3. Growing up in Frankfurt

Aminata C., Maya B, Lafia T. and I share an important feature in our lives: We all grew up in Frankfurt, and we are happy about that. Although Maya and I left the city – a long time ago in my case, while Maya moved away for several years before going back – we are all fond of the city and of our memories of childhood and our teenage years. One of the reasons we like Frankfurt is that it is a very multicultural city, and we grew up with children who came from very different national and cultural backgrounds. We lived in similar environments, which could be described as urban and middle class, not posh areas but neighbourhoods that were close to each other and near the city centre.

Maya and Aminata both grew up with their West African fathers; their daily existence included Sierra Leonian or Guinean cultural practices right through their childhoods and adolescence in Germany. For Lafia, the situation was different. She grew up with her German mother and only saw her father from time to time, as he lived in a city nearby. Senegalese cultural practices were not part of her self-understanding as a child and teenager.

In this chapter, I will focus on the process of growing up in Frankfurt by zooming in on the lives of Aminata and Maya, with whom I have been good friends since high school. This picture will be complemented by the life story of Lafia, who also grew up around the same time in Frankfurt but moved in slightly different circles.

The chapter demonstrates the role of place in the construction and understanding of selfhood. The other aspect that I focus on here is generation. Aminata, Maya and Lafia are shaped by the city they grew up in, but the specific time they grew up in the bonds that created among people of the same generation also mattered a great deal. Aminata and Maya's lives were influenced by what Frankfurt had to offer in the 1990s and around the turn of the millennium, a time when US infrastructure and GI culture were still present – though not to the same extent as immediately after World War II – and these played a significant part in their young lives. This was not the case for Lafia, who neither moved in the American world nor in African diasporic networks as a child and teenager. Dealing with her Senegalese heritage started much later than for Aminata or Maya and was more connected to her education choices. Yet besides these differences, their paths also crossed as teenagers,

as all three frequented the same middle-class school circles and there were places where they hung out together. The stories of the three women, although singular and subjective, also transmit something that I call 'a feeling of a generation' because the experiences they had and the places they frequented resonate with many others of their age group, people born in the 1980s in the cosmopolitan city of Frankfurt.

The shared reference to a certain place at a certain time creates a feeling of familiarity. When I speak to old friends from Frankfurt or even people who grew up in the city at the same time as me but who I only met after leaving Frankfurt age 19 to move to Vienna, the fact of having grown up in Frankfurt around the same time creates an instant bond. We refer to the same places, hanging out in the city centre after school (at Burger King or the Zeilgalerie shopping centre) or at the Grüneburgpark (a big park close to the city centre). Although we might not have spent time there together, knowing that we were part of it makes it feel as if we did. In many of these spaces, class distinction did not matter much – as people of all class backgrounds would come together in the city centre, and we met young people who attended all the different types of school. Yet in many other spaces class distinctions were already very present, in practice if not at the level of vocalisation.

The Grüneburgpark, for example, was close to a high school (Bettina Gymnasium) in a well-off neighbourhood, and the pupils usually came from middle-class backgrounds. The school system in Germany tends to facilitate class distinctions from an early age. After primary school (four years, usually from six to ten) pupils (or their parents) have to decide what sort of school they want to attend, and their primary school teacher also gives a recommendation. The German secondary school system back then was divided into three categories in Hesse, where Frankfurt is located: One ended after 9th grade (*Hauptschule*), the second after 10th grade (*Realschule*) and the third after 12th or 13th grade (*Gymnasium*). Today the *Gymnasium* and the *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school) provide a direct path into higher education. The majority of pupils who attend a *Gymnasium* already come from middle-class families, and their parents often have a tertiary education themselves; they are recommended for this type of school far more often than pupils from working-class families. The German educational system reproduces social inequalities from very early on in the lives of children (Kuhlmann 2008, Solga 2008, Wolter 2011). In this way, common generational feeling is divided along class lines.

Then there is the shared reference point of certain major global events that we all experienced while together in Frankfurt. We were teenagers when the attacks on the World Trade Center took place and the 'War on Terror' began. Our first political demonstrations were in opposition to the war in Iraq launched by the Bush administration in 2003. We also witnessed the rise of the internet. In terms of the specific group I and my participants belonged to, party culture provides a number of common references. Here the American GI clubs come into play, as everyone who was into RnB and Hip Hop frequented the same clubs in and around Frankfurt. Usually

when we speak about these places with friends, there is a certain amount of nostalgia that goes with it, a sentiment of carefree youth that we spent together.

The young women that I work with, Aminata, Maya and Lafia, now bear the heavy responsibilities of adulthood, and all that comes with it. They all have children of their own, are trying to create a good work–life balance, want to advance in their careers and be there for their children, and sometimes face illness and loss in their own families with the attendant care responsibilities. The feeling that life has become more serious is all-encompassing. And so it was that our discussions often turned towards nostalgia for the 'good old days'. Talking about the times when we were young and carefree, remembering certain songs, certain items and brands and mocking our youthful styles helps make today feel less serious as we remember older versions of ourselves.

Later I will describe Aminata and Maya's teenage years, their involvement in African diaspora family networks and their encounters with African American culture in Frankfurt, which were formative of Black identity. I examine how spaces such as the GI night clubs, the PX (mall reserved for American citizens) and the US airbase were important for how they dealt with their African heritage and being Black women in Germany. As I have known them for a long time, a lot of the things that I write are memories that we discussed together. At other times we also carried out scheduled interviews. Besides many discussions of my research, we also took a trip to London together, which I also discuss. The material I use for the analysis and representation of Aminata's and Maya's lives is taken from notes that were part of my PhD fieldwork in Frankfurt in 2017/18 and, in Aminata's case, also from three telephone interviews between Lausanne and Frankfurt at the end of 2018 (two biographical ones and one about travelling to Ghana) and many other conversations that we had over the years. With Lafia, the methods were a bit different. As we were not friends before the research we started with formal interviews and began to spend time together socially after the first official meeting. We had three interview sessions, in two of which she told me about her life and travels. At our first session I informed her that she could just start telling me about her life, but she was a bit confused by that, 'You mean, relating to being Afro-German or…?' I explained that if she immediately thought about that she could start with it, but that in general she could just start with her experiences of growing up.

Situating Frankfurt

Regina Römhild, doing research on transnationalism in Germany, called Frankfurt a 'small global city' (2004). Frankfurt is in the state of Hesse, located in the west of Germany. It is known as an important global financial centre and is the seat of the European Central Bank. It also has Germany's biggest international airport. Its population is now over 750,000, making it the fifth most populous city in Germany (Bunde-

samt 2019). Almost 30 per cent of Frankfurt residents do not possess German citizenship, and according to a survey by the city's Office for Multicultural Affairs (Amka) (the only such office in Germany), more than half of the population has a 'migration background'. However, most of these are second generation, which means they were born in Germany to at least one parent who had immigrated from another country (Amka 2017). This also means they may or may not have German citizenship, as in German law citizenship is still often acquired through the principle of *Jus sanguinis*, which means that for a person to get German citizenship they need to have German ancestry. Since 2000, *Jus solis* is also recognised (with some constraints) alongside *Jus sanguinis* (Mecheril 2003). In terms of the African diaspora, of the 220,000 inhabitants of foreign nationality, a little over 17,000 hold citizenship of an African country. That is about eight per cent of the foreign population. The majority of people with African citizenship are from North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia); this is followed by West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Togo), East Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia), Central Africa (Cameroon, Sudan) and finally Southern African countries. Hesse is the state with the second-largest population of African nationals after North-Rhine-Westphalia, a neighbouring state to the West. The largest groups of foreign nationals in Hesse are Turkish, Croatian and Italian (Bundesamt 2017a, Bundesamt 2019).

