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ABSTRACT

JUST/US: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF AFROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SPACES

by

Serian Jeng

The lived experiences of African immigrants in the Nordics are rich and complex, but the literature available on this population is lacking. To counter the deficit thinking and oppressive literature available on Africans in Norway, this paper is created to uplift the African community by highlighting the important work of the first Pan African youth organization in Norway Afrikan Youth in Norway (AYIN), our elders in the community, and other Africans in Norway while telling the stories through a critical lens. I used Africana Critical Theory to look at the growth, education, and identity formation of us, outside of the Eurocentric lens. This is drawn from critical thought and philosophical traditions rooted in the realities of continental and diasporan African history, culture, and struggles. This exploration includes interviews from former members of AYIN, with a focus on the experiences they had growing up, and the influence the youth organization had and still have in their lives. This inquiry is a celebration of us, the population in Norway that have over generations worked towards going beyond tolerance by the Norwegian society, towards inclusion and acceptance.

JUST/US: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF AFROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SPACES

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

Miami University in partial

fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational Leadership

by

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The Graduate School
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio

2023

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2023

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DEDICATION

To my late Mamma and Pappa
Jërejëf, Takk for alt

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express sincere gratitude to my academic advisor and friend Dr. Lisa Weems for her encouragement, understanding, and support throughout the years. My committee, Dr. Denise Taliaferro Baszile, Dr. Joel Malin, and Dr. Brian Schultz for seeing my vision, providing encouragement and guidance, thank you. I am forever grateful to Dr. Thomas Poetter for always providing great pep talks and help throughout my time at Miami University. To Cindie Ulreich and Virginia Phelps, my wonderful friends from the EDL office.

I am grateful to have such supportive friends and family and would like to thank my sisters Olimata Jeng and Aisatou Jeng for all the support, tough love, and patience. Without the two of you I would never have completed this project. My extended family here in Norway, I am eternally grateful for all the love and encouragement throughout the years. To my chosen sisters; Mercy Orleans-Fiaka, Nina Lappebakken, Amie Edvardsen, Muni Kwarasey, Haddy Jammeh, Della Jeng, Dominique Brown, and Timme Shisiali Boardman for keeping my spirits high and encouraging me throughout the process. To my chosen brothers Emile Kodjo John, Daniel Coleman, Craig Heard, Abdibasid Ali Mohamed, Balita Buhendwa, Philip Boardman, and Victor Orleans-Fiaka for cheering me on all these years, I appreciate you immensely. I love you all.

To my children, Adama Daniel, Ida, Serian, Noah, Theo, Omar, Sarah, Jesse Ese, Nora, Filip, Emily and Isak, although I did not give birth to you, I love you and I thank you for all the joy each of you have brought into my life.

To Baba Buntu, my first professor, my friend, and supporter. Thank you for all you have done, and still do for us.

To my elders in the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, and The Gambia, thank you for letting me stand on your shoulders. Thank you for being surrogates for me when my parents passed away, I appreciate every conversation, all the advice and reassurance.
To my guardian angels and grandparents who surround me spiritually, I am thankful for the protection and love you have provided. I am nothing without my heritage and ancestors, I am forever grateful.

Overview

This project is divided into five chapters.

Chapter one

The first chapter provides an introduction into who I am through the extension of my family, community, and heritage. Here I introduce the importance of understanding heritage in relation to who we are as immigrants in the Nordics. As African immigrants in the Nordics, there have been debates on labels for decades, and how we should be addressed. Without consensus, we are left being categorized in several ways. As foreign Norwegian beings, second-generation immigrant children, third culture kids, or Afropeans, we are now examining why these labels are important, and how they reflect the society we live in, who we are in it, and how our identity formation has been affected by it.

This chapter further discusses the themes that have colored our experiences growing up as Africans in Norway, or as Afropeans, how immigration has largely been viewed by social anthropologists in Norway with opposing views, and how those views are largely shared among the Norwegian population, policy, and institutions. In this first chapter I also introduce Afrikan Youth in Norway, the first Pan-African youth organization in Norway. This organization also known as AYIN was fundamental in my identity formation as an African youth living in Norway. AYIN is the central focus of this paper as it was the blueprint to everything that has been established by Africans in Norway since. This organization is important because of the activism work, the safe space, and the educational space it provided for youth and adults in the Oslo area in the 90s and 2000s. Through its activities, AYIN was able to spearhead the socio-political agenda of our community, as Africans in Norway dealing with issues of oppression, discrimination, and racism.

Chapter two

The second chapter allows for an understanding of the literature reviewed with regards to the African population in Norway, youth studies, as well as background and history of Afrikan Youth in Norway (AYIN). This chapter helps to clarify the importance and need for further inquiry into this underreported population. The literature review offers definitions of concepts concerning the population, beginning with the understanding of transnational youth in the

context of Norway. Growing up in Norway as immigrant youth, we lacked representation, understanding, and the opportunity to integrate our home cultures with the dominant ethnic Norwegian culture. This chapter continues to look at the history of African populations in Norway, who the first large non-European immigrant populations were, and the reasons for their immigration, also a short overview of the immigration stop of 1975. The literature also looks at the concepts of race in the context of Norway, as well as the understanding of coloniality as it relates to the history of Norway. This highlights how language determines how the ethnic Norwegian culture understand Africans, and how this creates tension when examining issues of discrimination and oppression. There is not much literature written on the African population in Norway, however, there are some resources found regarding AYIN as an organization, and why the group was so instrumental in the strengthening of the African community in Norway. The murder of Benjamin Hermansen in 2001 was one of the most devastating events in the history of immigrants in Norway. This case became very important in the understanding of hate speech, and acts of racially fueled violence in Norway, something that created a greater understanding and awareness of racial issues in Norway, especially by the population that were mostly affected, African youth. AYIN worked on offering an Africa-centered curriculum through creating educational spaces where African history, activism work, and empowerment were central topics.

This chapter highlights how African immigrants understand the spaces we occupy, how we create hybrid identities as extensions of our heritage cultures, mixed with our national identities within Norway. The second chapter also shows how little literature is available on the topic of Afropean people in Norway, and how much there is a need for further addition to these topics, especially qualitative inquiry, reported by the Afropean population.

Chapter three

Chapter three introduced the methodology used and gives context and clarity to why autoethnography is the method of choice for this inquiry. Through Autoethnography, the stories of the African community in Norway were contextualized through the memories of former Afrikan Youth in Norway members, as well as my own experiences and memories. Collectively, we looked back on growing up within the youth organization, and the impact the organization had on us during those years, especially how the African-centered curriculum impacted our

understanding of self, within the context of Norway. And how AYIN continues to shape us as adults, the lasting impact.

Through Africana Critical Theory, I used the lens of Norway as Diaspora, understanding how I see myself not only as an individual, but as a part of a larger diasporic community. This chapter considers the ethical implications of looking within my African community as participants, how our relationships might cause complications within the process of data collection, but also how beneficial it is to be an insider/outsider in the process of reconnecting with this community, especially during the pandemic (Brown, 2012). Looking at the data collection process, as well as the data processing, the pandemic became a very important factor. As the data collection and sorting happened during the pandemic, this chapter discusses how the world event shaped how the data was collected and analyzed. This chapter also includes a personal exploration of how the pandemic played a part in how communication between the myself and the participants shifted, how some of the methods intended to use were unachievable because of the physical restrictions that were in place, and how I pivoted to continue in the process.

Chapter four

Chapter four gives insight to the Afrikan Youth in Norway population, their stories, interlaced with mine, to contextualize the meaning of growing up African in Norway. In this chapter I introduce my participants. Muni from Ghana, Olimata from Gambia, Abdibasid from Somali, and Serge Balita from Rwanda/Congo. The participants were all members/leaders/youth leaders in AYIN during the late 1990s, early 2000s. Muni who was a part of the conception of the organization gave me insight that I was unaware of. She described the void this organization filled initially as a space where, as she put it "debriefing…like bereavement counseling" took place. Through her time in the Nordic black theatre, she experienced the young African people would naturally meet up and share grievances, experiences of racism and discrimination, and they realized the need to come together and create safe spaces. Muni describes how AYIN changed her view of self, her views of raising a young black man, and how activism work could change Norway for the better.

Olimata joined the organization as an adult. She was also looking for a space to feel included and safe and was able to do that while taking care of the youth and being a resource for the younger generation. For her, she realized her unawareness of African history, both from the continent, and the history of Africans in Norway, something she learned through the African history curriculum of AYIN. Olimata felt validated through exploring similar experiences with other Africans in the organization and became aware of the biases she experienced earlier in life through these revelations.

Abdibasid, coming to Norway as a refugee had a different experience. He highlighted experiences from school that most African Norwegians would resonate with. He talked about acts of microaggressions from fellow pupils and teachers, while also reflecting on how much the AYIN curriculum shaped him as a father and psychotherapist today. Abdibasid also credits AYIN for allowing him to connect with youth from different African countries, something he had limited experiences with from before.

Balita remembered the sense of community he felt within the organization, the way in which AYIN helped with every aspect of the youth when in need, providing emotional support, educational assistance, even within the traditional school setting. Similar to the other participants, Balita looked back at the lack of history education in school, and how vital the supplementary education from AYIN became a lifechanging event for him.

Together with the participants I shared stories that resonated with them as they reminded me of the time we spent together in the organization. The conversations had with the participants evoked epiphanies of togetherness, resilience, and activism work, but also made us collectively aware of the foundation AYIN provided us with, and how each of these participants use what they learned through the organization today in their work.

Chapter five

The final chapter lays out a conclusion, and further thoughts on how this paper can be enriching to the community and add to the literature about Afropean populations in the global north. Reflecting on AYIN, the people who made it special, and the importance of community engagement of Afropeans, this final chapter will discuss how AYIN has laid the foundation for many organizations, groups, and social spaces in our local community today. Through the legacy

of AYIN, we have seen activism work continue, often by alumni members, but also by the younger generation that were not in the organization. We have also experienced an "consulting elders" culture, where the alumni support the younger generation, provides guidance and support, while uplifting them.

Adinkra symbols

Adinkra symbols, native to West Africa, more specifically Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire are symbols traditionally used on cloth to cultural gatherings and funerals by the Akan people or Gyaman people (Asante & Mazama, 2009). These symbols represent sayings, fables, or African proverbs often through images resembling fauna, human interaction, shapes, and animals. I recollect seeing these symbols all through my life, and find them fitting as anchors to my chapters, using symbols from the continent, which are more than just words, but proverbs that carries the essence of being West African. I use these symbols as a way of honoring my heritage, staying connected to my continent, and expressing myself in a way that feels familiar to me/us.

Chapter I - Introduction

Aya – Fern. The fern is a hardy plant that can grow in difficult places. “An individual who wears this symbol suggests that he has endured many adversities and outlasted much difficulty.” (Willis, The Adinkra Dictionary)

Who am I?

“When I first heard it, it encouraged me to think of myself as whole and unhyphenated: Afropean. Here was a space where Blackness was taking part in shaping European identity at large. It suggested the possibility of living in and with more than one idea: Africa and Europe, or, by extension, the Global South and the West, without being mixed-this, half-that or Black-other. That being Black in Europe didn’t necessarily mean being an immigrant.” (Pitts, 2019. p. 1)

Figure 1Family photo ca 1983. (Author's photo)

The question ‘who are you?’ is perhaps one of the most complex and frustrating questions I was asked growing up African in Norway. It is rarely a question to determine your hometown, or if you are far away from home, it is unequivocally a question of ‘why are you Black?’ This question usually appears in the sequence of encountering someone like me in person; a 5’10, African woman with locked hair and deep-toned dark skin, who speaks Norwegian fluently, and shares the Norwegian stoic posture and mannerisms. The question of my origin then becomes more puzzling, as people, still in Norway, do not expect someone who looks like me to be Norwegian. There is an expectation of a more exotic lunch box, certainly not crispbread, and brown goat’s cheese; or that I would celebrate Christmas differently, surely not traditionally Norwegian. The question then, of why are you Black? becomes an attempt to dig deeper into how you came to be in Norway; The premise on which your parents made it to Scandinavia; Whether you were adopted and brought to Norway by a white family; Were you married to a Norwegian, then transplanted? These personal questions and probes into other people's lives have become somewhat normalized in Norwegian society, but in the quest to understanding ourselves as foreign Norwegian beings, second-generation immigrant children, third culture kids, or Afropeans are now examining why these questions are important, and how they reflect the society we live in, who we are in it, and how our identity formation has been affected by it.

A third culture kid/individual has been defined by Pollock and Van Reken (2009) as

> *A person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture…. [He/she] builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into [his/her] life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.* (p. 13)

All these definitions are important in understanding us as a community, however, I will use Afropean and African youth as descriptive terms for our community and use people of color in the grander concepts of all immigrant children (including other minority populations from Asia, and South America).

I spent most of my young life as an African girl in rural Norway, wondering why *I* had to be the different one. Every ethnic Norwegian person I knew had extended families nearby, a family cabin in the mountains, and a sense of belonging and ownership to the country. They experienced having their teachers look like them, the bus drivers, the newscaster, and the dolls and Barbies as well. Kids in my class had appointments at the hairdresser, that was something I never had. Everyone around me felt ownership of their culture because they lived within their parent's culture, and they were all part of a homogenous space which I was in the margins of.

My grandparents were not nearby, and we did not take trips to cabins in the mountains. If we did, it was because we were invited, not because we owned anything within that experience. Whenever a trip like this would occur, it felt somehow like an invitation to become more "normal", it instead felt at that moment very alienating, artificial perhaps, as it brewed this underlying conversation of assimilation. It felt like a charity offering, that "poor African family don't have access to cabins, and Norwegian traditions, let's help them become more like us." I would return to school after such a holiday, unaware of this undertone feeling included, as I could also talk about my trip to the mountains. For a week or so after a trip, I would feel like I belonged.

The question, then, of who you are becomes layered with self-doubt, and confusion, as I am born in Norway, from Gambian parents, but feel neither one nor the other.

The Other

Figure 2 Kroer Skole Elementary school picture. (Author's photo, 1989)

I grew up in a small village in the eastern part of Norway called Kroer, which is in a town called Ås. We lived in a new construction development, in the first house my parents were able to purchase; it was a side-by-side duplex, two-story, three bedrooms, two bathrooms with a beautiful garden my parents nurtured meticulously. Anyone who is a foreigner in their home country understands this; the house was a hybrid home. Our home culture was not Norwegian enough, or Gambian enough, but an absolute blend of the two cultures. It was also a monument of how my parents understood and remembered Gambian, or more specifically Wolof and Aku ethnic cultures, and their personal upbringings, replicating their values and understanding of their home cultures in this new house. Our house smelled of spices, herbs, and incense, giving you the sense of entering a home in the Gambia. As we weaved in and out of languages, speaking Wolof with injections of Norwegian words, and English intonations, we truly had a hybrid home. The

soundtrack in our house in Kroer was a blend of Fela Kuti, Youssou N'Dour, and Otis Redding blasting at any time from the massive stereo system strategically placed near the television, creating the epic entertainment center of the living room. At the time, as a young girl, I had no understanding of how complicated this really was; the complexities of being a young girl, navigating these spaces, being multilingual, Afropean, and different from all my peers.

I tell these stories of my childhood as a part of my journey to remember and examine my own, like many other Afropean individuals, lived experiences, and how we have negotiated being considered immigrants in our own countries. This is important on different levels; this work adds to the work that exists, although sparse on this population.

My review of existing literature confirmed that that qualitative research on African immigrants in Norway is scarce. As Mainsah notes:

> Most research on African Diasporas has focused mainly on the particularities of peoples of African ancestry in the Americas, and Africans in European countries that were former colonial powers. Thus, there is a need for more research that focuses on the particularities of those communities that lie outside of these three nodes of the Atlantic triangle. (2014. p. 108)

Mainsah suggests that if people of color are barely present in scholarly literature, it begs the question of whether our contributions have been deemed insufficient, or just unimportant, and therefore are missing from the Norwegian curriculum. He continues:

> Migrants in general and people of African ancestry in particular constitute a rather heterogeneous group of people with different sexual and gendered subjectivities, class, backgrounds and migration trajectories, yet upon entry into the Norwegian society, are confronted by a multitude of discourses that attempt to homogenize them into disempowering and marginal subjectivities vis-à-vis the Norwegian society. (p. 109)

This homogenizing of people of color in Norway have created broad descriptive terms used not only for people who have immigrated to Norway, but to include people who were born in the country but do not necessarily fit into what the Norwegian society would accept as Norwegian. These categories, according to Mainsah; "'immigrant', 'refugee', 'Muslim', 'fremmed kulturelle'

foreign cultured and 'African' are in the Norwegian context culturalized terminology that are often used to rationalize their alienation and their status as the Other in Norwegian society despite the fact that most of them were born and grew up in Norway." (2014. p. 109). Loftsdóttir & Jensen, (2012) elaborate on this notion of Othering in the Nordic countries, focusing predominantly on Sweden, while stating:

> In contemporary Sweden, being white means being Swede and being non-white means being non-Swedish regardless if the non-white person is culturally Swedish and was born or grew up and have lived most of her life in Sweden. This means that the difference between the bodily concept of race and the cultural concept of ethnicity has collapsed in a contemporary Swedish context. (p. 45).

Like in Sweden, we experience being non-Norwegian and often push back with new terminologies such as Afropean, instead of just African or immigrant. These attempts to solidify, and perhaps take ownership of how we are identified does not diminish the fact that we are non-Norwegians, just like the non-Swedes.

Our lived experiences need to be explored as a way of diversifying the current literature and understanding of the Afropean population in Norway, as well as fostering a greater understanding of what it means to be African in Norway under the cultural context that the Norwegian society has imposed upon us as people. By continuing to broaden what it means to be Norwegian, the Othering of people of color will become a question that should be addressed. While Statistisk Sentralbyrå (Statbank - Statistics Norway), the main statistical agency in Norway often releases research on minority populations, they are often quantitative, and represent the outliers in our society. It is either focusing on the challenges, or the triumphs within our society; those who are academically brilliant, or those who are not thriving or integrating into Norwegian society. This continues to reinforce the homogenous view of us, which in turn continues to marginalize us. Seldom are we able to hear the stories

of us, how we feel, think, and grow in a place that is native and foreign at the same time.

Afrocentricity

Being born to immigrant parents in Norway has equipped me with a sense of self that I spent much of my life ignoring or taking for granted. My vantage point of the world has always been from an African perspective, without really realizing or understanding what that means. As I tell stories of my upbringing, my youth, and who I am today because of it, I am unable to extract anything that is not centered around my African heritage, my history, my legacy.

> Afrocentricity conveys African peoples' sense of the world and of their existence and provides an epistemological tool to deal with social and cultural manifestations either from a cultural/aesthetic, social/behavioral, or even a political/functional perspective, in search for the foundations of African identity. (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014 p. 4)

Born into a clan of griots, my father's side of the family are considered the storytellers of the Wolof people of Gambia, Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania. The job descriptions for griots are as historians, storytellers, praise singers, genealogists, advisors, mediators, and spokespeople among other important community duties. Although my family have long stopped practicing their griot duties, I experienced our griots praise singing my parents at a marriage ceremony and the emotions felt through that moment. As the praise singer looked my father in his eyes while she, without an introduction, called upon my father's great-great grandparents, then his great grandparents, and so forth. I saw my father, who was looking back at the praise singer in awe of the history he was being reminded of while wiping tears from his eyes. He got up from his seat to join the praise singer in her slight dance, swinging from side to side while praising him he reached to his wallet to shower her with money, as a sign of appreciation of her knowledge, the beauty in her voice, and to show support of those keeping our history safe.

I think of that praise singer often. It was the combination of seeing her approach someone, just by looking at them, knowing what home they belong to, knowing who their family is, and being able to, in chronology, tell their stories back to them. It might have been the most beautiful story I've ever experiencing being told or sang. Through the telling of the history, the praise singers often add a personality trait, or a descriptive term that relates to the person they are telling a story about, something that will anchor the person in the story. I doubt I will ever be a storyteller like her, but every time I think of my community, our history, and who we are as

Africans in Norway, I think about the importance of our story, and that we should tell it. I know there is something in me, the griot in me has allowed me to tell our story, hoping that capturing stories, memories, and naming our community members will memorialize our African history in Norway.

> Endowed with a potential for liberation from every form of oppression, Afrocentricity challenges the contemporary social thought as designed by the West and affords as many multifarious approaches as experiences that shape the lives and cultures of peoples rooted in their African values. (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014, p. 33).

Without being raised to praise sing or tell oral histories, the values I grew up with are rooted in Africanness, I understand the world through the lens of Afrocentricity, it is the center of my thought, my language, the way I love, and how I understand my experiences. Through Afrocentricity, I tell the stories of African people in Norway, how we learn, live, and create community with African values, knowledge, and history.

Without having the language to name it, Afrikan Youth in Norway youth organization had Afrocentricity as the foundation for the curriculum. Monteiro-Ferreira (2014) describes Afrocentricity as "It provides a method to deal with social and cultural manifestations either from a cultural and aesthetic perspective, a social or behavioral, and a political/functional one, in search for the foundations of African agency and identity" (p. 105).

Home

By the time I was 10 years old, I had seen three of my four grandparents. My mother's parents, and my father's mother. My mother's mother whom I was named after was called Auntie Sarian. She was a five-foot even strong-willed, a bit shy, but very hardworking woman. Her nickname was Aunty Bola, and she spent her life raising children, her own and as a nursery schoolteacher, many others. Aunty Bola struggled most of her life, worked hard to make ends meet, but had nine children of her own, who she did everything she could for. By the time she reached her 50s, Aunty Bola was tired, and her health was reduced significantly. She moved to Norway to live with us for a while, to get her health monitored, and to spend time with her oldest daughter, my mother Sainabou, and her grandchildren. Having Aunty Bola live with us felt euphoric. I finally understood what my peers experienced, this love that reached deeper than the

love you received from your parents. She would look at me as if I was perfect, regardless of what I did, or was going through, she could fix it. Finally, I felt again like I belonged. I would go to school and talk about my grandmother, like all the other kids, in a matter-of-factly, nonchalant way. Aunty Bola was always at home, in the time she spent with us. Looking back, she might not have lived with us for a long period of time, but I fell in love with her being there, I could not remember life before her. We used to come home to an empty house, but with Aunty Bola there, the front door was always unlocked, food was always prepared, and hugs were abundant once you got home. As children, we do not understand the pressures placed upon our immigrant parents to provide for their extended families back in their home countries. My parents always sent a portion of their paychecks to their siblings, aunts, uncles, or other family members for their needs. They likely felt obligated, but it was also something they wanted to do, as they often felt like they were given opportunities that some of their siblings did not have. This I later understood as part of colonialism; the way in which my parents moved across the world, due to the lack of opportunities in their home country. The drive to "make it" in Europe was strong because they had families in the Gambia depending on their success to live and thrive.

My parents were always working, so this luxury of having a grandmother in the home eased a burden for them as well, something I did not understand until much later. My parents were working, studying, and sending migrant remittance, maintaining several households in the Gambia, something most immigrant children can relate to. I often wondered why families around us could afford trips around the world and nice new cars, especially because our parents had the same type of jobs and lived in the same type of homes. I did not understand the responsibilities they had, that they could not just earn for themselves and their children, because their siblings' children were their children, and their siblings were their responsibility. This would then make it easier to understand why we did not own multiple homes, cabins, boats, and fancy cars, because the culture they came from was rooted in the collective, and not in the individual's ability to succeed financially. We were never a nuclear family, because that is not terminology conducive to the Gambian way of life. This meant that our home in Kroer was never just our home, but that anyone that came had the right to rehome me to my older sister's room, and shared the responsibility of raising us, disciplining us, cooking with us, and living as an extended family unit.

I also did not see how much comfort my mother found in having her mother with her, and what that meant for her life in a country she was still trying to navigate, find her place, and be accepted. Having Aunty Bola there made my parents feel like a slice of the Gambia was there, in their house. They were able to talk about things we (the children) had no concept of, but they also were able to practice the traditional roles of parents and children, how they live in the Gambia, in multigenerational homes, where the elder is the source of knowledge, encouragement, love, and wisdom. They were also able to model behavior they wanted to instill in us as their children. We developed our language skills during this time, being that Aunty Bola is from the Aku people of the Gambia, she spoke Creole, but also Wolof and English. To communicate with her, we had to brush up on the very elementary language skills we had learned from our parents to speak with her. We learned about how to treat our elders, how to be grandchildren, but most of all, we learned how to look after our parents when they grow old or ill, something I did not know at the time, but became very helpful as we cared for our mother for years before her passing.

The Afropean griot

Figure 3 Parents' first year in Norway together. (Author's photo, 1976)

Being an African diasporic person in Norway, the stories and history of us as Afropean is strengthened by our understanding of self, as well as the understanding of the world around us (Dei, 2010. p. 2). Therefore, I find it pertinent to tell the stories of my parents first, because in my story, who I am, often begins with where my parents came from, and where their parents come from. Understanding the importance of African history as a way of knowing the self, and understanding the world in which we live, are central to my story. To understand the complexities of living and growing up in a predominantly white space, it is important to inquire about the history of our people, and the journey which led us, here, today.

Imagine a place so unaccustomed, you lock yourself in a room to look in the mirror just to see someone familiar. A place so barren of anything recognizable that you speak loudly to yourself, just to hear your beloved native tones. That is an experience most of us are spared, but that is the story of Norway, for my father, in the spring of 1974. Terrified of losing himself, while leaving everything behind for his education, his promise of a new and perhaps "better

life”. My father used to sit in his student housing room, in complete silence, then start a conversation, on his own, just to hear his native tongue. He found comfort in pointing at items in his room, and saying the name in Wolof, partly for his fear of losing the language, but mostly because he was alone, in a space where no one really understood. His dream was of being an artist, a painter, but dreaming was for those with an abundance of opportunity. Being a painter in a place like Gambia sees you living from hand to mouth, success within the arts is reserved for old white people, not Gambians. Living off your art would require you to have a market stall or sell to the tourists on the beach, not a career, not for someone who was brilliant and had the capacity to learn from a European institution. My father could not afford that dream, his reality was cold, dark, and Nordic. The thought was to provide a “better” life for his family, a Western concept of success, because he was “just” a teacher in the Gambia, someone saw the potential in him to become more.

