the institute, Herman Lundborg, co-operated closely with German race biologists in the 1930s, sharing their views concerning the superiority of the Nordic race and the need to prevent groups thought of as inferior to reproduce. The belief that degeneration was a threat was widely shared by politicians and scientists. This is one reason why sterilizations came to be used extensively in order to cope with the problem of the reproduction of people with the "wrong racial characteristics". This also implies that the vision of the "racially", or ethnically, homogeneous people is typical of the times when there was a belief in the "science" of race biology and fears that mixed marriages were a national threat.

The history of Swedish race biology and ideas of Nordic exceptionalism are part of the historical horizon of present day explorations of the implications of race and racism. While the "others" of the nation during the 1920s and 30s were the domestic, historical minorities, particularly the Jews, Tornedalian Finns, Roma and Sámi, migrants from non-European countries have taken their place in present-day xenophobic cartographies that conceive of the nation as threatened by alien elements. In this context the situation is especially complex for people who belong to "visible minorities".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term "visible minority" is discussed in a Swedish presentation of critical race and whiteness studies. It refers to people whose physical appearance differs from the white majority population. People with black skin and people who look Asian are mentioned in particular (Hübinette et al. 2012, p. 67, p. 69).

### Blackness and Swedishness

Anyuru's double ethnic ancestry is of major importance for his literary writing, both on a thematic level and on the level of aesthetics. Skin colour was a major theme in his first collection of poems, *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* [Only the Gods are New] from 2003 (Heith 2008). The collection is dedicated to his mother and somebody called Shamme who is apostrophized in the following way: "keep your sword up nigga,/ vi ska ta oss ut ur den här friheten/ och in i en annan." [/. . ./ we will get out of this freedom/ and into another, my translation]. The social setting is that of a suburban location, which has the character of a domestic Orient (see Ekström 2006). A war is going on between young men with immigrant or migrant backgrounds and the police. This image of an unequal society with social unrest and conflict provides a stark contrast to official Swedish self-images emphasizing domestic community, democracy and equality. It also problematizes the notion of the Swedish People's Home ("folkhemmet") by drawing attention to the exclusion of groups of people who were never conceived of as 'the people'. Although it was never acknowledged explicitly, the Swedish People's Home was intended for ethnic Swedes (Hettne, Sörlin & Østergård, 2006, 400).<sup>2</sup>

The lyrical I of the poem is a young man of African descent. Already in the first collection there are autobiographical elements such as in references to the African, black, Muslim father of the I: "Min far var stridspilot/ och man kunde se det/ när han rörde sina slanka, svarta/ händer genom luften/ som fåglar/" [My father was a fighter pilot/ and you could see that/ when he moved his lean, black/ hands through the air/ like birds] (Anyuru, 2003, 58). Elements from the life story of Anyuru's father, who trained to become a fighter pilot in the Ugandan army before he fled as Idi Amin came to power, are used extensively in the 2010 novel and the 2011 experimental 'diary'. Anyuru's latest novel *En storm kom från paradiset* [A Storm Came from Paradise] published in 2012 is based entirely on the story of his father's life. This preoccupation indicates that the links and connections to Africa provided by the story of his African father's life contribute to explorations of estrangement and displacement in a Swedish context. And this turns out to be creative for Anyuru as a writer.

The quote from the dedication to "Shamme" in the first collection together with references to Africa and blackness indicate the role of multidirectional patterns and cross-appropriation of elements from diverse cultural traditions (see Mercer, 2008, 7) in Anyuru's work. References to Homer, urban youth culture, American rock lyrics, Swedish Latin Kings, Swedish high culture poetry and African cultural elements contribute to a deconstruction of notions of cultural homogeneity which shaped the building of the modern Swedish nation-state (Arvastsson 1999). These continue to influence today's xenophobic political parties that cherish ideas of Swedish cultural homogeneity and exceptionalism (Heith, 2012b, 170).

### Diaspora

<sup>2</sup> "Det svenska folkhemmet i Per Albins klassiska tappning var utan tvekan tänkt för etniska svenskar, även om detta aldrig framhölls eller ansågs behöva framhållas." [The Swedish People's Home in Per Albin's classical version was without doubt meant for ethnic Swedes, although this was never acknowledged or thought to be necessary to acknowledge.] (Hettne, Sörlin & Østergård, 2006, 400).

