

"Reconstructing The Black Presence in Norway: 1600-1800 Challenges and Findings"

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Speakers Bente Møller, Lovleen Khan, and Ida Velde before me underlined the importance of recording the history of the immigrant and immigration. Emphasize on the importance of records has also been pointed out during the morning session. Indeed, Norway has been changing in the past hundred of years as Professor Kjestadli et al. argued in his book on immigration published in 2003. The population is becoming more and more ethnically diverse, and this population is increasingly visible. The numbers speak for themselves: According to SSB (Statistic Central Byrå), they are 50,000 Africans from more than 40 nations living in Norway. The African population makes ~~xxx~~ percent of the Norwegian population.

In the past 400 years since Africans arrived in Kristinia, Stavanger, Bergen, through the activities of missionaries in Madagascar, South Africa, Cameroun, and through the activities of Norwegian seamen in the Atlantic slave trade. However, the bulk of today's Black communities are of relatively recent origin, dating back only to the late 1960s¹.

Before, we proceed any further; let us ask the following questions. Can we speak of an African presence in Norway or for that matter in Scandinavia? When did the first Africans arrive in Norway? Who were they, ethnically speaking? What were their names? What jobs did they do? Why did they come? What processes led to their arrival? How did the new society that they lived in perceive them? What clothes did they wear?

Did they marry? Where did they establish their residences? What are the sources? It is crucial to ask these questions to have an understanding of early African in Norway and during the union between Denmark and Norway.

In this paper, I argue an early presence of Africans in the period of the Danish-Norwegian, as well as during the Sweden-Norwegian union. It is crucial to look at these periods to understand how, when and why the African arrived. This lecture is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation, but rather provides an "overview" of some milestones in African-Norwegian and Scandinavian history yet unknown to either the scholarly world or the general public.

Early Africans in Oslo and in Denmark-Norway formed a joint Kingdom from 1640 to 1814. In 1650, Denmark entered the slave trade in an effort to build up imperial power. In its effort to build an empire, Denmark with its satellite Norway acquired between 1660 and 1732 St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John islands in the Caribbean. Historical documents that we have uncovered show a black presence going back to as early as 1589. We know that four African musicians were invited to the marriage of Princess Ann of Denmark in Oslo in November 23, 1589. We can imagine the harsh weather they faced. The temperature must have been below zero! These four African musicians were invited to Oslo by the Scottish Prince (name) to impress Princess Ann. The wedding celebration went on for several weeks. It is said, because of the harsh weather condition, three of the musicians later died of pneumonia. The fourth musician returned to Scotland. How

did it come to be that there were African musicians in Scotland in 1589? The British writer Peter Fryer argues in his interesting book; *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, that blacks had been performing at the Scottish court from 1501. They are also traces of Africans in the British Isles going back to the Roman occupation.

Status Symbol

Rich people in Copenhagen and in major cities such as Bergen would often display their wealth and good taste by dressing black in special costume. Obviously they employed some expensive garments or some kind of showy livery. These options can be studied in many portraits of noblemen that conventionally include a black child-no doubt as a foil or status symbol or both. An example of such is the painting of Frederick Gyldenløve with a little black page. Ulf Hamran, a specialist on Christian Hansen Ernst argues in a letter sent to me in 2000 that the black boy in question could be a young Christian.

Pageant Performers

More decorative still were the costumes chosen for the black people who performed in Copenhagen in 1593. At that time, three Africans and two Indians were part of a huge parade organised by the Danish King.

The records are then quiet until 1640. Then one source informed us of (at least the preliminaries) an African named Christian working at the court of Frederik II in Denmark in 1640. We must underline that the African presence in Norway dates back to the 1589.

But was that a new phenomenon? I shall try in this paper to present some of our findings on the African presence in Norway.

The attempt to reconstruct the African past in Norway, I must confess, has not been an easy job. At times, it was perplexing, confusing and frustrating. One hand document are scarce. On the other hand, the writings of historians such, (Hall, 1987), (Svalesen, 1998), (Hamran, 1988), as well as the ongoing work of Philip Sampson xxx have helped me to locate new materials in the archives of Copenhagen, Oslo, Goteborg, and Paris. Why Paris and Goteborg? For we can not do research on the African presence only by looking at the archives of only Oslo and Copenhagen, we must also research the archives in the cities of Paris and Goteborg. One source tells us that Denmark, Sweden, and France from early on were involved in establishing trading houses in the Gold Coast, that later became slave dungeons.