My father met a Norwegian man in Gambia who suggested he pursuit a higher education, he was from the Rotary Club and invited my father to apply to become an international student. He applied for a Rotary Club scholarship to study Agriculture at a small community college in a town in southern Norway called Lyngdal. My father would often tell stories of how lonely he was before the arrival of my mother, as he was unfamiliar with the Norwegian language, and the Norwegians were unfamiliar with him. The average Norwegian at the time were not proficient in the English language either, nor had they seen anyone that looked like him in their lives, making him feel alone and alienated. He missed his home, his family, the food, and the communal living he had left behind. He was lonely and being newly married and having a young son in the Gambia, made being far away more challenging for him.

Unlike my father who moved for an education, my mother moved for love. She arrived in Norway on April 16, 1976, and gave birth to my older sister on April 16, 1977. I like to say that my parents had a romantic love story; They were so in love that they would have followed each other into pits of lava, but instead, they followed each other into mounds of snow. My mother had a hard time adjusting. Unlike my father, my mother became a mother at the age of 17 and had little formal education past high school. She was a hard worker who could do anything she set her mind to, but in a sleepy little seaside village, that was peeling shrimps on a factory floor, getting paid by the kilo. She told the story often, being the only African woman in the factory,

coming from a receptionist job at a hotel in Gambia, she had long nails and was accustomed to dressing up and sitting behind a desk all day. The reality of a cold and uninviting factory floor left her in tears most days, not having colleagues to talk to (as they did not speak much English), feeling alone, and not succeeding in earning much as she was a slow shrimp peeler. She stayed at the factory job while my father was finishing up his first degree, to make ends meet, and to stay occupied in this very lonely place.

My older sister was the first African baby born at Farsund Sykehus (Farsund Hospital) in Lyngdal, Norway. She was the only African child in her elementary school, and had to endure many firsts as a child, something many of us that came after her are eternally grateful for. She encountered racism, discrimination, and alienation at a very early age, at birth to be precise. Her birth was announced over the radio, as she was the first African baby born to the hospital in Farsund. Her arrival drew a crowd of people who came to see this unfamiliar creation. People lined up outside the nursery to see this African baby for themselves. According to my mother, one lady leaned over my sister's hospital bassinet, licked her cheek, matter-of-factly, "just to see whether she tasted like chocolate". This act of entitlement towards a newborn child, because of her ethnicity was unsettling, disrespectful, and extremely intruding at the time, but in retrospect, it was racist and vile. People today gasp when told this story, as my mother never really reacted publicly to this unfortunate event. But if we look very closely at some experiences immigrants have had in Norway, we have all had our cheeks licked in one way or another. The exoticizing of women of color is one of those ways. I have personally experienced being touched without consent, both my skin and hair. I have been asked how much I cost, commodifying my Black body for personal amusement, as well as having medical professionals attribute illnesses or aches to me being of African descent.

These extremely disrespectful, intrusive, and unsettling acts along with my father's early memories of feeling isolated are clear examples of immigrant experiences in Norway. Over the years the racism and discrimination has manifested in different ways, alienating immigrants, and creating a divide between the non-Norwegians, and Norwegians, promoting an "us" and "them" culture. My parents were not compliant in this situation, but their silence, perhaps, confusion and shock were taken as such. The understanding of privilege and power were not in the forefront of my mother's mind as a person who had just given birth a year after moving to a different

continent. In an attempt to not seem like the "hostile immigrants" they remained quiet, highly uncomfortable, not wanting to alienate themselves even more, although that was essentially exactly what was going on, they were Othered. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects. (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 156)

Figure 4 Mother and sister at Farsund Hospital, April 16, 1977 (Author's photo, 1977)

Marianne Gullestad (2002), a late social anthropologist from Norway expanded and critiqued on the need for Norwegian culture to maintain an "us" and "them" culture, naming a perceived threat to the Norwegian welfare state, and the Norwegian need to protect and defend the "Norwegian culture" (p. 53). This, she states, comes from the idea that the culture is complete, and therefore should not change or expand to fit the whole population (p. 53). This means that anything out of the "ordinary" becomes strange and distant, especially when it concerns immigrants. To delve deeper into the idea of Norwegian culture being perceived as complete, Gullestad analyzes the work of a Norwegian social anthropologist, Unni Wikan, who has been criticized for her views on immigrants, and how the Norwegian government practices *snillisme,* or "foolish generosity" in English, towards immigrant women, particularly (p. 51). Wikan criticizes immigrants in Norway, stating "'My opinion is that one is not Norwegian in practice (*i gavnet*), only in name (*i navnet*), if one has a Norwegian passport, but distances oneself from fundamental Norwegian values and not learn Norwegian' (Wikan 1995*a*: 177-85)."

(p. 54). This further solidifies the “us” and “them” culture in Norway. By looking at immigrants as “guests who arrived uninvited (*uinnbudt*)...” (p. 54), she is stating that the host should be able to act as they please, especially if the guests do not conform. I believe this ideology allowed people to rush to the hospital nursery where my older sister was because as hosts to uninvited guests, there is no need for permission because as a guest, you are expected to be polite and accommodating. This also means that as hosts, they decide what is relevant to teach children, and what is important to celebrate. Uninvited guests, as we are according to Wikan, often relay this feeling of being uninvited, as we are often made to feel invisible. Wikan’s (ideas of “us” and “them” also allows for ethnic Norwegians to view immigrants and immigration as only being temporary, as she refers to immigrants as guests.

Wikan’s views on immigrants are not solitary or unfamiliar to most immigrants, as I remember growing up regularly trying to be as invisible as possible, in an attempt to fit in and become more Norwegian. I believe my parents did the same as they made an effort to master the Norwegian language, they both cooked traditional Norwegian food for us at home, and even bought us traditional Norwegian clothes for celebratory events. It is now evident to me that my parents struggled with raising children in Norway, as for every Norwegian meal cooked, there was a Gambian one the following day, as if to create balance and reiterate the importance of our own culture. The rule in our house was to speak Wolof, my parent's language, and to always respond in the language you were addressed in. As much as they hoped that we would become Norwegians, they wanted us to be Gambian as well, have Gambian values, understand the language, and love the culture and food. Our home became a space of fusion, or an Afropean, diasporic space where cultures were blended, but also preserved, as we created a new way of living, attempting to blend the Norwegian and Gambian to exist harmoniously.

After years of studying and receiving his Ph.D. in 1991, my father was offered a position at the National Agricultural Research Institute in The Gambia. My parents embraced the opportunity for their children to learn about Gambian culture, traditions, and to get acquainted with the extended family. My older sister, myself, and our youngest sister, who was not actually born at the time, were all set to move, my older brother decided to stay in Norway, as he had just become a father for the first time.

We lived in The Gambia for four years, from 1994 to 1998, and in 1998, I was due to start Senior Secondary School or High School in Norway. After much consideration, my parents decided that the best thing to do was for me to move to Norway and stay with my brother while they stayed in the Gambia, as my father was concluding his project at the National Agricultural Research Institute in Gambia.

Moving back to Norway was overwhelming, and quite daunting. We had spent years in The Gambia speaking a hybrid language at home consisting of Norwegian, English, and Wolof for the past four years. I had attended school in a British Commonwealth country, with standardized tests that were adapted from the British school system. We wore Catholic school uniforms, and were taught in English, as the only language permitted on school grounds. It took me months to acclimate to school life in The Gambia, and having lived in Norway all my young life, I had until moving to the Gambia only known of a very liberal progressive educational system where play was an educational tool, and resources were in abundance. Towards the end of my stay in the Gambia, I had acclimated to the Gambian school culture of rigor, and the school culture in Ndow's Comprehensive Middle School had become the norm. I became highly competitive as "one of the top students". I learned how to fit in, code switch, to mute my foreignness by being a good pupil. Coming into the Gambian school, I was the strange, and very awkward girl from abroad, but once I learned how to compete in class, I became the "smart girl" and no longer the "foreign girl". After mastering how to maneuver in The Gambia, moving back to Norway became frightening and challenging as a 16-year-old. It became evident that the Gambian school system also had little interest in teaching African history. Our curriculum consisted mainly of World War I and II, the European revolutions, yet nothing about our own continent or country of origin, something to be expected as a British Commonwealth Country and a former colonized country. We spent our days solving mathematics problems where counting apples and pears were used, instead of oranges and mangoes; we were stuck with a curriculum made for British children, not for us. In retrospect, it is evident that even former colonized countries must battle with the same identity issues Afropean children are faced with. The lack of representation in school leaves pupils wanting to be part of the dominant culture, contributing to the perpetuation of the West as more desirable than the Global South.

In August of 1998, I entered my first year at Stabekk Videregående Skole (High School), located in the Upper West suburbs of Bærum, on the outskirts of Oslo. The school was small, one main L-shaped schoolhouse with a second attached physical education building. Students at Stabekk were known for being wealthy, casually sporting Versace Moon Boots and Fendi purses to school daily, owning luxury condos, and cars, despite not being legally able to drive until the age of 18. These young adults had a culture that was vastly different from mine, not only because of my experience living away but because I was from a small farm town, nearly an hour away from Stabekk, where designer clothes and fancy cars were not part of life. Trying to transplant myself into this new place without being able to conform to the extravagant ways of living was challenging. As an outsider, I realized that this school would be a challenge for me. Not only did I move from The Gambia back to Norway, but I was accepted into one of the most elitist schools in the region. My skin color had not been of importance for the duration of my stay in The Gambia, and returning to Norway, I was reminded not only of my ethnicity, but also my social class. During the two years at Stabekk, I experienced extreme alienation. I was unfamiliar with the curriculum taught, while my classmates seamlessly went from middle school to high school, continuing where they left off the previous school year. My culture shock, perhaps even homesickness was clouding my school experience as I had not quite entered the same teenage phase as my Norwegian classmates. I went from being comfortable in Gambia, attending an upper-middle class school, to being a working-class girl at an upper-class school. My intersectional identities were solidifying my place in this space, I was a stark contrast to my fellow school mates. This was not only lonely but became the driving force towards finding people I could connect with, people who understood me, and had similar life experiences.

Purpose of study

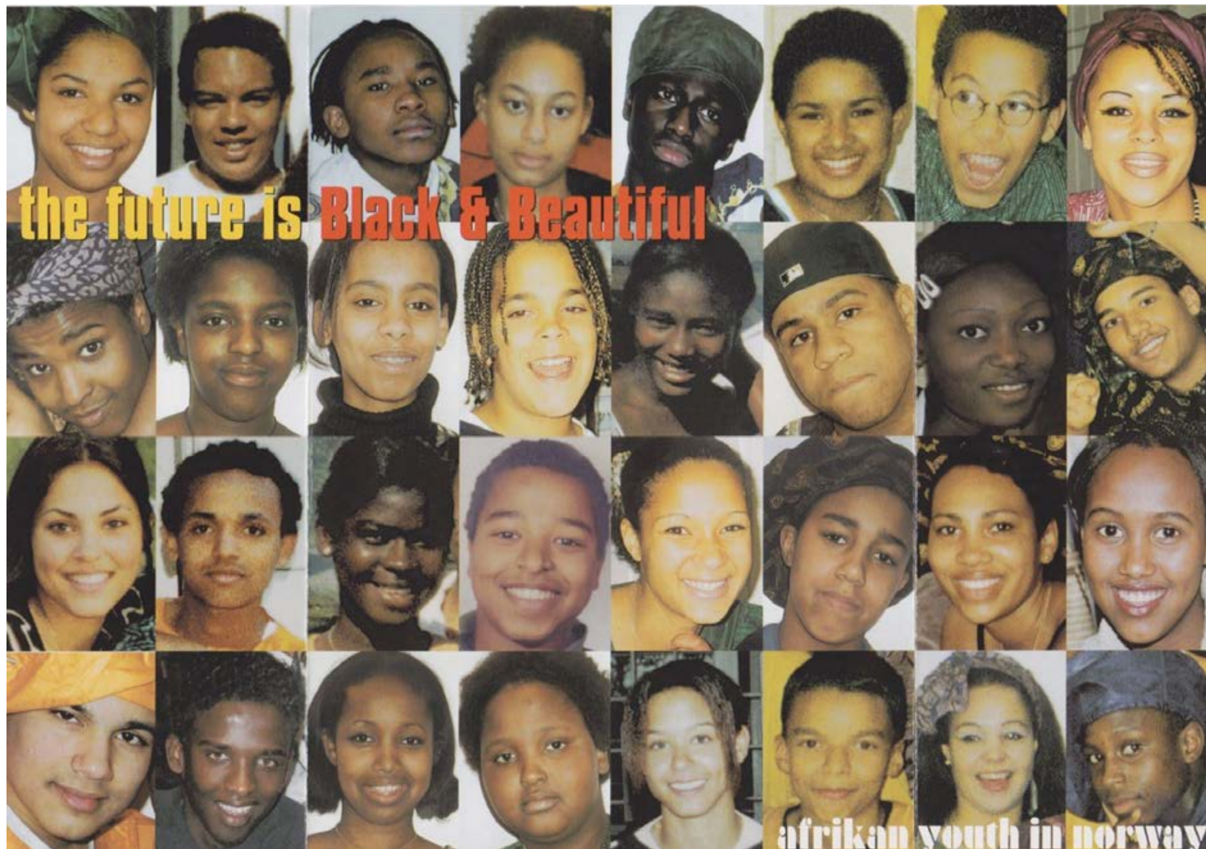

Figure 5 Afrikan Youth in Norway pamphlet (Author's photo)

The purpose of this study is to tell my story, which is also the collective story of Afropean youth. To tell this story, I interweave my autobiographical experiences enriched by other members of the African community in Norway. I use autoethnography as methodology and draw from the conceptual frameworks of diasporic and critical youth studies to investigate and represent this collective story. "Autoethnography is a qualitative method—it offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people." (Adams et al., 2014b, p. 21). In the center of my story is my youth, and the youth organization that made me who I am today - Afrikan Youth in Norway (AYIN). Afrikan Youth in Norway (AYIN) created a diasporic space for Afropean youth and adults to belong. This organization is in the center of my story because it matters to my community, and to me/us. This space allowed us to practice empowerment, resistance, and civic engagement through supplementary education of African history. Through my self-discovery, and conversations with other past members, I will examine how the lack of

representation in the formal Norwegian school curriculum affected us as young adults, and how this has influenced our own world view and identity as Afropeans in Norway. I hope my explorations will provide a better understanding of how people from Africa, and the African diaspora in Norway actively create and maintain diasporic social spaces. By collaborating with my participants, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of accessible African history education for Afropeans in Norway. Our history is important to not only celebrate our perseverance, but to shed light on the lack of reform for a more culturally inclusive curriculum.

I will use the terminologies diaspora and transnational community interchangeably as a concept as one alone cannot define this population of African youths in Norway. These populations are a combination of these two concepts. As researchers have gone back and forth in the bid to differentiate or clarify the differences, it is evident that intersectional beings are not defined as Either/Or, but rather Both/And, meaning it is important to see the complexities in people, and to remember that their gender, ethnicity, nationality, as well as religion, all play a role in how people perceive the world. I use the general term of Africans in Norway or Afropeans because this group represents youth from many parts of the African diaspora and can simply not be narrowed down to a region or nationality.

Lived curriculum.

The stories shared in this inquiry are rooted in the understanding of our experiences as Afropean youth, our learning, and the fluid nature of our curriculum. I spent a lot of time trying to separate our lived experiences within AYIN from our planned education within the organization. The experiences of the AYIN youth can be looked at through the Aokian lens of curriculum-as-lived or liv(ed) curriculum. (Aoki 1993). The lived curriculum is the understanding of the past lived experiences, the current experiences being lived and how we contextualize our learning within our community going forward. The beauty within AYIN was that even though there was a planned curriculum, learning happened in the in-between moments as well, allowing the cultural, historical, and political experiences to be our lived curriculum, creating a vantage point we otherwise would be without in our Norwegian school institutions planned curriculum.

I introduce the notion of curriculum-as-lived, not only in the understanding of our experiences as Afropeans, but also as a learning experience that is ongoing, through re-telling and re-remembering the learning experiences of this organization, we are able to use these lived experiences to understand the broader meaning of curriculum to include the experiences of us as individuals, but more importantly, as a community.

Representation

"You guys know about vampires? … You know, vampires have no reflections in a mirror? There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. And what I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. I was like, "Yo, is something wrong with me? That the whole society seems to think that people like me don't exist?" And part of what inspired me was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it." - Junot Diaz

Through reading the literature written about the transnational community in Norway, a minimal amount of those articles were written by the minority population themselves. This lack of representation is changing; however, we are still experiencing a lack of representation in all Norwegian academic institutions, and this creates challenges in all aspects of society.

I recall as a child, there were efforts made to include non-ethnic Norwegian children in television shows, but these efforts somehow felt a bit underdeveloped and lackluster as it was more about placing Ethnocentric and Eurocentric views on the minority population, something that felt like comparisons between "us" and "them".

Figure 6 Olimata appearing on "Halv sju" (NRK 1986

My older sister Olimata was asked to appear on a children's television show during Christmas to teach other children about how Gambian families celebrated Christmas. Even though Olimata had never actually celebrated Christmas in The Gambia, my father coached her on the festivities, and she presented those experiences in her portion of the show. The hosts of the show constantly compared these events with those of Norway, as if the Norwegian Christmas was the norm, and that those of The Gambia were exotic, far from normal. They also wanted to know how our Christmas celebrations had changed now that we were Norwegian, even though we were born in Norway, they assumed that our household was purely Gambian. These assumptions made us feel even more different, alienating us from the Norwegian culture, but also making us unaware of our desires to nurture the hybrid culture of our home life, like many other immigrants had.

In *Postcolonial Theories* (2011) by Jenny Ramone, Fanon interprets the complex relationship between language and identity, he states that a Black person who was raised by their family will be abnormal if they are raised around white people (p. 110). Fanon continues to say "This is because his actual body is in conflict with the way that he has been taught to think about his body…" (p. 110). We were taught by society that we were outside the norm, making us feel

like abnormal beings. This upholding of Othering existed, and still today, is evident in every part of society. The trivializing of our traditional African clothing by calling them costumes, versus dresses, or for instance the eroticizing of Black (particularly women) in Norway as hypersexual beings, or prostitutes, as I and most of my friends have experienced numerous times reinforces the Othering of people of color. The exclusionary practices of trivializing or omitting the history of Black people in Scandinavia in history or social science classes in schools, show how little immigrant culture matters in Norway. What we were taught in school made us think about ourselves as abnormal beings, quite simply because we were never represented as the norm. Africans were never the center of any narrative, even the ones which were about Africa. The transatlantic slave trade was a distance incident, that in our history books, did not help us gain perspective on the timespan of the trade, nor the number of human lives were lost during this timeframe. By not being represented, we were in the margins, as we often felt like in society as well. Living in the margins is partly how we managed to gather as youth in our organization.

Quite recently, while my mother was in the Intensive care unit at Kalnes Hospital in Sarpsborg in the southeastern region of Norway, we experienced another incident similar to what I believe Fanon depicted. My mother had experienced a series of small strokes, and a sudden unconsciousness which lasted for close to a month. My siblings and I spent every day and night by her side in hopes that she would regain consciousness and return to us, cognitively, physically, and emotionally. Although the treatment she received was nothing less than excellent, we encountered, almost daily, medical staff who had difficulties drawing blood from my mother. Like myself, my mother had smaller veins, and therefore, drawing blood was always challenging. The nursing and anesthesiologist staff would make numerous attempts at drawing blood, making the process agonizing. This was especially difficult to watch as my mother was unaware of her surroundings during this time and would therefore become combative due to the pain inflicted upon her by the staff. As we have encountered the issues of drawing blood in the past, we (my sisters and I) would suggest placing her arm in warm water or feeling for veins instead of looking for them. One of two things were guaranteed to happen when this situation arose: Either the unsuccessful nurse would give up and go find an African medical professional to do the job, or, the struggling medical professional would make a comment regarding her skin color as the primary reason for them not finding a vein, followed by highly offensive comments, due to the inconvenience of my mother being of a deeper complexion. A nurse was overheard

stating that drawing blood would be easier on an elephant. This said in the presence of my younger sister. Living within a system that systematically ignores your presence in the world, disregards your needs makes you feel like an inconvenience because you are not the norm. This situation was problematic on many levels: firstly, common bedside etiquette was quite poor, considering her children were sitting in the room, hearing these comments, but also because the patient deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of her heritage. But also, the lack of understanding and education when it comes to dealing with diverse populations as medical professionals. Signs and symptoms of some illnesses may manifest differently on me than it would on someone with lighter skin than myself. For instance, if something can be visible on lighter skin, one must learn to look for alternate symptoms on deeper skin toned people, instead of complaining about how someone's deep skin tone is inconvenient to the person who are supposed to treat you. By acknowledging that Norway is a diverse nation, cultural competence should be a staple in education, regardless of it being in the medical field, or in social studies at an elementary school. The lack of representation of people of color in school therefore crosses all educational levels. This story might seem out of place, but instances like my mother's hospital stay reiterates the importance of representation, which brings me back to the importance of acknowledgement and understanding of African history or history of Africans in the context of Norway. With the push for assimilation as the main form of integration, Norwegian society encourages a culture of colorblindness, a dilution that pointing out, or understanding the needs of different people is negative or unnecessary. Similar to the pre-service educators in Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Powers-Costello (2011) study, our teachers displayed their fairness through telling us frequently that our exterior did not matter, ''I don't care if they're Black, White, or green with polka dots, I treat all children the same''. (p. 335). Similar statements uttered by my teachers gave me comfort as the only African child in class, because at that age, I wanted my diverse background to be invisible, or at least irrelevant. This Colorblindness has contributed to the lack of understanding of immigrant populations in Norway by not addressing the aspects which make us diverse, but continuously muting what makes us different and special. Instead of acknowledging and learning about each other, colorblindness creates a space where being different and celebrating one's diversity is looked down upon, as colorblind people would all be a part of the white dominant culture.

> Proponents of the colorblind ideology believe that paying special or close attention to an individual's race when making policy and practical decisions is inherently problematic, as it potentially distributes inequitable privileges to individuals from one particular racial group. Furthermore, proponents of the colorblind ideology largely deny and ignore the existence and devastating impact of racial injustice in various institutions in the societies of today and yesteryear. (Husband, 2016 p. 4)

I tell these stories because many (if not most) African families in Norway have had similar experiences of feeling alienated, discriminated against, and oppressed at some point while living in Norway. I believe all stories are educational moments, and ways in which, through understanding and education, the acts of discrimination and oppression can be recognized and worked through to create an environment more prosperous towards minority populations. I hoped to gain insight, a deeper sense of understanding of my community, and how education is perceived in the spaces in which we created and occupy. I value these stories because of how important my community is to me. The African immigrant community in Norway is composed of strong, intelligent, resilient, and resourceful people of all African and diasporic nationalities, ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, ability, and educational level. The longer I lived away from my community, the more important it became to who I am as an Afropean woman. I originally rationalized these thoughts and feelings of great appreciation and love for my community as a nostalgic feeling, of missing the familiar spaces. However, through exploring the literature on people of color in Norway, I realized the importance of history, and how history education has become a pillar in our community. This also meant being at a physical distance from this population, I had the privilege of exploring my memories, thoughts, emotions, and understanding of Africans in Norway from a distance. Being back in Norway has given me a sense of reuniting with my community. The privilege of exploring my memories have now become moments of remembering with my community, through interviews. The experiences of moving to Miami, then back to Norway, and living through the pandemic has solidified the complex nature of being an insider/outsider. My physical distance allowed me to be an outsider almost, looking in, not seeing the nuances of what was really happening in Norway, but returning, feeling the embrace and welcome from my community, grounded me in my insider identity. (Brown, 2012) offers a perspective on the insider/outsider position:

> A Black feminist epistemology, which is grounded in Black women's experiences and cognitive styles, contends that the multiply marginalized draw from personal experience as insiders who are oppressed within their social order. Black women's distance from power enables them to critique the system. (p. 20)

As Brown notes: Black feminist epistemology allows for Black women (women of the diaspora) to tease out the nuances of power in particular settings through the concept of insider/outsider researcher positionally. In this dissertation, I utilize my position as an insider/outsider to explore the history of African immigrants in Norway, specifically, how issues of race and racism have shaped the community as it is in the 2020's. I would like to explore the history of African immigrants in Norway, more specifically, how issues of race and racism have shaped the community as it is today. I am also interested in the stories of growing up in Norway, with the backdrop of the Pan-African youth organization, Afrikan Youth in Norway. I want to explore the stories of former members of this organization as we explored pre-colonial African history as a form of empowerment and tool to foster community. Through this, I hope to better understand the importance of communities to act as surrogate schools, when the educational system fails to adapt to a more culturally diverse population.

The experiences of African immigrants in Norway are shared experiences echoed in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. There will be references to these countries, as the immigrant experiences there mirror the ones in Norway. The terms Scandinavian and Nordic will be used as umbrella terms for these countries. When referring to Scandinavia, it is usually Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. When referring to the Nordic region, it includes Finland and Iceland as well. Concepts that have been explored and researched in Sweden or Denmark particularly often resonate with Norwegians as we are intertwined through history, language, and proximity.