Aminata and her father both told me that Frankfurt felt like a safe place for them. A place where they would not feel as if they stood out in any particular way, because the city was so diverse and international. During our interview, Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, would speak of his perceptions of Frankfurt:

> I think Frankfurt always was *weltoffen* ['open to the world']. I almost never felt like a stranger in Frankfurt. Almost. I cannot say much about the rest of Germany, but Frankfurt always was '*multikulti*' (multicultural), other people always lived here. You always had the neighbour that was Portuguese, or from Ghana or Nigeria. Frankfurt was always like that.

When talking about various journeys she made around Europe, Aminata also stressed that she was always happy to come back to Frankfurt, where she had created a safe 'microcosm' for herself and her family. Many neighbourhoods in Frankfurt are socially and culturally mixed and richer areas are often very close to poorer neighbourhoods. Aminata grew up and still lives in a socially mixed neighbourhood with a majority of working and middle-class people, a lot of green spaces with a small river flowing through it. It is centrally located with many bus, train and underground stops close by. Using the train, you can reach the city centre in ten minutes. The swimming pool is very close by, which in summer becomes a home from home for many who live in nearby neighbourhoods – Aminata and her family among them.

Maya, Lafia and I also grew up a socially and culturally mixed neighbourhood, but it has been gentrifying for a few years now, partly because it is a central district very close to the main station and city centre and the richer 'Westend' neighbourhood. It takes 15 minutes to cycle to the city centre and ten to reach the Grüneburgpark, two spaces where we hung out a lot as children and teenagers.

The US military presence in Frankfurt since 1945

The US Army presence in and around Frankfurt dates from the end of World War II in 1945, when Hesse became part of the US occupation zone, whose capital was at Wiesbaden. But the headquarters of the whole US military in Germany was in Frankfurt, and all soldiers were coordinated from there. As their headquarters they chose the IG Farben Buiding,[1] the head office of the largest chemical conglomerate in Germany (Häfner 2014). More than 3,000 people worked at the headquarters. The US Army moved out of the building in 1994, but a number of army bases remained around Frankfurt after that.

Some 11,000 army personnel, together with their families, used to live close to the headquarters, which is located in the city centre (partly in Westend, partly in the Ginnheim district) in a part of the city people in Frankfurt still refer to as the '*Ami-Siedlung*', the American Settlement (Tyler 2014). The IG Farben Building was acquired from the American military by the German federal government and sold to Goethe University Frankfurt in 1996, in which capacity it has served as a beautiful campus in Frankfurt centre for several years now (Häfner 2014).

The rise in the number of soldiers arriving in the 1950s led to big changes in Frankfurt. Entertainment to keep the American soldiers happy was an important part of the infrastructural development after 1945 and thus, in the course of a few years, more than twenty-five GI clubs were founded in and around the city, spaces where Germans and American soldiers would meet – and still do today. After being significant in promoting African American culture in the form of jazz music in the 1950s, the GI clubs turned to RnB, Hip Hop and soul in the 1990s. Fans of such music still attend the GI clubs in Frankfurt, Darmstadt and Wiesbaden now. The influence that black music had on lives of young people in Europe is also well exemplified in a side note by Paul Gilroy, writing about himself as a Black teenager in London, a generation before ours:

> When I was a child and a young man growing up in London, black music provided me with a means to gain proximity to the sources of feeling from which our local conceptions of blackness were assembled. The Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and above all black America contributed to our lived sense of a racial self. […]

1 For an overview of the history of the building, see: https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/68266113/The_IG_Farben_BuildingConstruction_and_Architectural_History (accessed June 2019).

> They were important also as a source for the discourses of blackness with which we located our own struggles and experiences. (Gilroy 1993, p. 109)

Gilroy here points to the importance of a 'local conception of blackness', which is then influenced by transnational flows. Black American culture in Frankfurt did not seem to matter much to Aminata's father, though. When asked about any connections with African Americans in Germany, he answers that differences in class and education meant that he did not have much in common with them. 'We were students, and they were soldiers', he said. And although Aminata told me that they went to the PX when she was a child, where a friend of her father's worked, this did not seem to be something he would describe as an influence on him in Frankfurt. The fact that he was already an adult when he came to Germany, having been socialised in Guinea meant he was not interested in drawing on GI culture to construct himself as Afrodescendant (more about Lamine Camara's trajectory in Chapter 4).

Another factor is that the GI culture was male dominated and thus more attractive for women, who were interested in dating and dancing. For my generation of Frankfurters, born in the 1980s, the US presence still played a very important part while growing up, for some more than for others, depending on one's taste in music and culture. For Aminata and Maya (as I will discuss further), the GI club scene was significant for their development and understanding of an individual sense of being a Black teenager.

Aminata Camara and Maya B. – Inspired by Black America

> Fieldwork at home
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> We sit in a café in Frankfurt's old town and for the first time in more than 20 years of friendship with Aminata, I switch on the recording device and ask her to tell me about her life. Although I've known her for many years, many of the things she tells me about her childhood and her parents are new to me, which somehow catches me by surprise. (Fieldnote, 14 January 2018)

The first interview with Aminata is very short, only twenty minutes, because an old friend comes in to the café by coincidence and joins us. Frankfurt is a small city after all. But we continue the life-story interview later on.

I first met Aminata when we were ten and had just started high school. Aminata is in her early fourties today, has two children aged eleven and 7 with her husband Albert, whose parents are from Ghana; he was born in Frankfurt. Her father migrated from Guinea to Germany in the 1970s on a student scholarship from a German foundation and studied economics in Frankfurt, where he has lived ever since. Aminata's

mother is from Frankfurt. She studied German literature in the 1970s and was active in left-wing politics in Frankfurt, which was a hub of the 1968 movements. Today, Aminata's mother works for an overseas development agency. Aminata's parents separated when she was in her late teens, but all three still live in Frankfurt. Aminata has a really close relationship with her mother, who often takes care of the grandchildren, as does Albert's father, and both live close to Aminata and her family. Aminata studied French, Culture and Economics and works in public relations. She also does a lot of work as a moderator of events on migration, the empowerment of women and People of Colour. She has recently taken on a new role at an educational organisation which does work related to anti-racism. Aminata has also co-organised the Afrika-Fest in Frankfurt for several years. It is fair to say that her family leads a middle-class, urban life. Although her early experience was very transnational – she was born in Colombia, where her parents lived for two years, and they lived in Conakry, in Guinea, as a child – Frankfurt is very much Aminata's home base. When she talks about Frankfurt, she says that she cannot remember ever having felt estranged from the city; even when she lived in Conakry with her parents, they came back in the summer, and she saw her friends again. And besides studying in Mannheim for a while (one hour from Frankfurt by train) she has lived most of her life in Frankfurt, which is also where she started her own family.

