1. INTRODUCTION

Vignette 1: Afroeuropeans conference, July 2019

Sitting in front of the University of Lisbon with Mélanie P., a Swiss PhD student in sociology and also a Black activist involved in two Afrodiasporic and anti-racist collectives,[1] we compare this year's Afroeuropeans conference to the one that took place in Finland two years earlier. It was there, in Tampere in 2017, that I started my ethnographic fieldwork, an event that Mélanie P. had also attended. There are panels about police violence, structural racism and the notion of 'race' and how it still very much matters today in a variety of different contexts. Many Black political collectives from different countries are present: Afro-feminist collectives that have emerged in the last ten years; such as the Swiss *CAS* (Collectif Afro Suisse, founded in 2009), *Mwasi* from France (founded 2014), or collectives founded in Portugal in 2016, such as *Djass* and *Femafro*. The members of these collectives are largely women, partly because most of them have feminist roots. They connect with each other inside and outside the lecture halls at side events, discuss strategies and goals and share food and drink. After the 2017 Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere, Mélanie P. suggested that we organise a panel together in Lisbon with another colleague of hers, Paméla O.; fortunately, we now find ourselves doing just that. Our panel is about Afroeuropean and Black life stories. In the call for papers, we invited people to present their work on Afroeuropean life stories/(auto)biographies and specified that we particularly welcomed proposals that involved the creative performance of life stories:

> We invite contributions that can either be scientific papers that include Afroeuropean (auto)biographies or (auto)biographic presentations in the first person in all its expressive forms (performance, dance, spoken word, stand-up comedy).

Although our panel is the only one that specifically addresses life stories, this theme does appear in several other panels as well. Many people – scholars, activists, artists

---

1   I use Black with a capital B to underline that this term does not simply refer to skin complexion. Rather it refers to an emic category used by people of African descent to indicate a political affiliation with other racialised people (hooks 2020).

– talk about their own life experiences in order to reflect on themes of home, belonging, diaspora, transnationalism or racism.

In our panel, we welcome two women who present their own life stories in a creative way.

One is a woman from Galicia, Spain, whose mother is from Equatorial Guinea, the other a woman from Portugal with a parent from Angola.

The Spanish presenter impresses me in particular. Tiffany López Ganet begins her talk by saying that she travelled to Equatorial Guinea a few years ago, which is the country of origin of her mother who migrated to Spain. Tiffany travelled there because throughout her life so many people had asked her: *Where are your origins? What are your roots?* She therefore felt impelled to go and 'find her roots'. She showed us a photo from the island where she had been: 'I can already tell you that I did not feel totally at home there, but well...', she tells the audience without going into further detail. It seems people in the audience know what she means as you can see many nodding heads. In her paper 'Black Microtales: Recreating Memories of a Bubi Afro-Galician Using the Visual Arts', the PhD candidate in Architecture and Education explains the stages she went through while dealing with her African descent in Spain. Tiffany talks about experiences of racism and being racialised while growing up. She remembers looking at a class picture and realising that she was the only brown girl. She remembers dancing a Galician traditional dance, how it felt completely natural to her because she was Galician, but how she was confronted with being seen as exotic by others who looked at her performance.

Today she reflects on these experiences as instances of racialisation, of being othered. Then Tiffany narrates the importance of finding relief as a young adult in a community of other Spanish Afrodescendant young women and becoming a member of an Afro-Galician collective. It was there that Tiffany could forge her own Afrodescendant identity in a positive way, feeling connected to others, sharing a racialised subject position in Spain with others who were also Black in Spain or Black and Spanish – with Black here referring to a shared experience and conscience of racial discrimination. After this Tiffany moves to another stage of her life, it is the stage that she is in at that moment as an adult woman, as she turns to her own personal Bubi family heritage, originating on an island in Equatorial Guinea, and a former Spanish colony (1778–1968). This is the land her mother, who migrated to Spain many years ago, comes from.

Through her photo collages (see Fig. 1), which she labels 'Autoethnographic microtales' (2017) in a published paper of hers, we can follow her life story. A thread running through her narrative is the care she takes combing her hair and how she uses the time spent on this task to reflect on her life – how with time, hatred of her Afro hair gradually changed to love – an important topic in Afrodiasporic movements around the world, where Afro hair has political connotations. In the collage we see an old class picture in which Tiffany is a young child, it marks her experience of being

'*la unica marron*' (the only brown person) (López Ganet 2017, p. 142) in her class. Then we see the face of her mother next to a man wearing blackface – it marks her mother experiencing being 'mistaken' by children for the daughter of Balthazar, one of the Magi or Three Kings in the Christian nativity story. We also see the author in front a mirror as a little girl – this refers to her wish to have straight hair like the other kids. Then we see her sitting with her Equatorial Guinean grandfather in a festive costume, and standing with her mother against the background of a Bubi village. In the final picture, we see Tiffany combing her hair. The combing of her hair becomes the arc for her personal narration of self; she finally learned to deal positively with being of mixed Bubi-Galician heritage and with being an Afrodescendant woman in Spain.

Figure 1: Collage and self-portrait, 2017 © Tiffany López Ganet

After Tiffany's presentation, Mélanie P., herself a Swiss person of African descent, thanks her and remarks that many things resonated with her own experiences of growing up in Switzerland – she can identify with her in many ways.

Vignette 2: On life-story sharing at the Afroeuropeans conference, Lisbon, July 2019

My intention in going to the conference is also to present my ongoing PhD research on Afrodiasporic identities in Germany, in which I use a life-story approach. I present one such story at a panel. It is the story of Aminata, a German-Guinean woman and friend of mine raised in Frankfurt in the 1980s and the life story of her father Lamine Camara, who came to Germany in the 1970s on a student scholarship from Guinea. I relate how Aminata told me about her life; how she went through different stages of dealing with her African descent (more of her story features in the next chapters); how she lived in Guinea for a few years with her Guinean father and German mother as a child, feeling more like a German expat than a Guinean repatriate; how she turned to Black American culture for identification as

a teenager as a way to define her African descent other than through her Guinean father and how today, as an adult woman with children of her own, Aminata is again seeking to learn more about her West African and Guinean origins and include this understanding in her everyday life.

After my presentation, I take a question from a young Portuguese Afrodescendant woman, she must be in her late twenties or early thirties. She wonders if I am planning to make a model out of the case that I presented. 'A model…?' I ask. The young woman goes on to specify that the process I describe for Aminata resonated with her own experiences. Being Portuguese, she did not grow up in Germany like Aminata, but she too had a father who emigrated from an African country and also grew up heavily influenced by Black American culture in her self-identity as a teenager. Moreover, as an adult woman today, she too has begun to deal more consciously with her African heritage and family history.

Problem statement and research questions

The biographies of young women and men of African descent presented at the various panels using diverse artistic and academic means at the Afroeuropeans conference in Lisbon – although being different in many personal or social and cultural aspects – also have certain aspects in common: Most of them grew up in the 1980s as children of African migrants and are thus part of the so-called second generation; as it is an academic conference, they are highly educated and mostly belong to an urban middle class. Many of them have experiences of being 'migrantised',[2] a term used by the German historian Fatima El-Tayeb (2016). Migrantisation in this sense means the act of treating people with a non-European background as eternal newcomers in public discourse – no matter how many generations they have already been living in a country.[3] The women grew up in surroundings where they were perceived as different from the norm of what it meant to be Spanish or Galician, German, French, Swiss or Portuguese, because they were perceived as not white. They were influenced by African American cultural production in their personal identification as Black people when they were teenagers. Many began to search for collectives formed by people of African descent with whom they could share their experiences of racialisation and racism. And, last but not least, many began to engage with

---

2   The original German term is *Migrantisierung*.

3   This process is well exemplified in the practice of naming children of non-European migrants 'second generation migrant'. It is a form of racialisation, because it applies mostly to people who are considered as non-white. The term racialisation refers to the process of constructing differences between people based on phenotype but without the hierarchical judgement that is inherent in racism (Guillaumin 1972).

their own particular African origins and the search for family history by travelling to their parents' countries of origin or countries with which they felt a sense of cultural closeness when they were adults.

The two vignettes this book begins with speak to the role of life storytelling and sharing in constructing Afrodiasporic identities, which is what my work is about. It is specifically about the making of diasporic identities for young middle-class Afrodescendant women in Germany. Both vignettes speak to an intersubjective construction of self: how others can identify with the stories we tell. In the first vignette, Tiffany Lopez Ganet described different stages of dealing with her Afrodiasporic heritage, and they resonated with other scholars of African descent at the conference – especially with the younger generation. In the second vignette, the story I presented of Aminata and her father was a stimulus for the young Portuguese woman to think about her own life. She saw similarities between herself and Aminata.