I think it is important to add that the absence of African history education in the Norwegian school curriculum excludes the history of Norwegian missionaries to Madagascar and the people who traveled to the Congo Free State to work under King Leopold II, during his reign, which resulted in genocide in the late 1800s (Pareli, 2011. p. 7). As this history is nearly impossible to find in schoolbooks, one can assume that men who served under King Leopold II

were also involved in the brutal killing, severing of limbs, and forced labor of Congolese people during this time. According to Loftsdóttir & Jensen, (2012)

> "Recent studies have illustrated how Scandinavian seamen were instrumental in maintaining the Belgian colonial apparatus in Leopoldian Congo to serve the harbours and ships along the spine of the colony, the Congo River (Wæhle 2002; Wæhle and Tygesen 2006)." (p. 19).

To omit this as a part of Norwegian history means history is being altered. History is significant in many ways, but certainly, it is essential to know how we got here. History creates a clear roadmap for us to understand where we were in the past, how we reached our current situation, and how to strive for a better future. But if this history is hidden, we will forever go forward with false information, and making choices that are not informed by our history. By understanding and exploring the involvement Norway had in the transatlantic slave trade, and colonialism, we can better understand who we are as people, and how to better live alongside each other. We must acknowledge that our ancestors, a few generations ago might have crossed paths, not as we do today, but in spaces where colonization, genocide, and enslavement divided us. To learn this history later in life changed the way I viewed myself, my ancestors, and the land they came from. To not be equipped with this knowledge from childhood left me, and other children like myself, disconnected from our true understanding of self.

The understanding of Norway, in the context of colonialism, will hopefully help uncover why the "us" and "them" dynamic continues to flourish in Norwegian institutions, and how that relates to the exclusion of African history education in public schools. I will also explore the work the African community in Norway has managed to do, to counteract the lack of African education in schools to make sure children of color learn their own history, through supplementary education, this especially done by the first Norwegian Pan-African youth organization, Afrikan Youth in Norway, founded by Mr. Baba Buntu.

Central focus

How do African immigrants in Norway (Afropeans) create and foster diasporic social learning spaces where African centered ideologies help young people understand the importance of the inclusion of African history education in a predominantly white country?

Research Question:

- How was the Afrikan Youth in Norway youth organization essential in the creation of a critical Afropean diasporic social and learning spaces mentioned?

The more I read and write about my community, I feel increasingly anxious about writing about the people I grew up with, the community I love, and the place I call home. In The *Handbook of Autoethnography*, there is a sentence in a chapter that has become my favorite, Herrmann says, “It is my contention that autoethnography is, at heart, about love.” (Adams et al., 2021 p. 67) Herrmann talks about love as a verb and how through the philosophies of Kierkegaard, noting “Love was extremely important to Kierkegaard, who suggested that there are three different ways of performing love or being a lover: love of self, preferential love, and love of all humanity.” (p. 68). I have been sitting with this project for a long time, picking it up, and putting it down again. My love of self allows me to continue writing. It allows me to be vulnerable to self-reflect, so that I can grow alongside this project, and remember that the I is not just for me, but for everyone who connects with the text. It is not only about me, but also about the love I have for my community, which is the preferential love of Kierkegaard. This allows me to understand who I am in relation to others in my community and understand the love I have for my AYIN family, my biological one, and the ones I have chosen, making preferential love an active daily choice (p. 71). The love for humankind or agape love is as Herrmann puts it, “…auto-ethnographers recognize that the political is the personal. (p. 74) Merely by writing about this community, I engage in an act of resistance, allowing for the ideas of a less homogeneous Norway to be highlighted.

I know anxiety is not always rational, and many of my memories have now morphed into questions of doubt about what I thought I knew, and if what I know is relevant enough to write about. I have therefore spent time trying to understand how to overcome these moments of anxiety and realized that these feelings are not as irrational as I initially thought. Furthermore, I have spent most of my life being a stranger and foreign in the countries I grew up in. I grew up being different, a person of color in a predominantly white space. I was singled out for looking the way I do, for having the hair I have, or for being multilingual. The qualities I celebrate today were ridiculed or exoticized growing up in Norway, making young me feel less than, always feeling like I had to alter my behavior, to make the differences less visible.

At the age of eleven, when the family moved to Gambia, I was the “toubab”. Toubab is the term used to describe white people in West Africa, especially in Gambia, Senegal, and Mauritania. My Wolof (one of the native languages in Gambia) was good, but not fluent. You could hear the Norwegian in me lingering through my diction, and with the blatant attention paid to my lack of language skills, I was not quite Gambian either. My parents spent all our lives preparing us for life in Gambia. They tried to immerse us in the culture, and taught us the language to ease the transition, but they did not account for how we were perceived. I recall very small and perhaps even insignificant moments where I would misunderstand a social cue like Gambian table manners, which are very different from Norwegian ones. In Gambia, families usually eat from a communal plate, some eat with their hands, others use a spoon. During the weekends in Norway, I would always look forward to my mother cooking a Gambian meal, so that we could eat together on the same plate. It is a very social act, and love is shown through the elder at the bowl placing pieces of protein and vegetables on top of the rice, on your eating spot. I knew the basics about communal plate etiquette, but once I was sitting at a communal plate in Gambia, I realized that my parents had only taught me and my siblings the very basics. The rules, values, or ways of being that were omitted to us included children do not reach to the center of the bowl while eating, and children should also place a finger on the rim of the bowl to keep the bowl from sliding around. We would usually receive a range of reactions when sitting down to a communal meal. This was either *“Ndeysan”* which loosely translate to, “bless your heart”, or a stern look, which indicated that we had no manners. The sitting around and sharing a large plate of food with family, friends, or neighbors is a wellness practice in The Gambia. It is never expressed as such, but similar to sitting down as a family at a table to eat is important in the Western world, in The Gambia, love is shown through the sharing of food. In this wellness practice, you learn about the family structure through the acts during the meal.

This delicate maneuvering of a culture I thought I understood further made me feel like a stranger in yet another country. I used to say that I do not have roots, because I never truly felt comfortable in a country, or like my classmates from elementary school, feel nostalgic about our town. I remember coming to college in the United States and everyone representing their hometowns with t-shirts and bumper stickers. My experiences did not leave me with a hometown, or even lifelong childhood friends. When I meet someone today, and they ask where I am from, I experience an internal battle of trying to break down where I am from. It might not

seem that complicated, I was born and raised in Norway by Gambian parents. But it is more than that, it is more than just representing countries as a part of my identity. I have never felt like I have been enough in either countries or cultures, always just short of authentic Gambian or Norwegian. "Striving to be both European and Black requires some specific forms of double consciousness." (Gilroy, 1993. p. 1). Anxiety grows from these experiences, and as I still live with the fear of being rejected anywhere else, every thought, my feelings, and ideas, will be scrutinized, most harshly, by me. The feeling of not being good enough lingers in most situations, even with all the places I now feel like I belong in, the underlying sense being inadequate still presents itself when facing meaningful interactions. The feeling of being fragmented and constantly beside myself, looking at my experiences with a Eurocentric point of view makes belonging more challenging.

Belonging was easy when I found Afrikan Youth in Norway. The organization initially catered to people aged 13 to 26 but had many members and affiliates beyond that age range. I was fortunate enough to come into contact, through a friend, with a youth organization called Afrikan Youth in Norway (AYIN) during my first year of secondary school. The AYIN office was in a spacious, open apartment on the top floor of an old building in the Grünerløkka District of Oslo. The space was filled with flyers, pamphlets, books, and DVDs stacked in every corner of the living room. Along the walls were large sofas and chairs, making it a perfect space for meeting and having conversations. Walking into the space, you were guaranteed to trip over shoes in the entryway, as the office was always full of teenagers just hanging out, reading, or writing rap lyrics, poems, and songs. The office became our hub, it became our landmark, and the place where, if you had nothing to do, or it was too cold to hang out outdoors, you would go to the office.

AYIN started as a youth organization by founder Dr. Baba Buntu in 1995. It was the first Pan-African youth organization in Norway, created mostly in response to the lack of African curriculum and awareness, as well as a lack of understanding of Afropean youth. One of the most important messages of the organization was that all people with African heritage are indeed African. We learned early on about the transatlantic slave trade, to better understand how closely related many of us were. Youth with parents from the diaspora and the continent of Africa, were all Africans, and if schools and the society neglected to teach us our history, it was our job to

educate ourselves, and in return, spread our knowledge to the rest of the community. This was the first time in my life that I had found a space of complete acceptance and calm. Huber et al. noted that within racist nativism, the nation and its boundaries are constructed to include and defend white as native and exclude people of color and immigrants who are perceived as non-natives (2008, p. 44). Even though most of us were born or naturalized Norwegians, we found ourselves looked upon as non-natives by ethnic Norwegians because of the color of our skin, or because, like in my home, we were socialized to love our parents' culture and traditions, solidifying the "us" and "them" dynamic Wikan spoke about, and creating a divide between how I viewed myself as a Norwegian, and how others viewed me. We were outsiders, we grew up in the margins, but for the first time for many of us, we had found a place to congregate, be ourselves, and explore what it meant to be children of immigrants in Norway.

Most of the members were born and raised in Norway, while there was a large population that were born elsewhere and were seeking a community of Africans in Norway. I was 16 years old when I joined, and so were many of my new friends. They looked like me, they spoke like me, we liked the same food. I vividly remember one of my first conversations in the AYIN office, it was about how our ethnic Norwegian friends could never know or understand the how our parents disciplined us in our homes, especially when it came to the unspoken corporal punishment our parents secretively gave us. It was a light and frankly funny conversation, as we laughed till tears rolled down our cheeks when talking about incidents where our parents would punish us in a manner which was illegal in Norway, but fully allowed in our respective homes. House rules trumped the law, and that was something we all had in common, along with the issues of having ashy skin after PE class or dealing with our friends wanting to touch our natural hair, to just compare it to wool. It was extraordinary to find AYIN, because most people wholly understood the struggles of growing up African in Norway.

Chapter II - Literature Review

Mate Masie – "What I hear, I keep" symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and prudence. The implied meaning of the phrase "mate masie" is "I understand". Understanding means wisdom and knowledge, but it also represents the prudence of taking into consideration what another person has said.

African youths in Norway are an underrepresented group in Sociological and Educational qualitative research, particularly in literature where their stories and experiences are illuminated to show intersectional identities, and dimensions within this population. To explore the lives of these youth, and understand the spaces in which they live, it is important to understand the complexities of growing up African in Norway. The purpose of this literature review is to examine relevant research as it exists with Othering, race, and representation in the Norwegian context. African diasporic youth in Norway, and social spaces for African-centered curriculum. As there is limited literature on African youth in Norway, I hope to give some background information about the population and then AYiN, the first Pan-African youth organization in Norway, in an effort to bring forth the importance of studying this population.

Youth

Finding a contemporary single definition of youth is not an aim in this review of literature, however, it is important to gain an understanding of the youth population, through reviewing youth studies literature (Ibrahim & Steinberg, 2014; Jones, 2009; Lesko, 2012; Lesko & Talburt 2012; Reynolds & Zontini, 2016; Simmons, 2014.). Authors within youth studies seek to understand the experiences of people within an age range through cultural, historic, biology, and politics. Gill Jones, the author of *Youth* (2009) explains that defining youth is quite complex, however, he says that it describes a time of transition from childhood, into adulthood (p. 59). He continues: "In order to understand youth in terms of identity, one has to explore the relationship between self and society." (p. 61). This means looking at how different youth are positioned in their society, taking into consideration nationality, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, as

well as kinship, and peer groups to gain an understanding of their experiences. Ibrahim suggests: "Youth is now an identity process in which a story is created about their own lives, where *persons* use the environment around them and, especially, pop culture to create the story of who they are." (Ibrahim, 2014, p. xvii). Similarly, Jones also explores identity formation through popular culture, stating that consumption has solidified how youth in the 21st century form identities (2009, p. 74). I believe these help in the definitions of youth, however, in the effort to understand African diasporic youth populations, it is important to consider how and where they are situated within youth studies.

Transnational African Youth

To specify the population of youth I am referring to, the description of immigrant and transnational youth by Reynolds and Zontini, 2016 will be used. "Within the context of this issue migrant youths refer to young people (aged 16-35 years) who are themselves migrants or are children and grandchildren of migrants." (p. 379). It is also important to remember that these transnational youth are not a homogeneous group, but a diverse group of people with different experiences, identities, and understandings of the world (p. 385). While all these differences can be found within this population, it is the history we carry with us that creates this powerful connection; "Diasporic youth carry with them across space and time histories of resistance, histories of colonial encounters, embodied knowledge that anachronistically speak through the lived experience of transatlantic plantation life." (Simmons, 2014. p. 200). This embodied knowledge and history that youth carry becomes important to understand in terms of identity. As Ibrahim (2014) notes, youth create narratives surrounding their identities from the environment around them (p. xvii). For African diasporic youth in Norway, these surroundings often reflect a reality vastly different from them. The social context of youth culture in Norway neglects to interrogate the histories carried by diasporic youth, but rather calls for this population to assimilate to Norwegian traditions and culture to uphold '*likhet*' or sameness (Gullestad, 2002. p. 46). By upholding these values, society devalues the importance of ancestral history for the African youth, as vital in the exploration of the self, as a person of color in a predominantly white space. As a community, we are not against sameness "African history calls in all of us to acknowledge the "unity in sameness" as well as the "unity in diversity." (Dei, 2010. p. 7). It is

vital to interrogate, understand, and celebrate both the sameness and the diversity, and assimilation does not encourage this.

The diverse experiences of transnational youth are often looked at through the concept of hybridity in youth studies. “Hybridity often connotes border- crossing, ‘in between- ness’, mobility, uncertainty, and multiplicity (Nilan & Feixa, 2006, p. 15) It is often looked upon as a “plural world”, but Nilan explains that this might be a view not typically shared by the youth, that the youth rather seem to exist within one complex world (p.15). Nilan (2012) problematizes the concept of hybridity within youth studies, as she fears oversimplifications of the complexities which lie within the dominant and subversive (p. 256). She also challenges the notion by critically questioning whether transnational and diasporic youth even see themselves as agents of cultural disruption, or as just youth being youth (p. 256). Even if problematized, this concept allows for a vantage point to interrogate the transnational youth cultures in the predominantly white spaces, as well as understand the interactions between the African culture, how it operates in Norway, and what that means in the global sense. The issue then of identity with transnational African youth in Norway becomes, according to Nilan, an issue loaded with “...racialized hierarchical power relations into the heuristic of hybridity for explaining the identity phenomena.” (p. 254). The politics of naming your national, ethnic, racial, or other social identity remains in the binaries of identifying. ‘*Norskfødt med innvandrerforeldre’,* (Norwegian born with immigrant parents), or *Innvandrer* (Immigrant) are common official labels of transnational youth in Norway, however the process of self-identification becomes a more difficult, as self-identification seems to be tethered to time and place.

As transnational youth, identity was a concept we often discussed. Nilan suggests “That which casts the greatest shadow of doubt over the concept of hybridity for youth studies is that young people themselves rarely perceive their identities, their social worlds, or their popular culture preferences to be ‘hybrid’ at all.” (p. 255). To this statement, I disagree, and perhaps the statement is referring to the youth knowing the concept of hybridity as they problematize their own existence in the Western spaces, or, if I understand it correctly, it is that youth do not think about how their identities, social world, or pop culture is situated because of who they are. From personal experience growing up as a transnational youth in Norway, not thinking of identity, or pop culture, and how your mere existence or presence can be looked upon as intimidating, or

exotic, constantly reminded us of the tensions that lie within identity. Our surroundings did not allow for us to not think about the hierarchy of identity, as we were labeled as '*barn med binnestreks identitet'* meaning children with hyphen identities. We were placed in the binaries of being Norwegian and Other. To give some more context as to why I disagree with this statement, it is important to understand the population of transnational African youth in Norway, the history of Africans in Norway, and the understanding of the spaces this population has occupied.

Africans in Norway

To gain more perspective, according to SSB (Statistics Norway), the population of first-generation African immigrants in Norway is 30,610 (2017). This number represents African children born in Norway to immigrant parents (parents not born in Norway). African immigrants in Norway represent 2,3% of the total population, which means about 121,111 people in Norway are African immigrants, meaning both populations who are born in Norway, and those who have immigrated. This population may seem small; however, Norway has a population of 5.4 million people (ssb.no, 2017), and most of the African population is concentrated in the Southeastern region of Norway, mostly Oslo, the capital.

The first large immigration wave from countries outside of Europe came after December 23, 1969, when oil was discovered outside the coast of Norway (Dagens Næringsliv, 2014). In an effort to sustain the new oil industry, Norway became dependent on importing workforce from other countries. After an influx of immigrants from neighboring countries, Norway opened its borders to accept immigrants from Southeast Europe, Turkey, and Pakistan predominantly (Vassenden, 1997. p. 86). To control immigration, in 1971, the Norwegian government enforced an application process for migrant workers to seek approval from their home countries to gain employment in Norway, this reduced the amount of casual migrant workers who the government referred to as 'pseudo tourists'. These 'pseudo tourists' were, according to The Norwegian National Statistical Agency (SSB), young men who would use their entrance into Norway as a gateway to travel around in Europe, seeking more lucrative opportunities elsewhere. Approximately 5 400 immigrants from Asia, Southern Europe, and Africa arrived prior to the Norwegian "immigration stop" in 1975 (www.ssb.no, 2017). The purpose of this immigration stop was for Norway to take a "*hvilepause*" or respite, to regroup, and assess immigration policy for the future. This stop was intended to conclude within a year; however, the stop was fully

enforced until 1980. During this stop however, asylum seekers and immigrants who came due to family reunification were not denied entry (Vassenden, 1997. p. 63). Many of the parents of the diasporic youth referenced in this paper came either before the immigration stop of 1975, as migrant workers, as international students, or as spouses to Norwegians, or after the stop by the same means, or as asylum seekers or refugees.

The concept of race is one that is quite challenging to understand in a country like Norway, where the term is rarely used as a descriptive term for people of different racial identities (Gullestad, 2002; 2004; Jensen, 2011; Mainsah, 2014). Gullestad, a late Norwegian anthropologist, researched the use of race versus culture as a descriptive term used in Norway stating: "'Culture' has become a new concept of race in that it functions in a reductionist manner to make 'them' lesser human beings than 'us." (Gullestad, 2004. P. 177). She continues to write that this notion has been used by anthropologists, and right-wing political groups with the intent to keep the conversation of race and racism dormant (p. 178). This is also partly because of the connotations of race and racism in Europe, often relating these terms back to the Second World War, and Nazi Germany's rhetoric (p. 182). She states: "People in Norway generally associate the term 'racism' with Nazism, the segregationist policies in the southern states of the US, and the apartheid regime in South Africa." (p. 182). The understanding of the systematic oppression of people of color is not a concept understood by most Norwegians as they are unwilling to parallel the oppression of people of color within the country with that of the ones in the US or South Africa, but rather keeping the concepts of racism and oppression within historical contexts and not as a contemporary state within the country. This often means that when the conversation of race surfaces in Norway, it is made to seem irrelevant as the term is not used as a descriptive term, therefore many do not consider racism an issue.

Norwegians see themselves as victims of colonial rule, due to the country being under Danish rule until 1905 (Mainsah, 2014. p. 108). The Norwegian government just recently admitted to their contribution to the Transatlantic slave trade, but till this day, this is merely a fact that most Norwegians either refute, or associate with their colonizer, the Danes (p. 108). Mainsah (2014) writes: "Although Norway's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is now well documented (Kjerland and Rio, 2009), the dominant self-image is of an innocent, humane, tolerant, anti-racist and peace-loving society" (p. 108). Mainsah explores how the denial of the

involvement in the slave trade reinforced the Othering of people of color in multiple ways. Although the larger sense of immigration of Africans is relatively new to Norway, historians have documented instances of Africans in Norway dating back to Danish rule. "In Norway, and elsewhere, Africans were displayed as curiosities at fairs and markets alongside midgets, giants, and bearded women." (pp. 108-109). This is, according to Mainsah, perhaps the explanation as to why Africans experiencing and discussing issues of racism and discrimination are often seen as being sensitive or complaining without reason (p. 109).

Gullestad also sheds light on other ways in which Norwegians distance themselves from the acknowledgement of racism existing in Norway, stating that from the average Norwegian to the researcher, and politicians, they all have ways of distancing themselves from the conversation of race (p. 182). European researchers often discuss race purely in the scientific term, alienating all social relations to the concepts like power, privilege, and oppression (Feagin, 2014). Likewise, politicians point towards the humanitarian work and aid that has been provided by the Norwegian state to other nations (cite). The Norwegian state supported the civil rights movement, the demolishing of apartheid, played a large role in the peace negotiations in the Middle East, just to name a few (p. 182). They are also one of the European countries who have taken in large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers over the years. The Norwegian public as well have their reasons for not using racism to explain and understand the oppression of minorities by individualizing the concept, and not allowing for it to be explained as a structural phenomenon (p. 183). If we examine these three layers of Norwegian society, researchers, the state, and the public, one will soon realize that finding studies, or ideologies that support the concepts of race, or that racism in Norway exist, becomes extremely challenging (p. 183). By changing the conversation to an issue of cultural differences, and not racializing and oppressing people of color, it becomes a problem of the individual and not the society. Because of this blatant denial and understanding of racism in Norwegian society, organizations have over time emerged as a response to this ignorant state.

African Youth in Norway (AYIN)

Figure 7 AYIN office hangout. (AYIN Archive)

The Afrikan Youth in Norway youth organization was the first Pan-African youth organization in the country; the organization was active between the years of 1994- 2008. The organization was founded by Baba Buntu (Amani Olubanjo Buntu) in 1994 to create a space where African youth would be able to feel safe, but also inquire about issues related to identity, discrimination, and racism. Buntu was himself born and raised in Norway, with ancestry from the island of Anguilla, in the Caribbean (Tajik, 2001, p. 8). As a former social worker, Buntu stressed the importance of self-identification and cultural awareness because of the predominantly white spaces we grew up in. The organization focused on creating a space where youth would learn about African history, pre- and post-colonial, literature, music, popular culture, etc. This organization was also created as a preventative measure for criminal activities and juvenile delinquency within the African community.

Afrikan Youth in Norway also known as AYIN, became in the mid-90s a space where youth and young adults felt a sense of belonging, a sense of common cultural heritage, and a

common understanding of what it means to be Othered. AYIN was an organization where youth were not only asked about their grievances, but instead encouraged to take action to shed light on the injustices for society to see, to change what the youth were displeased with, or at the least, to bring awareness to the issues dealt with daily. The book *Svart på Hvitt* (2001) by Hadia Tajik, is a collection of stories by transnational youth, and how they felt about integration politics in Norway at the time. Buntu was one of the contributors, writing about his frustrations regarding being Black in Norway, stating.

> I know many Black youths who are just about to explode. They have the bit between their teeth and have put up with much. They have been chased by racists, suspected of shoplifting, beaten up by the police, misunderstood by the child welfare authorities, and refused admission to bars. They have been the subject of threats and abuse, applications for fifty jobs in succession rejected, and not least, been accused of being oversensitive when they express themselves on these matters. They have been silent up to now. They can remain quiet a bit longer. But what happens after that? (p. 9).

Buntu would often be looked upon as being overzealous or even radical, but in his portion of the book *Svart på Hvitt* he described the norm for many African youth in Norway. He uses words such as racist, and mentions police brutality, issues which are hardly talked about, or believed to be happening in Norwegian society. Even with the murder of Benjamin Hermansen in January 2001, at the age of 15, an African youth in Oslo, the issues of hate, racism, and xenophobia were only discussed within isolated incidences, and not as a societal and institutional issue that colors the nation. Hermansen was stabbed to death on a sidewalk by three Neo-Nazi members from the gang "BootBoys" (Cowell, 2002. p. A1). Marches were organized to stand in solidarity against hate crimes and Neo-Nazi groups in Norway, however, in the media, this conversation did not continue long after the court case which convicted his murderers ended.

Figure 8 Candlelight vigil for Benjamin Hermansen (Aftenposten, 2001)

All the members of AYIN were affected by the murder of Benjamin as he was a close friend to many of the youth. It became a startling reminder of the dangers which lived amongst us in Norway, and how easily someone could lose their life because of the hate and ignorance towards people of color. We were all Benjamin, and as the rest of the country moved on, all ethnic minority communities were on high alert, constantly worried about the threats, while almost uncontrollably angry and frustrated at this level of hate and senselessness. This murder might be the most well-known case of a hate crime; however, it is not the first, nor would it be the last. Two years prior to Benjamin, Arve Beheim Karlsen, a Norwegian boy adopted from India, was killed by being chased into a river where he drowned. The accused were said to have chased Arve into the river while yelling "drep negeren, drep negeren." *kill the ni**er, kill the ni**er. (NRK Sogn og Fjordane, 2001).* The main accused in this case was sentenced to three years in prison for racist motivated violence, not murder. The AYIN organization acted during these, and all other race related incidences, as it was evident that we had to take matters into our own hands. We were armed with the knowledge and the emotions of these cases, and took to the streets, radio, television, and newspapers to engage and urge the population to share our outrage and condemn these acts. One of the ongoing struggles was related to racial attitudes and acts that were considered non-harmful by the dominant culture. According to (Gullestad, 2005), The

experience of discrimination is often trivialized by some form of denial ('the problem is not racism, but....'). Minorities who complain about racialization and racism are often seen as aggressive: 'too sensitive', 'too thin skinned' or 'obsessed by skin colour' (29). AYIN was not only seen as aggressive, but radical and perhaps even extreme. This ideology reduces the experiences of people of color, especially in times when heinous acts of violence, rooted in racism occur, to individual acts, rather than systemic patterns that are erupting from the untold history of the Norwegian country.

