

AfroNordicness in Contemporary Literature and Culture

Nordic Journal of African Studies

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Contemporary African diasporic experiences and cultural expressions have been extensively studied in Anglophone contexts, often with particular focus on a number of celebrated writers. In a Nordic setting, comprising Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, Afro-diasporic experiences have received less attention until recently. As noted in previous research, only some preliminary work has been conducted so far about the numerous expressions of African and Black identities and their connections with the Nordic countries and Nordicness in personal and cultural terms (Sawyer and Habel 2014: 4). Further examination of the concept of AfroNordicness in cultural contexts is thus timely. The publication of the seminal work *Afro-Nordic Landscapes: Equality and Race in Northern Europe* (2014) offers an important starting point with its focus on nation, racism, and diaspora (McEachrane 2014: 1).

In a Swedish context, the experiences and lives of people with African origins or ancestry have received somewhat more attention than in other Nordic countries. The term AfroSwedish has emerged, with Nana Osei-Kofi (2024) asserting that AfroSwedish studies is a relatively new field of research that is still finding its bearings and taking as its focal point “AfroSwedes as a racialized and minoritized population”. The term is gaining scholarly interest, not only as a way of defining people with certain backgrounds but as the “multiple subject positions” that strategically address and negotiate what it means to be part of the African diaspora in Sweden (Skinner 2022: 5; 7). The term has also gained more prominence through the founding of Afrosvenskarnas Riksorganisation (the National Organisation of AfroSwedes) in 1990, then with a different name. The organisation states on their website that they work to create a more inclusive and just society, raising awareness about the history and culture of AfroSwedes. Osei-Kofi examines the concepts AfroSwedish and AfroSwedes and defines them as concerned with experiences of racialization, a “shared social reality (Afro)” and of being part of “the Swedish nation (Swedish)” (2024: 2).

As research confirms, racism against people with African ancestry or origins remains a significant problem in Europe, along with experiences of “hyper(in)visibility” and “vulnerability” (Small 2025: 12). In Sweden, a study conducted by Lisa Wallin and Klara Hradilova Selin (2022: 12) finds that more or less 1000 hate crimes defined as Afrophobic are reported each year. They also discuss the term AfroSwedish and assert that not all people who could potentially be included by the

label choose to define themselves as such (Wallin and Selin 2022: 15), an important reminder about the problems involved with labelling, particularly if done from the outside. In an AfroNordic context, a relevant topic also concerns how “acceptable identities” are defined and reinforced (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2016: 9). Literary and other cultural expressions often go beyond individual stories, especially in migratory contexts, and invite critical examination of race and belonging (Englund 2026: 2).

While Osei-Kofi observes that certain attention is being paid to cultural expressions of AfroSwedes, this special issue explores broader AfroNordic experience and expressions with particular interest in what “Nordic” means when combined with African heritage. In what ways can AfroNordicness coexist along with other ways of defining personal, cultural, or national identity and belonging? What are the political ramifications, expectations, and limits of AfroNordicness in personal and cultural terms? The questions are relevant as the Nordic welfare state is characterized as built in order to ensure that “no one gets left out” and that power is equally distributed (Askegaard and Östberg 2019: 10). However, increased segregation and unequal opportunity may thwart such efforts, revealing cracks in the welfare system. Research shows that Sweden today has become “one of the most statistically segregated and segmented societies along racial lines” (Hübinette and Lundström 2014: 424).

Extending these starting points to encompass other Nordic countries is the focus of this special issue and the term AfroNordic goes beyond individual experiences. Any potential AfroNorwegian, AfroDanish, AfroFinnish, and AfroIcelandic perspectives and shifting identities require further examination in more specific national contexts. This issue is interested in how expressions of AfroNordicness can be theorized or analysed in various cultural products such as literature and film, drawing for example on the important work done in *Afro-Nordic Landscapes* but taking it further to include specific cultural/literary/arts-related perspectives. The potential for new perspectives on Nordicness, Africa in the Nordics, and a variety of combinations of the “hybrid form” (Heith 2018: 147) that may emerge or already be established are of interest. The issue also invites critique of terms such as AfroNordic and their possible limitations. The question “what stories are erased and silenced in the branding of the Nordic region?” (Sawyer and Habel 2014: 1) makes for an important starting point.

This issue is also interested in comparative perspectives, concerning whether realities in the five countries in question provide separate trajectories, in what ways and to what extent. “Nordic” has also to some extent become commodified as a “brand” which ties in with “qualities and values” and not just geography, language, or shared societal structures (Strang, Marjanen, and Hilson 2021). What are the qualities and values of AfroNordicness, for example in specific national contexts? The special issue also invites interrogation of Nordicness and what it means to be Nordic, particularly

when having origins elsewhere. The Nordic countries are being increasingly examined from a viewpoint of democracy, human rights, welfare, often relating to migration and contemporary political shifts. To what extent do such features of Nordicness encompass, or exclude, the varied individuals, groups, and communities that live in the region, and what are the ramifications for people of African descent in particular?

This special issue invites contributions that critically interrogate any expressions of AfroNordicness in cultural and literary terms, potentially even questioning the usefulness of such a label. The issue is interested for example in the following topics as in-depth analyses of particular works of literature, film, or other art forms, or as more theoretically or methodologically engaged interventions:

Hyphenated identities and experiences

Race, ethnicity, racialization, racism

Memory and remembering

Construction/commodification of AfroNordic identities

Postcolonial/decolonial perspectives

African diasporas in the Nordic countries

Place-related/spatial concerns

Alternative Nordic identities

AfroNordicness and genre/form

The Nordic welfare state as symbol of inclusion/exclusion

Generational migratory experiences and perspectives

Nordic exceptionalism as it pertains to AfroNordic experiences

Future perspectives and directions of AfroNordicness

Timeline

Abstracts (300-500 words + author bio): 15 November 2026

Decisions on abstracts: 1 December 2026

Full papers: 31 March 2027

Editorial comments: 20 April 2027

Papers ready for review: 31 May 2027

Publication: early 2028

The venue for publication is the *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, an interdisciplinary open access journal which publishes scholarly articles in the fields of language, literature, culture, society, and history: <https://njas.fi/njas/index>.

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