I am very glad to have had that young woman tell me how she could relate to the story of Aminata. I informed her that, although I was not planning on defining a model, I was indeed interested in researching the connection that she felt. The reason I do not want to define a model is because a model is a rigid and predictive construction which tries to take the personal out of the equation; my take on researching Afrodiasporic identity constructions is more dialogical and personal. However, I am still interested in looking at differences, similarities and patterns that do emerge in the life stories I analyse. What I want to describe are the processes that make it possible for a person to identify with others from the same generation across different countries and continents. I seek to explain the process that leads an Afrodescendant person to identify with other Afrodescendant people in Europe; to analyse the common mechanisms of construction of self that result from shared experiences. I do not want to stop at the single story but to draw comparisons and explore larger connections. My rejection of the possibility, put to me in a question, that I was constructing a model is typical of anthropologists, who focus on the particular. In anthropology we do not do models, I thought. We illustrate complex realities and never take the subject(ive) out of the analysis. Yet this is not completely true. I do seek to objectify subjective reality by trying to understand under what circumstances (personal and structural) a subjective understanding and construction of self emerges and how it relates to others: Ethnographic work should create a ground for comparison and should contribute to answering the question of how the particular, the unique, speaks to the general. Webb Keane calls for a 'productive understanding of objectification' (2003, p. 223) when criticising recent anthropology for favouring epistemologies of intimacy, rather than estrangement, as sources of understanding. He contends that an epistemology of intimacy is crucial for ethnographic fieldwork, essential to capture local meaning, but also asserts that, for understanding individual experiences, 'the estrangement' or analytical distance that follows fieldwork is as crucial.

Keane suggests that even self-interpretation does not stick to the particular; the very action of self-interpretation already assumes some ability to self-objectify. Objectification in that sense relates to the ability to see your own experience as relatable to and co-dependent on others – as intersubjective.

The book engages with the lives of five women of African descent in Germany, who were all born in the 1980s and are children of migrant parents. Through their life stories, it explores experiences of growing up in a German city and follows the relations they built to their respective places of ancestral origin. In the cases of the women I follow for my work, hearing and reading about the lives of other women of African descent helped them to de-singularise their own experiences. One important part of their life stories are experiences of travelling to ancestral homelands – where 'origins' are not necessarily the places of origin of their parents but closely related; these experiences are connected to their coming of age as Afrodescendant people in Germany. This book examines how practices of kinship, storytelling and travelling contribute to self-construction and the creation of belonging to Afrodiasporic communities. It shows how becoming part of different communities (transnational families, political networks), sharing experiences and dealing with personal family histories of migration plays a role in the women's understanding of self as young middle-class German women of African descent.

The questions my work poses are: How are diasporic identities formed by people of the second generation, children of African migrants who grew up in a German city (Frankfurt)? What is the role of the country of parental origin in the lives of these women, how does it evolve and change throughout the course of their life, and how is the practice of travelling to one's 'origins' related to the construction of diasporic identity? And, last but not least, what is the role of life storytelling for the construction of self and community?

In examining the diasporic identity-building processes of the women, this book emphasises their socioeconomic conditions, taking the intersection of race/racialisation, gender and class as the basis for analysing their accounts and experiences. The additional dimension of kinship also emerged as important on two levels for studying the creation of African diasporic identities: In terms of both the individual and intimate making of diasporic identity by engaging in transnational family life and history, including travelling to origins, and in the form of the collective creation of diaspora communities through coalitions in Black (feminist) political communities where life stories are used as vehicles to convey a sense of community and 'chosen family' (Weston 1997). These identity-building processes are examined through three spatial scales: the local/national – looking at how the women grew up in the German city of Frankfurt; the transnational – focussing on the construction of transnational family ties in the African countries of ancestral origin; and the global – considering the connections with globally entangled African diaspora communities.

The aim of this work is to contribute not only to the presentation of life stories but also to the analysis of how stories of a life can reveal identity-building processes, how they are used to create a coherent self and to connect with others. The person-centred approach of following the lives of five women in depth allows me to delve into the everyday practices and understandings of these women's self-fashioning and to learn about their relations to parents, extended kin and friends. The fact that I have known two of the women since we were children in school allowed for an in-depth understanding and situating of their lives. It also let me examine their situated understandings and presentations of self – in forums ranging from public events and conferences, to everyday conversations and experiences. The five women I worked with for the research all have academic degrees and are experienced in reflecting and talking about their lives and selves. Such an intimate methodology also facilitates analysis of how identifying as Afrodescendant is just one part of an understanding of selfhood that intersects with other selfhood markers such as gender and class.

Working with women

The study centres on women for three reasons: One is simply that I activated my circle of intimate friends in Frankfurt, which happens mainly to be female. I chose to include two women I went to school with and have known for almost all my life. It is through them and through our shared history that I was able to reconstruct what it was like to grow up in Frankfurt. Many of the results that I present in my thesis are the product of intimate conversations where they narrate their biographies and travel experiences. In some of these remembered moments I was there with them, in others this was not the case. It is especially our shared teenage years that bind us together to this day and which gave me the curiosity to explore further this crucial time in their lives and the significance of growing up as a woman of African descent. In particular, I am intrigued by the role of the particular 'geography of Blackness' of the city of Frankfurt, which was influenced by the presence of US troops and their entertainment infrastructure in and around the city and which we were part of.

The second reason that I focused on women is because I collected data at Black political network meetings at international conferences and these networks often have a feminist history and background. In these networks most (though not all) of the members are female.

And third, and finally, there are analytical reasons why I work with women: There is a gender component to my work because there are particularities about growing up as a woman of African descent – these particularly concern *techniques of the body*, a concept Marcel Mauss described in 1936. Thus, I explore how women who have been racialised learn to use their bodies in specific ways – how they move, feel and are affected by the gaze and actions of others at different times of their lives. And how they learn to take care of their bodies or to see and use their bodies differently by turning

to Black feminism. The most striking use is certainly hair and hairstyle, the use of the Afro and braids as a Black feminist symbol. Learning to take care of their curly hair and thinking critically about the use of chemical relaxer is a learning experience most of my interlocutors have gone through, and there are certain techniques and products that are associated with it – as Tiffany López Ganet explains in the first vignette: Learning to care for her hair has been about learning self-care too. This connection between body, care and politics will be explored through various examples throughout the life stories of my interlocutors.

The practice of travelling is also crucial as it facilitates a focus on the embodied experiences of the women. Being and living in the places they relate to via ancestral origins makes them experience their bodies in different ways, as well as experience different gender norms. This is why I chose to work with an intersectional approach (see below, section on 'Analytical approaches') that takes race/ethnicity, class and gender into account in the analysis of these women's lives.[4]

In my work, I have traced in depth the lives of six women, most of whom were born in the 1980s; five of them appear in this book. I will now briefly introduce the women and their families,[5] the main characters in this study. While writing my thesis, I asked my partner if he would draw my research interlocutors. Drawings have the advantage of being more anonymous than photography (in drawings you can play more with the features of a person to make them a bit less recognizable), yet they are still very intimate, as the person who draws is trying to capture a unique facial expression and indications of personality. The drawings I asked my partner to do are also meant as a homage to the women and as a sign of respect and gratitude for their collaboration. Mostly they underline that this work is based on intimate relations that I was able to rely on as well as to build further during the PhD process.

---

4   Although the people I follow in depth are all women, men are not excluded from the study, as they are often an essential part of the lives of the women and appear as life-partners, fathers, sons and brothers.

5   For the sake of anonymity, I have changed almost all names of the people appearing in this thesis except for Oxana Chi, Layla Zami and Lamine Camara as it was important to them to be included with their names.

Aminata Camara

Figure 2: Aminata, 2020 © Christophe Schwartz

Aminata is an old friend from school in Frankfurt, the city where we both grew up. She was born in the 1980s and has two young children with her husband Albert. His parents are from Ghana, and he was born in Frankfurt. Aminata's father migrated from Guinea to Germany in the 1970s on a student scholarship; her mother is from Frankfurt and studied there in the 1970s too. Today, Aminata's mother works for a development cooperation agency and her father is a retired business consultant. They all live in Frankfurt. Aminata was actually born in Colombia, when her mother went there as part of an academic exchange programme for two years to teach German, where she was accompanied by her father. Soon after returning to Frankfurt, the family relocated to Conakry, Guinea, in the 1990s. They went back to Frankfurt again when Aminata was ten and was soon to enter high school, which is when we met and became friends. After finishing school,[6] Aminata studied French, Culture and Economics in Mannheim and today works as an independent media and public relations agent and does a lot of work as a moderator for events for and put on by Black people and People of Colour in Frankfurt, as well as for migrant organisations. For a few years Aminata has been co-organiser of the Afrika-Fest in Frankfurt.

Maya B.

Maya was born in the 1980s in Frankfurt. After finishing high school she studied tourism and urban planning, taking part in an exchange programme with a university in Kenya. Maya's father is from Sierra Leone and her mother from close to Frankfurt. Today her family is transnationally dispersed: Her mother lives in Germany,

---

6   With the *Abitur* qualification, the holder is entitled to attend university.

her father in Sierra Leone, her younger brother in the USA. She is in regular contact with her brother and father via phone. Maya's husband Otis is from Frankfurt. His mother is German and his father is African American. They both work for a big development cooperation agency. In 2018 they moved to Nigeria for work and because Maya wanted to try out living in West Africa, but they kept their flat in Frankfurt. In 2019, Maya came back to Frankfurt to give birth to her first child.

Lafia T.