This pattern of trivializing the struggles of people of color created an even larger form of dissociation for African youth to the country they were born to or raised in. Norwegian children born to immigrant parents are also Otherized by the categorizations they have in the Norwegian society, by being labeled as 'immigrant', 'Muslim' or other signifiers which distances and alienates them from being Norwegian, even if they were born in the country (Mainsah, p. 109). Growing up in a country where you are labeled an immigrant in your birth country distances you from the dominant culture, perhaps as much as the color of your skin or your religious beliefs do. The assimilation processes which are in Norwegian schools tells all pupils to honor the Norwegian cultures and tradition, encourages the very nationalist celebration of 17th of May, the Norwegian constitution day, and reinforces the importance of religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter, while granting much less, or no time and energy towards holidays such as Eid, Rosh Hashanah, or Kwanzaa. This is what Gullestad calls *Imagined sameness.* (Gullestad, 2002. p. 46). Gullestad writes about the way in which Norwegians value 'ordinary people', and the importance of sameness or *likhet* in Norwegian. "The central value concept is *likhet,* meaning 'likeness', 'similarity', 'identity' or 'sameness'." (p. 46). This social contract dictates that to be a part of the society, you should act like an 'ordinary person' which would mean understanding and living similarly and becoming the same as the dominant culture. The confusion then becomes greater when you are asked to act according to the societal norms and values in the Norwegian system, yet, you are categorized as anything but the same as the dominant culture. Fylkesnes (2019)

> Norway has always had its Other – its history of dominance and violence against its minority populations is no different to that of other Western countries –; however, it has always managed to assimilate the Other by any means necessary. Importantly, Norwegian

> educational institutions have played a central role in this regard (Pihl 2010). However, as the Other's presence is now also visible in the form of bodies of colour, it is no longer possible to completely assimilate it into the colour-blind ideal of imagined sameness. (p. 398)

This concept of *'likhet'* contributes to the creation of the 'model minorities', who consist usually not of a particular ethnic minority group, but rather people who chose to adopt all, or at least most, of Norwegian culture, values, and norms. "*Likhet* is the most common translation of 'equality', implying that social actors must consider themselves as more or less the same in order to feel of equal value." (p. 46). To achieve this *likhet,* minorities often seek support from the people who are of the dominant culture, trivializing their differences and magnifying their sameness to gain the acceptance of the people they are trying to become more similar to. The AYIN youth organization was often looked upon as a radical Pan-African organization perhaps due to the celebration of diversity and differences. The concept of *likhet* for the youth organization was looked upon as problematic, as Africans in Norway would not adhere to the concept of *likhet* meaning equality. Alongside *likhet* Norwegians use terms such as 'to fit together' (*å passe sammen*) to underline the importance of social cohesion and sameness. People who choose to not subscribe to these values, are often seen as 'too different' and are therefore dismissed in society (p. 47). There is a need for more research on the topic of assimilation in Norway, as the conversations are not being had when it comes the lack of acknowledgement of non-white youth in the classroom and curriculum.

Fylkesnes (2019) in a study on racialized discourse in Norwegian teacher education speaks about the lack of understanding, or rather the lack of wanting to address the racial disparities in Norwegian society, especially as it pertains to educators, stating.

> The descriptions of Norway as part of Nordic Exceptionalism and the Nordic Model, the refusal of race as an analytical concept and the understanding of racism as explicit actions of hate can be understood as re-producing a historical pedagogical amnesia that blinds Norwegians to the idea of Whiteness working as a social construct at the intersection between Norway's national past and its contemporary political and economic interests. This amnesic behaviour silences the workings of Whiteness and, in turn, leads to an

understanding of contemporary Norwegian teacher education policy and curriculum documents as anti-racist promoters of social justice (p. 416)

As Norway is often looked upon on the global stage as a place void of racism, homogenous and peaceful, the conversations of inequality and racist institutions are often left out, and even hard to understand to outsiders. Fylkesnes highlights the importance of naming Whiteness and looking at the country, to work towards an actual anti-racist agenda.

Spaces we occupy.

The concept of diasporic and transnational space while exploring diasporic youth in Norway becomes important when thinking of how and where we fit in (Bauböck & Faist, 2010; Bruneau, 2004; Faist, 2006; Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013; Schwalbe, 2000; Zeitlyn, 2015). Often, space refers to the relationships transnational youth have two or more countries they have a connection to, and the one they migrated from/to. “Terms such as transnational social spaces, transnational social fields or transnational social formations usually refer to sustained ties of geographically mobile persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation-states.” (Faist, 2006. p. 3). As African diasporic youth in Norway, African transnational youth have multiple connections across borders, but also within borders. This means that connections are created through commonalities found amongst each other. Some of these identities may have been created through the common identifying words which have been placed upon them through the nation state in which they live in, i.e., first-second-third generation immigrant, Muslim, Black. Awad and Ibrahim use the term rhizome to contextualize the identity of black youth, stating “Working against facile notions of “roots” and “origins,” a rhizome is always in “a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills.” (2014, p. 2)

Thus, we might conceptualize the connections not just as roots, but rhizome, which allows for identities to coexist and evolve.

> i .e. to a world of dissemination and hybridisation, as opposed to a world of filiation and heritage. There is no hard core of identity – nor continuity nor tradition – as in the community model, but a variety of formations. This hybrid diaspora rejects all reference to the nation and to nationalist ideologies. (Bruneau, p. 37).

When referring to space, it is the space in which transnational youth exist, open to explore their intersecting identities, meaning class, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, to name a few (Zeitlyn, 2015), the emotional and social ties they have to their community (Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013), and the intersections of physical and abstract spaces in which transnational youth act within (Mainsah, 2014).

Zeitlyn stating; "Transnationalism enables a conceptualisation of the way people are embedded in more than one society simultaneously in ways that create transnational social spaces" (2015, p. 29). Bruneau expands on this by dismissing the notion of static and binary identities and allowing for the rhizomatic versus the root formation and sustainability of transnational persons and communities. In *Diaspora and Transnationalism*, Bruneau explores the concept of hybrid diaspora, developed from Chivallon (2004). Bruneau states that a hybrid form of diaspora does not share a national, religious, or nationalist ideology, but that it is without specific traits that would help generalize a group (p. 37). The coming together of people not because they share a place of belonging, but because they belong to a host of different spaces, both physical and abstract. The common understanding of being a transnational youth, the physical and emotional ramifications of Othering, and the shared experiences of being brought up as foreign in their "home" countries, creates this hybrid diaspora. The concept of hybrid diaspora by Bruneau encompasses the newer description of diaspora (Bauböck & Faist, 2010; Mainsah, 2014) explored. The way of looking at diaspora from a traditional sense is being challenged as people are becoming more diverse and transnational. Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013 although presented the more traditional description of this concept, also allowed for the understanding of how emotions and memory were important aspects of belonging. The hybrid diaspora that exists within the group of African youth in Norway includes the concept of a digital diaspora and socio-spatial networks. It is not that these youth only inhabit these spaces, it is because African youth in Norway use all these concepts to maintain and foster their diasporic spaces. These different concepts are not fragmented in practice as they might sound in theory, they are intertwined and effortlessly coexisting to create this transnational space.

I use the term "Othering" from this definition: "A prerequisite to exploitation is othering-the defining into existence of a group of people who are identifiable, from the standpoint of a group with the capacity to dominate, as inferior." (Schwalbe, 2000. p. 777). Although a perhaps

extreme definition, it is important to explore the dominant versus the oppressed, especially in a country where the language itself is oppressive against racial/ethnic minority populations, meaning the labels that are placed upon us are often internalized or used against us, to uphold a divide.

Although transnational African youth in Norway are diverse in their beliefs, national identity, nationality, heritage, geographical location, and culture, they do share a forced label of identity, generally labeled '*fremmed kulturell'* meaning 'of foreign culture'. This is a definition forced onto people of color in Norway, by the dominant culture. The youth in Norway often socialize and identify based on other factors other than nationality, as most African youth in Norway are Norwegian by nationality but have several other important identities which connects them to other youth with similar life experiences, namely cultural heritage.

Although I have blurred the lines between diaspora and transnational, I have experienced confusion in the separation of the two concepts, depending on the author of the texts, or in what context these concepts are explored. Faist, Fauser & Reisenauer state that diasporas exist within transnational spaces (p.15). Transnational spaces are referred to by Bruneau stating "It is a new space of political socialisation, one of identification beyond that of national societies." (Bruneau, p. 44). Cohen (1997) defines diasporas as "groups that experienced the territorial dispersion of their members at some time in the past, as a result either of a traumatic experience or specialization in long distance trade" (p. 15). Although I think this definition serves some diasporic populations, I believe that this definition also excludes populations when thinking of how migration patterns look today, as well as when thinking about the different ways in which people inhabit different spaces today. Crossing national borders or moving around within nation states is not only because of refuge, or work. People move due to family reunifications, international studies, and curiosities, just to name a few. The mobility of people is not only reserved for physical mobility anymore. People use online spaces to connect with people from different places, learn languages, and even work, or attend schooling online. These forms of diasporic populations do not fit into the Cohen definition.

To further explore the diaspora and transnational similarities and differences, hypergeo.eu, an online encyclopedia focused on the epistemology of geography, featured a piece from Michael Bruneau where he described diaspora as it relates to transnationalism. Although

Bruneau states that one can compare diasporic spaces with transnational community spaces, he clarifies the differences as follows:

> A diaspora has an existence of its own, outside any state, it is rooted in a strong culture (religion, language, etc) and a long history; it has created and developed its community and associative networks. The transnational community on the other hand arises from the migration of workers who retain their family base in the nation-state from which they have come, and they travel between this base and one or several countries where they have settled. They retain a strong anchorage in the place of origin, as well as citizenship or institutional links with their country. (p. 3)

In the case of African youth in Norway, this definition of diaspora helps to explain the strong connection people have to one another. Although there is a strong cultural aspect that connects the African youth population together, the history we are connected through comes not from our history in Norway, as it is not very long, but rather our shared understanding of our African heritage and history. The strength of the community comes partly from the understanding of the importance of learning and sharing knowledge about the African continent, pre-colonial history, the hidden histories of Africans in Norway through history, and the role of Norway in the transatlantic slave trade. Bruneau's definition of transnational communities gives the impression that this might be the precursor to a diaspora, meaning that the transnational community created the foundation on which the diaspora grew from.

These two forms of space and community together explains the spaces in which transnational African youth in Norway live within. Within Africans in Norway, there are well established people, born and raised, or might have parents who are Norwegian. There are also African youth in Norway who were not born in Norway, but moved to the country as young children, mostly as refugees or asylum seekers. According to SSB, one of the largest refugee and asylum seeking populations in Norway come from Somalia. Somali youth generally would fit under this category, alongside Eritrean youth, and Sudanese youth. The population is, however, ever changing, with people moving to and from Norway, creating a version of transnational community and diaspora which intertwines.

Transnational communities are recognized by the emotional and social ties that connect them (Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013, p. 15), acknowledging that these transnational spaces are more than just physical, but that they are also spaces created through emotions and memory. The authors characterize these communities as;

> Transnational communities comprise dense and continuous sets of social and symbolic ties, characterized by a high degree of intimacy, emotional depth, moral obligation and social cohesion. Geographical proximity is no longer a necessary criterion for the existence of a community- there are 'communities without propinquity' (p. 14).

This definition does not necessarily reflect how diaspora will be used in my future research as this definition implies a common traumatic migration pattern, which is not the case for all diasporic communities, as specified by Bruneau in his definition of diaspora. Faist sought a newer definition using Homi Bhabha, stating the importance of cultural hybridity and the diverse nature of cross-border mobility (Bauböck & Faist, 2010. p. 13) as part of understanding diasporic communities better.

Bruneau continues, "All diasporas are socio-spatial networks necessarily undergoing territorial expansion because they aggregate both places of memory and places of presence (Offner & Pumain 1996: 163)." (Bruneau, p. 36). The concepts of diaspora as spaces of memory and places of presence, and how these spaces expand across nation-states is why the concept of space becomes so fascinating. Space for transnational youth becomes a place formed perhaps from the expansion of their parents' home countries, with their values, norms, and traditions, the cultural identity they brought, alongside the identities they have later adapted, or melded with as immigrants in predominantly white spaces. Transnational youth also develop customs or values from their parents' home countries that build on their transnational identities, such as language, traditions, and appreciation for their culture and traditions.

As well as understanding the differences and similarities of transnational and diaspora, it is also important to acknowledge that there are categories within these concepts that are also important to explore. With globalization, people tend to say that the world is becoming smaller, as people cross nation-states more effortlessly than ever before. One way to connect with others is through the internet. The term digital diaspora as explained by Mainsah, explores how the

internet has made it possible to connect otherwise distant communities, letting people who would not traditionally have the ability to connect, find commonalities through ideology, iconography, and music, just to name a few. (Mainsah, 2014. p. 107). Mainsah explores the way in which African Norwegian women use social media to connect to the African diaspora. Through his research, Mainsah seeks out to understand how they interrogate their local and global sense of self in different spaces. Through digital ethnography, Mainsah explored the practices of being online and offline as African women in Norway, specifically with two participants, to better understand the importance of the online spaces they use, and how that translates into their offline lives. Mainsah concluded;

> The life stories narrated in this article show individual experiences of racism, and alienation at the local and national level can form desires for alternate community and belonging. One might thus argue that faced with such experiences, Africanness can constitute a lived form of diaspora where the focus on 'roots' can be a way of negotiating new 'routes' and spaces (p. 116).

In this context, using online spaces as places of self-expression has, according to Mainsah, allowed these women to exist within multiple spaces, using the online space to seek out 'safe Black spaces' where they can expand their diaspora.

African-centered curriculum and youth activism

Figure 9 Members of AYIN on youth exchange trip (Author's photo)

The youth of AYIN consisted mostly of youth who were aware of the difficulties of assimilating to Norwegian culture and traditions. In addition to learning about history, this organization created a place where African youth were able to share experiences that were not commonly shared with Norwegian youth. Because of the culture of sameness, stories that show diverse cultural norms were often deemed embarrassing to share as youth, somehow magnifying *how* different you are.

AYIN's role in the lived experiences of African youth in Norway can only be described as historic. As the first Pan-African youth organization in Norway, this organization has strengthened the community, educated the greater community, and most importantly, educated the African youth. One of the pillars of AYIN was the importance of learning African history, as a means to strengthen and unify us as people (Dei; 2010; Freire, 1970; Anderson, 2012; Mainsah). The understanding and appreciation of one's ancestry and history create a greater consciousness, especially while navigating predominantly white spaces. This consciousness fueled the activism work of AYIN. When speaking of activism, I will use the common definition by Anderson (2012); "A common definition of activism is individuals engaged in activities, such as direct action and community organizing, to foster some form of social change." (p. 314). The

purpose of AYIN's work was grounded in social change, changes which would, if successful, create a greater understanding of the matters in which most African people in Norway deemed important. The issues were mostly related to the dismantling of the social structures which were, and still are, oppressive to minorities in Norway, through the members' understanding of African history and its importance for all people (Dei, 2010. p. 6.). Dei explores the importance of African history in education as a form of understanding the world in which we live in today. The history of Africa, he says, is the history of humankind (p. 6), and the omittance of this history in schools continues to uphold the systems of oppression in society. Due to the lack of African history in the Norwegian school curriculum, AYIN offered this curriculum to strengthen the knowledge of African youth in their own history, as the foundation of the activism work.

AYIN was an organization which received much scrutiny because membership was exclusively for African youth alone. This was not in an attempt to exclude non-African youth, but rather a deliberate choice to place African youth first. Dei's exploration of African-centredity using the definition of Molefi Asante helps to explain why the organization chose to remain only accepting African members. Asante's definition states; "a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate." (p. 21) Often having to explain to our white friends "No, it is not about you, it is about us", which at the age of 17 was a concept few understood. In order to get away from the Eurocentric way of thinking, learning, and understanding, we needed to place ourselves first, to build a community where our African values would become central to the work (p. 21). In order for youth to even explore historical texts, we had to understand where these texts came from, who wrote them, and what perspective they were written from. As all the youth in the organization attended Norwegian public school, where the curriculum is Eurocentric, it was therefore important for the community to gain a different perspective to the one taught in schools. "Eurocentricity is part of a system that teaches the superiority of white European people, culture, history, and ideas over everything and everybody else." (Dei, p. 21). For the organization to engage with the African history curriculum, the youth were made aware of Eurocentricity, as a tool of oppression through the introduction of African centered writings, understanding of different African cultures, and traditions.

Youth engaging in activities was one of the main objectives of the organization. AYIN organized seminars, workshops, book clubs, retreats, tutoring, and other recreational youth activities. AYIN also encouraged artistic expression through the creation of several music and dance groups, as well as writing workshops. These activities were created to engage the members of the organization to a) foster community/unity, b) learn African history thus gaining a better understanding of the systems of oppression, and the self c) encourage understanding, self-esteem, and self-love. These organized activities created a foundation for the activism work AYIN did throughout the organization's existence. Freire (1970) writes “Since the unity of the oppressed involves solidarity among them, regardless of their exact status, this unity unquestionably requires class consciousness.” (p. 174). In order for the organization to work towards common goals, it was vital to acquire an understanding of the social structures within our country. Unity was built through the activities, using workshops and seminars to teach and learn African history as a way of uncovering the systematic oppression of people of color, and how this narrative fit within the structures of Norwegian society. By gaining this knowledge, the youth united over common goals which led to the activism work of the organization. Gaining a common perspective of goals requires solidarity, and in a transnational space, where people have different cultures, traditions, immigration statuses, and understanding of the society within which they live, becomes vital. In this paper, I have used the common description of African youth, and as I have explained, youth in this instance are between the ages of 16-35. The term African is used due to the vast diversity of youth engaged in this organization through the years. This organization had youth that were immigrants, first- and second generation, Afro-Caribbean, multi-ethnic, refugees, etc. While mentioning the African youth population, the terms Afropean and African diasporic youth will be used as a general term.

In a study of Cameroonians in Norway, Mainsah (2009) brings to light the difficulties of using the general term “African” in the study of African immigrant populations in Norway. In this study, Mainsah interviews Cameroonians in Oslo, Norway, to gain a better understanding of the role of media in the construction of their identities (p. 83). In the understanding of identities, and how easily migrants moved across identities (p. 86) it is important to understand how people view themselves in different settings. The overgeneralization of Africans in the media often gives the impression of Africans as a homogeneous population in Norway (p. 87). For Africans in Norway, it often becomes an irritant as we know how vast and diverse the continent is. As

other immigrants would be named according to their nationality or ethnic origin, Africans usually get a general description, almost alluding to Africa being a country, and not a continent. In the study, Mainsah states "However, while they contested the designation of all Africans as a single homogeneous group, they still used the same stereotypical designations when referring to themselves." (p. 87). This is a prime example of what I am and will be doing in this text, this is partly because of all the different nationalities referred to, but also, as Mainsah states, we are viewed as "other" in the Norwegian society, and being outsiders unites the people who have similar experiences, creating a proud "africanness" within the community (p. 87).

Conclusion

After reviewing this literature, it has become clear that qualitative studies on African youth in Norway are lacking. There are several authors within anthropology and communications who have done fascinating work with the population, however, there seems to be a lack of research within education. With the cultural norms of Norwegian society, researching the "others" would illuminate the lack of sameness within the community, and therefore dismantle the notion of assimilation as the best policy for integration.

Using literature on transnational youth from other European countries created a skewed perception of the African population in Norway as the immigration histories of the different European countries create a different reality for the immigrant populations. This study illustrates how AYIN provided a space of belonging for Afropean diasporic youth as well as an Afrocentric curriculum that served to counter the racism embedded in school curriculum.

Long term, I would like to continue my reading on Africanness and the importance of African history for African youth in the diaspora. As I have barely touched on the necessity for a more extensive African curriculum, I would like to delve deeper into this topic as I think it will be central to my work. The youth organization became central for many people in the journey to understand the importance of African history, and the development of self. In Norway, we often look at Norwegian peers and wonder how they are so established and grounded in their communities without thinking about the teachings we have received growing up. We tend to forget that as others, we spend our school days learning about "them", and very little about "us". The AYIN alum consists of many successful people, personally and professionally, and I believe

that this is partly contributed to the African curriculum we learned while being active members. The building of community, and the building of ourselves as Africans in Norway, taught us how to see our surroundings through a more Afrocentric point of view. By allowing us to place ourselves and our history in the center, we were more aware of the Eurocentric ways of looking at the world, which helped us become more critical as youth.

To fully immerse myself in AYIN as a curricular space for Afropean diasporic youth, I analyze resources which came out of the youth organization, such as brochures, music, and dances created by the youth, as well as annual reports, and articles which would give me a broader perspective of the work that went on within the organization. I also hope to further explore transnational social spaces, or "floating spaces" as spaces in which we as transnational people create and maintain. This means not only inhabiting these physical spaces, but also truly building an AYIN network through social media, to fulfill Mainsah's concept of creating diaspora within social media spaces. Exploration of these resources, spaces, and places, as well as the narratives generated from key members will strengthen my inquiry of the importance of AYIN as a diasporic space and understanding of being a transnational person in a predominantly white space.

Chapter III – Methodology

Nkonsonkonson-"Chain Link" symbol of unity and human relations A reminder to contribute to the community, that in unity lies strength. This is the sign of mutual responsibility in which, however, neither party must surrender his or her individuality.

I encountered the true beauty of autoethnography while reading Robin Boylorn's dissertation titled *Southern Black Women: Their lived realities.* In her work, she gains personal growth and understanding of her community, but also of herself, something I relate to.

> The stories I wrote did not come easily or naturally. There were competing stories, competing versions, competing parts of me that struggled to emerge as I began to ask myself questions about my life in Sweetwater. Autoethnography had never been such a difficult strategy for coming to terms with who I was. The goal of my project was to look at rural black women's lives and to try to understand them. A byproduct, by necessity, was that I came to understand myself better. (Boylorn, 2009. p. 82).

Through her words, I started to understand the importance of a researcher's voice in their own work. Often, the spaces we enter and wish to inquire tends to exclude ourselves, as if our personal narratives and experiences do not affect the spaces we occupy. In the book *Critical Autoethnography,* Boylorn and Orbe (2014), outline how autoethnography operates as a methodology in the social sciences (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). According to Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, (2011), "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).

Using autoethnography as a methodological framework, I focused on the experiences of growing up African in Norway. Autoethnography allowed me to explore my own story, as it relates to the stories of others, and to understand the stories of us as African immigrants in Europe. Similar to Borylorn's account, I wanted to investigate and represent the narratives of

Black people (diasporic Africans) within a predominantly white space. Using autoethnography allowed me to reflect, embrace, and reconnect with who I am, because of the people with whom I share a community.

Autoethnography as a method of inquiry

Autoethnography emerged as a method that allowed research to be done on oneself. Those at the forefront of this movement, such as Carolyn Ellis, Art Bochner, and Norman Denzin, rejected positivist notions of truth and validity. They argued that personal narrative could produce complex and meaningful phenomena which introduced unique ways of thinking and feeling and helped people to make sense of themselves and each other. By putting the researcher's experience, emotions, and interactions at the center of the story, this made the research into that particular phenomenon richer and more meaningful. (Campbell, 2016, p. 96).

Through autoethnography, the themes of this story were centered around the narratives of Norwegian African or Afropean youth, weaved with my lived experiences and memories of the African community in Oslo, Norway. I explored how growing up in a multi-ethnic African community in Oslo shaped us, how we learned, how we nurtured spaces, and how we supported our community. Through AYIN, we were able to exist in more than one society, meaning we embodied being transnational in our daily lives by creating spaces that supported all our identities, without having to choose. "Transnationalism enables a conceptualization of the way people are embedded in more than one society simultaneously in ways that create transnational social spaces" (Zeitlyn, B. 2015, p. 29). Africans in Oslo created spaces as a response to the ways in which we exist in multiple societies, or spaces simultaneously, as well as due to the ways in which we are viewed as foreign or Others by the predominantly white society in Norway. The importance of storytelling is rooted in the quest to create more spaces for transnational beings to feel safe and validated.

The story, through the background of the African Youth organization, had a firm base within the understanding of the oppression of transnational youth in Norway. It would have been impossible to study this group without understanding the complexities that are within our gendered, cultural, ethnic, and national identities, and how growing up as African diasporic children shaped our experiences and fueled the need for spaces of community and gathering.

I like the idea of the phrase “floating space”, and I use it interchangeably with “diasporic social spaces” in describing the type of community created in our African community in Norway. This phrase was based on the idea of diasporic socio-spaces from Pries and Seeliger (2012), a shared commonality (such as culture, religion, or traditions) spread over different locales (p. 284). However, what this socio-space idea seemed to have missed, is the constant connection between a small network of people who share many commonalities, not restricted to culture, tradition, or religion. (Amelina et al., 2014)

Throughout this inquiry, I used the idea of “floating space” to describe physical and non-physical spaces that encompass the relationships between persons, identities, nation-states, ethnicities, cultures, and social spaces. It is floating because it is constantly moving and changing, depending on who is engaging within the space. The importance of inquiring about the floating space was not because networks of people were new concepts, but the interesting dynamic of looking at how the positioning of Africans in Norway has influenced the desire to learn African history, which in turn resulted in a cultural legacy formation of Africans in Norway. The negotiating of identity and understanding of race, ethnicity, nationality, and socioeconomic status through history draw from the critical lens of looking at how race, ethnicity, and oppression directly influenced the urgency of a diasporic or transnational space. This critical lens allowed for an insight into how the exclusion of African history in Norwegian schools is used as a tool of oppression. This also allowed me to explore assimilation politics, and how the formation of AYIN then became a form of resistance. This form of resistance was examined using the social and cultural norms of Norway, as the dominant culture in Norway predominantly encourages “sameness” over celebrating differences, as well as the forced labels placed upon people who were not a part of the dominant culture. The importance of understanding Norway in the context of transnationalism and the African diaspora, helps better understand the need for communal social spaces for minority groups.

My study is rooted in the importance of telling stories of how race, ethnicity, and citizenship, directly affected Afropeans in Norway, and how these factors contributed to the creation of these spaces. The importance of looking at these factors also informed transnationalism and living in the diaspora in spaces people might not consider to be transnational. The compilation of these stories allowed for a holistic understanding of the

importance of African history as a foundation of this network, as well as how the historic and contemporary societal structures created the conditions which called for the need for a community of African immigrants to preserve these spaces. African immigrants in Norway have seldom been the narrators of their own stories, meaning that data collected to understand this population had been mostly collected by researchers outside of these communities. The significance of understanding African immigrants in Norway as important actors in the community, and the importance of this population as contributors to society hopefully created a greater understanding of the importance of nurturing these spaces in Norway.