Maya grew up in Frankfurt with her father, who came to Germany from Sierra Leone, her mother, who is from a small town close to Frankfurt, and her little brother. Today Maya's father lives in Sierra Leone again, something he always dreamed of. Like Aminata's father, he came to Germany in the 1970s, and he lived there for about thirty years, founding a family. Through his daughter, he is still very much connected to Frankfurt. At first, he went to the United Kingdom, but as the economic situation was better in Germany at the time, he decided on the advice of friends to relocate to Frankfurt. Maya's parents separated when the children were still young, and Maya and her brother grew up with their father. After a few years, Maya's father married a second time, and the family of three expanded. Maya lived as part of that big family until her father decided to relocate to the USA. He had good job opportunities there, as did his second wife, who was a trained nurse but could not work in Germany because her diploma was not recognised. Maya was about 17 then, and decided not to join the family in moving to the States. That was a tough decision for Maya, and she missed her father, her brother and the rest of the family. Maya studied tourism and urban planning in Cologne and Kenya, and today lives with her young son in Frankfurt. Previously she had moved to Nigeria with her husband Otis for work, where she was employed by a major development cooperation organisation.

Although I only became friends with Maya during high school, when we ended up in the same class, we went to the same primary school and grew up in the same neighbourhood. I remember seeing her playing in the school playground or in the

class pictures that hung in the hallway of the primary school. But we only became friends when we were about 14, when Aminata, Maya and I started to spend a lot of time together. In high school, Maya was always the one with the best written essays; she was very creative. I understood why when we began to become friends. Maya was a bookworm, and together with her then best friend, Clara, she hung out at the neighbourhood library a lot. It was Maya who sparked my interest in the African diaspora. When I needed book advice, I would ask Maya. We were both really into family sagas. After advising me to read Isabelle Allende's *House of Spirits*, she recommended that I read Alex Haley's *Roots* and *Queen*, novels about the genealogy of a family caught up in slavery.

These novels tell the story of Kunta Kinte, who was born in West Africa in the eighteenth century, captured and sold into slavery and shipped to the USA. They follow his life and the lives of his descendants. I was mesmerised. As I slowly began to be interested in stories of the African diaspora or Black America, Maya was already a huge fan and had read Malcolm X and many others.

It was ongoing conversations and experiences with Aminata and Maya which sparked in a big way my interest of wanting to work on the topic of life stories of young adult Germans of African descent, their life in Germany and the role of transnational travel in it. I remember travelling together to Paris and Munich with school, and discovering the American GI club scene in Frankfurt and surroundings together as teenagers and young women. Maya and Aminata have been good friends for about as long and the fact that they are both of mixed German and West African descent together with their love for Hip Hop, Soul and RnB brought them very close in their teenage years. Even if they were not friends from the beginning it had been important for Maya to not be the only Afrodescendant person in class (they were not the only Pupils of Colour in class but the only ones of African descent). Since I moved away from Frankfurt at 19 our contact persisted but I was much less involved in their day-to-day life and they less in mine. Starting my fieldwork brought me closer to both once again.

Aminata – Between Frankfurt and Conakry as a child

Aminata was born in Bogotá, Colombia, in the mid-1980s, when her mother was there teaching German, accompanied by her father. They left Bogotá soon after she was born and went back to Frankfurt, where her parents both found jobs at a development cooperation agency. After a year, her father started to think about relocating to Conakry. There had been a change of government in Guinea, and he began to see an opportunity to live there with his family. They did move there in the 1990s but came back after four years, again due to a shift in politics, which made it difficult for the family to stay. In Guinea, Aminata went to a French school and experienced, as she explains it, an upper-class expat life:

> We lived in Conakry, the capital. I suppose that is the only place where there is a French school. But yes, we were there and lived in a rented house. Years went by until I was about nine, and well we had a good life there. We were, I would say, privileged expat kids, with a driver; I had a personal driver who drove me to school or to friends. Or a playdate was of course at the pool of a family / who were expats as well / Yes, French families, American families, everything mixed […] And we were Whites, me as well. /But not your father./ No, of course not, but when we [she and her mother] were outside somewhere, my father worked a lot, then we were of course Whites. […] 'Fote' apparently means 'white' in Susu. But they also did that in Ghana [she and her family travelled there in 2018], they called us 'obroni', 'obroni' means white, that applied to us all as well [her husband and kids], although of course we are not white in our perception, for them we are. I remember that, I totally remember that.

When she thinks about her time in Guinea, what strikes her most is how privileged her life was, and today she reflects about it consciously in terms of class. When she talks about her life then, she is aware that she lived in an expat bubble and not as a true Guinean. Though her father was from Conakry, the structures they inhabited were those of the expat community and not the Guinean people. Moreover, since her father worked a lot, she spent more time with her mother, who is white and German, and Aminata was perceived as white as well. Aminata's foreignness dominated her experiences of Guinea. She went to the French school, all her friends were from the international community, and when I asked her if it had been difficult to leave Frankfurt at the time she said, 'We always returned to Germany for summer holidays, so almost for three months, which is why it never really felt like being away' (interview 14 January 2018). Nonetheless, she lived in Guinea for a few years and gained a sense of the place: the markets, the streets, the food, the smells – they are still part of her memories and are important for her identification as Guinean. Aminata and her parents returned to Germany when she was ten. The political situation had unfortunately become rather insecure, and they decided to move back. It was almost time for Aminata to enter high school. We went to school together until we were 16, when Aminata moved to a different one. But we stayed friends and spent a lot of time together in our teenage and young adult years.

Maya – Living in a large Sierra Leonian family as a child

> Kitchen talk (1)
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> While we are sitting in my kitchen in Frankfurt, Maya's dad calls. I haven't seen him for about 20 years. Not since Maya and I were at school together. She hands the phone over to me: 'He wants to say hello.' A bit surprised, I take the phone:

> 'Hello Mister B., how are you?'
> 'Good, good, and how are you Silvia?' he answers.
> S: 'I am okay, I am spending some time in Frankfurt now and also with Maya.'
> Mister K.: 'That is great. I just wanted to properly say hello.'
> S: 'Thank you, and how are things going in Sierra Leone?'
> Mister B.: 'It is raining here now, but besides that things are fine.'
> I hand the phone to Maya again, totally stunned at how well her father still speaks German, since he has lived in Germany now for more than 15 years. He spent many years in the USA, and upon retirement a few years back moved back to Sierra Leone after building a house there. Maya says, 'My father is really severe, so that when I speak something else than German with him he says "No! We have to speak German." Even when I'm speaking to my brother, my father insists that we speak German.' (Fieldnote, 10 October 2017)

Maya grew up in Frankfurt, but today her family is very transnational and lives between the USA, Sierra Leone and Germany. While growing up, Maya, who lived with her father until she was 17, was always part of a Sierra Leonean diaspora community; she knew both worlds, the world of her mother in Germany, when she stayed with her and the world of her father, who facilitated her contact to the small diaspora community in Frankfurt. She went to African parties as a child, and was often surrounded by Sierra Leonian people, food and music. When her father remarried, Maya and her brother acquired many new stepsiblings, and for about ten years they all lived together in a single household. Maya's youth was shaped by being socialised in both the Sierra Leonian diaspora and German society. Through family and friends, it was part of her everyday life. But unlike Aminata, she never lived for an extended period in her father's home country. As a child, she only visited Sierra Leone once with her father and brother, as the civil war broke out when she was seven, and was to last from 1991 to 2001. Yet Maya remembers that they always travelled a lot with her father, especially within Germany. She describes her father as very self-confident, recalling how, ever since she was little, he always told her that she should not put up with anyone treating her badly simply because her dad was African. Another influence was also important for Maya, even as a young child: Because her father worked at the PX mall and had many American colleagues, there was a constrant stream of Americans visiting their flat. This included many African Americans, and she was always impressed by their self-confidence. The USA became the country of her dreams as a young girl and she began to read African American authors. She also listened to a lot of Black American musicians, from Mary J Blige to Mos Def – Maya was a real fan of Soul, RnB and Hip Hop and knew every track, new or old.