Figure 3: Lafia, 2020 © Christophe Schwartz

Lafia was born in Heidelberg in 1986 but moved to Frankfurt when she was little. Her father is from Senegal and her mother is German. In Frankfurt I only knew her by sight – Lafia is a friend of friends and we made contact via Facebook. She has two children and is married to David, an Irish-German from Frankfurt. Lafia grew up with her mother and visited her father regularly. He lived in Heidelberg with his second wife and one son, Lafia's half-brother. Today, Lafia is a writer and a trained psychotherapist for children and teenagers. She is pursuing a PhD in educational sciences and holds a teaching position in psychology at the Goethe University of Frankfurt. Lafia's mother is from a small German town; she moved to Heidelberg as a young adult, inspired by the 1968 generation. She met Lafia's father through friends in her left-wing liberal circle. He had come to Heidelberg on a student scholarship and was studying economics. When Lafia was little, her mother moved to Frankfurt for a job while her father stayed in Heidelberg. Her father unfortunately died in 2018 in Senegal. A few months earlier Lafia had visited Senegal for the first time with him and he had stayed on after her visit.

Oxana Chi and Layla Zami

*Figure 4: Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, 2020 ©
Christophe Schwartz*

I met the married couple Oxana and Layla in Tampere, Finland at the Afroeuropeans conference 'Black cultures and identities in Europe' in 2017.[7] Oxana is a dancer, choreographer, filmmaker, writer and Afro-feminist activist in her fifties. Her father is from Nigeria. Her mother is German. Oxana was born in Frankfurt and grew up in Bochum, where she went to a Waldorf school, a private alternative school usually associated with alternative left-liberal circles. Layla was born in Paris in 1985. She is a teaching scholar, musician, poet and filmmaker. Layla wrote a PhD in Gender Studies about diaspora and dance. She has German Jewish grandparents; her father is French-German Jewish, and her mother is from Martinique and lives in France. Layla lived in Berlin for many years during her childhood and moved there again in her twenties.

Oxana and Layla met in Berlin at one of Oxana's performances. Today, they travel and perform together and both are active in Black and feminist networks. Oxana and Layla generally live between New York and Berlin and travel a lot for their work and artist/research residencies. The performances usually include themes related to the African diaspora, exile and feminism. I went to conferences in Cannes and Toronto with Oxana and Layla, when they were invited as keynote performers, and visited them in their homes in Berlin (2017) and New York (where they were based between 2018 and 2022).

Nina M.

Nina does not feature in this book because I chose to focus only on women who grew up in Germany so as to capture specific racialisation processes and experiences of

---

7   Oxana Chi's website is oxanachi.de and Layla Zami's is laylazami.net.

racialisation and racism for children of the second generation who grew up in Germany. I have decided to mention her here nonetheless in order to show that even if she does not feature in the text directly, she has informed much of my thinking. Nina was born and grew up in Uganda in the 1980s. She has lived in Wuppertal for more than ten years now after originally moving there as an au pair. She is currently finishing her PhD in English studies on Black British literature. She has a blog called *The Afrodiasporan*, which she started after arriving in Germany.[8] I met Nina at the conference in Tampere, where she presented herself as 'somehow Afro-German'. After that I met her again at a summer school in Frankfurt and conducted a life-story interview with her in Wuppertal soon after. In 2018, we went to a Black travel symposium together and explored the city of Brussels. My encounter with Nina was very important because it was particularly through discussions with her that I started to think more about class and education when researching Black and Afrodiasporic identities. She also sparked off a lot of ideas for research on the generational question. Nina has a great deal in common with the other women in this study; although she grew up in Uganda, she shares many cultural references when it comes to Afrodiasporic cultural production, and especially media production. I wrote a fieldnote for the anthropological blog *Allegralab* in which she features (Wojczewski 2019).

Life-stories and anthropology: Between method and object of study

In this section I will outline the main methodology used in my thesis: reflecting on the role that life stories and family ethnographies have in the discipline of anthropology and their importance for my fieldwork, as well as considering the life story as object of study in itself. I will also outline how I analyse the life stories. In addition, I reflect on the themes of the fieldwork both 'at home' and 'on the move' in a subsection on positionality.

Although at the outset, life-story narration was only supposed to be a method for recording ethnographic data, it soon emerged as a central theoretical component of the research itself, once I found that it had an important place at Black identity events and for the construction of activist identities. Hence, in my research the life story is more than just a means to an end. I do not only use the life story as a method to research a particular problem but also examine the importance that it has in and of itself in the construction of self and community. I present and examine the life stories of the women I work with and at the same time I look at how they use stories of their lives and stories about travelling in everyday situations and at events and conferences and how this creates a dialogue.

---

8   Nina's blog is at www.afro-diasporan.com.

The biographical or life-story approach is an essential part of my fieldwork; I collected life-story material from my research participants during fieldwork at home as well as while on the move. This material came in various forms: In many cases, I conducted biographical interviews, holding between one and three sessions and recording the results. This was the case for Aminata, Oxana, Layla and Lafia, and the results were very diverse, ranging from intimate conversations to more distant interviews where I felt that the interviewees were rather following a script. Often the interviews were a mix of biography and recollections of travel experiences at different points in their life.

The interviews were certainly all very different. Lafia, for example, asked if she should talk about her life in relation to being Afro-German. Yet since the question came from her, and because my idea of the interview was that she could tell me whatever she wanted to in that moment, I indicated that she should just tell me about growing up. With Aminata, the prompt 'So, tell me about your life' was all that was required. My discussions with Oxana and Layla revolved more around their travel experiences and how these were linked to their lives.

Interviewing was only one method of research. I also observed how life stories unfolded directly on various occasions during fieldwork. These included stage performances by Oxana and Layla as well as many informal conversations with Maya, Lafia and Aminata. Besides biographical interviews, I also conducted several interviews on travel experiences – travels that my participants perceived as existentially important to them and important in shaping their lives in various ways.

Although it is not the most common method, anthropology has a long tradition of using life stories to illustrate how life is lived and perceived in a certain time and place. These biographical narratives have the power to illustrate both the possibilities and limits that a person has as an agent in various organisations (family, the state, the system of production) and shows how they negotiate belonging to these different groups, taking into account a larger historical context. The autobiographical accounts are not objective illustrations of facts; they are experiences turned into memories and shaped to make sense and to present a coherent version of self (Linde 1993). The anthropologist Annika Lems, who used the method of life story in her work writes that 'life stories focus on the cultural scripts and narrative devices that individuals use to make sense of experience' (2018, p. 43). Through telling the stories of particular individuals – or rather, letting them tell their stories – showing a specific lifeworld and specific practices, ethnography seeks to demonstrate how the meaning of the world and of the self is produced by a person.

The use of life stories has a particularly long tradition in the anthropology of women and feminist anthropology (Birx 2006, Hopkins 2001). It started with Marjorie Shostak's classic *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981). Shostak includes many transcripts of the life story told by Nisa in her own words. These direct citations alternate with Shostak's own introductions of given aspects of !Kung life.

The two voices remain separate in this ethnography. This is not the same in other examples: Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1993) and Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (1991) also focus on the life of one particular woman in their participatory fieldwork. In those ethnographies, the authors place a particular importance on the relation between themselves and their main characters and reflect upon their own role in the field while also giving space to the voice of their interlocutors. The relationship and the auto-ethnography are included as organic parts of these books. It is this possibility of including the dialogue and relationship between interlocutor and researcher that motivated me to use the life story as a method.

Other ethnographies utilise the life story as well. They include Sidney Mintz's *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (1974), Gananath Obeyesekere's *Medusa's Hair* (1984) and Lila Abu-Lughod's *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (2008 [1993]). These works focus on the lifeworlds of particular subjectivities to demonstrate how people not only negotiate, embody and challenge a range of identities and cultural symbols through their engagement and relations with the world and the people surrounding them, and how positions evolve over a lifetime; they show how people cope with certain social and economic developments depending, for instance, on their class and gender. Another aspect that most life-story ethnographies have in common is that the researchers have already known their interlocutor(s) for many years and have engaged in previous fieldwork with them. In my case this is even more pronounced: I have known some of the women I work with since childhood, which allowed for a very intimate and in-depth portrait of their lives. While most ethnographers use the life story as a method, they do not analyse the function it has for the person telling it, which is one important focus of my work.

The important dimensions for the analysis of life stories in this work are temporality and rupture in the accounts as well as self-interpretation with the help of fiction and the sharing of stories, which allow the women to identify with a larger Afrodiasporic culture. These two dimensions are important for understanding how my interlocutors make sense of their African heritage as part of themselves.

How can life stories include both the idea of a dynamic self and of a stable one? I analyse how life stories are used to create identity in the sense of Ricœur's narrative identity (1988). He argues that the act of narrating a life or life events mediates the knowledge of oneself to the self and to others and is thus a way to mediate and interpret experience. The individual does not know their own self as such, s/he has to use resources to interpret and mediate it for herself and for others. Ricœur's two conceptions of identity, which suggest a certain permanence in time of the self – identity as *idem* and identity as *ipse* – are brought together dynamically in the form of narrative identity. Identity-idem refers to the character of a person that is perceived as stable trait of self, while nonetheless being the fruit of history; while identity-ipse refers to an awareness of change in time but with an effort to stay the same.