To counter the deficit thinking and oppressive literature available on Africans in Norway, I would like to uplift the African community by highlighting the important work of AYIN, our elders in the community, and other Africans in Norway while telling the stories through a critical lens. I used Africana Critical Theory to look at the growth, education, and identity formation of us, outside of the Eurocentric lens. This drew from critical thought and philosophical traditions rooted in the realities of continental and diasporan African history, culture, and struggle.

This showed that although Scandinavia has been rated the best place to live in for years in a row, battles, and struggles of being African was not reserved for those in the Americas or on the continent of Africa. We also seek liberation from the daily struggles of racism, sexism, colonialism, and oppression, and using the lens of Africana Critical Theory (ACT), lessens the deficit thinking other theoretical perspectives have towards Afropeans, as we are often left out of the conversation. My project organically become rooted in ACT, through the understanding of AYIN, the teachings, and the methods in which the organization structured itself and became a binding agent for our community. ACT is rooted in community, and not the individual, “Indeed, Africana critical theorists are well aware that for the oppressed, individual consciousness is inextricably linked to the collective”. (Bassey, 2007) There is no singular “I” in my stories of growing up in Norway, as all our stories are shared experiences of oppression, discrimination, and challenges of growing up as minorities in a very homogenous society. ACT allowed for an understanding of the AYIN community as a vehicle for social change and liberation through education, mobilization of youth, community engagement, and activism.

Rabaka states, “Africana critical theory involves not only a critique of domination and discrimination but also a commitment to complete human liberation through constant social transformation.” (2003, p. 40) I believe that AYIN was rooted in liberation as the curriculum was in understanding ourselves as Africans, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Through this lens we learned to embrace the collective, not to criticize Eurocentric views, but to remember that our heritage cultures allow for us to have a different understanding of community, different needs within educational systems, and a need to acquire knowledge from sources with an Afrocentric lens. This Afrocentricity as Asante’s theory explains, is rooted in being the narrator, observer, and reporter of our own stories, and not only the objects of it (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014, p.2).

Ethics

While conducting this research, there were several factors that were mindfully considered when thinking about the ethics of telling stories of people who are a part of a small minority community. While the African community is relatively small and located in a country that is quite small as well, there were concerns about confidentiality and anonymity as the youth organization has been exposed to media coverage on several occasions in the past. Telling personal stories of oppression, prejudice, and racial incidents could have been quite emotional, private, and intrusive. Therefore, it was important to make sure that the participants understood that their identities would be private if desired and that pseudonyms would be created to protect their identities if they so wanted.

One of the largest concerns with interviewing this population was the personal relationships I had and continue to have with the participants going into this process. As an active member of the African community in Norway and a former member of the AYIN organization, I had considered myself exceptionally lucky to have personal relationships with many people who have had experiences similar to mine. The blurred lines of the researcher/participant relationship could have become an issue in the process; however, the process remained an evolving collaboration between myself and participants, in the construction and understanding of our reality. This meant that as I was telling my story, I needed to keep in mind that no one story stood alone, but that people in this community had shared experiences and overlapping stories. The question that then emerged was whether I had the “right” to ask the participants to share their realities and whether my views of issues that might arise during the

study were glorified because of my emotional attachment to the participant group. The concern is whether I had taken the liberty to tell the story of a group of people without properly consulting them on how they would have liked for the inner workings of the organization and community to be exposed. As an insider, I had to consider these challenges, to better understand whether this study would have done "more good" than harm for this population. The language and vocabulary I acquired while being in a Ph.D. program allowed me to apply a different lens to what I remembered of growing up in this environment, meaning that I had to understand and hold myself accountable for the ways in which I understand my community, and how that might come across to the participants who were willing to share their stories.

I also needed to consider how critiquing the structures in Norwegian society that contributed to the need for this type of space might have influenced some of the participants.

> Inhabitants of specific cities must be understood not only as constantly repositioning their city within fields of power that are transnational in their scope but also as actors who are shaped by and shape the variations of transnationality produced within such repositioning (Schiller, 2012, p. 28).

As many of the alumni members have graduated from school and might be working within these structures, it was important to not do harm in their daily lives. There are several advantages to bringing the stories of African immigrants in Norway to the forefront, but this could not be at the cost of anyone in the community.

Research on African diasporic youth in Norway had often been conducted by people who are outside of the demographic, therefore, I saw this as an opportunity for this population to tell their own stories, not relying on outside researchers to depict our lives from their vantage points. The ability to tell your own story is not only powerful, but it is an act of resistance. The need for qualitative inquiry in this field is also relevant in this process, Statistisk Sentralbyrå (SSB), the official statistical agency in Norway, is the place where numerical representations of our lives are displayed. Stories are told through data collection which rarely focuses on the stories of the people being studied, rather using this data to paint broad strokes about very diverse populations. I would like to note that there have been several Africans in Norway before me who have

contributed to the literature of our people in the country, and I am very grateful to have the opportunity to add to that.

We matter.

I thought about how to conduct my study, and due to some of the factors mentioned above, concerning my personal connection to the group of participants, I used my relationships in the community to gather participants. I have had close relationships with many Africans in Norway that expressed interest in talking about our lived and shared experiences of growing up in Norway. To determine the participants in this study, I had to look at the individuals who were active members of our current African network, who were working in fields or doing work in the local community, and who were also actively participating in the AYIN organization during its active years. We had long underestimated our importance in telling our stories, and I never knew being Afropean would be of interest to anyone. But, we are anything but average, and we tell beautiful, meaningful stories that we hope every generation of diasporic youth can learn and grow from. There was also a therapeutic layer to collectively remembering our youth, our identity formation, and how these years formed us into the adults we are today. "Autoethnography is predicated on the ability to invite readers into the lived experience of a presumed "Other" and to experience it viscerally" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014 p. 15).

Autoethnographic projects are living documents, stories that are not complete, as we move and change throughout our lives, so does what we remember, how we remember it, and how that is interpreted at this moment, with everything we have experienced the past few years (Adams, et al., 2021). In the *Handbook of Autoethnography* by Adams et al. (2021), Keith Berry explored how reflexivity and mindfulness were used in his autoethnography. Berry describes the process of using meditation as a way of dealing with the traumatic events that resurface during writing, or just remembering hard times in life. Including and incorporating mindfulness as a method in writing shifted how I viewed the importance of storytelling, sharing, and collective reflections, and the need to cherish these words, that are uttered by me, and by my community (p. 31). According to Ellis (2009), "As an autoethnographer, I tell a situated story, constructed from my current position, one that is always partial, incomplete, and full of silences, and told at a particular time, for a particular purpose, to a particular audience" (p. 4). Like most others, the past years had been riddled with death, sadness, and reimagining life as we knew it. It fostered

spaces for me to redefine wellness and mindfulness, accepting that I tell incomplete stories, that my silence is not universally understood, and that the purpose and the time of this project had shifted. Through meditation and ritualistic practices, I gained access to deeper understanding and self-acceptance. Through journaling and guided practice, I understood better what it is to story, and how vital the stories of others were to my project, as I am partial, incomplete, and full of silence.

I have mentioned social spaces a few times, and upon reflection, our spaces, although often performed online, were largely found in the Oslo area. As a rural Afropean woman, I had never lived in the city, but spent most of my adolescence and young adult life taking the train 45 minutes from Ås to Oslo Central Station, to then take the tram or subway further into the more urban Oslo boroughs to meet up with other AYIN youth. A large population of the African community in Norway resides in the Oslo area, I, therefore, considered this my primary site for data collection. Over the years, there has been an increase in community centers and organizations created by the African communities in the Oslo area, predominantly based on country of origin or religious beliefs; none of which are used by the AYIN alum at the moment. We lacked a permanent physical location of congregation, therefore, alternative spaces in the city would be optimal for interviews, places we could gain access to for free with privacy. I asked participants to help suggest spaces to meet up, somewhere comfortable for them, and meet them there. I also used artifacts from the AYIN organization, as a part of my data collection, and as a guide in the interview process, which helped bring back memories for some participants. I anticipated these artifacts would be stored in several places around the city as well, especially throughout the eastern part of Oslo, which is known to have a larger immigrant population. "Cities are not themselves homogeneous spaces. Neighborhood differences highlight, reflect, and reproduce the uneven transnational processes of place-making within which cities are constantly rebuilt and reimagined." (Schiller, 2012, p. 29). The different boroughs within Oslo have clear markers of who inhabits them, while the west is traditionally homogenous, with the ethnic majority population, the eastern part of Oslo is known to be much more multicultural, meaning that naturally, meetings with participants were likely to be held in either east or central Oslo.

The East/West divide in Oslo is interesting, as it has become more prominent in the last 50 years, largely due to immigration. This explains why most of our community congregates in

the eastern part of town, however, the reason for this divide has many contributors, but the most interesting ones in my mind stem from the mid-1800s, when central Oslo was home to the Norwegian elite. As the city grew, it became congested and foul-smelling, and the elite decided they would move out of the city, towards the western parts of Oslo, where "bymarka" or the forested and hilly areas of the city were. Here, many elite families already own summer homes, and it then became natural for them to retreat to those areas. The industries created pollution, but also due to poor transportation options at that time, factory workers had to live close to the factories, driving the elite further west, to avoid the working class. (Drageset, 2017). In later years, post-World War II, satellite cities, or "drabantbyer" were erected to solve the sudden need for housing, especially in the eastern part of Oslo. The apartments and high-rises consisted of smaller units, for the elderly, and young families, hence it became less attractive for larger families. As the immigrant population grew, these apartments became social housing homes for immigrant families coming to support the workforce. (Tidsskriftet Plan, 2021). These satellite cities have also been known as the Norwegian "ghetto", or "getto" as it is called in Norway. Over the years, the eastern part of Oslo has remained diverse, and has been the home for most immigrant organizations, international world music concerts, festivals, food markets, stores, and the home of the AYIN office.

Collecting data

I solicited participants via personal email, social media, and text messaging. I concluded that broadcasted general messages on social media felt impersonal and might attract people who were not active in the organization. I contacted members that I knew were active in the organization and are still fostering diasporic spaces in our community. I conducted the interviews informally, conversationally, as we invoked memories in more informal settings. I tried to listen more than I spoke, but I had to take into consideration my relationship with each participant, keeping the interview more comfortable by being authentic in our interactions.

I used an audio recorder as my primary source of record keeping, along with field notes. I was also interested in using pre-existing photos from our time in the organization as a part of the interview process, to evoke epiphanies of memories, but was unable to find them due to COVID-19 restrictions. This collection of artifacts included pamphlets, flyers, books, reports, pictures, etc. To analyze this data, I intended to use *NVivo* to code, store, and analyze the data collected.

NVivo also codes visual data, which would have been very useful in the event of locating a larger collection of pictures or other artifacts. As I had not established a timeline for this research, I intended to collect data during scheduled trips to Norway while working on the analysis and coding at Miami University.

COVID-19

Entering a global pandemic was not a part of anyone's plan, mine included. The amendments made to the data collection, as well as my processes as a person living through a pandemic were vast. I collect interviews through WebEx instead of in person. This process swiftly became more emotional, and more challenging as I was caring for my mother with stage four (4) kidney failure, and advanced heart failure. Interviews were conducted during intervals of my mother's hospital stays, which came with great support from my AYIN community. Through these interviews, I remembered how caring my community members were, how they cherished my mother, and her involvement with the organization, as well as how similar we were, as diasporic adults, navigating the bizarre challenges of caring for our elderly parents in a culture that does not value the same type of care for their elders. Norwegian society does not relate to the care of elders the way most of us in the diaspora do, and this, in turn, created more difficulties for us as the children of someone who required around-the-clock care. During COVID, I was able to rely more on my African community to create safe online spaces. We acted as a collective, through abstract and concrete spaces, which sometimes meant long phone calls, online zoom parties, sharing of recipes, receiving words of encouragement, and sometimes even receiving baked goods on our doorstep. Keeping a terminally ill person safe heightened my anxiety, and my days consisted of wiping down, sanitizing, and isolating, all while being the primary caregiver for someone who was unable to walk on some days, talk on other days, and eat most days.

My siblings and I spent our days learning how to administer injections, do physical therapy sessions, and caring for our dear mother fully and holistically. We, like everyone else became professional knitters, painters, banana bread makers, and crocheters during this time. And I think it is fair to say that writing became secondary, or perhaps even tertiary to everyday life, and to the events that were taking place. Yet, there was this drive to achieve and do as much as possible. The notion that because we were on global house arrest, that everyone was to be

hyper-productive, was challenging. I spent many days feeling guilty that I did not help mom enough, or that my writing had not been touched for months, not considering that even just existing and living through a pandemic was more than enough. Ultimately, COVID-19 showed us all that we're resilient, and that with these obstacles, we adapted. And so did this project. I was no longer the person who started this project. As I managed to reconnect with my network, set up online meetings with the AYIN alumni, transcribe, and code the data, I learned how to maneuver the pandemic, care for my mother, and pick up where I left off with my writing.

I adapted, and my plans of gathering AYIN artifacts all over the city disappeared. Not only was traveling to another town too risky due to covid, but as humans, we realized that our own safety was not the only factor that drove us to work together during this time, it was how our movements affect others in our communities, the elderly, and the vulnerable especially. So, I stayed put within my village, honestly, I stayed in the home I lived in most of the time. Deliveries became less interactive or engaging, as groceries, medical supplies, and antibacterial wipes, sprays, and bottles were left on the doorstep. The doorbell stopped ringing for anything other than the delivery people, risking their lives so that we would have our necessities. I realized that scaling back and being rational became more important like it became a vital life skill we all learned during the pandemic. I resulted in sorting, coding, and analyzing using Microsoft Word. Through some graduate school Twitter accounts, I was encouraged to buy some posterboards, print out my transcriptions, and create a so-called "murder board". A board with clippings, where I would see all my data, touch it, and be one with it. As Twitter has never steered me wrong, I bought some posterboards and created a masterpiece wall, filled with all the amazing words from people I respect in my community, who took the time out, to evoke memories, share stories, have epiphanies, and some good belly laughs, with me.

Chapter IV- Findings

NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU "He who does not know can know from learning" Symbol of knowledge, life-long education and continued quest for knowledge.

As an Afro-European or Afropean, who I am in relation to *where* I am becomes significantly different. Even through the long process of this project, I went from feeling like a Black woman in Ohio, to being a foreigner in my own country of Norway, navigating a pandemic, racial injustice, and grieving the loss of so many people, my mother, my nephew, and cousin in 2021. We have witnessed a shift in Norway, a rise of our Black Lives Matter chapter in Oslo, raising issues concerning the Afropean community, while reminding the majority (ethnic Norwegian) society that we face the same hardship Black people elsewhere experience. The continuous string of murders of Black people globally ignited a sense of urgency everywhere, Norway being no exception. We marched in the streets after the murder of George Floyd but continued the work by demanding to be seen and heard. The visibility of diversity in television, in politics, and in art and academic spaces can partly be attributed to the foundation AYIN laid in this country. Young Norwegian people of color are mobilizing, increasing visibility, and redefining what it means to be Norwegian. It is therefore such an honor to engage with the Afrikan Youth in Norway alum; to create a space of re-remembering and uplifting each other, to show gratitude for the experiences we had growing up in Norway, and how that has contributed to the foundation of change we see the youth are building on today.

I initially started asking the following question:

How do African immigrants in Norway (Afropeans) create and foster diasporic social learning spaces where African-centered ideologies help young people understand the importance of the inclusion of African history education in a predominantly white country?

· **Sub questions**

- How, and where are the diasporic spaces created and fostered?

- How does the history of Africans in Norway color the way African diasporic youth position themselves in Norwegian society?
- How was the Afrikan Youth in Norway youth organization essential in the creation of the diasporic social and learning spaces mentioned?

Looking at the diasporic spaces in Norway today, I found it particularly rewarding to look back, acknowledging the journey we have taken, the experiences we had as the first Pan-African youth organization in Norway. I invited participants who joined the organization for different reasons, from different backgrounds and diverse Norwegian experiences to indulge in a look back, exploring what our own histories have contributed to our personal lives, but also to the population of people of color in Norway. I interviewed four (4) Afro-European/Afropean people, all AYIN alum, who helped create and maintain a diasporic social space for the African immigrant population in Norway.

The interviews were all supposed to be conducted in two rounds: informal 'meetups", where more free-form conversation would take place; and then more focused dialogues to produce recorded textual data to be transcribed and analyzed. Both spaces were designed as places to allow for participants (along with myself) to evoke remembering, and *collective epiphanies*.

> While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate "intense situations" and "effects that linger - recollections, memories, images, feelings - long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Bochner, 1984, p. 595).

The process of *collective epiphanies* was supposed to collect stories that we deemed transformational together, while evoking thoughts in some of us that might have been forgotten. Ellis et al. states "When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity." (p. 275) As Afropeans in Norway, who have collectively been a part of AYIN, we share a culture, being third culture youth, now adults, all having experiences of AYIN as a supplementary educational and emotionally supportive space. The interviews were conducted as conversations, with questions to guide, but allowing for free

flow conversations so that both the researcher and participant could inject anecdotes, ask questions, and just freely talk. I had allotted approximately 40-60 minutes per interview, some were shorter, while one lasted approximately two hours. After the conversations with the participants, I transcribed the interviews using the recordings and coded initially using NVivo, but later used a method of color-coding themes and sorting through the collection of transcriptions manually. Translation was also necessary for one of the interviews, as participants often weaved between languages, as well as used Norwegian slang.

The participants were all former AYIN members. They were all given an informed consent form, as well as a demographics form to fill out and return to me prior to the interviews. The participants were asked age, gender, age of arrival in Norway, country of origin, and what year they joined AYIN. I interviewed two women, and two men. One of the participants were born in Norway, while the other three migrated to Norway with parents. One of the participants was involved in the conception of AYIN, while the other three joined at later times.

Every meeting with an AYIN alum started the same way; a grand embrace prefaced with hollering and stomping. There were the occasional dance moves, followed by a second embrace. The celebratory nature of our planned or random meetups ignited such camaraderie. It is like showing up at a random park and realizing it is your family reunion. Every time we meet, it feels like a celebration.

Muni

Meeting up with Muni to interview was no different. Standing at a whole five foot two, I guesstimate, Muni is our big sister, to all of us youth that went through AYIN. She invited me to her office to talk, just before COVID, and organized a conference room for us to be in. Meeting Muni, like meeting anyone else from AYIN, was the same, family reunion style. As I stepped into her office, Muni gave me a hug and a reassuring squeeze as we laughed before she guided me through the office, made me a cup of tea, and created space to honor me, shower me with love and attention, while excited to be a part of the project. Muni is encouraging, and always willing to participate in making your dreams and ideas come to life, especially if it involves the advancement of Africans in Norway. After living in London for many years, Muni

always has great ideas on how to strengthen our community, bringing what she learned and observed from a much more mature community of Afro-Caribbeans in London.

When I contacted Muni, she responded without hesitation, just as I assumed she would. We sat down and I presented the questions to her, asking her **how she would describe her experiences of growing up in Norway?** Muni took her time, thinking about the question before reflecting and saying,

Um, I think looking back at it now, it is very strange to grow up in a setting where you think you are a minority in, and you realize that you really, you really are not. I think in the concept of being, being looked at as very different. Everything about you is very different and never the norm. I think that does something about, it does something to your bone marrow, do you understand me? I mean like, it does something to you, your essence of who you think you are and what you can be. Uh, it just, I think having had that experience (of growing up in Norway), when you look at it from a bigger context, you're just like, fuck my life could have been so... it wasn't that it would be different, but it could have done something, especially during the youth years of who you think you are, and have to be. Uh, is very strange when you live inside a little vacuum and you think that this is the center of the world, and then you grow up as see, Oh! this is just like a little bubble somewhere and you are actually part of the majority.

Muni laughs and gestures to this as a lightbulb moment, the realization that you're not strange or outside the norm, you are just in a geographical location that does not reflect who you are.

Serian: How did you get involved with Afrikan Youth in Norway?

> Muni*: There was a little group of us, like we were interlinked with Nordic Black Theatre when we started just meeting up and basically just debriefing every - like once a week, or every other week about our lives, and issues. And, uh, like, you know, like when you work, like you have bereavement counselors at the end of each workday, they meet up and then you just, uh, empty yourself of everything you're taken with. So that's what we were doing.*
>
> *Uh, but, um, yeah, just like, uh, talking about having a safe space where, where young people could meet up, uh, um, talk about the stuff they wanted to talk about without being scared that people would get offended or they have to defend what they felt, or even have to defend what they experience as like, "Oh, you're over sensitive. Is that really what you experienced?" Like just a safe space where we could try and… And cause we saw that we all had a lot of things in common of things that we missed and we*

> *needed, both from input, being together, yeah, sharing his space or we just can be ourselves and away from the white harshness and the white gaze and the judgment and, uh, terror basically. That the way we felt.*

Serian: So you guys met up and you kind of did this, um, kind of unloading and mental health wellness type of meeting where you can kind of talk and discuss and then, um, the idea came up to involve younger, a younger generation, I'm assuming? And then you guys went on from there. And then that's how Afrikan Youth was formed?

Muni nods and tells me about how they went on recruiting young Africans, coming from a large family, she recruited first from her home, getting her younger siblings engaged in the organization. The conception of AYIN came from this necessity that Muni describes. The creation of this wellness space that offered education, care, food, camaraderie, and an artistic outlet was rooted in the selfless act of creating a safe zone for Afropean youth. Baba Buntu alongside Muni and others pioneered this space for us to grow and often provided shelter for many of us. Muni speaks of a place where her mental health and wellness was upheld, similar to a bereavement counselor would, which speaks to the challenges we face as diasporic youth in Norway. As Gullestad (2005) mentioned, minority youth are typically labeled as sensitive or obsessed, this is something that Muni echoes here. She mentions how important the safe space is to self-expression because spaces outside the organization simply were not considered safe. Muni was involved with Nordic Black Theatre, which was and still is a transnational social space in Oslo. The theatre space has regularly been a hub for many of the AYIN alum, especially those interested in performance art.

Muni's experience with AYIN is part of the reason we refer to her as our big sister. She was there from the start and is a well of knowledge and resource for the whole community. Muni is also the person that knows all the elders and can put you in contact with anyone you want. Alongside her impressive networking skills, she is also a source for archives of African artifacts in the city, as well as book recommendations from African writers, toys for children, and African natural hair and skin products.

Abdibasid

Abdibasid is a gentle soul, full of comedy, usually reserved for a select few. He moved to Norway as an 11-year-old, due to the conflict in Somalia in the early 1990s. Greeting him is

like meeting that calm, cool cousin that likes to chill and give out great advice, we always have an inside joke that we test out, to see whether we have outgrown it, but I don't think we ever will. Abdibasid was happy to talk on video-call, meaning our elaborate greeting ceremony was way less hype, but heart filling, nonetheless. Abdibasid asked about my mother and lent an ear as I aired some sadness as to how challenging the situation was, but that she was hospitalized now, which allowed us this space to reconnect. Abdibasid, a psychotherapist and activist, learned about AYIN through a friend. He spends his days now working predominantly with African boys in the community, but also travels worldwide, holding talks and workshops dealing with racial trauma, and does work within epigenetics.

As we sit and chat through the screen, Abdibasid suggests I buy all the participants dinner once the restrictions have lifted. This, he says, is something that he misses, us together, eating and remembering the AYIN days. I agree to the dinner and ask him whether he can recall his initial thoughts on Norway, experiencing snow for the first time, and his misconceptions of the country. He sits back in his chair before saying:

> *So one of the things that I remember was we came in February and it was a lot of snow and everything was covered with snow. So I was thinking "so I know these white people from Europe are rich, but they even paint the mountains white" because in Somali the word for snow is ice we only use one word for it because we didn't have snow or ice over there was no need for it. So when I used to hear it snows in Europe I used to imagine those ice cubes falling down and I would think, poor people. Anyways, so those are the things that I really amazed me and we moved to North Norway, Tromsø. That's where we started our journey. And so first time I saw the Northern Light, the Aurora, my goodness! This thing is beautiful phenomena, if you know what it is, but a little kid you experienced war and all sort of things seeing this it was the scariest thing I ever saw.*
>
> *And I'm a Muslim by faith. And so, we believe in that so one day is going to be doomsday. So I was this wee little kid outside playing, so Tromsø is always dark. Doesn't matter what time it is during the winter, and all of a sudden, I see all these beautiful colorful formations and a lot of stuff going on and I'm like Oh my goodness.*

Abi recollects his first contact with the AYIN organization years later, as a teenager:

> *A friend of mine took me to one of the meetings or "hangouts". We had the movie night and it was so cool, you know, and it was a weird experience since all these kids were all Black, and I didn't know we had such a place at the time. And it was fun. We had different food, I think mostly… I think one of our Gambian moms used to cook, so it was usually Jollof all the meals, and it was cool and I really liked it. So we keep coming back and then yeah, that's how my African Youth Journey started, through a friend.*

Movie nights, like all other themed nights at the AYIN office, were rooted in the representation of people of color, firstly, with diverse films spanning from Sankofa (1993) by Haile Gerima to Boyz n the Hood (1991) by John Singleton. We learned early on in our educational spaces in AYIN about the heterogeneity of people of color, and how vast the African diaspora truly is. I remember these movie nights just like Abdibasid remembers them, with food, friends, and warmth. It is universal that food attracts the youth, so strategically, I think anyway, the movie would play while the food was being cooked, all the aromatics just dancing above us under the tall ceiling of the AYIN space, all the youth excited to dig in, while the critical post-movie discussion would take place. Baba Buntu would stand up after the movie ended to engage and challenged us to see ourselves in the movie. He spent time to draw differences and similarities to our experiences, while always allowing the film to become a learning tool for us. Baba Buntu could make anything and everything educational, and he did so most times to our oblivion. He would see a group of bored teens and get them hype through call and response, and suddenly, he would find a piano or a rhythmic instrument, and just like that, he would create a whole party. In these moments, we would be unaware of the ancestral significance of a call-and-response session, but this form of musical engagement was created in Sub-Saharan Africa "The call-and-response, a pattern of two distinct phrases played by different musicians in which the "response" is a commentary on the "call," has likely existed since the dawn of Africa's language-proficient communities" (Keegan, 2005 p. 10). We had only heard this form of call-and-response through rap music, not ever thinking this might have roots from the continent. We felt connected to hip hop, not only because we loved the music and culture, but because it was the sole representation, we saw of people who looked like us, and we connected to that immensely. The African youth embraced African American culture, without really understanding the link between the two continents, we had heard about the enslavement of Africans, and how we all likely have a lineage that crosses the Atlantic, but we did not understand the strength of our ancestry, and how connected the diaspora is. This is something we would learn something about every time we entered the AYIN office.