As the USA was very present in the public sphere in Frankfurt not only through books, music and TV shows but also via the presence of US military structures and

soldiers stationed close by, her connection to the USA became even stronger when she was a teenager. This was also the time that Maya and Aminata became friends.

Aminata C. and Maya B. – Teenage years and GI club culture in Frankfurt

US cultural production, and African American material in particular, was already important for Maya when she was in her early teens, and it grew in significance in the coming years, this time more in relation to gender and sexuality. This was also when Aminata and Maya became friends. When when they were about fourteen, we all travelled together to Paris on a school exchange. And it was during their time in Paris that they discovered how much they had in common: in terms of family background – both their fathers are West African and they could find many similarities in their behaviours which often made them laugh – but even more so in their US-influenced tastes in music and fashion. After the Paris exchange, they began to hang out more together and I started to spend time with the two of them as well, I was also very much into Black music and dancing and we shared a similar sense of humour.

Aside from her Guinean kin relations, Aminata's 'first contact' with Afrodiasporic identity in Germany goes back to her teenage years in Frankfurt and is closely linked to the Black American GI club scene, which still existed in Frankfurt in the early 2000s, and the social world around it. She worked in a shop at the US airbase with her friend Shreeta, and consumed American products such as Hip Hop music magazines, food, cigarettes, make-up and more. Life as teenage girls in Frankfurt was pretty much defined by discovering the club scene in and around Frankfurt, especially centring on RnB and Hip Hop. I recall how the weeks were structured by the opening of clubs and special nights. It started occasionally on Tuesday at Cooky's, then continued on Friday and Saturday with Freeway or Natrix. Then there was the option of going to Park Café in Wiesbaden on Sunday and to Dorian Gray on Monday. This musical landscape has changed since then, as most of the clubs (except for Park café and Cooky's) have closed. Discovering the GI clubs where many African American soldiers and army employees went was a decisive moment out for Aminata, Maya and her friends (including myself) as a teenager and (very) young adult. These spaces were of particular importance in the process of constructing womanhood. For a few years, as Aminata recalls, her life revolved around Black American culture, music and GIs.

Every weekend we would dress up, put on our high heels, stand in the line at the Freeway club in the city centre or take the train to Darmstadt to go to Natrix. And we would always have a second pair of shoes – sneakers – in our bag, because we knew that we would dance the night away. Aminata and her friend Shreeta went more often than me or Maya, and their English skills improved massively, because as soon as we entered these club spaces, the language would switch to English. I remember that in the beginning that was difficult for me, but I got used to it. For Aminata, it

had become normal after a while, and for Maya it was not a problem at all, as she was used to speaking English with her father and he often brought African American friends home – English was an everyday language in her household. Freeway was a fairly small club, just one big dancefloor and a bar, but the doorwoman was a tough cookie, and we always feared we would not get in, although most often we did. Natrix was on another level: It was a huge club, with a massive dance floor and stage. It was easy to get lost in there, which is why we would usually always stay on a specific spot on the dancefloor. Natrix was a real club, there were beatbox and dance contests, foam parties, concerts. As we were still teenagers, we were able to afford the entry fee, but we did not drink there – that was too expensive.

We went to Black music, Hip Hop and RnB nights. There was always some African or Afrodiasporic sounds included in these events, like Dancehall or Ragga music, two Reggae-inspired musical styles from Jamaica; these were popular at the time in the clubs, including the classic 'Murder She Wrote' (1993) by Chaka Demus & Pliers, which we heard over and over again when we were adolescents (although it is from the 1990s, it was often played in the clubs as a classic). It was the time of German Reggae star Mr Gentleman, a white German who had connections to Jamaica and lived a transnational life between here and there. Today, the styles are called Afrotrap or Afrobeat; the most famous DJ that Aminata, Maya and I now listen to and go to see (not as often as when we were younger though) is called DJ Kwame (a popular Ghanaian name); the parties in Frankfurt clubs like Oye or Zoom club have names like Afrodiziac, Ghana meets Naija (short for Nigeria), Afro Swing or Hip Hop meets Afrobeats. A niche during our times, Hip Hop parties with Afrodiasporic sounds (especially Afrotrap) have become mainstream today.

Doing some research about Natrix, trying to find articles and photos, the most interesting parts actually were the comments under videos or articles; they come from former GIs who were stationed around the area as well as from Germans going out there. In a YouTube video from a 2003 performance by American rapper Petey Pablo in Natrix, I scrolled down to the comments. They include 'Best time of my life from 2000–2005 in Germany good memories', 'biggest club I ever seen forget ktown, Heidelberg or Stuttgart', 'Natrix was the hottest club ever' to 'since being there all other parties could not live up to it'.[2] For people in Germany who were interested in Hip Hop and RnB, the GI clubs were the gold standard in a musical landscape otherwise dominated by techno at the time.

During a phone call Aminata and I had when I was doing fieldwork with my other participants, Oxana and Layla, in November 2017, we talked about being influenced a lot by Black role models from the USA, not only in music but also in literature,

2 Petey Pablo concert at the Natrix club in Darmstadt, 2003: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM2pLlMAqcE (accessed 21 April 2020).

or TV shows and channels such as MTV. Aminata stressed the importance of music and club culture for dealing with her African descent. 'We [referring to her and Maya] began to deal with this part of our identity very early on, through music and also through American culture in Frankfurt' she recalled. But the special thing, Aminata says, was also that it was very inclusive, it was not a space to distance oneself from others, there was also space for me or for Shreeta, for example. 'We constructed that for ourselves', Aminata emphasises, 'and this is what's special about it'. Many of the famous German Hip Hoppers from the 1990s such as Die Fantastischen Vier or Advanced Chemistry were influenced by the 'GI discos' and were drawn to Hip Hop, RnB and Soul through the influence of that club scene that existed into the 2000s (Jochmaring 2010).

Aminata found her sense of womanhood confirmed in the GI clubs. African American GIs represented access to a desirable and somehow exotic world, the world of American – and more particularly Black American – culture. During the second interview with Aminata, the role of GI culture in her life and ours was a major topic.

> Silvia: The time at high school was also the time of puberty, time to discover yourself [we laugh], and we discovered club culture, tell me how that was for you?
> Aminata: How did we start? Very very young, it was about being together and listening loud to music, then, more as a coincidence there was the Freeway that was the first club we went to, and there were sooo many Black people – and that was very cool, very cool to have such a vibe and to see so many faces, that for sure was something special. And of course the whole '*Ami*'-thing, USA, Hip Hop, I was very attracted to it. Actually almost everything was about that for a few years, everything else became irrelevant, school and everything moved to the background. It was about defining oneself there, and above all I got my womanhood affirmed there, and that was like 'Jackpot!'
> Silvia: But how were you perceived by the *Amis* (American GIs)?
> Aminata: Of course that was colourism, they saw in me that light-skinned [woman] [referring to an African American beauty ideal of not being 'too dark'] – although many also liked white women, but I looked like something they knew. I could have met them in America, I mean speaking of my looks. And I think I just corresponded to the common American beauty ideal in a way? But then of course, they thought 'Oh, she's really interesting because she speaks both German and such good English,' so I could use a lot of my skills, and was able to connect well… because most of the women were… But well at 17 it's okay, but if you're 25–30 you have to ask yourself what for, but for us at that young age it was all fun and games.