For Ricœur, the narration of identity allows the combination of both dimensions of identity – the stable and the dynamic dimensions. It includes different stages and experiences of life and brings contradictions and change together in a single narration of self. In the case of my research here, narrative identity is an important concept because it focuses on how, through narration, self-identity is created but also on how identification with others – the construction of community – becomes possible through narration and the interplay between listening to and telling life stories. It is not the life history – a factual account of someone's life – that I am interested in, but how people put their experiences into stories in order to interpret who they are or were. The life stories of my interlocutors reveal the tensions between permanence and change, especially with regard to growing up in Germany as people of African descent. The othering they had to deal with in the society in which they were socialised led to specific forms of engagement with their African heritage during the various stages of their lives. Temporality is one means of connecting continuity and change in a single narrative strand. The temporal dimension in the life story, according to linguistic anthropologists Elinor Ochs and Lisa Kapps (1996), focuses on the transition from one stage to another and looks at how past, present and future become connected. Consider, for example, the life stories I presented in the two vignettes at the beginning of this book: The stories relate to past events, yet through performance at the conference they are connected to the present, mediated by the teller and a listening audience. The function of telling stories of the past is to make sense of the present and to construct the future, as one aim of the telling is to build Black communities through the sharing of experiences.

In my analysis, I draw particular attention to the importance of anticipated or unexpected 'turns of events' (Ochs and Kapps 1996, p. 27). Travel experiences are often described as such turning points in the lives of the women and for their construction of diasporic identities, especially through meeting with transnational kin.

The other key aspect of analysis is how these personal stories are inspired by history and fiction, and the ways in which these help to shape understandings of self. Ochs and Kapps suggest that knowledge of self becomes possible indirectly, through the use of cultural signs and symbols – tools that help a person make sense of their existence. How do the women in my research make use of history, fiction and other people's stories to make sense of their lives? And how does this help them to relate to a larger Afro-diasporic culture?

In their life narratives, the women become a kind of fictional character not only because they narrate themselves, but even more than that, because in order to understand their lives, the women refer to many African American cultural symbols, and use fictional characters from African and African American authors or other people's biographies to interpret their experiences. The narration of (parts of) their lives helps them make sense of transformations and change, and reveals how ruptures, contradictions and tensions are also part of a single life.

The purpose of telling stories about one's life to others and to oneself is to create coherence over an existence which is full of contradictions, coincidences and things that might not easily make sense. It can help create a sense of a coherent self or bring coherence into the events of one's life (Bourdieu 1986b, Linde 1993). The life stories that I heard were sometimes rather elaborate, as was often the case when someone was already used to telling (parts of) her biography because she was active in Black identity movements. The women would not always narrate their whole biography but rather bits and pieces to different people in different situations. On other occasions, I heard life stories that were less clearly developed and evolved. In these cases there were more moments where contradictions and conflicts evolved in the narrative spontaneously and were dealt with ad hoc by the person telling her story. It was never told in a coherent way from beginning to end, but the women always chose to draw connections between past and present; they talked of a past event and thought about it in light of the present. For example, when Aminata told me about school, she also reflected upon her experiences with the 'racial lens' she had developed as an adult. And sometimes, when she would talk about herself as a child, she would make a loop to her own daughter and reflect on her life.

Yet life stories are not only found in individual life-story ethnographies, they matter in many different ethnographies and notably in family ethnographies.

Family ethnographies

I have also sought to include the perspective of my participants' parents and was able to interview Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, in Frankfurt. Our conversation provides a good frame for the exploration of African diaspora throughout generations in a family (see Chapter 4 'Family affairs'). The interview with Aminata's father added a new dimension to my work. It gave insights into the history of African student migration to Germany after 1945 and how it was connected to the 1968 student protests in Germany. It also added the perspective of how a person who actually migrated developed a new relation to his country of origin. This interview shows how Lamine Camara deals with questions of national and diasporic belonging in relation to his children who were born in Germany. In the biographical interviews of the women in this study, the parents or the necessity to speak about one's parents is an important concern. On becoming adults, the wish to understand where the parents come from, the often difficult though loving relationships they have or had with their parents and the wish to build a connection to their countries of ancestral origin became increasingly pertinent. Lafia informed me that the migration history of her father and his country of origin, Senegal, began to be a matter of interest to her only when she became an adult herself, and that 'at a certain point after I started working in a migration project I realised that he must feel homesick from time to time'. Family also becomes important for my interlocutors when they have founded families

of their own. The fact of having children themselves and being confronted with the question of what they want to transmit to them culturally and politically also makes them deal more empathically with their own parents.

Including the family histories of my interlocutors responds to the idea already posited by migration scholars such as Abdelmalek Sayad (1979) and Stéphane Beaud (2018) that a family history of migration does not start or end with the arrival of a migrant in another country. There is a before and an after, too.

As long ago as the 1970s, the sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad brought a consideration of family and an intergenerational aspect to the study of international migration when researching Algerian immigration to France from the 1950s onwards and the different generations of descendants of migrants (2006 [1979]). Sayad uses an in-depth biographical interview of Zahoua, the daughter of a couple who came to France from Algeria in the 1950s. It is only after their conversation that he adds his analysis and some context. The contextualisation is supposed to give the reader the chance to understand and objectify to a certain extent the subjective account of Zahoua's life – to place it in a wider context.

A sort of continuation of Sayad's work can be found in the family ethnography of Stéphane Beaud, who in *La France des Belhoumi* (2018) writes with and about a family of Algerian origin in France, painting the portraits of three generations in France following the father's arrival in 1971. The anthropologist also gives a lot of space to the narratives of his interlocutors, especially the daughters of the Belhoumi family, the second generation in France, and less to the analysis of the accounts. Much like in the ethnographies of Behar or McCarthy Brown, the relation between researcher and family members is prominent in the works of Beaud and Sayad. Beaud often refers to conversations he had with the daughters of the family, how they exchanged text messages and newspaper articles, which gives clues about how much Beaud was able to learn from this very participatory approach with the Belhoumi family.

One of the reasons I chose to engage with life stories and family ethnographies is that it allows room to contextualise and reflect upon the relation between researcher and interlocutor, while also giving the interlocutors' voices time and space to develop. Yet I opted to take a somewhat more interventionist approach to the narratives of my interlocutors. I chose certain citations to discuss, brought up particular themes and circumstances in order to draw comparisons or to add a personal description. Description, analysis and context are connected in my work. Nonetheless, I also leave space for some stories to develop in their own rhythm and only intervene afterwards. Sometimes a direct citation is only a catalyst to discussing a broader situation. Bourdieu calls for an embeddedness of life histories or biographies in a broader context, as only that context makes it possible to give sense to the narrative itself (1986b). The context in which the interview took place is also relevant. Where was it, who was there, who spoke? What sort of relation is there between interviewer and interviewee? The interview situations were a common experience between me

and my interlocutors in which, by posing questions about their life, I tried to support a potential for self-analysis and hence a potential for objectification of self-experience. But it is important to keep in mind that this self-analysis is limited to the point that it is still a performance towards me as interviewer/friend with a recording device (in many cases) and that some insights might not be shared with me (especially when the recording device is on).

Most of the people I write about are in their thirties and fourties and have begun to found their own families – whether with or without children. Many of the discussions and interviews I had with them included reflections about their parents or about themselves as parents – as if the process of coming of age and of feeling that they reached adulthood brought about the need to reflect upon their parent's lives and sensibilities. In my research, which focuses on the topic of being of African descent, these reflections tend to turn around their African parent, most often their father, but their mothers are no less important in their reflections. In the cases of Aminata, Maya and Lafia (my research participants from Frankfurt), the relationships with their fathers during their teens were difficult and a refusal to deal with that relationship in the past has turned to a wish to reflect and engage with it as an adult. Yet the family ethnography that I propose goes beyond immediate kin. It includes transnational family relations and the challenges and opportunities they pose for the diasporic identities of the women. It follows the efforts, challenges and tensions of my interlocutors to become truly part of transnational families and to transform distant kin into family.

Positionality: Fieldwork 'at home' and 'on the move'

The life-story or biographical method is used frequently in the anthropology of travel and tourism, yet usually travel itself is at the centre of the research, as the researcher tries to encounter the person during their travels (Picard 2013, Leite 2017, Simoni 2018, Harrison 2003). I decided rather to place an emphasis on the home context, to really understand where the people are coming from and how their diasporic travels are a small piece in the bigger picture of their lives; being able to engage with my interlocutors over the long term was an advantage in that regard. First, exploring their home lives placed the diasporic travels of my interlocutors in a wider context – showing how they are connected not only to the pasts of these women, but also to their future plans and endeavours. Second, it revealed how these journeys are not only an important objective in themselves but also enabled new relationships to emerge and transformed existing ones at home.