<u>Balita</u>

Balita is an artist, full of energy and enthusiasm for all things related to African Liberation and the betterment of the diaspora. He came to Norway in 1996 as a young teenager

from The Congo, and moved to a small town in Norway, Hadeland, with very little diversity. Balita was a boxer as a teenager and became renowned in the whole country for his sharp boxing skills. Now a father, and an educator, Balita works with local youth of color to create safe and creative spaces for them, as they experience discrimination, and racism in a borough in the western part of Oslo. Additionally, Balita is a recording artist and one-half of the group African Sunz.

Our conversation was over video call, yet again, restricting our abilities to embrace and jump around in unison. Balita did the jumping in his kitchen, while I did mine in my mother's bedroom. Balita tells me that he has been wanting to have this conversation for a while because he often feels that we forget how important Afrikan Youth in Norway was and still is to us, and that he hopes that his children will have something like AYIN. Balita also asked if we could speak Norwegian, saying that as a native French speaker, his English might be a bit rusty. I thoroughly enjoy listening to Balita speak as he has this stylized Norwegian Multiethnolect that feels so familiar from our AYIN days. According to Svendsen and Røyneland, "multiethnolects are characterized by their use by several minority groups "collectively to express their minority status and/or as a reaction to the status to upgrade it" (Clyne, 2000. p. 87)". (2008. p. 64). This Multiethnolect which is also known as Kebabnorsk by mainly nonmultiethnolectal people to distance themselves from the language (p. 68), varies from different places in the Oslo area, depending on whether the speaker is ethnic Norwegian, or a minority. In some areas, the multiethnolect may be more Spanish influenced, while other places it might be more Arabic, Urdu, or Punjab influenced. (p. 65.). This multietholect evolves as the city and country becomes more diverse, however, some of the language we used as youth is still in circulation with the youth of today, such as saying *wallah* (swear by Allah), or *tært (good)* in conversation to solidify our statements. Also speaking harder and faster, mimicking Arabic speech patterns is something that is very different from traditional Norwegian language patterns (p. 71). This way of speaking became unpopular with linguists, and right-wing Norwegians, as they saw it as a bastardization of the Norwegian language and went as far as to ask minority youth to "learn proper Norwegian". Insinuating that this multietholect was a replacement from the traditional Norwegian language, not an addition to it. An educator wrote an open letter to the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* in 2006, stating:

> I actually think many Norwegians would benefit from being instructed in Norwegian as a second language. Especially those who have grown up in areas with 90% migrants. Once, I had an ethnic Norwegian pupil at secondary school who spoke "broken" Norwegian. Frightening. (Aftenposten 8.6.2006). (p. 63)

This assumption that the way we speak is broken, is shared by many from the dominant culture, and we who use it code-switch depending on your surroundings. Within friend groups, such as Balita and I, we tend to relax into the multietholect, weaving in and out of Arabic and Urdu words, English, and perhaps some French in Balita's case.

Balita does not remember much about his first meeting with AYIN but remembers who introduced him to the organization. All he recalls is an event, one of many AYIN were involved in, to increase the cultural events in the city.

> *Så jeg husker faktisk ikke det første møtet. Jeg husker bare at jeg var plutselig inn i Afrikan Youth. Jeg tror det var i forbindelse med en fest på XRAY et eller annet…John Dee! Det var en konsert på John Dee. Jeg er litt usikker på om det var Dead Prez, husker jeg bare kom der og T (name removed) bare "fett!". Så kort sagt, i det så fikk jeg møtt folk, "oi, shit, er det svarte folk her!" og de oppførte seg helt hæ!*
>
> *Ok cool! So I don't actually remember when I first went to AYIN. All I remember is that I was suddenly a part of Afrikan Youth. I think it was through a party at Xray, something…John Dee! There was a concert at John Dee. I am unsure whether it was a Dead Prez concert, just remember coming there and T was like "Awesome". So in short, I got to meet people like "oh shit! There are Black people here!" and they are acting all hype! Ok, cool.* (Translated by myself).

Balita, living outside of the city, was unaware of this community Black youth in Norway. This, combined with a hip-hop concert meant that the connection was deeper than just skin color. Balita recollects the baggie jeans, the FUBU clothing, and the hype atmosphere giving him an instant sense of belonging. Going back into his rural community, Balita says he became a rebel, or "pøbel" as he says. He was not afraid to not fit in anymore, because he had found his people.

Finding your people is challenging in a country with a small African community. Especially when you live outside of the Oslo area where most of the Afropean population resides, according to The Norwegian Statistical Agency, ssb.no, 33% of Oslo's population is made of immigrants, making it the highest concentration of immigrant populations in the nation. With the borough of Stovner being made up of 53% immigrant population. To put this into

perspective, we must look at the population of Norway. The population of Norway in 2022 is recorded as 5 425 270. Below is a table showing how the national statistical agency conducts its census, with regards to how they count immigrants.

	2022			
	Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, total	Immigrants	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents	Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents in per cent of total population
Total	1 025 175	819 356	205 819	18.9
The EU27/EEA, United Kingdom, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand	419 720	370 240	49 480	7.7
Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, and Europe except the EU27/EEA/United Kingdom	605 455	449 116	156 339	11.2
EU27/EEA countries	386 858	339 510	47 348	7.1
European countries outside EU27/EEA	105 723	83 102	22 621	1.9
Africa	144 868	103 076	41 792	2.7
Asia including Turkey	342 571	253 358	89 213	6.3
North America	13 038	12 145	893	0.2
South and Central America	29 515	25 662	3 853	0.5
Oceania	2 602	2 503	99	0.0

Figure 10 Immigration Statistics (Steinkellner 2022)

The above table shows the number of immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. This table also differentiates between nationalities, showing that only 2.7% of immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents are from the continent of Africa. Keeping in mind that we are unable to count the diaspora as with AYIN, everyone with ancestry from the continent were welcome.

This table does however uncover a few things. The first would be the challenging language used to describe immigrant populations in Norway. Immigrants are defined as persons born abroad of two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents. Norwegian-born to Immigrant Parents are born in Norway of two parents born abroad and in addition have four grandparents born abroad. (Steinkeller, 2022) The second thing to consider is that 18.9% of the Norwegian population are considered immigrants, however, 7.7% are what we call *usynlige innvandrere* or invisible immigrants. These are predominantly white immigrants who are less likely to experience being Othered, racism, discrimination, etc. as they more easily “blend” in with the ethnic Norwegian population. This table does also not include Norwegian-born to one foreign born parent, with foreign ancestry, nor does it specify how it counts transracial adoptees

either, which makes these numbers somewhat confusing and lacking in explanation. These numbers do however shed light on the lack of diversity in Norway, and how that affects our need for diasporic communal spaces, especially for those who live outside of the city, where there is less diversity.

Olimata

Olimata is youthful, always has been. She is my older sister, by six years, but people constantly ask whether I am older, which tickles her to the point that it has now become a personality trait. Olimata was born in Norway, and was the baby who was, to put it bluntly, was the victim of being displayed in a manner reminiscent of a human zoo. She is now the founder of Norwegian Naturals, an online forum for people of color in the Nordic countries creating support and advice on anything Black hair and skin related. As my sister and one of my best friends, she was more than willing to sit down for a chat about her AYIN journey. Olimata, unlike most of us got involved with AYIN as an adult, just moving back from The Gambia after living there for six years. Olimata felt disconnected to Norway, and the African community as she moved back. She was 21 years of age, feeling out of touch with her former school mates, and was eager to find people she could relate to. I was already back in Norway, had started Secondary school, and was in the organization when Olimata moved back. Wanting her to connect with some of the leaders of the group, I suggested she join the organization. Olimata remembers getting in touch with AYIN:

> *I think I went to like a meeting or an event. I can't remember but after that, I just probably spend 80 to 90% of my free time there. Yes, you know working and you know hanging out first but I started working there very very quickly because I was older than the demographic.*

Living in Ås, a small college town, 45-minute drive from the city, immersing herself in AYIN was instant. She had found a space that reminded her of The Gambia, the place she had come to love and for the first time in her life, felt like she belonged. Olimata, and the rest of my family were moving back to Norway not because we wanted to, but due to necessity. The Gambia had experienced a Coup d'état, an overthrowing of the government, which left my father stranded, with a project that was funded by the World Bank, which they retracted as they feared more unrest in the country. As the political situation in The Gambia continued to feel uneasy, family

members and friends of the family were experiencing being exiled from the country, and the unsafe nature of the nation left us having to leave. Although the transition from Norway to the Gambia was challenging, Olimata and I flourished in the Gambia, we gained an understanding of our culture and language that we see as invaluable today. We experienced an authentic communal extended family living system; cohabitating with cousins, uncles, aunties, grandparents, and distant relatives, learning cultural practices, and for the first time in our lives, feeling like the majority population.

Coming back to Norway and having somewhere to belong echoes the sentiments of all the AYIN alum. As Muni mentioned, having somewhere to freely exist, to receive validation in your experiences, and to feel safe was something that the youth needed, but also the young adults such as Muni and Olimata. AYIN created a space to escape the harsh microaggressions, racism, and discrimination we all experienced in the streets, in school, and everywhere we went.

Growing up in Norway

Figure 11 Olimata & Serian at a school cultural event. (Author's photo)

We spent our lives thinking that we were alone in our feelings of being marginalized. Norway has a strange relationship to racism, and rarely uses the terminology to describe racist acts. Racism has been labelled in Norway as isolated incidences by radicalized persons, and not an institutional issue. "Talking about racism in Norway is difficult, because there is an assumption and a consensus that the country is tolerant and inclusive." (Wiggen, 2021) Norwegians generally believe themselves to be tolerant and acceptant of other ethnicities and nationalities, and rather accommodating as politically we have historically opposed Apartheid, been actively involved in peace treaties in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and hosts the Nobel Peace Prize yearly, where they hosted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1964. These national accomplishments are often used as examples to how Norway is liberal and

accepting, “However, there is little understanding among white Norwegians of implicit bias or institutional racism. Even seasoned politicians seem to think racism doesn’t exist if it isn’t conscious.” (Wiggins, 2021)

This lack of conversation around racism has affected the minority population and has shaped how we experienced growing up in Norway as African. We grew up not having a language to express the racism we faced daily, and looking back at being a child in Norway, the first word that enters my mind is loneliness. Being marginalized as a child is confusing, and not having the language for it, makes it even more challenging. Some of the participants, myself included, experienced the feelings of being marginalized as a child, Olimata recalls an incident:

> *I remember in particular there was- I think we had done a math test or something or I think it was civics, I can't remember, but, I remember getting the same score as one of my ethnic Norwegian classmates and we were walking home from school and we stopped by his house first and then we were going to walk to my house. And I remember his mom being upset with him for the score that he got and then he was saying “but I got the same score as her” and the mother said “Are you comparing yourself to an “N-word”, and I will never forget that day.*

The racist and damaging message of a mother who does not want their child to compare themselves with someone they categorize as a “neger” (N-word), even though Olimata herself was not aware of the true meaning of the word, this incident taught Olimata that who and what she was perceived to be was less than tolerable, and inferior. This feeling of inferiority she says, *I think that from there on I felt some sort of inferiority when it came to especially like my intelligence, and then I think that's when I started messing up more in school as well. [00:06:55]*

Abdibasid reflects on the feelings of being Othered as well, remembering.

> *What I remember at the time I didn't realize it but the things that I now reflect upon, is and, doesn't matter how hard you try to be one of the kids. You will always be reminded that you are different. So whenever it is some political questions or religious questions, whatever. Hey, Abdibasid, you are a Somali, or you’re Muslim. Tell us, you know, and all this time I've been trying to be one of them even I remember I used to develop a habit. I didn't have long hair, you remember this? So, I would see the kids always go like this with a hair and I start doing it you know? I tried really hard to fit in and, but my teacher, thanks to him, he used to tell me “Hey, relax man, you are different”.*

One of the first conversations I had with Abdi as a youth, we bonded at AYIN over exactly this concept of trying to fit in, to the point of, looking back at it, feeling delusional. When

I was in elementary school, my parents worked full days, my mother, who did not drive, worked three jobs, and would finish and wait for my father to give her a ride home. They would come home between five and six pm, and my siblings and I had keys to get home. As the youngest child at the time, I had a key that was always hanging around my neck, and I was the first one home, getting off school at around one pm. I was instructed to lock myself in the house, take off my school clothes, get a snack, and do my homework. I have always been a television connoisseur, so I loved watching television. My father knowing this, had a lock code on the television, so that no-one could access it until he came home. To pass time, and to feel like one of the ethnic Norwegian kids at school, I would get a pair of tights, throw them over my head and run along the living room, to simulate having long hair, more specifically, having long pigtails, just like my friends had.

As a Black person, my tightly coiled hair which defies gravity, something I was strongly opposed to as a child, wanting only to have the same hair as the other girls in my class. I would dream of going to the hairdresser, something that was unavailable to people of color in Norway during that time, and only knowing my auntie as my hairdresser, no chair, or smock, just a cushion on the floor, a tender scalp, and an achy neck. My classmates would show up to class with short bangs, long hair, and new colors, and I just wished to once feel my long hair blowing in my face or feeling my hair behind me when I was running. So, my living room sessions of running with the tights were my attempts to feel normal, as I understood it. I remember hearing Abdi talking about how he subconsciously started blowing his bangs away from his eyes, not realizing that he did not have bangs, nor would he probably ever be able to grow long bangs. But modeling behavior from his classmates, with a desire to fit in, you long for a moment where you are not being marginalized, just so that you can feel like you are one of them, just for a tiny moment. We bonded over our experiences of strong desires to fit in, using humor to ease the hurt of growing up African in Norway.

The Unsaid

Figure 12 AYIN youth on a trip (Author's photo)

Being Othered and marginalized explains *why* all of us became members of AYIN. Coming into the organization, there were no expectations from any of us youth members that AYIN would become a learning space, a therapeutic environment, and our connection to the continent and diaspora. AYIN would several times a year arrange a youth camp, either during our spring or fall break, where we would travel to cabins outside of the city and stay for four days for some much-needed collective healing and knowledge replenishment. Looking back and remembering the camps might just be my absolute favorite pastime. It was something we looked forward to for months. We would plan sleeping arrangements, candy stash, wardrobe, games, and all things teenager related.

AYIN usually hired a bus to take us to this camp, in the later years, we were fortunate enough to get an African bus driver, Uncle B. Uncle B was one of the first African bus drivers in Norway, and he was able to get a bus for the youth, and charter it for the long weekend. He would bring his son and stay for the duration when possible. We usually also had one or two "moms" on the trip, who were officially responsible for the cooking, but unofficially were there for so much more. My mother was one of the AYIN moms, she loved going on the camps with

us, and would always bring her best friend Mamma Katty to join. With Baba Buntu as the leader, he was joined by a team of adults who made camp possible. We were surrounded by Elders, some not much older than us, but they brought so much knowledge, safety, love, and care to the camps, it created a safe diaspora space, usually in the woods, or near campgrounds which were otherwise very Norwegian and white. Camps were important because of the space it created for us. Growing up in Norway, we rarely learned anything about the continent of Africa, and the African diaspora. Muni remembers; *I went to primary school or secondary school, the same school and the only thing I can remember that had to do anything about Africans were while we were talking about this United States, and slavery and that was like a little blink of an eye type of "Oh they did something really bad, or blah blah blah", and I was thinking like I should have expected them to talk about Catholic history when it comes to slavery. They didn't say anything about their involvement. At all!*

Like Muni, I have a hard time remembering learning anything about my ancestry in school, all I can recollect is a page or two in our history book where slavery, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King were gathered to signify one era in history. Reflecting, this hyper condensed version of African/Black history cultivated a sense of confusion on the timespan from being enslaved, to the assassination of Dr. King, not understanding how much time had passed, the magnitude of these horrific times in history, as well as the horrific nature of history. Abdibasid remembers *I don't remember anything.* You don't? *That's throughout. I think I… the little that I remember was about climate like in Geography books. So they showed the maps of what kind of resources people and different countries or continents had but not in like history.*

With no memory of any African history education, Abdibasid was armed with much less than I was. The notion that African history education only serves the African children is rooted in Norway's lack of ability to acknowledge their global contribution to colonization and enslavement. As mentioned in the previous chapters, Norway insists of not being involved in the transatlantic slave trade, or colonization, but these myths have been uncovered in later years. In the recent decade, scholars have uncovered and published articles, books, and dissertation work on the Danish-Norwegian involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, their involvement in shipbuilding, and colonizing of Caribbean, African, and Asian regions. In the book "De Dansk-Norske Tropekoloniene" by Roar Løken, Løken explores the involvement of Norwegians in not

only the transatlantic slave trade, but also their involvement of keeping enslaved Africans, on plantations in the West Indies, and in Africa, but also how many upper-class families wanted to own enslaved girls and boys. This trend, he says, came after the Danish Queen and Crown Prince requested an enslaved girl be delivered to them, something that took three tries, as the previous two died on their way to Copenhagen. (Løken, 2020) The book is rich with chapters on Nordic involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, but this book not easily found, nor is it used in any capacity to enrich the current history curriculum. As an AYIN alum, we had already learned about some of the history found in this book, it was left out of our traditional education, however, we learned this information through our camps.

Camp "Leir"

Figure 13 Afrikan Youth in Norway youth exchange trip to Amsterdam (Author's photo)

Many of us lived in the outskirts of the city, relying on diversity from our families, visiting other families in Oslo, and whatever you would get through books, magazines, and MTV. Growing up in Ås was lonely and looking forward to camp made the months between the camps bearable. There was something about seeing others that looked like you, that had the same

interests, same references when it came to parents, family life, and feeling marginalized. Some of us were born and raised in Norway, while others came as children or teenagers, I can imagine, for many of those who arrived in Norway as refugees, the isolation felt especially harsh. Balita remembers:

> *For jeg kan sitte å ja OK jeg så her i Norge at jeg hadde aldri møtt en person fra Kenya: Jeg fikk møtt dem på Afrikan Youth, ikke sant?! Jeg fikk møtt noen fra Gambia, you name it! Vi var veldig like, og det som skilte oss var karakter. Alle hadde sine egne greier så var det bare "å shit!", det var ikke nasjonalisme, liksom. Jeg husker, men jeg kan, jeg kan ikke huske at jeg husker folk ut fra hvor de er fra. Jeg husker bare at, oh shit, her er det bare, her er vi Afrikan Youth*
>
> *I used to sit and think, Ok, I have never actually met anyone from Kenya; I met them at Afrikan Youth, you understand!? I got to meet some people from Gambia, you name it! We were all so similar, but what differentiated us was that everyone was their own character, everyone had their own thing, I just thought, Oh Shit! There is no nationalism, you know. Thinking back, I can't remember where people are from, all I remember is that here, we are Afrikan Youth.* (Translated by me).

I remember having to tell my ethnic Norwegian friends that I was going away to camp, where, on more than one occasion, they would ask if they could join. The answer was no, this was just for us. Our insistence to retain AYIN as a space for "just us" was something that drew attention to our organization. Some accused us of being exclusionary and discriminatory, even labeled as reverse racists for not including everyone, being described as political and similar to the Black Panther Party. The notion that we/us, as immigrants, did not ask for validation, or apologized for our need to congregate and be by ourselves was very difficult for the Norwegian public to digest. I remember feeling uncomfortable to tell my Norwegian friends that they were not included, because of the guilt placed upon me to want something for myself.

Muni remembers this as well, stating:

> *At some point, Oh! I remember some woman was saying that, "Oh my gosh, Afrikan Youth is like The Black Panthers". So we were like, Oh my God, they compared us to the Black Panthers! And we're just like a group of young people, we just want to hang out together and like, we just want to go to the camps and, and like just be in our own space. We weren't even like that, and I also have heard, "they have meetings and no white people are allowed".*

While this woman might have said this with a negative undertone, we were slowly realizing, and learning through AYIN how important the Black Panther Party were to their local communities.

We knew that we were not nearly like the BPP, but this became a healthy way of positioning ourselves, to embrace our work, and seeing it as political and resistant. It gave us strength, and we realized that there was action behind our words, that saying "actually, this is just for African youths, but you are more than welcome to attend our fundraising events, to support our mission, and become allies for our cause" became important and powerful statements, not in an effort to exclude, but to center ourselves for once, and to nurture the safe diasporic spaces we had created.

I vaguely remember one of my friends bringing this topic up to Baba Buntu, asking if we could bring our ethnic Norwegian friends to camp, he looking at us in awe, wondering whether we actually knew what he was going to say, or perhaps just being so sad for us, seeing that we missed the point, that us being together, exclusively, meant that we were creating a space that was ours, what we actually wanted, but we were so conditioned to think that wanting this was selfish and discriminatory. We were being conditioned to think that being pro-Black, meant being anti-white, that reverse racism exists. Assimilation politics in Norway are rooted in the ideas that Norwegian culture is stagnant, that it is something everyone should buy into, and that it is not something that is in constant change. This breeds a false sense of togetherness, and as previously mentioned, "sameness" that is far from how metropolitan areas in Norway look today. This also related closely to how the Norwegian society traditionally views racism; as isolated, violent acts of hate, and not something that is present in greater society. The idea of colorblindness is more common, and accepted, and is often used in this notion of togetherness of saying "Ja, du er jo Norsk" – *Why yes, you are Norwegian,* or "Jeg ser ikke farge/Jeg tenker ikke på at du er annenledes, jeg!" *I don't see color/ I don't think of you as different.* Norwegians often use these phrases in complementary ways to show their progressive nature. This means that because you are assimilated, i.e., speak the language, eat the food, partake in the cultural and traditional events, you are "one of us". So, when the AYIN kids said to their peers that they were not included in the camp, this idea of togetherness and colorblindness was questioned by those excluded.

Memories of feeling awkward and sad that our ethnic Norwegian friends were excluded from the camps were distant once we arrived at the camp site. We would meet up by the large Tiger statue situated in the center of the open square in front of the Central Oslo train station. I would spend the whole morning making sure my outfits were laid out, my sleeping bag was

packed, and that I had enough pocket money so that I would be able to run into the grocery store at the central station to buy *smågodt* (candy) and soda we could binge during the nights when we were supposed to be sleeping but were rather sneaking into each other's rooms. After the snack purchases, we would rush onto the bus and occupy rows of seats with our designated best friend of the trip. I remember feeling like nothing else mattered once I entered the bus. The feelings of being alien at school, the microaggressions from teachers and administrators were in the rearview as we drove to the campsite. There was never a moment of silence on the bus, even as the leaders were shouting out announcements, there was already a self-proclaimed DJ with a boombox taking requests while the rest of us passed CDs around on the bus. The atmosphere was hype, with people spilling out of their seats to tell stories, show off new dance moves, or just to embrace each other.

Once at the campsite, the camp leaders, who were our AYIN elders, would help us with room designations and making sure nobody had to room alone or felt left out. The campsite I remember the most was located at the Larkollen Camping site, merely 2.5 miles south of my hometown of Ås. In a sea of caravans and elderly ethnic Norwegian campers, the bus, often filled with 40 Afrikan youth, slowly entered the campsite and parked by the cabins located on the edge of the camping grounds. We would spill out of the bus, to run towards the desired cabin, in an effort to claim our rooms, even though we already knew that the cabin doors would be locked, and that the leaders purposefully did so to prevent any newcomers of having to room by themselves. The excitement in the air is a feeling I still long for today, and perhaps it's the feeling I get when I meet up with the former members at a restaurant or a party; everyone had a story to tell, a new song to play, a new style to debut, and we all at that moment, felt a sense of belonging.

The campsite had three main buildings; Two for sleeping, and one where we had our meetings, meals, and entertainment. Entering the main house would transport you immediately into your mother's kitchen, where coincidentally, oftentimes, my mother and her best friend Tanta Katty would be stationed for most of the camp, cooking up Gambian food and providing a sort of "on-site mommy corner" for the youth that needed a bit of mommy time. The industrial size kitchen although large, felt intimate and inviting as the aromas of jollof rice and homemade baked goods swerved around the enormous room. The moms would order us around to mop this

or cut that, and praise us as we completed tasks, making camp feel like home. Our moms, called either Mamma or Auntie by all the youth had a significant role, just by being present. As well as having them there, as grand matriarchs, they also created a space where many of the youth experienced being parented by an African mom for the first time. We would then have a welcome meeting where we would do introductions, go over the program for the days to come, and receive a rules and regulations list.