The GI world was a space to play with gendered identities that intersected with race and class. Jacqueline Nassy Brown, in her book on African diaspora in Liverpool, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (2005), stresses that the women of African descent she interviewed had gone out with African American soldiers especially because they felt that their own 'type' – being of African descent and having a brown skin tone – was often rejected by other men in their home town, and that the American GIs made them feel like attractive and desirable women. Black America and Black Americans gave Aminata an opportunity to create a positive racialised identity and a different way to deal with her mixed Guinean-German heritage, one that was detached from kinship, and something different from the usual othering and experience of not being like most other boys and girls in school. As Robert Smith (2006) notes in his study of Mexican-Americans in New York, dealing positively with a feature of oneself that is often discriminated against, stereotyped and othered in society is an important way to counter discrimination. Aminata's high level of education distinguished her from other women who hung out in the same spaces and marked a class distinction ('I could use a lot of my skills') and her body fulfilled beauty standards on Black American terms. These were not the experiences she had in the rest of her life in Germany, where she felt that the common beauty ideal represented in TV or media in general was skinny, very light-skinned and straight haired. Furthermore, flirting culture in Frankfurt was generally rather meagre compared to American norms.

Aminata saw that the desirable, highly sexualised women in Black music videos on MTV looked more like her; and the Black GIs looked more like men she desired; they looked like the men from the music videos with American sports clothes, fancy sneakers and durags (male hair coverings worn a lot in Hip Hop culture). As a teenager, these aspects of fun, love and desire were responsible for making the USA an imaginary dreamland for a while.

The experience of class distinction was more pronounced in the GI spaces than in others – many of the people Aminata was close to in the rest of her everyday life shared her middle-class and educational status. But in the GI places, many of the GIs and other people who hung out there came from another social clusterthat was more working class, with fewer educational opportunities.

During that time in her life, Aminata travelled to Miami twice. Once still as a teen with her mother and her friend Shreeta, and again as a young adult with Shreeta. That second visit to Miami, an imagined dreamland for her and her friend, also marked a key part in the process of her disenchantment with GI culture. However, the trip, self-financed by her and Shreeta's work at the US airbase, is still a great memory: 'We took all the money we made at the airbase and squandered it there. And it was the best, for me it was like I want to stay here, I never want to go away, I mean beach and holiday and the way it is then, of course you never want to come back again.' The trip marked the beginning of a majoir change in her life, the end of her

school years and the beginning of adulthood, with the taste of incredible freedom at turning 18, the age of legal adulthood in Germany. For Maya, too, it was especially through travel that the USA lost its status as a dreamland.

Disenchantment with GI culture

As they grew older, both Aminata and Maya went through a phase of disenchantment with African American and GI culture. Aminata's position came closer to the one of her father, who felt he had nothing in common with African American soldiers, and the differences in terms of class and political education began to be more pronounced. This was about the time of 9/11 and the beginning of the Iraq War (from 2003), which provoked major demonstrations in Frankfurt, in which many of us took part. In their childhood and early teens, Aminata and Maya both idolised American culture (as many of her generation did, including me). 'The ideal for Black culture was America, was *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*', Aminata mentioned in one interview.

> Silvia: Can you remember how the process of detaching yourself from that phase went?
> Aminata: Hmm, difficult. I'm not sure, but I think it was, especially after the *Abitur* [final school exam], it was kind of a clique thing. I had another clique and also other interests. I don't know, it just happened gradually, it was not really intended, and the clubs closed or got a new name, somehow the hype was over. Short and stormy.
> […] Then, September 11, growing political interest which led me to rethink my position: 'Americans are not *that cool*, and I don't want to be like them.'
> Silvia: So it just changed a bit or what?
> Aminata: I don't know, I mean it was also this whole GI thing that was… the military, they were soldiers, the prolonged arm of Bush in a way! So that simply wasn't possible anymore. The whole debate was way too heated; when I think about it, it was the first political debate that really got to us.
> Silvia: Sure, I think it was also the first big gatherings that we really consciously went to, I remember.

Aminata's disenchantment with the GI world coincided with a heightened left-wing liberal politicisation, which was also attached to 'the feeling of a generation'. The attacks of 9/11 and their aftermath were the first major global political events that we experienced as teenagers with a political education. We became adults around that time, being 17 in 2001, finishing school while taking to the streets to participate in big demonstrations against the Iraq War. We would meet up at the demonstration and encounter young people from other schools as well. The demonstrations actually became spaces for hanging out together. Around that time, Aminata knew GIs who had to go to Iraq as soldiers. As her involvement with the GI world diminished,

her politicisation not only towards the left but also towards Black German and anti-racist politics grew (I will discuss this in the next chapter).

Maya also became disenchanted with the USA, but for different reasons. It was not so much linked to her dissociation with the cultural workd of the GIs in Frankfurt, but more with the experiences she had when travelling to the USA to visit family. For Maya, the USA had become very important, especially because of the ideas she had absorbed as a child and teenager through contact with her fathers' colleagues and by reading Black American authors. Yet her first visit caused her to revise her image of the USA as a dreamland: 'I have a better life in Germany. It is better in the urban centres in the USA for Black people but in small towns…' The USA had been an ideal, especially with regard to a potential life as a Black person there, but seeing the reality that many African Americans faced, especially the poverty and the poor healthcare services made her not want to move their anymore. She was equally astounded to sense that there was a gulf between African migrants and African Americans and not the solidarity she had hoped for. The desire to live in the USA began to diminish and, much like Aminata, her orientation in terms of Afrodiasporic identity shifted towards West Africa.

Lafia T. – Growing up in a white and female world

Lafia T's relationship to her Senegalese origins through her father was more distant than was the case for Aminata or Maya. And although all three grew up in Frankfurt and knew some of the same people and places, the GI world was not part of her reality. Aminata and Maya began to deal with their African descent early on; because they grew up with their fathers, it was part of their childhood and it continued through their contacts with GI culture. For Lafia, the process began later and was mediated by different influences.

Being invited into Lafia's home

I meet Lafia at midday in Frankfurt at a metro stop, and she recognises me straight away, which surprises me a bit, as we haven't seen each other for many years. In fact, it is the first time that I have ever talked to her; until now I only knew her from friends of friends at school.
I contacted her a few weeks ago over the internet. She had liked a post by me, an article from a photographer who travelled in Senegal. I decided to contact herbecause I knew that she had Senegalese origins and asked her if she would be interested in participating in my research, and she wrote back that she would.
We talk about old times as teenagers, about Bettina High School – a school neither of us attended but where we both had friends. Her son goes there and is already in 6th grade. Although she lives in Offenbach (a small town so close

to Frankfurt that it is almost a city neighbourhood), she says that Bockenheim and Westend (two neighbouring central districts) have always been her hood (Kiez). Her mother lived there until recently as do her husband's parents, who often take care of her son.