In a literal sense Anyuru's first novel *Skulle jag dö under andra himlar* (2010) [If I Were to Die Under Other Skies] and the book *En civilisation utan båtar* (2011) [A Civilisation Without Ships] deal with diaspora as a spatial condition of dislocation, as the main character of both texts is an Afro-Swedish young man whose father came to Sweden as a refugee. Both the novel's protagonist Francis and Johannes Anyuru, who is the narrator and focalizer of the 2011 book, take notice of Africans they encounter in Madrid and Athens, respectively. In both cases the Africans are noticed because of their skin colour which is conspicuous in white European locations. The fictive character Francis and the narrator Anyuru are aware that their own skin colour distinguishes them from white Europeans. They are conscious of being gazed at and they gaze themselves at other Africans exploring those other "who look like me".

In *En civilisation utan båtar* the history of the slave trade and the First African Diaspora is evoked in a passage in which Anyuru reflects upon images in history books from his childhood: "I have a father, I have my childhood, I have the history books with pictures of *people who look like me* in chains." (34, my translation and italics). When discussing histories of traumatic ruptures and enforced separations from Africa, Stuart Hall uses the metaphor "The past continues to speak to us" (Hall 1997, 53). He emphasizes the differences between peoples of the African diaspora, but he also underlines the notion of sameness which is central in constructions of an imagined community of Africans of the diaspora. Despite differences, there are histories of transportation, slavery, colonization, and experiences of racism that are shared by a large number of people. This however does not constitute a common origin (Hall, 1997, 54).

There are also representations which negate ideas of an African imagined community, particularly in the work of writers who themselves have grown up in Africa and experienced war and the effects of bad leadership. One Swedish example is Sakina Ntibanyitesha who has written about the war and ethnic rivalry in the Congo which she has experienced personally (Ntibanyitesha 2012a; Ntibanyitesha 2012b). Another example is the internationally known Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma whose novel about an orphan boy who is forced to become a child soldier has been translated into several languages (Kourouma 2000).<sup>3</sup> As opposed to Ntibanyitesha and Kourouma, Anyuru was not born in Africa and he has not grown up there. The ideas of Africa that he has developed are the result of mediations, for example in the form of his father's stories, various media representations such as pictures of slaves in history books, and the sight of people he encounters whose skin colour reveals that they are of African descent.

When discussing the theme of "returning to Africa" in processes of identity formation, Stuart Hall emphasizes that there is no way that people of the African diaspora can go back in a literal sense, but that nevertheless Africa speaks through (and to) people of the diaspora through their skin colour (Hall, 1997, 55). Both Hall and Paul Gilroy underline that 'Africanness' is a category that is invented and transformed through cultural production related to African diasporas (Hall 1997; Gilroy 1993). In the case of Anyuru's literary writing this involves new images of 'Africanness' which deal with the issue of what Africa has become in the USA,

<sup>3</sup> Kourouma, *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000); English title, *Allah is not Obligated* (2007); Swedish title *Allah gör som han vill* (2002).

Europe and Sweden. One essential characteristic of these new images is that they present a hybridization of culture in which influences from diverse locations intermingle.

Apart from ‘rupture’ and ‘dislocation’ the term ‘diaspora’ may also denote “a postmodern intellectual notion that expresses existential dispersion” (Ponzanesi, 2004, XIV). Both when referring to spatial conditions of dislocation and intellectual and emotional notions of dispersion, the term is connected with a post-national or polynational space, characterized by diversity, flux and hybridity. In this kind of space identities and subject positions are fickle: “Multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed;” (Brah, 1996, 208; also see Yuval-Davis 2010). Furthermore the term ‘diaspora’ is used to denote interconnections between the emergence of new cultural identities and artistic forms of representation related to “the diaspora experience” (Hall, 1997, 58). Stuart Hall uses the term ‘diaspora aesthetic’ in order to describe the new artistic sensibilities which he sees as interconnected with the post-colonial experience (ibid.). With an example from the Caribbean, he concludes that it was not until the 1970s that an Afro-Caribbean identity became available. He relates this to the emergence of a new awareness among black and brown-skinned people who were descendants of slaves. At this historical moment according to Hall, Jamaicans “discovered themselves to be ‘black’” and to be the “sons and daughters of ‘slavery’” (Hall, 1997, 55). His point is that artistic representations are vital for the shaping of diasporic hybrid identities. In Anyuru’s case this implies explorations of coming to terms with the “discrepancy” of being black and Swedish and of finding forms of identification that do not rely on racist, nationalist binaries that construct Swedishness and blackness as mutually exclusive. In the sense that this may involve active explorations of “Africanness”, blackness and Islam, with the consequence that affiliations that affect identity formation are transformed, this also implies “becoming black” (see Wright 2004) and defining oneself as black.