Remembering back to camp and the rules and regulations, expectations of conduct remind me of Kleinfeld´s "warm demanders". "We define warm demanding as a feature of culturally relevant teaching that is characterized by culturally relevant, critical care, and authority" (Bondy et al., 2012. p. 441). There was a sternness at camp we would otherwise only experience at home, they were not like our schoolteachers; they were tough, demanded a level of conduct that we usually did not experience in other spaces. There was also a level of care that we only could explain as almost familial. Once we put our luggage down, got in our cozy outfits and sat down to chat, it was like you were among family. I cannot remember a single time I have uttered the word "Leir" without seeing everyone who has ever attended do anything but grin. Remembering back, there were a very few rules, very sensible ones like no mood-altering substances, regardless of age, being respectful, doing the chores assigned to you, etc. But as teenagers, those rules seemed too harsh. So of course, we would sneak in some cigarettes, booze, and always try to get away from doing the chores. But our warm demanders were always there, catching us in the act of smoking, taking a swig of something we weren't supposed to have, or trying to sneak off the campgrounds at night, or just to the next cottage. They would give us a stern talking to, send us back to bed, and bring it up the next morning after breakfast. They always made sure to wake us up early the next morning, the worse we were the previous night, the harsher the waking up. I remember waking up one morning, before my peers to see my older sister and the other leaders stand around in the kitchen, compiling lids and ladles to create an orchestra of chaos to wake the rest of the camp. The leaders would run around banging on the lids and saucepans to make the most amount of noise to wake us up, revenge for keeping them up the previous night. We would be miserable, after a whole night of being chased by the leaders, to sit up at the breakfast table at nine am, felt harsh, but knowing we had this weekend to be amongst familiar faces made it worth it. The leaders would then prepare for a day of workshops, group assignments, role playing, singing, dancing, you name it.

Our dense program at camp was something we constantly complained about. We would organize ourselves as youth and discuss asking for more free time from the leaders, saying we were tired and that the workshops were too long. The comradery and organization we created was magical. We knew that bringing forth this suggestion would land us in a discussion of why we were there, and whether we wanted to learn more about ourselves or just lazy around. The answer from the leaders was usually no, they would remind us of all the free time we already had and made us rejoin the planned program. Looking back, I enjoyed every activity at camp, learning about ancient African civilizations, or discussing social issues through Sister Souljah's writing left me feeling empowered and confident.

I consider camp our primary educational space. Myers & Grosvenor (2011) explore supplementary education in the United Kingdom. In their article, they underline the importance of having a sense of belonging, stating that these educational spaces are not only important for language (i.e. Chinese language schools), but aid in identity formation, and create safe spaces away from racism (p. 504) At the time, I was unaware of the magnitude of learning occurred in this space, over the span of four days. Somehow, Baba Buntu and the leaders were able to create a curriculum full of information that was exciting to learn, relevant, and fun. They would use our interest in popular culture to ignite an interest in the curriculum in a way that encouraged us to learn without even really knowing it. There was also much learning happening organically during camp. We had youths teaching each other to braid, dances, telling stories of their lives both on the continent and in Norway, but the most magical part was the way we learned to lean on each other and create a community that to this day today is being nurtured.

Abdibasid recalls;

> *So Amani (Baba Buntu) and all the other leaders, youth leaders, we had then before we became youth leaders, would have lessons that were formed in a very pedagogic way. It was fun. It included a lot of culture. So it wasn't like I had to sit down and write down the right stuff. So it's through storytelling. Which is from our heritage and yeah, so this kind of way of learning just sticks with you longer than the conventional way of learning, right?*

These ways of learning were often thought sketches and role plays. We would be separated into groups that were assigned a particular topic. Each group had a prompt that we used to create a play, we were assigned a group room, and asked to come up with a group name,

and a theme to work from. These plays were usually funny and relatable as we discussed social issues and found ways of illuminating them and playing out creative solutions to remedy the issues. These topics were usually a problem that we had to find ingenious ways of solving, or something that had occurred that we were highlighting. We were encouraged to use music, dancing, comedy, and lots of drama in our sketches. We would have breakout rooms where we would spend hours writing up a script, planning costumes, and discussing plots. The performances would be on the last night of the camp, where we also had a big dinner, impromptu dance-offs and lots of treats and laughs. The last night was the evening where we would wear our African outfits. Most of us had some we brought from home, while others had clothes, they could pick out from Baba Buntu's vast collection of African outfits. We would get dressed up, while the leaders dressed up the dining hall with ribbons and balloons, African textiles, and music. The kitchen crew would bake sweet treats and make a huge pot of jollof. We would all sit down for a nice dinner, followed by the plays, and always a dance-off with Balita in the center of the dance floor.

These unconventional ways of learning that Abdi is referring to, like storytelling, was one of the reasons why AYIN camps were so invaluable. Many of us had been told that we were perhaps not smart enough to pursuit certain career paths by our school guidance counselors, and some of us were not fluent in Norwegian, and had hindrances which made school challenging. The educational sessions with AYIN created a space where we were able to ask questions, get clarification, and excel in our learning, as our teachers created a safe and patient space for us to learn in.

Every camp had a theme, and Olimata remembers the "African inventors/Black excellence" camp.

> *I remember when we were we would have those charts with Black inventors, and hmm Amani (Baba Buntu) would pass them around and we were like, "okay everybody like relax", like there's no way! You know because we still have that mindset of what we learned in school, because you have the Egyptian Dynasty which is so far away timewise for us, and then like, then you switch then you know, you switch that off and the next time you bring back Africa in history, It's about colonialism or slavery and stuff like that. Everything else was negative. So with Amani (Baba Buntu), he was passing around these charts just an example. We're just looking at it, like "Amani (Baba Buntu) is crazy". All of these things can't be facts? When you just came out of learning very little about African history, most of what you've learned is all this negative stuff. So you just think*

> *like okay, this Amani (Baba Buntu) character, he's just crazy, like why is he showing us all these things? that cannot be true? But they were and they were true.*

As Olimata entered the organization as an adult, she had not come across any of the African history education we received at African youth. Only knowing what we had learned in school, the vast information we received at these camps were often met with disbelief, simply because it painted a picture of the African Continent and the diaspora that was in direct conflict with what we had learned throughout the years in conventional Norwegian schools.

Many of us struggled with the negotiation between what we were learning at these camps, with what was being in taught in our planned curriculum in the traditional Norwegian schools. Attempting to gauge what was true, and relevant was always challenging. We were, like Olimata, only taught very little history, but alongside the lack of history education, we experienced being marginalized and Othered in different ways. As both Olimata and Abdibasid mentioned, being made to be the "expert" on all things Islam or African were daily struggles for us, we were also, in a much larger scale taught that our home continent was excessively poor, poorly managed, and in desperate need of aid. Abdibasid reflects saying; *We would unconsciously resist learning about our heritage because it was associated with bad image, you know, that's what we were instilled.*

In Norway there a day in the school year for middle school children known as O.D. day, or "Operasjon Dagsverk", which is an initiative to involve our youth in global conversations. On this day, students are excused from formal education, and encouraged to find a job where the employer has agreed to donate the students daily wage to a worthy cause, mostly a cause that concerns poverty and lack of access in Africa. Although a worthy initiative, it has, in the past at least, brought up uncomfortable situations for us in the classrooms. Videos of famine, malaria, and other horrific issues are broadcast in classrooms, on the television, and often, we are, as children of color, asked to contribute to the conversation. This conversation often also will refer to Africa, as if it is not a large continent, stereotyping the whole continent and teaching about it as if it is homogeneous and that the standard for Africa is always grim and sad. Situations like these, paired with the occasional cultural night at school, an attempt to be inclusive, landed us as props and displays to show diversity, even though this was not reflected in any of the school curriculum. With schools providing the narrative of a deficit continent, and the lack of

representation of people of African descent, most of us had accepted the narrative of a poor and hopeless continent. Many of us had parents at home who tried to inject the knowledge they had but was often disregarded as we trusted in the Norwegian school system to have the comprehensive knowledge. So, it is therefore not strange, or difficult to understand why there was skepticism, and distrust in what Baba Buntu and the other leaders were teaching. Many of us had not heard of Black inventors, our technological advances, or any pre-colonial history at all, and with the knowledge taught in school, these narratives became complete contradictions. This counter-narrative taught by AYIN became a lifeline to many of us, as it became the beginning of us understanding the importance of telling own stories and understanding the difference between story telling from the oppressed versus the oppressor.

The Awakening

Figure 14 AYIN Camp (AYIN Archive photo)

As we attend camps and acquire knowledge about ourselves, we slowly start to understand how the AYIN curriculum informs our daily lives, Muni like myself, gained the confidence to seek out more knowledge through the encouragement of AYIN. Muni notes:

> *I think the, the thing with Afrikan Youth is it gave me a source... like sources when I started discussing. Um, I was a library nerd because I went to the school just by the main library. So we used to have our free time (free period) to hang in the library, so I think for me it just triggered me wanting to read more books and find more information about things. Uh, and buying Black books written by Black authors about Africa, about science, about politics, about philosophy, dance, uh, hair and beauty, all kinds of stuff. So I think Afrikan Youth, that's how it's like supplemented in that it made me, um, helped me find some of the places to look. And I remember one of my, my, sources when I started, In Afrikan Youth, was, um, a Jamaican guy called Pepe Kai, who had a, basically a bookstore in his home, in his flat in Tottenham, London. So we used to go to London (…) to Pepe Kai's house, and he had like, he, supplied loads of people books around in London and eventually also supplied Amani (Baba Buntu) when he started a bookstore, in Grønland, with all his books.*

Muni is mentioning mining for books in Tottenham, as books were challenging to get a hold of in Norway, and with the help of the internet, that has shifted some today. AYIN provided a library of resources for us to use and encouraged us to engage with these in our school projects

and papers, but also in our free time. The organization offered writing, poetry, dancing, and endless other workshops. If someone had an interest, the organization would make sure to help nurture that interest and create a space to grow. The organization had music projects, released albums, and dance groups which helped catapult the careers of famous Norwegian artists, where the AYIN leaders and youth members would work to get studio time, book performances, etc. AYIN also had a book club for the older members; An after-school program to help with assignments and improvement of grades; a group for little children with cultural activities; alongside all the activities previously mentioned.

My AYIN awakening came around the time AYIN had all these activities happening simultaneously, it was flourishing. I was already heavily involved in the organization, and like my sister Olimata, had invested all my free time to the organization. The organization had also gained a lot of attention, as a group of progressive Africans, who were loud and unable to be silenced, AYIN became an important social justice entity. This meant that we were often booked public speaking arrangements to speak on issues involving race and discrimination, some of the members were in books, theatre plays, television, some athletes were speaking publicly about issues related to our cause, which increased our visibility. One of the early works that became almost synonymous with AYIN was the creation of the brochure, SVARTING (Darkie/Blackie).

Figure 15 Svarting pamphlet (Author's photo)

Created by a project within AYIN called SHAKA with the first edition released in 1997, and the second one in 2002, this pamphlet was created to combat hate speech through informational text and pictures of AYIN members. This pamphlet was educational and informational, used in schools, places of employment, and institutions nationwide to educate people on better ways of communicating with each other, in more respectful ways. I personally carried a few copies of the pamphlets on me, so that at any given time, I would be able to share the information. I had personally, like many others, repeatedly had debates and conversations about racist language that, to many Norwegians, was and is not considered discriminatory, racist, or inappropriate, and this informational pamphlet helped put context to the origin of the language, and the racist past that was linked to the word "neger" (which translates to *negro).* This project was driven by youth at the time, with members and leaders in the organization supporting and distributing this work. I

have great nostalgia looking at these pamphlets, as they have helped me in school and workplaces where hate speech and bullying affected me personally. AYIN provided this tool, not just for their members, but for the Norwegian public. Over 20 years on, we still have conversations about the use of racial slurs in everyday language, and it is disheartening. The work done by AYIN and SHAKA is extremely meaningful, and has significantly affected the Norwegian society, and the way we view language. Although phrases like "mulatt" *mulatto*, and "neger" *negro* are still used, there is today a broader understanding that these terms are considered racial and degrading. They are no longer considered descriptive terms for people of color, when describing someone's ethnicity on the news, etc. This, I believe, is largely due to the influences of AYIN and the SHAKA project.

I recall at one of the first camps I attended, one of the leaders kept requesting help from one of the youths, asking them to pick up this and hand them that. After the third of forth time of being called, the youth turned around and yelled "Står det neger på panna mi eller!?" meaning; *Is negro written on my forehead!?* Insinuating that they were being treated as the "help". The room fell silent, as we had all, or at least most of us, heard this saying at school, on the playground, at practice, somewhere. This was a common phrase in everyday language, and although we all knew how degrading and sad it was that we knew this phrase, and used it, it felt different once used in our presence. I fail to remember the sequence of events following the outburst but remembering feeling a concoction of sadness and anger oozing from the leaders. We knew the N-word was not tolerated, but looking back, it established how little we understood ourselves, how we had accepted hate speech in our own little corners of Norway, to not feel different, and to not be noticed too much. It illuminated how we had suppressed our own pride and self-love, to fit in, to assimilate, to become more Norwegian. Together we fought for our right to be addressed respectfully, to identify us as Black people, or Africans, Caribbeans, South Americans, and so forth. With this outburst in the kitchen, looking back at it, I finally understand how engrained in Norwegian culture racism really is. Recently, an article came out in the Norwegian newspapers, where a soon to be attorney went for a job interview at a reputable financial firm in Norway. The person being interviewed asked the interviewer about the tasks included for the job applied for, and the interviewer responded that it was "negerarbeid" which translates to *negro work.* (Rustad, 2022) The person being interviewed, being a person of color had a reaction to this but was most shocked that nobody else in the room did. Incidences like these are not uncommon,

and by the lack of reaction by the others in the room, this kind of language is not surprising. Like the previous incidence, these phrases and words are ingrained in the Norwegian culture as slurs indicating work that is considered boring, routine, and not respected, and are used in everyday speech. Even with the understanding that this type of speech is problematic, people often excuse the language by saying that it is "just a saying" or that it doesn't mean that they are racist for saying it. My personal experiences when encountering this type of speech has in the past, as a youth often left me feeling gaslit and confused. I, like all my friends of color, grew up being told that we were too sensitive, and that our friends did not appreciate being policed because of what they chose to say, or what song lyrics they wanted to sing. It was not until I joined AYIN that I realized my strength in what was said around me, how my feelings were valid when it came to the language uttered in my presence, and how I had the right to self-identify. The SHAKA project came out with the phrase "Kall meg hva jeg vil" which roughly translate to *I decide what you call me.* This phrase was meant to foster conversation, to ask people how they identify, as many Norwegians reluctantly asked what they were supposed to call us, if "neger" was inappropriate. The conversation allowed us to talk about the importance of having the right to identify oneself and stressing the notion that people of color are not homogenous. Muni remembers,

> *But, um, I feel that that, uh, the public image was that we were quite hardcore, and we were exclusive and that we, uh, wanted to, um, segregate ourselves. Um, I felt that for a long time that was the image of Afrikan Youth, even though the people who were close to us knew that that wasn't really the, the, the real, real, uh, image of us. A public image of Afrikan Youth that was about, uh, these Africans who were wearing African clothes once in a while, and, uh, talking about Black is beautiful. It's like, "Wow, they're so radical and hardcore!" Uh, and also I think it's like, I think like three, four years into it, we did also have quite a lot of young people who went on TV to talk about concepts and why we didn't like people using "Neger" and why it wasn't okay to call us that. Then I think for the public that was "Oh my God, where do all these Black people come from?" We're taking up the space. But I think it was a good, it was a good, good thing. Uh, and that at some point it was like, the image was like, Oh, they are very angry, angry young people. Um, but I felt like that being angry isn't something negative as such, especially if you have a reason to be.*

The idea of Afropean youth having a voice, being angry and radical, fueled identity formation for many of the AYIN youth at the time. To create change, we had to be the change we wanted to see in the country. We had to see ourselves, some of us for the first time, identify ourselves, and stand together as Africans. Our intersectional identities were rooted in the

understanding of our ethnicity, nationality, religion, skin tone, socioeconomic standing, and countless other factors. I personally still struggle with explaining concepts of racism and race, ´because of the lack of words in the Norwegian language which allows for nuanced identities. Not having the words meant that we often borrowed from English to grasp our own identities; redefining how we understand the concepts of being Black or *svart*, Blackness in a European context.

As a group, the members and leaders who were active often attended conferences, meetings, debates, workshops, and so on all around the world. When I became a youth leader, Baba Buntu and the other leaders taught us how to apply for grants and funding through the European Union Youth Portal, creating opportunities for us to participate in youth exchange trips and other activities. In 2001, some members of AYIN even attended the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. The organization created countless opportunities for personal development and made experiences available for youth that would normally not have access to. These experiences, that I greatly benefitted from were instrumental in my identity formation, Abdibasid also, as my fellow youth leader, had similar memories.

> *So on a personal level, African youth (AYIN) has given me a lot. It's priceless the things that I've gotten throughout the years. The connections that I made, you know, someone a young kid, I was in that time of my life where I was actually searching for who I was. And it's natural a lot of human beings go through this phase, especially during teenage years. And so, coming to a place like Afrikan youth gave me this and I knew who I was. And it helped me to be more conscious about who I was or where I came from. So personally, it had huge effects, which I still reflect on. It has also given me that it ignited a wanting to do something for the continent.*

Being given opportunities to travel, and connecting with other youths of color from different countries and sometimes continents is a privilege so great, I underestimated it as a youth. As a youth I thought that these trips were amazing, being able to get away from my parents, traveling with my friends, and attending conferences in buildings where presidents and heads of state discuss deals and made changes that affected us globally. Like Abdibasid said, I still spend time reflecting on these opportunities, they have truly ignited my passion for my culture, my understanding of the diaspora, and my eagerness to uphold spaces for my community.

Baba Buntu's Role in AYIN

Afrikan Youth in Norway sounds like a well-oiled self-driven machine but in the drivers seat was Baba Buntu. On a personal level, he was my first professor. Every time I mention his name, this image of his tall stoic stature flashes in my head. His colorful African kaftans and his kufi hat, as he always is rushing to fulfil an errand, a talk, a meeting, or just to open the office for us. I found him annoying through most of my teenage years of knowing him, mostly because he pushed me, every chance he had, he would challenge my thought processes. He might be the original "Clap back king" as he always had a rebuttal when we said something rooted in our own ignorance or learned behavior. Remembering back, I hear his voice always pushing back at me with "Men Serian…", *But (come on) Serian…* Every sentence was a push for you to self-realize, to self-discovery of what you were saying, how you are acting, or what you are mimicking. He would push, then step back, allowing you the space to figure things out, but also always being available for learning once ready. His lesson plans were extensive, and I am grateful for him. Through all the arguments, hugs, talks, and teachings, he always still reaches out to check on us, supports each one of us in our projects, and involves us in his. Baba Buntu has been mentioned countless times throughout this project, and I do believe that at some point, this project became a love letter to him, and to AYIN, and for that alone, I have succeeded.

My inner critic

In a recent therapy session, my therapist and I spent most of our time talking about fear, shame, and expectations around what completion would look like. These days, most of the sessions come back to how scary completing a dissertation would be, satisfying, accomplished, yes, but also very scary. She asked me what my inner critic was telling my more confident and kind self, my inner coach, and how I manage these conversations within. I told her about this force from within that I sometimes refer to as a monster, that yells at my inner coach. The monster has a volume level that drowns out all the kindness and confidence my inner coach supplies me with, and fills it with self-doubt, isolation, pessimism, and stagnancy. My therapist then asked me what I thought this meant; *What is my inner critic trying to do?* My initial thoughts were that my inner critic is sabotaging me, keeping me from achieving my goals. I have called myself a procrastinator in the past and allowed for my lack of urgency to be categorized as such. To understand my inner critic, she allowed me the grace and space to further interrogate

my thoughts around this loud inner monster that was successfully bullying the coach and delaying my work. This monster brought up questions about my own validity, my reliability, my capabilities, and whether I had spent years loving and fighting with this project, just for it to be rejected by the people I love and respect the most, which includes my family, friends, and my dissertation committee. After a long conversation, my therapist asks me, in her delightful voice: *Is it possible that your inner critic is protecting you?*

I was asked to think back on when I started feeling the overwhelming volume of the inner critic. I took some time to re-remember my childhood and mentioned that I probably felt this way earlier than I realize, but that I remember walking down the hallway in elementary school. Kroer skole, it was a small school with about 87 students from first to sixth grade at the time. It is the same school pictured earlier, small, cozy, and appropriately staffed (my older sister was in a class of six students with two teachers, we were 17 with three teachers). I used to wear track suits almost every day to school, and as my mother believed in autonomy, she encouraged me to wear what I wanted, even though she ironed and hung something out for me daily on the top of the railing on the second floor at home. I was the proud owner of a She-Ra: Princess of Power track suit, white and gold, fitted with her signature shoulder shields. I wore this tracksuit more than I care to remember, but wearing tracksuits was a dangerous game at school. You were rarely able to walk through the halls which lead you passed the first to fourth grade without encountering someone who would in passing, pull your pants down to reveal your underwear. It was a daily embarrassment which led to a collective paranoia and distrust in the halls, but also made us all pull the drawstrings on our pants extra tight, and vigilantly held up our pants to get our outer clothing and winter shoes on for recess. Like every other day, we all rushed to get dressed, while holding our pants up tightly, and rushing out the door to enjoy recess. As a fourth grader, I was looking forward to hanging out with my best friend who was in the third grade, Camilla who I had not seen that day. I walked out of the first graders exit door and encountered two fifth graders who looked me straight in the eyes and called me the N-word while laughing and pointing. I remember little of what followed, as I felt sucker-punched in the stomach. It was the first time I had heard this word spoken by a peer, and the first time the word had been uttered towards me. My older siblings had told my parents of instances of being bullied, but for me, this was foreign territory. I cannot remember anyone ever addressed this moment, or that I told anyone, all I remember is feeling small, insignificant, and beaten, all over this short nasty word.

In this process of learning how to be an autoethnographer, I have loved re-visiting, and re-remembering moments of the past that shaped me, this moment was less enjoyable. I understand now, what that sucker-punch was. I understand now that my reaction was fear and shame, as in that moment I likely had a realization, I hid deep within myself and buried. I realized in that moment that I was an Other. I was in the margins, and everyone saw that but myself. I felt seen in the worst way, not acknowledged for who I am, but categorized as what they were not. I couldn't say it back, nor would a rebuttal make any difference, as I had no words that would cut as deep. That wound never healed, that little girl is still in me, fearing the unknown and the unheard, but now she anticipates the hurt to protect her heart.

My inner critic has been protecting me throughout this process, not in the most helpful way, but nonetheless has protected me from my fears. I fear my community would not understand my project or think that it is less relevant today than twenty years ago. I fear my participants would feel misrepresented, or at some point regret choosing to not be anonymous, as we are a small community. Bigger than those fears are that my committee would not get the context of what I am trying to convey, that writing about being African in Norway is not relatable, or that they simply do not understand the choices I have made. My inner critic has reminded me of all these fears, simultaneously, every time I have sat down to write, creating a less than optimal space. This misguided protection, while it may have slowed down my process, yields valid concerns that deserve thought and acknowledgement.

My appreciation

I questioned whether my method of inquiry was achievable, and whether I would be able to do this project justice. And all the while, my questions were always about making sure I create something that can add to the sparce literature we have on Africans in Norway, by Africans in Norway. This felt immediately like a question about ethics, how do I mindfully create and uphold a space for our community to have a voice, to be seen? There are many ways of conducting research, and I hope that as Afropeans, we utilize everything we have, all our ancestral and learned knowledge to document our own history. I set out to understand how we as Africans in Norway were able to create spaces for supplementary community education, especially pertaining to our own history, in white spaces, and gained so much personally. Reconnecting with my community was the largest price in this process. I learned that worrying

about what the traditional school curriculum will or will not teach is important yes, but that it is a concern that does not have an expiration date, it will always be here. As a society, we have gained knowledge on our involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, but that this information is reserved for the ones who actively seek it out, generally those in academia, and not something that is in any public-school curriculum. What I realized was how my personal thoughts and feelings towards the school system stunted my understanding and appreciation of the education I received through AYIN. Having the pleasure of deep conversations with my participants, I enjoyed their level of self-reflection, the love they have for themselves and our community, and their unapologetic Africanness. Confidence and self-love is a pillar in the AYIN curriculum, front, and center. Through them I have a better understanding of how enriched our lives have been through the AYIN curriculum, how little value we place on education outside of the schoolhouse, and how ungraded work is largely disregarded.

The reality is that I have the ability to tell these stories of our experiences at Afrikan Youth in Norway because of the education and life experiences I received through the AYIN curriculum. I am thankful to the people who replied to my emails and text messages about this project, and were excited about this topic, and that I wanted to hear their stories. They coincidentally are all people who have helped shape my AYIN experience in different ways, and for that I am grateful. The participants in this project did not want to remain anonymous, something I earlier in the process was concerned about. After discussing the option with each participant, I understood that our community spends a great deal of time revisiting these memories together. The conversation I had with the participants felt like a more intimate version of those meetups. What often occurs during these gatherings is that someone would present a memory from a camp, a trip, or a party, and then everyone who was present at the time would join in on the memory, while having collective epiphanies about what happened at the time, how we viewed it then versus how we see it today.

While writing down the questions I wished to ask the participants, I was aware that these would guide the conversation, and not be a question-and-answer setting. What I was unaware of was how much we would emulate this dynamic, this experience of co-construction.

I do not know whether this dissertation will have an impact on my community, but I hope that it will, at least, serve as a reminder that we have the capacity to enrich the lives of our

community, and the larger society by mobilizing ourselves and creating educational safe spaces where identity formation and collective growth can flourish. I have never met a former member of AYIN that has not said the following statement in some form “I wish we could recreate what we had then”. Some people are nostalgic about what AYIN was, a place that was always welcoming and open for us to stop by and hang out, others wish we could still go on camps and have educational workshops, but most of us wish that AYIN was still active so that the generation growing up now would have the support and love we had through the organization.