Travel opens up new paths. For me, as an author, researcher and friend, the desire to reflect on personal history was something that drove me to include Frankfurt – the city where I grew up – in my work; my research is therefore in many ways an 'intimate ethnography' (Waterston 2019, p. 10) of a native anthropologist. I decided

to include close friends in the research so that we could reflect and analyse together how the city and our upbringing shaped us, but more specifically how it shaped the Afrodiasporic identification processes of my interlocutors. In this way, I was able to draw on more than 20 years of friendship and living in Frankfurt together. For my six months of fieldwork in Frankfurt in 2017/18, I tried to 'transform home into a field of study' (2000, p. 34) as Noel Dyck expounds in his essay 'Home field advantage?' Exploring the ways in which Frankfurt is and is not my home is important in order to explain my own position in the field. Frankfurt is my home in the first place because there are people there with whom I have shared intimate relationships over a long period of time, my family and friends. Peter Manning (1987) explains that there are two strategies for doing ethnographic fieldwork: Either you go into a field that is totally strange to you and try to make it familiar or you go into a field you suppose is familiar and try to make it strange again. The anthropologist Florence Weber has called the two types 'investigation through distantiation' and 'investigation through familiarisation' (Beaud and Weber 2003). The first field (the strange one) is well represented by the Malinowskian tradition of fieldwork and the social anthropological tradition, while for the second (the familiar field), the works of members of the Chicago school of urban sociology are a good example. All those researchers chose familiar surroundings of a sort, usually an urban setting, but still entered an unknown world within this familiar setting. The study by William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society* (1943), is one early example of this approach, in which he undertakes lengthy ethnographic research in an Italian neighbourhood of Boston, Massachusetts. In a way, he was at home, if you consider his home to be an urban environment on the east coast of the USA. However, in many regards the field was unfamiliar to him, and he was not a part of the group he studied. He was still mostly an outsider in his field and needed to become familiar with the people and the neighbourhood he was studying.

Then there are other examples of researchers who went back to their native places to study a milieu that they had left and where a large social distance had grown between them and their birthplace. They had formerly been insiders in the milieu they studied. For instance, bell hooks studied the importance of class within families in her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000) and described how it was for her to grow up in a Black working-class family and later engage in class mobility by means of higher education, becoming a university lecturer. More recently, Didier Eribon explored and reflected very personally on the habitus of the white working class in France in his own family in *Retour à Reims* (2009). These authors returned to their origins long after a distance had been created by social mobility enabled by higher education. They had, in one way or another, cut the ties to their working-class origins and returned more as outsiders than insiders. But they also explore how these class origins (intersecting with gender and race) influenced their social mobility and their lives in their academic milieus.

I am much more of an insider to my field. I never cut the ties to my milieu of origin, and there is no social distance between me and the people I studied – only a geographical one, because I moved away at the age of 19. For my fieldwork, I went back to an urban, highly educated, middle-class milieu, where I still have friends and family with whom I share this milieu today. Hence, I needed to practise distanciation in this milieu that was very familiar to me, to reflect on my position while growing up and consider how it was different and not so different from the women in my study.

So, I grew up in Frankfurt, which is a very multicultural city, and ever since I was a child ethnic and cultural diversity have been a normal part of my life. I often did not even consider whether my life and experiences were different to those of my friends who were seen as People of Colour; for me, we all seemed equal. But, as a teenager, I began to understand that there were experiences in the lives of my friends who had, for example, a Guinean or a Turkish parent that made us different. These were experiences of racialisation and othering,[9] as well as a fear of outright racism. The intersection of racism and sexism was a constant companion in their lives. We shared many things growing up as part of the same generation in rather middle-class urban surroundings, but what did the different subject positions resulting from racialisation mean for our individual lives and relations? Because of these experiences of growing up together yet being different, I first began to be interested in the history and theories of racism, politics of anti-racism, and categories of difference and intersectionality.

But I also needed to familiarise myself with a milieu I did not know: the Afrodiasporic and Black organisations in Frankfurt and Germany in general. This led me to get to know Frankfurt in new ways. I met and interviewed new people and people whom I knew only by sight as a teenager and young adult. I got to know new places too, such as the city archives, to find out more about the history of migration in Frankfurt, went to meetings of the Afro-German Graduate Network (ADAN[10]) and spent time at the new campus of the Goethe University. I also chose to not stay at my parents' house while doing fieldwork in Frankfurt, as I felt it was impossible to put myself into an independent working mood if my parents were waiting for me for dinner every night. So I lived with an old friend who had a spare room, which was a lucky coincidence for me, as she and I would regularly exchange thoughts on my research.

---

9   Othering refers to a discursive practice of marking a person as different from a supposed collective or of marking boundaries between a self and other, which in this case would be 'the Germans' who are imagined as an ethnocultural collective which excludes People of Colour, who are marked as other based on descent, phenotype or religious affiliation (see for example Schneider et al. 2012, p. 291).

10   ADAN's website is at https://ada-netzwerk.com (accessed 23 November 2020).

Constructing the field at home requires to a certain degree making that home 'unknown, unfamiliar, unusual and challenging' (Dyck 2000, p. 36). I can say that Frankfurt as a research site did indeed become that for me. I hadn't lived there for more than 15 years when I left at the age of 19, just starting to get a very blurry feeling of what it meant to be an adult, and came back as a person who had constructed her life and career elsewhere in Europe. Hence, although Frankfurt was the place I had been socialised in, it felt unfamiliar, and I had to rediscover the city as a thirty-something. Also totally unfamiliar were, of course, the new terms of relationship that I applied to my old friends/new research participants. We not only scheduled private meetings now but also more professional meetings where, for the first time in our lives, I would switch on the recording device to do a formal interview. That definitely felt strange.

In every case and at all times, I informed my friends and participants that I was conducting fieldwork, but it was easier to be aware of this working relationship in the cases of Layla, Oxana, Nina and Lafia, who I had met through the research context, than for Maya and Aminata, who I had known for more than twenty years. They were aware of my research when I pulled out my voice recorder or when I started writing down notes on my phone, but I think they were less aware of being the focus of my enquiry on other occasions. To manage informed consent and research ethics around researching long-term friends, I differentiated between private and professional meetings – for example, an interview would be considered a professional meeting. Nonetheless, as I have known them for a long time, my analysis of their accounts is significantly informed by the private time we spent together, too – the boundaries are blurred. In my writing I try to not disclose too many details of their private lives and consciously avoid going into detail about certain aspects. And right up to the end of the research process, I applied the mantra that their consent should take precedent over the advancement of my research. Usually, when I write a paper for a presentation, I send it to the people concerned and ask what they think. Anonymisation is also important if it is wished for, but when you record life stories the process of preserving anonymity is all the more demanding.

On the move: Research during leisure travel and conferences

Instead of merely going to Frankfurt and staying there for an extended period, as classical fieldwork methods would suggest, I decided to follow the people I studied, to engage with them in their mobility from one place to another, whether for leisure or for work (Elliott et al. 2017). In their conceptualisation of the 'mobilities turn' (Büscher et al. 2004, p. 1), the sociologists Mimi Sheller, John Urry and Monika Büscher call for innovative approaches to study a world that is increasingly built on the mobility of people, goods, technologies and services. New work–life models today question a simple work/leisure (stationary/mobile) dichotomy and in order to

study emerging forms of mobilities and immobilities, old methods must be adapted and new methods invented. One such method is to join people during their journeys. So I decided to travel with my interlocutors.[11] With Maya and Otis I travelled as tourists to London and documented the trip with photos and fieldnotes. I had been staying in Frankfurt for a while when the idea came up that we could travel together to London. I had already considered travelling with people to see how Afrodiasporic identities matter during journeys and how identification and difference is created during leisure travel. The trip to London would be a good occasion for it. I told them beforehand that I would also use the trip for my research and would take notes and possibly ask them a few questions along the way. Before we set off, Maya made a plan of where she wanted to go; besides taking afternoon tea and visiting the Tate Modern art gallery, her list also included visiting Brixton, a multicultural neighbourhood much shaped by African and Caribbean migration, checking out a Ghanaian restaurant and taking a Notting Hill Black heritage tour. I documented much of our travel with photos and fieldnotes, mostly writing on my phone, and would sometimes put my recording device on when we had conversations I deemed interesting about Afrodiasporic and Black identity (after asking Maya and Otis for permission).

For instance, right after the Black heritage tour, I recorded a short video on my phone asking them both what they thought about the tour. Travelling together opens up the possibility of catching the experience in the moment and not only retrospectively in a later interview. This makes it possible to engage more closely with the more spontaneous aspects of the experience, for instance by going out at night dancing, and capturing the interlocutors' interactions with other people while travelling. It involves moments of joy, astonishment, exhaustion, like, dislike, disappointment – not only for the interlocutors but also for me as a participant and researcher. Travelling together also brought us closer as a group of friends, as it had been a very long time since we had spent so much time together. Moreover, it brought my research project closer to Maya and Otis. They were able to ask questions and see how I worked. The method of participation in people's leisure travel is used by anthropologists of tourism and travel to explore the diverse intersubjective experiences, negotiations and reflections that happen in tourist spaces. Edward Bruner (1995) and David Picard (2011) participated as tour guides to investigate practices of tourism, while Naomi Leite (2017) participated as a tourist in guided tours of Jewish heritage in Portugal, living in that country for an extended period. Valerio Simoni (2015) lived in Cuba several times for extended periods; his research also included multi-sited ethnography as he visited some people he got to know as tourists in Cuba in the places where they came from and lived. For other journeys that I could not participate in but which were of particular interest to my study – for example, travels to

---

11   Part of this section has been published in *Feministische Geo-Rundmail*, a feminist research journal (Wojczewski 2020).

places associated to ancestral origin – I relied on ethnographic interviews after the trips were complete (for that method see Harrison (2003)).

I also undertook fieldwork at conferences that I attended between 2017 and 2019 to meet potential research participants. I also later travelled to several conferences with existing research participants. I decided to conduct fieldwork 'on the move', travelling to conferences and events, as I figured that this would open up my research to a more political and academic side of Afrodiasporic identities and reduce my reliance on friends and acquaintances. The first event I attended was the Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere in July 2017. I went to present my ongoing research, and my PhD supervisor suggested that it could also be a good 'field site' to get to know potential research participants while I was there. Until then, the possibility had not occurred to me, but I could recognise that conferences were good platforms to introduce my research to potentially interested people. This is how I met Oxana Chi, Layla Zami and Nina.