We go home to her flat in Offenbach where she lives with her 11-year-old son and husband. She makes us tea and tells me that she works in two hospitals at the moment and is writing her thesis; 'That's a lot', I tell her and begin to explain a bit more about my project. In her living room, there are lots of photographs, and one in particular in black and white catches my attention, in which her father is holding her in his arms when she was a little child. 'What a beautiful picture', I remark. She laughs – they have only recently changed the photo's position; before that it was hanging elsewhere, and no one noticed it. Now in the new place, everyone spots it and tells her how nice they find it. Well, it is nice. I immediately gravitated towards this picture, because both the people in the picture are smiling, particularly her father, who looks happy and proud. They both have the same smile, I think to myself.

After a little while her son comes home, and we make pancakes. He has never seen me before but seems at ease with people he does not know. 'He is used to it', Lafia reassures me 'We lived in shared flats when he was little'. After eating pancakes and chatting with her son about German grammar we start our interview. (Fieldnote, 22 November 2017)

When I met Lafia her for the first time, while conducting fieldwork in Frankfurt in November 2017, she was training to be a psychotherapist and working at two different clinics. Today (2020) – as a woman in her early thirties – she is a trained child and adolescent psychotherapist, doing a PhD on motherhood in the context of migration and interculturality, and teaching psychoanalytical theories. A few days before we first met, I wrote that we could possibly also look at travel pictures. During our meeting, she then told me that she had been a bit worried about my intentions. Though her father is from Senegal, she had never been there; her father lives in Heidelberg with his second wife and son and only rarely goes to Senegal. They (she and her father) had planned a trip there for December 2017, but they had to cancel, which has not been easy for Lafia. Because, as I begin to understand, it is an important and conflicted topic in her life – the fact that she has never been to the country of her father. Lafia has something unapproachable in her attitude, from her reactions sometimes I do not know how she feels about things. But when she laughs this dissipates and a sympathetic aura spreads around her. With Lafia I had three official and recorded interviews and many other meetings and conversations over the course of my research. In our second interview (before she had been to Senegal) Lafia talked a lot about the role that the country played during her life, and that there were many turning points when she was in her mid-twenties (her professional development as a

psychotherapist especially) which made her feel she wanted to explore this unknown heritage.

I am going to start this subchapter by exploring Lafia's life story and how she relates to Senegal through her father but was influenced by growing up in Frankfurt in a mostly white and middle-class environment. How did her relationship to the country of parental origin develop in her life and how did she deal with growing up as person of African descent in Germany?

Lafia's early childhood in Heidelberg and Frankfurt

Lafia was born in 1986 into a 'big hodgepodge' (*Kuddelmuddel*) in Heidelberg – a popular small student city one hour from Frankfurt, which was also much influenced by US military settlements. Her parents, her father from Senegal and her mother from a little town in Germany, met in a shared flat (*Wohngemeinschaft*) – a very popular living set-up, especially since the 1968 generation.

There were always a lot of people around. 'When you think about that time, in the intellectual left wing scene these were the times when '*Multikulti*' [the idea of living in a multicultural world side by side] was an approach to life', she starts. And when she thinks back, this is what her life felt like too. She was often the only or almost the only dark-skinned child around, but the attitude conveyed by the people around her was 'society is colourful and that is a good thing', as far as Lafia remembers. She was also involved to a small degree in the Senegalese-German or African German community in Heidelberg when she was little, which means she also knew some other kids with West African fathers and German mothers: 'Wait a minute… no; for all the couples I can think of, it was the man who was African and the woman German', she adds. Most African students in Germany at the time were men (Pugach 2015).

Her neighbourhood was Heidelberg-Weststadt, and this is where she spent her first seven years. Lafia remembers that she had incredible freedom of movement there; even as a young child she was able to wander the streets with friends without her parents worrying very much.

And as she recalled, 'it was *kuddelmuddelig*' [describing a chaotic though pleasant situation], with a lot of we sleep over there or they sleep over here'. And of her parents: 'It is not like they were together and then they separated, they were never really a couple as I remember it, and I lived with my mother and visited my father.' This is how she recalls the living arrangement.

Lafia speaks a bit about her parents. Her mother left her own parents' house rather early, before she had turned 18, and went to study Art in Vienna. When she finished, she came to Heidelberg and was part of artsy alternative left-wing post-1968 groups. Her father studied macroeconomics but never finished and instead embraced a 'bohemian lifestyle' and started to earn his money from translation and teaching jobs. Lafia recalls that he always wanted to study philosophy and was happy

to come to Heidelberg, where many of his idols had studied and lived. He married his current wife when Lafia was about three years old and lived in Heidelberg with his wife and son, who is about 18 today. Moving to Frankfurt was not an easy decision for her mother.

Lafia and her mother led a very socially active life in Heidelberg, with a lot of friends. Her mother's decision to go to Frankfurt to work as graphic designer was driven by a desire to make life economically better as a single mum. 'So it was kind of like an internal migration… At least I didn't want to move', Lafia remembers. They moved to Nordend, a rather bourgeois, middle-class neighbourhood of Frankfurt, and she saw her father on weekends. But it was not easy for him to maintain a relationship with his young daughter. When they saw each other he tried to produce a sense of normality between them, a sort of feeling of everydayness:

> But, well, it is not easy for weekend dads. Like from time to time when he was sitting with some of his Senegalese friends, he would come and say 'Lafia go get us some tea.' Things like that to produce a feeling as if I was always there. But for me, coming from an all-female household and feminist education, that was not normal for me of course.

Here Lafia explains how, ever since she was a young child, the world of her father seemed strange, far from the normality of her 'all female and feminist' household. While her relationship with her father remained distant, Lafia got along with his German wife. When Lafia spent time with them, she talked more to her and did things with her as a child and teenager. Her father also tried to do activities with Lafia but, as she recalls, found it sometimes difficult to motivate his young daughter to play tennis with him or do other things.

Dealing with Senegal as a child

> 'My father has gone such a long way and now I sit here […] I lead a very bourgeois *German life*' *(Lafia, Interview 2, 22.11.2017)*

When Lafia was a teenager it became even more difficult for her father to see her: 'I began to cancel on him regularly', she explains. The time came when she wanted to distance herself from her father and, with that, also from her Senegalese origins. Aminata also went through a phase of distancing herself from her father, but for her it was also important to find a personal African identification besides her Guinean origins. This did not play such a big role in Lafia's teenage years. Although her dad had tried to arrange a trip together to Senegal, it had never worked out so far. Lafia describes that fact today as an 'irritation in her biography'. For various reasons, her

trip to Senegal was often postponed. And when I told her that I was also interested in the role of travel, she spoke about that issue:

> Travelling also plays a role in my connection to my father. Because I made several trips with my mother, and there is still something that I feel is an irritation in my biography, namely I was in Kenya at about 10/11, with my mother, it was a malaria region, so you needed a prophylaxis, and now at 31, I still haven't been to Senegal. The region where my father comes from is also a Malaria region, and that was often given as a reason not to go there, because I had such an awful experience with malaria prophylaxis in Kenya that I did not want to take it again. […] But in retrospect it is so stupid, when I tell that story I am like, what? Why haven't you at least been to Senegal instead? (Interview 22.11.2017)

It is precisely because Lafia has *not been there* that Senegal possesses inflated significance for her. She feels that the trip to Kenya when she was about ten years old was the first incident of many which led her to constantly postpone her origin journey. From a very early age, it was difficult to build a relaxed or neutral relationship to the country of her father; it quickly became associated with fear, and it was complicated to overcome that fear. Continuing her travel-related narration, she then looks at the role travel has played in her family history, comparing the life of her father – including his transnational migration from Senegal to Germany – and her life, including her class and social milieu:

> When I think about it, travel is also related to… something sad… When you travel, you encounter destinies in the world; that is a characteristic of travelling, I guess, and that is something that very often afflicts me. When you suddenly realise your own enormous privilege. And that is again something biographical. My father finished school in Dakar at 18 and somehow made it to Germany with a scholarship to Heidelberg, now he is in his mid-50s, [has lived] in Germany since then, has gone back to Senegal only for short visits. [S]omehow I am always pushed to the reflection: What are the odds, how likely is it […] that my life would have been sooo different? That my father would have stayed there or I don't know what could have happened.