These countries were sometimes allies, and at other times enemies. Because trade brought riches to the kings and queens of Europe, trade agreements were signed between the European rulers from between 1600 to mid-1800 to control this lucrative business. In 1691, France and Denmark signed a commerce treaty at Versailles, France.

Queen, kings and the nobility of Europe owned coffee, tobacco, and sugar plantations in the Caribbean, mines in Southern America, and trading posts on the coast of Africa. The rulers and the European aristocracy--meaning vicomte--merchants, entrepreneurs and bankers owned fleets that were involved into a world trade of goods and human beings. This trade has been described as the Atlantic Slave Trade, which forceably relocated millions of Africans outside the continent. I would not attempt to reconstruct all the complexity of the Atlantic slave system. A number of authors have already provided information and sources on the

subject. I am however keen to emphasise the importance of the trade because it helps understand the presence in 1600 of Africans in Copenhagen and then Kristinia. (Waabe, 1987) gives a figure of some hundred African servants working in Copenhagen alone in 1600.

African Servants

From 1500 a new fashion developed in many European courts. This fashion role was assigned to Africans who came from Africa or the Caribbean. According to Ulf Hamran, the tradition of owning a little black child came from Italy. These young African boys and girls conferred status as symbols to their master. (Waaben, 1988) argues in his *Histoiske meddelser* that between 50 and 100 African servants served the Danish aristocracy from about 1650. Danish and Norwegian plantation owners brought back African boys and girls to the continent with the help by ship captains. These young black bodies served several purposes. They worked for the kings and queens as servants. The servant's role was multifold. Besides serving the kings and queens, they were sometimes treated as pets, but overall they confirmed the wealth and status of their masters. Having a black boy showed one's connection to warm countries. Warm countries were described as exotic, full of wild animals, riches and savages. From warm countries were brought very rare and exotic spices and species.

First African Official

Not all African came from the Caribbean. According to Hamran, Christian Hansen Ernst, who was nominated to the position of postmaster in Kragerø, a southern city in Norway, came from London. We know neither the date of his birth, nor anything of his background. What I believe is that was probably a black Londoner who served a British aristocrat. Hamran goes on to write that it was during a state visit to London that Frederik Gyldenløve, prince of Denmark, met the young Christian Ernst. Ulf Hamran argues that after many years in service at Gyldenløve a friendship developed between Prince Gyldenløve and Christian Hansen Ernst.

In 1681, Christian Hansen Ernst was appointed postmaster in the little southern town of Kragerø by the Danish Court.

In 1694 Christian Hansen Ernst was stabbed by Grunde Olsen Barland. Grunde Olsen Barland was smuggled out the country and returned to Norway after seven years of exile abroad. He was never put on trial. Exactly what happened that night? What is the story of Norway's first known black official? We have no documents to tell us.

Coffee, Sugar and Tea

It was during the (trade) potato, tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco and exotic fruit entered slowly apart of Bourgeoisie diet in Denmark and later to Norway and the rest of Europe. Sugar became in the 1700 the most valuable item. It is representing what is oil today to oil producing nations according to a source. From this trade grew a bourgeoisie in Copenhagen and it some extents a small Norwegian in town such as Halden, Bergen, and Drammen. In his book, *Herren til Møhlenpris* (Fossen ,2003) gives an interesting account of Bergen most powerful merchant, Jørgen Thormøhlen. Thomelen was a man of his time. He was an entrepreneur with connections to several European courts. Thormolehen owned ships and an important sugar industry in St. Thomas. He was St. Thomas most important plantation owner. He was not only a plantation owner but he also had more than 200 enslaved African on his

farm.

What do the Archives tell us about the Black Presence in Norway?

It is not easy to find Africans in the archives for there are no such archives on the African presence. Without, the help of royal archivist Leif Thingsrud, Nils Kristian Høymer of the Missionary College and Librarian Tove D.Johansen my work would have been impossible. For their dedication and time gave me the confidence that it is possible to find materials, letters, photographs, and population censuses.