I tried to spend a lot of time just hanging out with them at the events and while travelling together as this allowed us to talk about diverse aspects of the research process, such as why I was interested in the topic (I will return to this question further below), which methods I was using and why. Informality was especially valuable when working with women I did not yet know, like Oxana and Layla, two Black Queer feminist artists, activists and researchers. It also enabled them to occasionally talk frankly about fears they had about my research. In Black political and feminist movements, it has long been recognised that representation matters and that who talks about whom, why and how is an important political matter, considering that public discussions of racism and racialisation are very often carried out entirely by white people, rather than including the voices of Black people and People of Colour, who have long been speaking up about how they are affected by these issues (Sow 2008, Hasters 2019, Oguntoye et al. 1986, Ogette 2018, Davis 1981, hooks 1981, Ha 2012, Lorde 2012, Ritz 2009). Being a white woman researcher myself, I often feared that I would not be accepted as person writing about Black experiences, that I would not be considered legitimate because I was not racialised myself. But my experiences suggest that this was not the case. There were occasionally Black women who declined to be interviewed, always with a polite refusal, but I cannot be sure that they rejected the interview because I was white. Most of the time I was accepted in my role as a potential ally standing in solidarity with Black political movements. I was often asked at conferences what I was researching and why, but never met with hostility simply because I was white – that turned out just to be just my own fear.

Researching with people who are keenly aware of what research about them could mean in terms of (mis-)representation and who were, at times, particularly suspicious towards anthropologists (due to the involvement of the discipline in the construction of false 'race theories') was a very educational journey, and the sense of learning deepended as I moved towards the end of the research process and into the

PhD writing process. When I wrote I often thought, 'What would Oxana think about what I am writing about her? Or what would Lafia think?' This mental questioning is based on advice I received regarding writing about others from Oxana and Layla. Sitting in a café after a conference in Toronto about Black Germany (BGHRA[12]) to which we had all travelled together, they told me: 'Look, we know we cannot control what, or how, you write about us, but what we want to make sure of is that what transcends is that what you write is not what we are, but your analysis of, and your thoughts about, who you think we are.' They did not resist the fact that I as a researcher could write about them and their lives, but instead they stressed the importance of making explicit our relationship and that what I write is the result of a dialogue that exists between them and me. They knew that my work consisted in writing about people, but they just wanted to make clear that what I wrote was not a definition of who they are from an outsider position, but a reflection on what they do as a result of an intersubjective relation and dialogue that we build together during the research process.

I have tried to keep that advice in mind during the process of writing. This means, as an author and researcher, constantly reflecting on how I represent those people I work with; what do I cite from interviews, how long are the citations, do I use real names or pseudonyms, how do I include my own role in the research process and in writing? Throughout my work, I try to engage seriously with Black women's voices and my PhD is a product of learning from Black women.

My experience of conducting fieldwork at Black political events has been unsettling in terms of experiencing racialised identity as a white person. But also and more importantly, it revealed how hard it generally is for Black activists in European countries to work on anti-Black racism, as it is often not recognised as a problem in European societies ('It is a problem in the USA but not here'). As I experienced things I had previously only read about in articles and books, or heard about from the accounts of informants, my admiration for Black and anti-racist activists increased. One important experience took place during a panel.

Afroeuropeans conference, Finland

I attended a panel at the Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere in 2017, where a Black Belgian researcher and activist talked about an Afrodiasporic organisation in Belgium. A white woman who was sitting in the audience raised her hand during the discussion just to say that she felt it was unfair that white people were excluded from Black networks, and that this was a very big problem (for her). In another panel she asked exactly the same question, and also began to tell her

---

12   The Black German Heritage and Research Association conference, whose website is: http://bghra.org/ut-2018/ (accessed 28 July 2020).

story – unrelated to the theme of the panel – about how she had been with an African man and since he had left her, she had felt stigmatised because she had been with him and because she was a single mother. That woman certainly felt like an exception at that time. I had not observed any weird interventions during other panels at the conference so far. The woman was not a researcher herself but had come out of interest in the topic and had been invited by friends who were in the organisational team, so her interest in the topic of Afrodiasporic identities appeared genuine. But her questions and comments felt really out of place at a conference about Black identities and anti-Black racism. I remember being impressed with the reactions of the presenter, having to respond to the question of the woman about white people being excluded. She stayed very calm, answering in a mostly friendly and reassuring way, and moving on quickly to the next question. I was also impressed by the solidarity present in the conference room when it appeared that that comment was about to take up more space in the discussion because the white woman wanted to say something else. Many people, especially Black women, raised their hands quickly, and in doing so suggested that it would be good to move on to the next question as swiftly as possible. I, on the contrary, felt a bit numb and unable to react the first time I had this experience. I also felt my face turning red, because I was ashamed to be one of the few white people in the room. I couldn't help but think, 'Why is this woman attending an Afroeuropean conference?'

After the last day of the conference, I walked home with Mélanie P., a PhD student and Black activist from Switzerland. I told her how uncomfortable I had felt when the white woman in the panel lamented about feeling excluded and how admiring I had been of the other delegates' reactions. Until then, I had assumed that this kind of occurrence must be absolutely exceptional and only happened because someone had invited the woman who was not a researcher but a friend of an organiser by mistake. Mélanie just shrugged her shoulders and said, 'Honestly, you know, that type of person will be at every event we organise, no matter the topic. We are used to having to deal with them – to us it is just normal.' (Fieldnote, July 2017)

This was when I realised that there were people attending Black political events who took up positions that denied – even if unintentionally – the existence of racism. Since then, at every conference or event I attended that dealt with Afrodescendant identities in Europe, I could be sure to bear witness to at least one white person affirming that they did not see race or that racism against white people was also a very big problem. At the University of Lausanne screening of the film *Métis*,[13] a documentary about mixed ethnic identities in the city, directed by Luc Godonou Dossou, himself an Afrodescendant person, a woman in her fifties who did not seem to have

---

13   The trailer of this film is available at https://vimeo.com/243473247 (accessed 20 August 2020).

any attachment to the university, but who had clearly been delighted by the film, began her comment by telling the director who was present: 'I don't see black or white. For me you are more like brown or milk chocolate.' She continued by affirming that in the Valais canton, where she lived (so she had travelled from Valais to Lausanne to see the film!), the foreigners were all very well integrated, but once again many hands were quickly raised in order to not let that discussion take up too much space (she had already been talking for quite some time). At another event, this time a dance performance about being an Afrodescendant woman from Switzerland, *Je brûle pour Joséphine* by Safi Martin Yé,[14] there was a more unpleasant reaction in the audience. After the performance, there was a discussion round in which people could ask questions, and it quickly turned to racism in Switzerland, as the experience of this was one topic of the performance. At one point, a white woman who presented herself as a teacher, commented that in her career she only had encountered racism against white people and that she could not really see how racism against Black people or People of Colour existed. I cannot say what the motivation of that woman was to make that comment or to even come to this event, but in reaction the organisers had a five-minute discussion about what racism actually meant, giving a brief history of it and how it existed against Black people and not against white people as a structural problem in Switzerland. Another white woman in the public who affirmed that she had enjoyed the piece very much said how sad and shocked she was to hear that the performer had experienced racism in Switzerland.

These are all reactions exhibiting what Robin DiAngelo (2018) has called 'white fragility', sometimes also referred to as 'white tears'. The definitions of these phenomena generally refer to white people who do not face racism in their daily interactions, who do not recognise their own racist bias and who are not aware of the scope of everyday and structural racism. The denial of racism also stems from the belief that theories of human races have long been proved wrong and that therefore racism can no longer exist – it can stem from an anti-racist motivation, but it does not help those who nonetheless still experience it (Noiriel 2009). It was after these experiences that I came to understand how difficult it was for Black people and activists to openly talk about experiences of racism when met with denial even from people who would consider themselves open and tolerant. This exposure to people denying racism occurred not only through their engagement with anti-racism but also in their lived realities outside of activist work, where they regularly have to explain racism to their white friends or family members.

As Tarik Tesfu, a German journalist, TV presenter and Black activist argues in an Instagram post, 'BPoC are not a Google search engine. I sometimes ask myself where I would be professionally and privately if I didn't have to waste my time with

---

14   Safi Martin Ye's website is safimartinye.ch/josephine.html (accessed 20 August 2020).

racism. I would probably be Beyoncé.'[15] It is not the responsibility of Black people and People of Colour (BPoC) to educate other people about racism by exposing their intimate experiences with it (in German the term used is often: *Seelenstriptease*, soul striptease), it is first and foremost up to those who profit from white privilege to educate themselves and do something about it, so that BPoC are no longer responsible. And I strongly agree with this argument: Anti-racist education should be a major concern for all societies, and books like *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019) from Ibram X Kendi can help with that.

I also believe that I learned a lot about the workings of racism as a daily, lived experience through friends who in Germany are affected by it in very specific ways and who have shared some of their experiences and insights with me since we were teenagers. It was through their sharing of experiences that I learned to be sensitive to everyday forms of racism and othering. Sharing personal experiences openly and publicly can also be a powerful source of political agency, as movements such as *#metoo* have shown. By exposing the sheer quantity of statements that are sexually or racially discriminatory, denial of the problem becomes more and more difficult.