Diaspora and identity formation is a theme theorized also by Paul Gilroy. He proposes that the concept of ‘diaspora’ is useful for “its ability to pose the relationship between ethnic sameness and differentiation: a *changing* same” (Gilroy, 1993, XI). The theme of sameness and differentiation is central in all anti-essentialist theories of identity formation. Although ‘identity’ is a contested concept as Yuval-Davis points out (Yuval-Davis, 2010, 261), notions of identity are still at the core of self-exploration, self-definition and explorations of group affiliations, imagined communities, belonging and home – all major themes in the writings of immigrant, migrant and second generation authors. While acknowledging the contested nature of the concept of ‘identity’, Yuval-Davis also advocates a refined use of the concept which would take into account the diverse and complex character of identity formation.

### **Black Self-Definition in a White World**

In both *Skulle jag dö under andra himlar* and *En civilisation utan båt* the focalizer ruminates upon the fact that ‘Africa speaks’ through his skin colour and that this may involve disadvantages. In the novel memories of having been subjected to racism and discrimination are filtered through the mind of the protagonist Francis, creating a

sense of uncertainty both in his understanding of himself and of the nature of his relation to community. A suspicion lurks in his mind that people he encounters might view him through a filter of racism and prejudice. In the 2011 book about Johannes Anyuru's trip to Athens in order to join Ship to Gaza, the narrator-focalizer Anyuru expresses hesitation about joining the activists as he is not sure of being seen as a Swede if Israeli soldiers should board the ship. He is well aware that his African descent is visible and that this may mean he would not be protected by his Swedishness: "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?" (9, my translation).

Both the novel and the book about the aborted voyage to Gaza use autobiographical material extensively, the latter more explicitly than the novel. Both books are about a young man with a Swedish mother and an African father. A recurring theme of the novel is the protagonist's mourning of friends who died, young men whom he grew up with. In *Skulle jag dö under andra himlar* the main character Francis mourns a friend who died of cancer, another who died from an overdose and a third who was killed in a shooting accident. By means of flashbacks, incidents which trouble Francis are brought into the story. As an adolescent he was a member of a youth gang in Borlänge, a small Swedish town, spraying graffiti, committing petty crimes and taking drugs. The memory of the deaths haunts Francis and he experiences sensations of loss and lack of meaning. To those who have followed Anyuru's work from his debut, this is well-known subject matter reflected in Anyuru's own life-story, known both from interviews and his literary writing.

### **Experiencing Belonging as a Swedish Muslim**

Like the main character of *Skulle jag dö under andra himlar*, Anyuru himself converted to Islam in 2007 and became a practising Muslim. The Muslim faith and the practising of Islam are prominent themes both of the 2010 novel and of *En civilisation utan båt*. In these texts Islam represents a positive element in the life of the protagonist Francis and the narrator Anyuru respectively. From the vantage point of Swedish mainstream culture a conversion to Islam represents a move away from what is conceived of as normality (Månsson, 2000, 259). It is not uncommon that dichotomies are established between the Muslim world and modern, secular or Christian, Sweden. This is the case for example in the rhetoric of the xenophobic party Sverigedemokraterna that is particularly hostile to Islam and Muslims. In a study of the Islamic presence in Europe it is pointed out 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). While this is true of depictions of Islam made from the vantage point of white, mainstream culture in Sweden and Europe, this is not the 'truth' depicted in Anyuru's texts.

Already in the first collection of poems, *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*, there is a depiction of a Muslim father preparing for evening prayer. He washes his hands, face, arms, ears, hair and feet. Carefully he shuffles the carpet over the floor so that

its direction corresponds to that of “kibblah.”<sup>4</sup> The calmness and serenity of this depiction of a black man practising Islam in a Swedish suburb concludes the collection. It stands out in relief to the beginning’s conjuring up of contemporary, urban, Americanized youth culture conveyed by the motto’s phrase “*keep your sword up nigga*” and the theme of young men fighting in the streets.

In the 2010 novel about Francis’ conversion to Islam and in the 2011 book about the aborted voyage to Gaza, the role of Islam in providing peace, a sense of meaning, and belonging is expanded. In both books the main character experiences belonging in transnational Islamic communities both in Sweden and at various locations in Europe where Muslims gather to pray. Islam is depicted as an element of the contemporary, transnational, global world and of the central character’s identity. In *Om jag skulle dö under andra himlar* Francis participates in evening prayer at a mosque in Madrid. When back in his home-town Gothenburg, he goes to a Muslim place of worship in the residential area of Hisingen. On the same street in an industrial area there are two Turkish Muslim prayer houses, as well as one Gambian and one Bosnian. The novel’s enumeration of the places of worship of various immigrant groups from Muslim parts of the world conjures up the creation of a ‘home’ and sense of belonging by migrant groups who have brought Islam to Sweden. In the novel and in the 2011 book, Muslim religious practices as well as the linking to Muslim communities function as positive counter-strategies to experiences of homelessness and lack of meaning. Both texts contribute to a redefinition of how myths of belonging may be shaped. In Bhabha’s words they conjure up “the starting-points of other national and international histories and geographies” (Bhabha, 2008, XX). The texts by Anyuru discussed in this article contribute to depicting intersections between the African Diaspora, migration and emerging migrant cartographies. References to Islam and the Quran function as elements in processes of self-exploration and identity formation, both which involve examining and coming to terms with the implications of ‘Africanness’ for a contemporary Afro-Swede.<sup>5</sup>