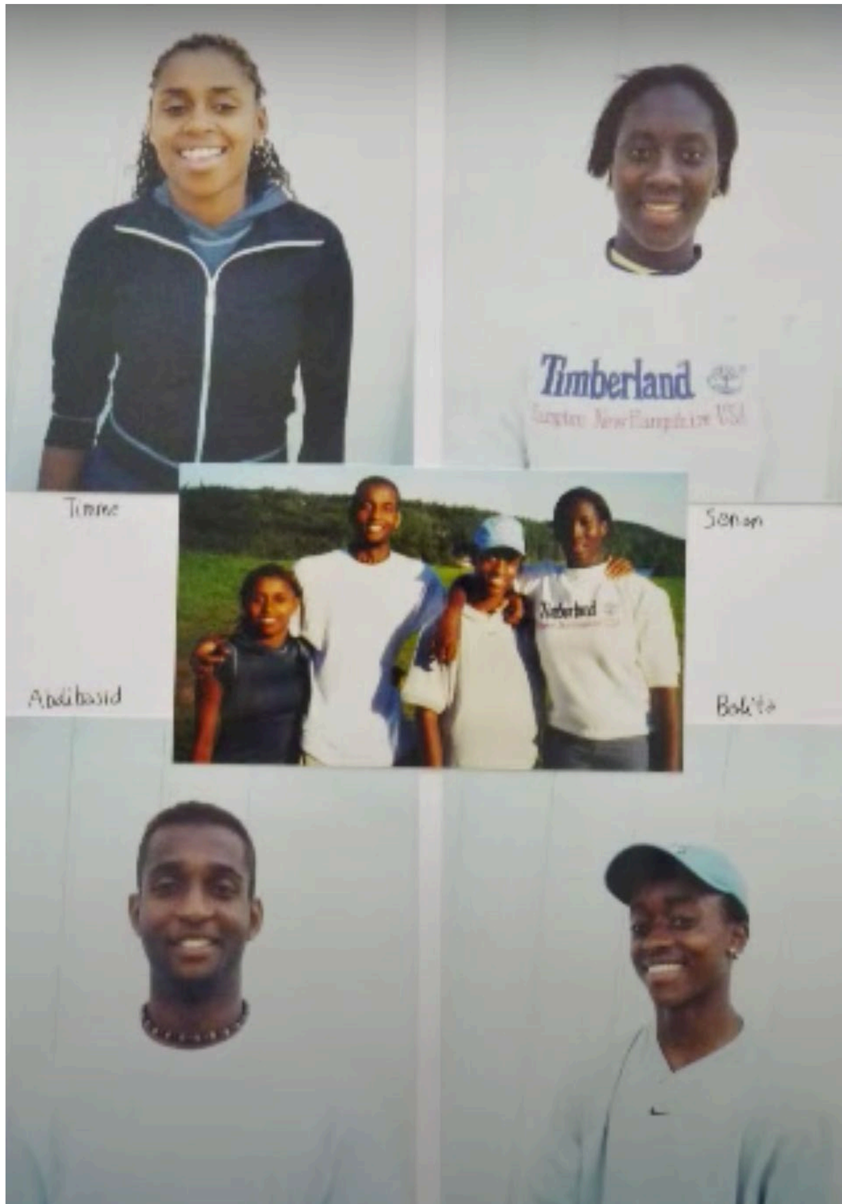

Figure 16 AYIN youth leaders (Author's photo)

Translating

I spent more time than I ever could imagine translating words, phrases, sentences, anecdotes, names, and concepts during this project. I knew coming into a graduate school program that translation would be a part of the process, however, it has become more than I anticipated. Like most international students, our translations are more rooted in culture than anything else. Although my university education has been at US institutions, my topic finds itself in a hybrid space that is Norwegian and African, where AYIN alum have their own circular or jumbled way of telling stories, where some expressions fail to translate, some idioms seem senseless, and some concepts are just too foreign. I saw someone on Tik Tok last week express this perfectly when they said, In English they say, “something is strange here”, Norwegians; “There are owls in the moss”. This idiom, a mistranslation of Danish to Norwegian centuries ago, is a normal sentence uttered daily by us Norwegians.

Throughout this project I have worried about having a U.S. audience understand the richness of AYIN, how we as Afropeans understand our growth, how the story is told, and whether the nuances will translate well. In the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Atay speaks about this concept of translating, and how we often times struggle with the “inbetweenness” of satisfying ourselves, while also accommodating for US academia, stating;

> My life and academic journey are a series of translated, stitched-together stories. I translate between languages and cultures. Sometimes, my English is corrected or altered to appear more U.S.-American. While others police my language, I also heavily police my English to leave no room for criticism. This is the burden that I carry as we translate because sometimes words do not mirror how I feel, my actions might not be fully translated between cultures, and sometimes, the translation might not fully capture the emotions that I express. There are always cultural slippages in translations. (Adams et al., 2021).

I was left translating my conversation with one of the participants. While translation services are available, none of the services would be able to translate the vibrant exuberance of the storyteller. His language is rich, full of memory, and emotion, and have words that are simply not in any dictionary. The way he strings words together are not traditional in any language but echoes how we speak as Afropean people in Norway. With our hints of Urdu, Arabic, and a host of African languages, alongside the injections of African American Vernacular English or AAVE, we have a rich and expressive language that requires negotiating while translating. I

experienced a great deal of loss in this translation, culturally, with the history we have, with the culturally diverse minority populations we live within, our words, our lives will be lost in translation. Atay continues "I ease the pain for you. I edit my sentence. I change my word choices. I change my examples, so they are not too "foreign for you." So, you can feel the way I feel within your comfort zone. We feel uncomfortable for you." (Atay 2021, p.229).

All academic work requires us to stretch ourselves, to reach for new insight, and to expand our understanding of the world we live within, but like Atay states, as international students, we try to minimize the foreign, even when the subject matter of our writing is foreign. Throughout this project, I have hoped our stories translate, make sense, and create insight into our world.

Being, here, then, and now

> Autoethnography benefits greatly from the thought that self is an extension of a community rather than that it is an independent, self-sufficient being, because the possibility of cultural self-analysis rests on an understanding that self is part of a cultural community. (Chang, 2009)

With all the fear and hesitation through writing this paper, I have realized the strength of our stories. We have all risen above what our guidance counselors, teachers, and what some friends envisioned for us, as children of immigrants, as Black Africans in Norway. I always looked back at the years when AYIN was active, and thought about how strong we were, how resilient, and bold we were, I have realized through connecting with the alumni that AYIN never really disappeared, it just transformed. Abdibasid with his activism work worldwide, Muni working with unaccompanied minors, Olimata with her Norwegian Naturals forum, and Balita through his art and activism work in Norway, Kenya, Rwanda, and The Congo. There are countless of AYIN alum who are educating the younger generation, continuing to serve the younger population with the teachings instilled in us decades ago.

As I looked back with the participants, we shared commonalities growing up that highlighted some of the questions I came into this project with. None of us could point to learning anything positive about the continent of Africa, and none of us could remember learning anything about African history that spanned more than two pages in the history book. We all,

with the exception of Olimata and I, grew up in different places in Norway, but we all received responsibilities as the only minorities of color in our classrooms to teach other children about ourselves, something that was looked upon as positive from the educators, perhaps a way of celebrating the diversity in class, however, it left us feeling singled out, and othered in a way that would stay with us through our formative years. The juxtaposition of classrooms as colorblind spaces, where teachers would declare that they saw no color, then in the same instance single out the only child of color in the classroom, caused confusion and challenges while growing up, and there is where Afrikan Youth in Norway came in, and created a learning space that aided in safe learning, and identity formation.

It is indescribable how we still feel when talking about AYIN camps from the past. The education received at the remote cabins, over the long weekends, were simply priceless. I hope to build on this paper in the future, to get a more holistic understanding of the curriculum, as I am forever grateful for being in there then and seeing how that has uplifted young Africans in Norway to realize our potential. AYIN taught us civics education, history, geography, culture, and sociology to name a few. We learned about ourselves, in a space rid of racism, judgement, and oppression. It was a safe haven for us.

Chapter V - Discussion

Sankofa = "return and get it". Symbol of the importance of learning from the past. A very popular symbol, especially in the Afrikan Diaspora. It shows a bird turning around to catch its lost egg. It is a sign of the return, which says that it is never too late to turn around and start on a new path once one has recognized one's mistake.

What I learned about AYIN and being Afropean

In the spirit of the African proverb *Sankofa*, I want to ensure that this chapter focuses on looking back to understand how to go forward in the future. "Sankofa! We must go back and reclaim our past in order to create a better future" (Prendergast, 2011. p. 121). Through this inquiry, I have, alongside my participants, looked back at a time when the Afropean youth in Norway had a hub, a physical space, and an educational space through AYIN. I learned through this exploration that AYIN in its own right was a school for many of us, teaching not only our history but also life skills that aided in our personal development as Afropeans in Norway. Through this organization, we learned how to maneuver white spaces, in ways that would not compromise our understanding of being from the African continent, but also allowing for our personal expressions, through education, music, dance, reading, and writing.

Furthermore, I have experienced looking back as a comforting experience, not only for me, but for my participants. My participants have called the experience of looking back as therapeutic, but also inspiring for possible work for our community in the future. It has become evident that the work of organizations such as Afrikan Youth in Norway was not just important for the youth, but also for the adults in the organization, and for the adults we have become today. AYIN is imprinted in our community and has become this legacy that we continuously reference to as a golden age of activism and anti-racism work in Norway. The work done by the founders as well as the effort of the youth, has changed the way we understand ourselves as a community today, going from a more fragmented immigrant population, to embracing diasporic people as Afropean, being more inclusive and supportive towards each other. AYIN created a

culture where Afropean youth were able to see their heritage as a resource, and not a deficit, as the Norwegian society often saw us. We experienced being labeled and marginalized as Africans, experiencing daily stereotypes of being poor, malnourished, under-educated, and less civilized, and encountering daily white savior experiences in our local communities (i.e. having elderly people ask if we have eaten, or shoving money in our pockets because we were likely very poor). This deficit thinking model was, and to some extent still is, damaging to young African children. But at the time of my childhood, this was a normal part of growing up. Through AYIN we were able to share these experiences, creating a space where we could process and collectively understand the effects these experiences of being Othered had on us as children.

<u>What I learned about the need for African-centered curriculum</u>

Prior to writing this paper, I assumed that most Afropean people in Norway had similar experiences in the Norwegian school system, regarding the lack of African-centered curriculum, however, I wanted to learn from the participants whether this was something true across generations. Using the former members of AYIN as participants, I ensured that the members were of African descent, but also that the members had diverse backgrounds, came to the country at different times of their lives, and lived in different regions of the country. My findings were that all the participants had similar experiences in their history lessons regarding African history on the continent, and the history of Africans in Norway. All the participants voiced that their history education was limited to a few pages surrounding slavery, and colonialism. None of the participants were taught anything on how Africans have contributed to Norwegian history, or how Norway under Danish rule contributed to both the Transatlantic slave trade and colonialism of the continent. The only history education the participants were able to recall was taught by Afrikan Youth in Norway. Through the AYIN curriculum, we learned about Africans who made contributions to Norwegian society, and about pre-colonial African history. AYIN directly challenged the deficit framework taught in school by offering a curriculum rich in the understanding of self, through history and popular culture. The enrichment through knowledge helped us counter the deficit thinking of the society around us, by learning to speak up for ourselves and believe in the narratives taught outside of school. By learning about the vastness of African history, we as Afropean youth were able to understand the enormity of the

African diaspora, but also see the beauty in our culture, heritage, and individual countries. Through this supplementary African centered curriculum, we were uplifted, served, and recognized by our community. We had spent our childhoods learning in Norwegian schools about famine, hunger, and aid work, although true, it was an incomplete overview of our heritage continent. Most of the participants experienced instances of being singled out, asked to be experts on anything concerning Africa, and asked to educate other classmates on topics they knew little about. Already experiencing being marginalized, being singled out highlights the feelings of being different, leaving many Afropean youth feeling ostracized and responsible for their own learning. This might have been in an effort to include the pupil, make them feel seen, however, none of the participants, including myself felt seen or appreciated through these experiences.

I have internally debated long over whether the Norwegian school system should be held accountable for the lack of African-centered curriculum, and I am still unsure to whether this can be included in the current curriculum mindfully. Norway seems to be in a place of attempting to remain colorblind, meaning that all children are to be treated the same, that they have the same needs, regardless of ethnicity. The Norwegian government acknowledges that there is a need for examination of how diversity and racism is handled in schools and have put in place initiatives and projects to increase awareness and promote equality:

> It is important to strengthen competence amongst teachers and school administrators on how to combat and deal with racism and discrimination, as well as disseminate knowledge about "good practices" from Norway and abroad related to these issues. In autumn 2017, the Directorate of Education commissioned the Centre for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities to develop, test and evaluate resources for teacher education. The purpose was to contribute to the strengthening of professional competence on issues such as prejudice, hostility, racism, discrimination, and radicalisation. To increase the dissemination and impact of the work on learning resources for teacher education, the project will be continued for two years with five new institutions, at a cost of NOK 2 million per year. In this phase, the institutions will develop more web-based resources, strengthen their own expertise and teaching about the relevant topics, and be further included in a growing network in the field. (Ministry of Culture, 2019, p. 28)

These initiatives are small steps towards addressing the issue of racism and discrimination within the school system, but the fact that the issues are being named and addressed suggests a path towards having conversations regarding a more inclusive school environment for all school

aged people. A concern for me with actions plans such as this one is that it might only concentrate on the current issues schools might be faced with, and not tackling the underlying culture of not acknowledging the diverse population and their need for representation as a tool for identity formation and growth. Another concern is the amount of time and energy allocated for this plan, stating that a two-year project of this magnitude has a budget of 2 million Norwegian Kroners (NOK) per year, which amounts to approximately $200,000, seems to not promise a plan that has longevity.

This action plan comes at a time where Diversity and Inclusion concepts have been incorporated in many companies around the country. This perhaps after newspaper articles calling out companies for racial bias in hiring, or lack of diversity in the workplace. This Diversity and Inclusion plan is an all-encompassing organ that is supposed to cover racism, gender disparities, sexual orientation, and ability to name a few, making it, in my opinion too broad to implement any tangible change.

It might be important to look within our community for the advancement of an African curriculum for our youth. This would mean to really reintroduce an educational system that is created by the resourceful people in our community, like AYIN. This might require funding from the Norwegian government, to create a supplementary educational system working for the advancement of African curriculum as a form of identity formation, anti-racism work, activism, and community strengthening.

The future of African-centered groups?

Figure 17 Former AYIN members at a Christmas meet-up 2022 (Author's photo)

Reconceptualizing AYIN has been a topic of conversation within the network of alumni members for many years. We have met up several times in coffee shops to talk about restarting the organization, creating something similar, or just attempting to start camps (leir) again. When encountering someone from the AYIN days, our conversations always start or end with "I miss Afrikan Youth" or "We should do a reunion". Reunions have been had in the past, and it created festive atmospheres where we meet up and talk about AYIN days, however, getting the organization "back together" might not be possible as many of the AYIN alum, including myself are limited in our abilities to imagine something new due to nostalgia. If we can get away from the idea of recreating what once was, we might be strong in our resources to build something new, that will support the Afropean community in ways that AYIN has in the past. AYIN should become a resource, something to pick apart, analyze, and draw from, but also allow the ideas to mature and shift with the time. With social media as the main form of communication we have seen a bloom of Facebook groups, Instagram pages, and Tik Toks dealing with being Afropean, conversations about racism, and resources around skin, hair, and African groceries to name a few. Scholars are emerging on topics concerning being Afropean in the Nordics, encouraging conversations across countries, and creating a wider network of people working towards the betterment of Africans in the Nordics.

My hope for the future is that scholars, activists, AYIN alums, our elders, and youth can come together to continue supporting each other in the different endeavors we are attempting and succeeding in as Afropeans in Norway. I think there is still a need for Africa-centered educational spaces, like the ones we had during the active AYIN years. All my participants are currently creating educational spaces for Afropeans; Muni with her work with unaccompanied minors from predominantly African countries, Olimata with her hair and skin forums, promoting inclusivity and representation in the beauty market, Abdibasid in his work as a psychotherapist, promoting wellness through therapy focused on African boys and men. And Balita who works with after school initiatives for Afropean youth in the more affluent Western Oslo area. This is a great testament of how AYIN inspired many of its members to continue working for the African community in Norway, creating safe spaces, learning opportunities, and wellness for the Afropean youth.

Recommendations to local educators (community and school-based) to help create and sustain similar organizations?

I firmly believe that educators, particularly community-based educators, like the participants in this project would be able to join resources to sustain a pan-African youth organization in our community.

I have the following recommendations for local educators, myself included.

- Mobilize and communicate on similar goals and ideology surrounding the youth population. This would include finding the Afropean youth of today, using social media outlets, community youth clubs, sports, and the arts, to gain an understanding of their needs today, while also introducing them to the history of AYIN. This inquiry could be used as a tool for educators to reorient themselves with the work AYIN accomplished during the active years.
- Engage Afropean scholars to strengthen the community educational curriculum for the youth. Create a diverse resource team with individuals from the community, educators at different levels and knowledge bases, especially focused on Afropean youth, and their needs today.

- Reach out to people in the community that are well-versed in grant writing and acquiring funds for a sustainable organization. Also invite Afropeans who are knowledgeable on laws and legislature to advise on how to proceed within a sustainable organizational structure.
- Make sure the youth are visible, and that they are the ones setting the agenda. Afropean youth are like all other youth in the world are engaged in social media, their music, lingo, artistic expressions come with influences from the African continent, but also largely the United States, United Kingdom and the rest of the world. Educators should tune into the youth, understand what their struggles are today, and build a curriculum around these issues, to help strengthen their sense of self, their activism, and their understanding of heritage.

What I learned about autoethnography, and recommendations for researchers

I entered the Educational Leadership program at Miami University not knowing what I was getting myself into. All I knew for sure was that I was interested in understanding myself more I wanted to expand the theory behind my practical work. I had no plan for after the program, nor was I expecting to become a great scholar. I struggled with (and still do) imposter syndrome, spending the end of each semester waiting to be “found out” by my professors or cohort mates. I attempted to imitate the writing styles of others, to become a better academic writer through a more impersonal and matter-of-fact manner, just to realize that I was muting my own voice and expelling all passion I had for writing. Through a reading assignment, I was introduced to Autoethnography. The idea of placing the self in academic writing felt illegal, and I was unsure whether this was something that could be real. After encountering the dissertation work of Robin Boylorn, S*outhern black women: Their lived realities* (Boylorn, 2009) I felt inspired to use my own story as the backdrop of an inquiry set to understand the complex group of Afropeans in Norway, to delve into the hardships, and the triumphs of this marginalized group.

I never imagined writing an autoethnography could be so rewarding, yet extremely taxing. I have experienced internal battles, breakdowns, tears, laughter, and confusion to produce something special, while staying true and honest to the community, and to the writing process. I

have fallen in love with autoethnography as it has given me the tools I need to remain authentic in my writing process. This method allows for reflection and moments of epiphany which aids in the understanding of the self, the community in which you are a part, and a chance to celebrate and critique all in the same process.

I sat at the CIES conference in San Francisco in April of 2019 at a roundtable and talked about autoethnography, feeling a bit unsure of the method but falling in love with it at the same time, I stumbled through my presentation of my paper and answered questions about it after. Once the presentations were done and we were leaving the room, one of the researchers at the table pulled me aside and congratulated me on my paper. She verbalized how she never realized that research could be personal, and that she appreciated how vulnerable I had been. That moment has stayed with me ever since. I think about this researcher every time writing becomes challenging and remember how privileged I am to have participants who were willing to share their lives, family who cheer me on and allow me to share their stories, and a support system of advisors and committee members who have created a safe space for me to explore autoethnography.

Reporting on qualitative data through this method allows for deeper understanding and creates an emotional connection for the readers. Although this method is rewarding, I have a great understanding that for many, this becomes too personal and therefore challenging. I hope more minority scholars tell stories in this manner, it creates layers and dimensions that are lacking in many other methodologies. I also think that writing autoethnography defies what traditional academia values, it allows for love, emotion, and human connection to be fostered, solidifying that data does not have to be cold or removed from the researcher to be valid.

What I learned through this process

Through this process, I have gained valuable insight into who I am as a person. I started the Educational Leadership program coming out of a job where I worked with diverse youth in different capacities at the Antiracism and Discrimination center in Oslo. I was intuitively working with the youth, providing safe spaces for them to explore their identities, art, and for some serving their community service sentences. I knew how to connect and create an environment for them that was safe but had no idea how I was doing this. I have learned through

this process that my intuition comes from my community, from Afrikan Youth in Norway, and from my fierce family. The process of this autoethnography allowed me to obtain the tools necessary to come to this realization. I have gained lenses through which I see my community as more complex than I initially understood. I have a greater understanding and appreciation of what it means to be an educator, that education happens everywhere, and that for us, our greatest learning experiences happened outside the traditional school system.

I have also learned that change sometimes must come from within our own Afropean community. I think that AYIN spent years working towards being heard, being included in the curriculum, and being seen by the Norwegian society, work that has made major changes in Norway, and has been the source of many debates, social learning moments, and language changes (this referring to the work done on the word "neger" in the Norwegian dictionary). Simultaneously, AYIN recognized that we had to build ourselves up, and this work must be continued for our youth. I have little faith in the Norwegian school system as a source of identity-building for Afropean youth, and therefore the community must provide this supplementary education through different avenues.

The founders of AYIN, alongside all the youth, are today adults, living in different towns, countries, and continents. Some have passed away, and others have AYIN as a distant memory that once was. But for some of us, AYIN still lives on, it is a part of our everyday life as it can be accredited to our support systems, our chosen family, and our places of employment. We stay in touch through social media mostly, sharing resources, opportunities, and events to keep our network together.

I found the courage to start my own counseling practice through this process. I realized that as a community member, I have something valuable to contribute, a service for marginalized populations to receive validation, a safe space to process racial traumas, and to reflect on the everyday struggles of being a minority in a predominantly white society. Through the support of AYIN alumni, I acquired clients, free ads, and unmatched support. They put me in contact with other professionals in the field, and one former member who works as a psychologist refers clients and forwards speaking arrangements to me. As a community, we show up for one another, and for that I am grateful.

My hope for the future is for AYIN to be the blueprint for a new school in our community, a school where Afropean youth can learn about their ancestors, inventors, warriors, and royalty, somewhere void of deficit thinking about the African continent. A place where they can receive validation, be heard, and allowed to be authentically themselves. I urge Afropeans in the Nordics to come together and create an educational network that serves our youth, combines resources, shares experiences, and strengthens our communities.

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Appendix A

Tribute by Baba Buntu

In loving memory of an incredible mother: Ajaratou Sainabou Mboob Jeng

Afrikan Mothers: Heroes in our midst that are often taken for granted and not acknowledged in the way they truly deserve. Some Mothers are VERY special Mothers. We know; because we have just lost one. Ajaratou Sainabou Mboob Jeng was truly a Super-Mother.

Back in the 90's and the early 2000's Mama Sainabou was one of the parents who insisted to come to every AFRIKAN YOUTH camp and help cooking the most delicious meals. She loved AFRIKAN YOUTH and everyone loved her back.

In addition to her brilliant masterchef-abilites, she was also a refuge for every young person who needed a hug, a loving word and an encouraging smile. She had an unconditional heart for every young Afrikan child; and a special concern for those growing up in Norway. Although her own upbringing was different, she understood more than anyone the challenges Black youth in Norway were confronted by. And she gave her energy, her skills, her presence and her advice – in the most profound and enriching way.

On a personal note: I am, myself, indebted to you, Mama Sainabou. Your own children grew up to become vibrant leaders in an organization that was far from easy to run. They represented a fresh breath and SO much talent. And they gave everything. Other Afrikan parents willingly sent their children to our programs, workshops and camps. And I know it was because of you. The way you believed in me. The way you believed in us. The way you believed in the Afrikan Child was beyond comprehension. Thank you for allowing us to walk in your presence, for keeping our hope up and for reminding us of our purpose here on this earth – to give, to build and to support.

We stand here – as the vast, global family you have left behind, shoulder to shoulder with Ousainou, Olimata, Serian, Aisatou and the Jeng clan. We find it hard to accept that you are gone; we will insist on holding on to your spirit and let it guide us as we keep your legacy of love alive – by practicing what you taught us, every step of the way.

May your Soul Rise in Power!

With the most profound love and respect,

Dr Baba Amani Olubanjo Buntu

Founder and Coordinator of Afrikan Youth In Norway 1995-2000

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form:

Research Consent Information:

The Story of Us

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Serian Jeng from Miami University. The purpose of this research is to examine the importance of African community education in Norway, through the former African Youth in Norway youth organization members. Participation in this research is restricted to persons 18 years of age or older.

The two interviews should take approximately 90 minutes each. Your participation is voluntary, you may skip questions you do not want to answer, and you may stop at any time. Notes accompanying this interview will not include information about your identity. Optional: With your permission, I will digitally record this interview to ensure accuracy. Later, I will take notes based on the recording and delete the recording. If you inadvertently include identifying information, such information will be removed from any stored data. Only the research team will have access to individual responses. Results of the research will be presented publicly only as aggregate summaries.

If you have any questions about this research or you feel you need more information to determine whether you would like to volunteer, you can contact me at jengs@miamioh.edu or my faculty advisor at weemsld@miamioh.edu. If you have questions or concerns about the rights of research subjects, you may contact our reviewing body: Research Ethics and Integrity Office at Miami University at (513) 529-3600 or humansubjects@miamioh.edu.

Please keep a copy of this information for future reference.

Participant Name:____

Participant Signature:

Date:________

Contact Information (email) if you would like a summary of the results.

____

Appendix C

Individual Questions

Briefly, how would you describe your experiences growing up as an African in Norway?

1. Did you learn about African history in the Norwegian School system?
    a. If you did, what do you remember?
2. Do you think AYIN contributed to your overall schooling growing up?
    a. If so, how?
3. What do you know about the history of Africans in Norway?
    a. If you have any knowledge, where did you acquire this knowledge?
4. To what extent do you think AYIN contributed to your knowledge of African history?