Analytical approaches

In order to study coming of age in women of African descent in Germany and how they construct diasporic relations and practices throughout their lives, I work with concepts of 'class', 'diaspora' and 'kinship'. By focusing on the lives of five women, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which class, diaspora and kinship relations have influenced how they understand themselves and their position in the world. Using an intersectional approach to class/race/gender, I analyse how these three categories structure these women's identification processes. I take a practice-oriented approach to diaspora and kinship, analysing the practices used by the interlocutors to create kinship ties and diasporic communities: practices of care (of self and others), of travelling and of storytelling.

An intersectional approach to class, race and gender

The women I worked with when writing my thesis belong to the middle class, are often highly educated and come from families of mixed national heritage. They grew

---

15   All translations from German to English are from the author. Original citation: 'BPoCs sind keine Google-Suchmaschine. Ich frage mich manchmal, wo ich privat und beruflich stehen würde, wenn ich meine Zeit nicht auch mit Rassismus verschwenden müsste. Wahrscheinlich wäre ich Beyoncé.' https://www.instagram.com/p/CBck1Vyqy2Q/?igshid=dpkjiba8yzlr (accessed 30 June 2020).

up in Germany, learned German as their first language, have a German parent, finished school, went to university and are currently in work. In comparison to their parents, they were either able to achieve some upward social mobility or at least were able to maintain the same social and economic level. And yet, when they have a non-European migration history in their families, they are often confronted with being perceived as 'not German', and experience discrimination and othering in the society they call home. They are faced with 'migrantisation' (El-Tayeb 2016), with being constructed as foreigners no matter how many generations their family has lived in Germany. Taking this particular situation into account, my approach will be attentive to the formation of a middle class, but a middle class that is racialised and gendered. This relation between racialisation and class has not been the focus of many ethnographic studies so far and usually only in relation to the working classes.

In Germany and Europe, a new generation has come of age – the children of those who migrated from many different European, African and Asian countries since the 1960s have, in the meantime, formed or are starting to form families of their own (Crul et al. 2012). The second and third generations of Europeans with non-European origins are now adults. They are the children of those who came either as labour migrants, many of whom had lower socioeconomic backgrounds (they formed the majority of non-European migrants since the 1950s) or as international students or political refugees, some of whom originated from higher socioeconomic milieus in the 1960s and 1970s. It is the latter group that I want to pay particular attention to. I study the connection between class and ethnicity/race with a focus on the middle class instead of the working class, which has been the main concern in Germany up to now both in academia and public discourse. Studies on the social and economic mobility of migrants and their descendants in Germany have predominantly focused on the large groups of immigrants, such as the Turkish population, and less on migrants from African countries who – with the exception of Moroccans and Tunisians who arrived as labour migrants in larger numbers in the 1960s and 1970s – have come to Germany in smaller numbers.

For the examination of the link between class and racialisation of people of African descent in Germany, it is useful to look at Germany's history of migration since the 1950s, the time of the West German 'economic miracle'. Migration from African or Asian countries to Germany only began to increase after World War II. Before that date, there were of course people of African or Asian origin in Germany (or the diverse territories that are called Germany today). They came, for example, during the era of German and European colonialism, but not in large numbers and usually not from diverse economic backgrounds, most of them being members of the elites of their countries of origin. Many (though not all) of those then left Germany after World War I (see Chapter 2 on the history of African diaspora in Germany). Although migration of African and Asian students and high qualified workers increased from the 1960s (see Chapter 2 for African student migration), the

majority of non-European migrants in Germany since 1945 belonged to the working class and came to Germany (and many other European countries) as 'guest workers' in the West, or as 'contract workers' in East Germany. Between 1966 and 1989, the GDR (German Democratic Republic) hired more than 500,000 contract workers from Vietnam, Poland, Mozambique, Angola and other 'socialist brother countries'. And between 1955 and 1973, the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) contracted almost three million guest workers, mostly men between the ages of 20 and 40, from a wide range of countries, such as Tunisia, Yugoslavia, Morocco, Italy, Turkey and Greece. Today, their families and descendants account for the majority of people with an international migration history in Germany (including descendants down to the third or even fourth generation today). Especially since the construction of the Berlin wall in 1961 and the interruption of refugee flows from the GDR, the FRG increasingly contracted workers from other countries (Seifert 1995, p. 24). As a result of this hiring of guest workers, the percentage of foreigners in Germany grew from 1.2 per cent in 1960 to almost 5 per cent in 1970. By the time the practice ceased in 1973, about 2.6 million foreign workers had come to Germany; between 1973 and 1979 the only legal form of immigration besides seeking refuge status was in the form of family unification, and so this time was marked by a lot of immigration of nuclear family members of guest workers.

Due to heavy immigration restrictions, most migrants to Germany in the 1980s and 1990s were either refugees or 'ethnic Germans' arriving from former Soviet countries; the latter were rapidly granted German citizenship if they could show German ancestry. Migration researcher Wolfgang Seifert notes that there is continuity within German immigration policy regarding the preference of migrants with German ancestry. They enjoyed a range of integration measures, while little was undertaken to help integrate migrants from Mediterranean countries such as Morocco or Turkey. On the contrary, policies for these groups were sometimes dominated by repatriation measures (Seifert 1995, p. 31). Immigration policy has changed a lot since 1955, and since 2000 Germany has officially accepted that it is an immigration country with a possibility to acquire citizenship by the principle of *jus soli* (i.e. as a result of being born in Germany) and not only by descent, or *jus sanguinis* (Butterwegge 2005). Since 1 January 2000, children born in Germany of non-German parents can apply for German citizenship when one parent has lived in Germany for a minimum of eight consecutive years. Today more than 20 per cent of the population have a 'migration background', which means that they or at least one parent migrated to Germany (BPB 2017). The idea that all migrants will form communities when they arrive at a destination country and that the second generation will be torn between maintaining their ethnic culture and assimilating to the culture of their country of destination has been put forward by Portes and Zhou (1993), among others. In contrast, Drouhot and Nee find (2019) that rather than stressing immigrants' formation of communities, it is important to note the

crucial role played by socioeconomic resources – class – in assimilation.[16] This is something they stress in their review of second-generation assimilation processes in Western Europe.

Most of my interlocutors' primomigrant parents arrived in Germany and lived with German host families, in student dorms or in shared flats with other young Germans or international students – unlike, for example, Turkish people who came as guest workers and associated more with co-ethnics living in the same neighbourhoods (e.g. Kreuzberg in Berlin). The more classic theme relating class and migration in Europe, namely research on the production of an ethnicised/racialised proletariat as a result of guest worker migration, does not apply to my research. It is all the more interesting to look at the topic differently and see how the second generation I focus on understands itself under these specific circumstances in time and place. First, the individuals of the second generation whom I study were not part of 'ethnic communities' while growing up: Because most of them had one white German and one West African parent, they knew the cultural worlds of both their mother and their father.

Second, the historical economic context in Germany matters for their understanding of class position. My interlocutors mostly come from middle-class family backgrounds with a high educational level (what in Germany is known as *Bildungsbürgertum*: educated middle class or middle class through education rather than through entrepreneurship). Their parents were already were part of the middle class upon migration and most had met in student or bourgeois left circles – in many cases they were German women who had met West African men. For the parents of my interlocutors, education – at university if possible – was very important for their children.

The interlocutors in my study define themselves as middle class, and this is mostly in line with their economic and social living standards. Their subjective understanding of class matches the objective characteristics in most regards. As a result of their middle-class consciousness, they also have a particular vision of how they should participate in society, including politically; they join civil society organisations or committees at their children's schools, for instance.

Studies of migration and class mobility in Germany are still scarce. The sociologist Barbara Lemberger studies mobility from the working to the middle class mostly through entrepreneurial activity among descendants of Turkish emigrants in Berlin (Lemberger 2019). She analyses the status transformation among a migrant community that was marginalised for a long time by restrictive migration, citizenship and labour policy in Germany as an act of resistance and a collective process of

---

16   Drouhot and Nee define assimilation 'as the declining significance of context-specific markers of difference—like race, ethnicity, or religion—in the lives of immigrants and their children' (2019, p. 179).

social transformation.[17] That economic mobility also created new opportunities for involvement in culture and politics.

I stress the word 'educated' in the designation of the people I study as educated middle class, because in terms of economic capital, the status of my participants often seems closer to the working class, but in terms of education, it is closer to the upper classes. This in-betweenness is often a characteristic of the middle class. Although Germany did not suffer as much as other countries from the 2008 global financial crisis, my participants have experienced the effects of the neoliberal reforms undertaken from 2002 under Social Democratic chancellor Gerhard Schröder and his '*Agenda 2010*'. Those reforms made massive cuts to the German state welfare system and deregulated the labour market (Butterwegge et al. 2007). My participants entered the job market right after the reforms with job insecurity due to short-term contracts and a very weak real wage development; they had experiences of unpaid internships and low pay as self-employed workers in the culture industry and other sectors. Today many of the children of the German Baby Boomer generation face the real fear of not having enough money for their retirement. In that respect, my participants occupy 'contradictory class locations' (Carrier 2015, p. 34), with high levels of cultural and social capital but less economic capital.