The process of black self-definition in a white world – a major theme of the autobiographical writing of black authors in the Diaspora (Anton, 2001, VII) – is central in Anyuru’s textual explorations of identity, belonging and home. When discussing black autobiographical writing, Chinosole emphasizes the emancipatory thrust of this mode of writing. She uses the term “functional aesthetic” for describing the combination of art and politics that she sees as characteristic of the literary works by the black authors she analyses (Chinosole, 2001, XIII). The theme of self-definition in the writings of black authors is explored against the backdrop of histories of slavery, colonialism, racism and a European philosophical tradition which has denied black people the status of being human. In this context self-definition is a struggle, connected with the issue of self-acceptance. Gazing on one’s own body and being gazed upon by others takes on specific meanings when the

<sup>4</sup> The term is usually spelled ‘kiblah’ and it refers to the direction of Mecca to which Muslims turn in prayer.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘Afro-Swede’, rather than ‘African-Swede’, as it corresponds to the term used by Afro-Swedes themselves, for example in the name of the NGO Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund (The National Association of Afro-Swedes).



person gazing, or being gazed at, is a black person in a predominantly white community. According to Chinosole, “Skin as representative of racial consciousness is a metonym for all Afrikans [sic.] from Egypt and South of the Sahara through the diaspora.”<sup>6</sup> (Chinosole, 2001,151). The theme of being black, of being visibly different in a predominantly white society, is explored both in Anyuru’s first novel and in the 2011 book about the stay in Athens. The protagonist Francis of the novel from 2010 ruminates upon whether he is subjected to racism due to his skin colour when he is denied a table at a restaurant in Madrid. In the 2011 book the narrator Anyuru expresses his concerns that he may not be perceived of as a Swede by Israeli soldiers if they were to board the ship. In both books the protagonist encounters people from Africa, black, or dark-skinned migrants, who to some extent look like him, but who also are different.

### Concluding remarks

Anyuru’s *Skulle jag dö under andra himlar* and *En civilisation utan båtar* depict a change of direction for the main character on an existential personal level through his conversion to Islam. While the first is a novel of conversion the second book depicts the role of Islam in the life of a young man who is a convert. As a Muslim the narrator Anyuru experiences community when praying with an Egyptian Muslim in Athens. There is a significant difference between Anyuru’s depiction of how Islam is experienced by Muslims themselves and accounts of how Islam is perceived by the majority society. For example research about women converts in Sweden has highlighted the converts’ experience of being seen as ‘traitors against Swedishness’ (“förrädare mot svenskhet”, Månsson, 2000, 261) and as being in favour of a collectivistic, traditional society which is seen as being in a binary relationship to modern, Swedish society cherishing values such as individualism (op. cit. 259). In a Swedish context depictions of Muslim spiritual practices and the integration of quotes from the Quran contribute to a redrawing of boundaries which have defined ‘Swedish normality’ as incompatible with Islam. Furthermore, these depictions function as examples of how appropriation of elements from the Islamic cultural sphere challenge and redefine boundaries of national belonging. By deconstructing mythologies of cultural homogeneity the texts contribute to the creation of new kinds of identities, belongings and aesthetics. In the world of the literary texts it is possible to be at home as a Muslim in present-day Sweden and to be integrated both within Swedish society and in transnational Muslim communities.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Chinosole ‘Afrikans’ is the newest term used to designate people of African descent: “denoting Africans from Egypt and South of the Sahara as well as in the diaspora, especially over the past five hundred years” (Chinosole, 2001, 161).

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### Summary

The article analyses deconstructions of the European construct from the vantage point of how skin colour, physical appearance and religion have been used for drawing boundaries between white, Christian Europe and the black, Muslim world. The analysis is based on literary texts by the Afro-Swedish author Johannes Anyuru. The article proposes that his first collection of poems from 2003, the first novel from 2010 and a multifaceted text from 2011, which is a kind of diary on the surface level,

contribute to the shaping of new notions of belonging, home and identity that challenge ideas of cultural purity and homogeneity. On the level of aesthetics the texts exemplify a diaspora aesthetic characterized by hybridization. This involves a mixture of elements from various stylistic registers and locations from within and outside Europe.

**Keywords:** Johannes Anyuru, Afro-Swedishness, diaspora aesthetics, hybridization, skin colour, Islam