She associates travelling with thinking about geopolitical privilege. The privileges that coming from a rich country in the Global North entails become particularly evident while travelling – how a passport opens doors, how a little money at home can be a lot of money elsewhere. For Lafia, there is another level that comes into play as well. She also realises that her father did not share these privileges she had as a young person, which creates a gap between her and him. Lafia stresses the differences between her and her father to make sense of their distant relationship. It is

also tricky to imagine what his life in Senegal actually looked like, because she has never visited Senegal and cannot associate any memories with it.

> But what's more is that my father has gone such a long way, and now I sit here, and also through the separation of my parents, I lead a very bourgeois German life, where it is not really a big issue whether I have Senegalese roots or not, Asian or American or whatever. I mean from the milieu, from the class, the friends that I have, the life, the job, the whatever, the choice of a partner [her husband is white German-Irish] all that was somehow not influenced by the fact that my father actually had lived in such a different life or world.

Lafia noted in a different conversation that she had started to think about and deal with the history and experience of her father more when she became herself an adult. The quote above speaks to many issues in transnational migration and of being part of the second generation born in a different country than a parent. For one, it shows how distant Lafia feels (or felt for a long time) from 'being Senegalese'. Her father is Senegalese, but Lafia had no points of identification besides him, and she did not identify with him for ages. She was socialised in Germany, and in general her life and growing up took place in a white and upper middle-class environment. She feels distant from the life her father lived in Senegal and does not know much about it or about their family there. This is very different from Aminata or Maya. Aminata spent a few years living in Guinea as a child, and although she describes it as an expat life, she has a genuine feeling for how life in Guinea was, it is part of her lived reality and she met her grandparents and aunts and uncles there. Maya, although she did not live in Sierra Leone, was very connected to her Sierra Leonian origins as she grew up with her father, who was very active in the diaspora community, and she was part of a big Sierra Leonian family. It was a normal part of her everyday life in Germany, not something strange or unfamiliar as it seemed for Lafia as a child. Maya and Aminata did not have an easy relationship with their fathers either, but being German and Guinean or Sierra Leonian and German was not lived as a contradiction by them. Today, as a woman in her thirties, Lafia tries to bridge that gap and has started to be much more interested in two things: what it means to be a person of African descent in Germany and Europe, and what it means for her to have Senegalese family.

Being a teenager out of place – experiencing racialisation

Reflecting on what it was like to grow up in highly educated middle-class family surroundings in Frankfurt, where people usually made sure to show that they were open-minded and tolerant, and where she usually did not feel that having brown skin and curly hair mattered at all, let alone negatively, Lafia could still remember moments – especially during her teenage years – when she felt she did not fit in be-

cause of her looks. This is something she has in common with Aminata, who also felt – although she was not an outsider at all and was in fact quite popular – that her looks were outside of the norm and made her unattractive in the eyes of boys or young men. As Lafia recounted:

> I have the feeling that I was always exotic or out of time for my age group. When I think about being 11, 12, 13, 14 there was something… I was out of the girls mainstream. At school, one guy I was in love with for a long time, he also often made [thinking] – yes it was strange, he always made jokes; he was a bit of a cynical, ironic person, he always made jokes about my being African, he is for me an example that I was not in the mainstream. He made comments, always in a funny way but like 'Lafia we have PE today, and I forgot my things so I wanted to ask you if you could make sure that we don't go outside by doing a rain dance?' […] And now I'm thinking: Why does it have to be the rain dance, so clichéd, you cannot be more trivial. And why does it have to be about my being black?

Lafia uses the word 'mainstream' three times in this extract, which underscores how much she really did feel outside of the norm as a teenager because of her ethnicity. She does stress that she grew up in a multicultural bubble, but that bubble was still white; it was an attitude that was transmitted by her close family: Appearance should not matter. But she was still confronted at school with being the only Afrodescendant child in her friendship group, which was something that was commented about or made fun of. At school she was confronted with how much her appearance mattered in making her feel different from what she considered to be mainstream.

The historical and political context and ideologies that she grew up with in her family and environs were very different from those that the Afro-German activists Ika Hügel-Marshall (born 1947) and May Ayim (born 1960) tell of in their writings (1998, 1997). Both grew up in conservative and working-class circles, where they encountered significant racism and discrimination, even within their close families. Although Lafia had a family background that protected her from experiencing racism in her intimate circle, she was still confronted with everyday racialised stereotypes about Africans that made her feel uncomfortable, and she was often the only person of African descent in her upper middle-class surroundings in Frankfurt.

Her environment today has changed in that regard. Now she often tells me about friends of hers who are also 'mixed' – who have one African and one German parent and Lafia does feel that this is a connecting element for them, especially when they are of similar age and live similar lifestyles. Even without being part of any Black or feminist political groups or networks, sharing one's stories and experiences with a group of people who have an embodied knowledge of racialisation/racism has become important in Lafia's life (more on this aspect of development in Chapter 7).

Reluctance to deal with origins

In one of our interview sessions, Lafia narrated her life story in relation to Senegal. It is easy to perceive how her not dealing with Senegal was closely linked to her relationship with her father. The idea that she might like to explore her roots had been put forward, among others, by her mother and father – but Lafia explains how this wish first had to grow within herself and not only be due to pressure from the outside.

> The idea that it would be nice to go there has always existed. And for my father, I think I understand that now, it was always about 'my mother the authority, demands that of me and wishes to see her granddaughter. And I as a son have to present her.' You know? […] And then of course, I want to show you my country, but I think his mother's wish was more central to him. And then there was always a thing – and my mother participated in that – a 'you have to know your roots', and this is also a part of you; but after a while this became like an empty shell, from time to time it was like 'sure, you have to', and I thought less and less 'Yes I want to know my roots and a part of me'. For a long time it was my father and pressure from outside, and I *should*, but it is not *me* who was curious.[…] And then between 11 and 12 and I don't know – *now*, a few years ago [she laughs] the relation between me and my father was also an obstacle, because there was a big distance between us, and it was somehow clear that if I go, I go with him, because of course I want to meet the family then and I can't just go to my father and ask 'Can you please write down grandma's address?' So somehow that was clear, and especially during my teenage years I rejected him so much, and I just didn't feel like it, I simply couldn't imagine travelling with him back then. (Interview 6 December 2017)

The reluctance to deal with origins is related to factors concerning Lafia's family in Germany while she was growing up. Today as an adult, Lafia often reflects on why she was not more interested in her origins before. She is also pushed to do so more today through her psychoanalytical training. The quote above brings up many aspects of why young Lafia was not interested. At the centre stands her difficult and distant relation to her father. Although her parents tried to explain her as a child that it was important to 'explore her roots', she was not able to make that wish her own. Lafia was not part of the world of her father and thus Senegalese cultural practices were not part of her daily existence:

> I remember in my youth […] something that was often mirrored back to me, especially by kids from Bettina [high school friendship groups in the Westend neighbourhood, which I also know], is that no one could be more German than me. And I have [experienced] that with others sometimes, when I notice someone has roots from another country, but makes an effort to be *so* German, or

> is emphasising his or her Germanness – that causes me irritation [pause for thought] and I think that something grew within me, this 'I need to go there.'