Identifying Early African in the Archives

Identifying Africans is a daunting task. But we begin by looking. Africans that came throughout the years to Norway had Danish names which mean that their original names were stripped away after landing in the Caribbean. Most of the Africans I have found doing research had typical Danish name such Christian, Frederik, Wilhemine, Hans, Morten etc... Population censuses are an invaluable source on Africans in the household of Oslo wealthiest such as Bernt Anker. For instance the population census of 1801 offers an interesting bit of information on an African named Morten Soliman. Another African is a woman named Wilhemine. We know for sure that she was born in St. Croix in the Caribbean. In 1801, she is reported leaving on a farm at Stange in Hamar. The information on Wilhemine says clearly that she was a «house slave». This said, slavery was not allowed legally in Norway. It has been difficult to unearth more information on Wilhemine.

Missionary Archives

The Missionary College in Stavanger houses an archive which is a wealth of information on Africans from about 1860. Dealing essentially with students of theology studies but as well with Africans seeking adventures in the nineteenth century as African seamen who worked on Norwegian boats. The records suggest that African students male and female studied the Bible in Norwegian and shared the same aspirations of their fellow Norwegians to serve God. However, these students never made Stavanger their home. They had come to Stavanger because the Norwegian missionary society sponsored their trip. They were in Stavanger to acquire the rudiments of the Bible, and later travelled back home with the mission to convert the “pagans” and “unbelievers”. Stavanger, a town situated in the west coast of Norway, housed an important collection of small format photographic prints taken between the 1860s and 1960s. This set is identified in the library files as x, has rarely received the focus it deserved. Yet, the Misjonshøgskolen collection includes a vast collection of photographs taken by Stavanger, Kristinia, photographs which portray hundreds of African theology students, and at least family, and seamen, has never been looked closely. In addition, the collection is classified by first name and family. The collection contains early photographs of the daguerreotypes. Finally, this collection is the testimony of African visitors and migrants from South Africa and Madagascar to Norway.

In studying, this collection, I am also, however, pursuing a larger goal. The striking features of this collection make it, in my opinion, an especially important source of wealth to renewed interpretation of Norwegian and Scandinavia history. For at the time many of these photographs were taken Norway and Sweden were in Union. The Union between Norway and Sweden starts in 1814 and ends in 1905. An example of such photography is the portrait of

Ester Radafy and Sigrid Rainiveolo taken in 1898. Ester Radafy and Sigrid Rainiveilo were both natives of Madagascar.

Between 1898 and 1900 they attended Industriskolen in Kristinia. In 1898, King Oskar monarch of Sweden and Norway paid visits to Industriskolen. During his visit, he joined Sigrid and Ester for a hot chocolate drink. It is not known, if any photographs were taken.

Migrations Record

Migration records [Passenger Lists] are invaluable in helping one find Africans. Board of Trade Passenger Lists, contain the names of people leaving ports in Norway for final destinations outside Europe.

You can carry out a person search using the first and last name. You can also refine your search by departure port, destination country and destination port.

From the city record of Sortland, we learn about an African-American named Henry, who earlier worked as a minstrel artist to become the first English teacher of that city. The only record we have on Henry is a photograph taken in the 1870s.

Conclusion

When I began the search for African among the city records of Oslo, Copenhagen, Goteborg, Paris, several years, I never thought that effort would lead to finding the stories of men and women of African descent in Norway. Until recently, they were no records kept of Africans.

The Copenhagen Royal and Goteborg archives house a wealth of information of the implications of Scandinavians in the slave trade and importantly of trading of young African bodies that later were brought to cities such as Copenhagen and Kristinia (today Oslo).

Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century Denmark and Norway the African population remained very small. Scattered between Copenhagen, Bergen, Kristinia. They were a handful of black pages. From about 1650, their number began to rise. Having a black or two in ones household soon became a craze for all who could afford it. It should be noted not all Africans worked as servants. Some, like Christian Hansen Ernst, rose to become a Post master and director of customs of the city Kragerø in Southern Norway in 1681. Others sailed the sea on board Norwegian ships. This trend continues until 1850s. With 1850, another activity brought this time African from the continent is the missionary. The activity of the missionary brought hundreds of young African males and females to Stavanger and Oslo.

> I thank your listening. Thank you.

I would to thank the organiser for this wonderful day.

Litterature

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> I Gyloy, Paul, , (1993) The Black Atlantic

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> Ron Ramdin, (2002) Remaimaging Britain

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- > 3 Hamrans article