Lafia remembers that when she was a child, some friends of hers from another high school (she went to Goethe school but had many pals at Bettina school, which is how our circles merged) reflected to her that 'One could not be more German than her'. On the one hand, friends reflected to her that she was indeed very German, while on the other, she also had friends who made fun of her African origins. Reflecting on these comments today makes Lafia realise that she put quite a bit of effort into stressing her Germanness when she was younger. Today she feels that she should not negate her Senegalese origins but rather try to own them and not see them as contradicting her Germanness. With that realisation, an interest in Senegal began to grow and a wish to travel there was part of it.

> Silvia: Ok but at first, you said, there was a defensive attitude? Lafia: Yes, for a really long time.
> Silvia: And why do you think that was?
> Lafia: Mmm, well the relation to my father … er, it's a bit … maybe let's start the other way around. A few weeks ago we saw a documentary, about Dakar.

Instead of telling me why she thinks she had a defensive attitude towards Senegal for so long, she continues from the other end of the story, explaining where and how she became interested in it. One factor was watching a documentary about Dakar, which I will come back to a bit later. At that moment in our interview, I hoped we would get back to the why she had not been interested for so long. Eventually we did.

To answer my question about why it was that she rejected Senegal for so long as part of her life, Lafia chose instead to tell a story about a friend of hers, which she then related to herself. Telling someone else's tale helped her to classify or make sense of her own experience; she sees her own experience reflected in that of her friend. The story is about a friend who is also Senegalese-German finding out that she has a half-brother. After finding out about this half-brother, and the second family of her Senegalese father, this friend of Lafia's tells her that she is actually not interested in getting to know her half-brother. Lafia found that reaction very sad, but could relate to it, as she saw it reflected in her own rejection of Senegal as a whole: 'Be it a brother or a whole country that you don't want to travel to… all because of concepts that we should maybe start to question!'

But what concepts is Lafia talking about? She takes the French philosopher Didier Eribon's autobiography Retour a Reims (2009) as an example to talk about the bourgeois family ideal and the feeling of shame and embarrassment that is produced when you and your family members do not fit these norms. This is something that Eribon explains in detail in his autobiography, which recounts his origins in a white

working-class family and the many ways he did not fit into that lifeworld due to his interest in philosophy and his homosexuality. Lafia finds herself and her reactions reflected in many parts of the book. She also felt that her family relations deviated from the German bourgeois ideal. She did not grow up in that ideal of the nuclear family: Her parents separated early. This led to her growing up apart from her father. The relations between her parents were complicated and difficult to deal with. But her family also deviated from the norm in that her father was Senegalese, not German and not white. For a long time, she conceived of herself by identifying with the family from her mother's side, which is white, German and upper-middle class, and with whom she spent a lot of time. At the same time, she rejected identification with her Senegalese father whose surroundings were unfamiliar to her; she felt unable to connect with him and far away from his reality of being a Senegalese migrant in Germany. Some of the feelings and analysis that Eribon describes in relation to himself and his family resonate with Lafia, especially the aspect of shame. The rejection of her father was related to feeling of embarrassment; he deviated from the family she felt close to in terms of racialisation and class. When people made fun of her African origins, Lafia felt embarrassed, and that embarrassment was projected onto her father. He was the reason she deviated from the mainstream, so she blamed him. Only as an adult did she reflect upon that rejection of her father and towards being Senegalese as something odd – as something she wants to make sense of today by actively exploring her origins.

Conclusion

Blackness as an Afrodiasporic identity marker became important for Aminata as a young teenager and she began to develop a Black identity through her contact to the GI scene, which forged a positive sense of gendered and racialised identity. For Maya, Blackness was also important, but more because of her early intellectual engagement with Black American literature and the fact that her father worked in an American environment. However, Blackness was not an important identity reference for teenage Lafia. She rather felt disconnected from any kind of Afrodiasporic identity and struggled with her Senegalese origins. The experiences and feelings of these three women when growing up thus differed, especially regarding gendered and racialised identity formation, although they share the same class background. Although both Aminata and Lafia felt out of place in terms of Germany beauty standards, Aminata found in Black America a beauty ideal where she fitted in. All three also have things in common, especially as they come from families with left-wing liberal political views and were never made to feel racism in their intimate circles – Aminata and Maya because they grew up with their African fathers and Lafia because her mother and wider family circle affirmed cultural diversity as positive. Moreover, aside from their differences, they also frequented many of the same spaces in Frank-

furt and share many references and memories of major global and local events. Aminata grew up living a transnational life living between Conakry and Frankfurt as a child but with Frankfurt always as her home base. Maya lived in Frankfurt throughout her childhood but in a very Sierra Leonian environment with her father and stepmother. When they were teenagers around the turn of the millennium, 'Black America became an object of diasporic longing' (Nassy Brown 1998, p. 311) – much like Nassy Brown explains for Black Liverpudlians in the 1970s and 1980s. The influence of American and African American culture, in particular, for the coming of age of the generation born in the 1980s in Germany was huge. It was even more important in parts of Germany where there still were US military bases and their entertainment infrastructures, which many Germans interested in Hip Hop, RnB and Soul used to frequent in the 2000s.

Although the intersection of racial and gendered identity begins to be consciously important to teenagers, as they enjoy the first freedoms of going out, class consciousness at that stage is still rather nebulous. For these young women, class was a habitus they did not reflect upon. Nevertheless, class relations always did matter in various ways, but it was only as they became adults that these women began to make sense of experiences and relationships more in terms of a shared identity as middle class (Carbonella and Kasmir 2015). When, for example, Aminata thinks about the GI spaces today, class distinctions clearly already mattered back then – it mattered in these spaces where she would compare herself to other women and it manifested after a while in her feeling disconnected and losing interest in GI men. Her dealings with the GI spaces can show how class is always a process in the making and brought to consciousness through different relationships, as August Carbonella and Sharryn Kasmir explain (2015). The cultural aspect of performing Blackness through Hip Hop and RnB subculture in and around Frankfurt was in the foreground at first. It was a way to identify with a bigger group of peers by sharing the same subculture in the city and being part of a community. It was also a way to deal differently with her mixed German-Guinean heritage than through her family, at an age when one usually wants to distance oneself from one's parents. The GI spaces gave Aminata the opportunity to be Black just like many Americans were – only she was Black and German.

In Lafia's reflections as an adult, class also began to matter more, especially in terms of her thinking how being part of a white feminist liberal educated middle class contributed to her feeling disconnected from the world of her father. For Aminata and Maya, identifying as Black created a positive sense of self as well as a group identity based on a positive and cool sense of racial identity. Lafia had to struggle more with being of African descent when she was a teenager. Having a distant relationship with her father, she was not at ease with seeing herself as related to Senegal and questions like *Where are you from?* could feel uncomfortable – especially because the answer *From here!* was not enough for most people.