The global financial crisis of 2008 affected most countries, leading to the emergence of new social movements. Ever since then, concepts of class have begun to feature more prominently in anthropological research. The anthology edited by James Carrier and Don Kalb *Anthropologies of Class: Power, Practice and Inequality* (2015), the result of an EASA (European Association of Social Anthropology) panel in 2010, is one example of the new prominence that class analysis has attained. In the social sciences, the assumption is not that class exists as a set of independent monolithic structures. Rather, research mostly focuses on 'the experiences and historic relationships of working people as they begin to make sense of their shared conditions and develop (or not) a shared identity' (Carbonella and Kasmir 2015, p. 42). Studying class is about studying the evolution and change in a group's consciousness about their role in capitalist society's systems of re/production and the ways that this affects other socioeconomic milieus.

The middle class has often been described as a group between the working class and the capitalist class, one that has aspirations and opportunities for limited upward mobility but with a constant *Fear of Falling* – as the sociologist Barbara Ehrenreich discussed in her 1989 book. For Ehrenreich, the middle class does not stand in clear opposition to the traditional classes of workers and capitalists. But people

---

17   Hiring stop of guest workers in 1973, restrictions on immigration from non-European countries, attempts to force return migration, difficulties in legalising citizen status, racist campaigns and attacks, see Berlinghoff (2019) or Seifert (1995) about the framing of 'welcome' and 'unwelcome' immigrants along racial/ethnic lines.

from the middle classes differ from other working people in the way that they have achieved an economic level that gives them the freedom to invest spare time and money in more than their direct needs: Investing in private property and 'human capital' (education and training) are the key strategies that Hadas Weiss (2019) describes as characteristic of the middle classes. For Weiss, one thing is clear: The middle classes are workers. This group comprises people who have to engage in wage labour for a living – from the teacher to the high-ranking manager. The middle class has a specific ideology which differs from that of other workers: People in the middle classes believe in self-determination; they believe that hard work and sacrifice will make upward mobility possible and that these are more important than structural forces of capitalism. The language of investment is crucial for the middle class: It is through investments in private property and education that the middle-class worker believes that they will attain a better wage and independent future for themselves and their children. This is what Hadas Weiss describes as the underlying ideology of people from the middle classes.

> This ideology is most credible among those who, while having to work for a living, can nevertheless devote some extra work, time and other resources toward the future, expending more than they immediately consume. (Weiss 2019, p. 119)

Yet these investments in the future are very fragile, and the returns generated are unreliable and depend more on capitalist market forces than on personal investment strategies; the 2008 economic crisis showed this brutally to many middle-class homeowners and pension savers throughout the world. This was especially the case as the most common investment strategies often include the assumption of heavy debts to pay mortgages. Moreover, the additional and unforeseen costs that come with private property often weigh heavier than the middle-class investor would have thought. But the hope for a better future that Weiss describes is so strong that workers will continue to pursue such investment strategies. She describes the middle class as standing in antagonism to both work and capital: It uses the (small) capital it accumulates for its own benefit, which relies on the exploitation of workers (as workers always participate in the accumulation of surplus beyond the recompense that they receive), while still having to work to save for investment. Most of my interlocutors have to deal with the issues described by Weiss, and a fear of falling combined with efforts towards achieving a better future are inherent traits of their lifestyles. What further complicates the middle-class status of my interlocutors is their experiences related to othering and racialisation, which add to the fear of falling; yet another aspect is bound up with the relations the women have to their transnational African kin. People with transnational families often face additional investment burdens besides investing in themselves and their children: They are often also involved in supporting other family or community members, if these are from

poorer economic countries. And due to the strong sense of responsibility that Weiss also describes as one of the political characteristics of being middle class, the financial burden carried by transnational family members to support others can be high.

One additional strategy that I want to add to the ideology of the middle classes is mobility and migration as investment for the future wellbeing of the family. Whether in the case of Caribbean middle-class families, who see migration to countries of the North as the main strategy for upward economic mobility (Amit 2007, Olwig 2007) or in the case of student mobility, where geographic mobility is engaged in to build a cosmopolitan vision of self, geographic mobility is a key aspect of social mobility around the world. In my work, I show how imaginations and practices of mobility are intertwined with plans for a better future by my middle-class research interlocutors, and how mobility plays in strategies of self-fulfilment while also being directed towards the future wellbeing of one's children.

In order to understand what it means for my participants come of age as people of African descent, it is important to grasp their relations to an African diasporic identity that is informed by a middle-class status in Germany (and Frankfurt in particular) and the way race/racialisation and class intermingle.

Racism can affect a middle-class German woman of African descent differently than a working-class African migrant man in Germany. Different stereotypes exist of 'African man' and 'African woman' and classism plays a part, especially because the net of relationships and access to im/material resources will differ for the affected person, as will mechanisms of agency.

Racialisation has a classist component in Germany. When people of non-European origin, especially from South Asian, African and Arab countries, are racialised, there are classist stereotypes inherent to the discrimination as well. For example, stereotypes some of the stereotypes of migrantised people include the image of the refugee who only came for social benefits and does not want to work or of a migrant woman who cannot integrate well and is not able or willing to learn the language or the culture of the country of destination (El-Tayeb 2016).

Since Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1991 study of how violence manifests itself in particular ways for Women of Colour in the USA, intersectional analysis has been widely used in feminist social studies. Intersectionality claims that socially constructed categories of difference are interrelated in their effect on a person. Categories such as race/ethnicity, class and gender cannot be analysed as single strands but must be understood as interrelated (Brah & Phoenix 2004).

Some social categories locate my participants in positions of relative privilege and others place them in situations of relative disadvantage, but they all come together in the same person. Because they are not white, the women I work with can find themselves the target of racist and sexist discrimination. Ranging from very subtle forms right up to physical abuse, all of this can have an effect on how they move, dress or behave in public and professional spaces. At the same time, their rel-

ative privilege in terms of socioeconomic status and nationality makes it possible to attenuate the negative consequences of racist or sexist discrimination and often put these experiences into the backgrounds of their lives (see Chapters 4 and 5), sometimes addressing them (being active in anti-racism networks, for example, or discussing racism in school with children's teachers) and sometimes ignoring them. It is this relation between privilege and disadvantage and how the women navigate these positions that informs my work (Adler 2019). In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, while following my interlocutors' journeys, I argue that travelling and meeting with transnational kin forces them to confront their own class and gender positions, which is particularly manifest in the arrangements they make for their personal safety during these travels. Throughout, I show how becoming aware of their privilege when they travel is a process my participants all engage with, as they come from and live in a wealthy European country. The contradictions in their class position is also evident in their transnational kin relations, which include global inequalities between North and South. Furthermore, their travels show how a new environment can be a ground for experiencing shifting social positions in terms of racialised identities, in the sense that their skin colour or African descent matters differently in different contexts for them and for others. Being and perceiving themselves as educated and middle class impacts on how the women in my study understand their position in society. The intellectual capital they have gained through their access to higher education affords them tools and social networks to deal with their racialised and sexualised subject position in Germany. When I use 'position' it is not meant as a stable position but as a location in a 'shifting field of forces' (Carrier & Kalb 2015, p. 15), a dynamic system.

The experience of growing up is also gendered. And there are certain potent stereotypes that my participants were confronted with because they were Black women – such as the stereotype of the exotic and sexually available woman. They also had to cope with the feeling of not matching typical European beauty standards (being white, blonde and blue-eyed) and with having their hair straightened while growing up. As adults, they were often able to transform these experiences to build renewed self-confidence as adult Afrodescendant women. This was helped by education and the availability of Black women's beauty blogs, which try to construct positive images and role-models for people of African descent.

The women in my research know that compared to other racialised people and groups in Germany, they are socially and economically privileged because they have German citizenship or access to higher education. And this is one reason why they also feel it is their duty to do something against racism and to be engaged in anti-racism networks actively. This awareness of social and economic privilege as a racialised person influences the people in my study in such a way that they feel a responsibility towards other not so privileged members to have to take up a leadership function and engage politically on different levels.

In chapters 3, 4 and 5, I present the cases of Aminata Camara, her friend Maya B., their acquaintance Lafia T. and Aminata's father Lamine Camara, arguing that their reflections and actions are influenced by their middle-class and highly educated status. This enabled Aminata to pursue a political role in Germany, just as her father Lamine Camara took on a political leadership function within the Guinean diaspora in Germany. It also affects Lafia's relationship with her Senegalese father and Maya's ability to build a Black identity as a child and teenager. In the American context, the sociologist Franklin Frazier saw the emergence and establishment of a Black middle class as the foundation for the coming of age of an independent and transformed Black community in the US. He analyses the emergence of a *Black Bourgeoisie* in the USA (1957) – a social group that was still subordinated by the logics of racism in the USA but nonetheless formed a middle class in terms of education and economic capital.

An identity movement based on one axis of identity can never be fully detached from other socially constructed categories. Identity movements based on ethnicity or race are also shaped by dimensions such as class or gender. For instance, a closer look into some African diaspora organisations I studied shows that Black and Afrodescendant organisations advocating for the rights of Black people and People of Colour also work with and formulate class critique. This might be less pronounced and less obvious than the intersection of racialisation and gender, but it is there nonetheless. Class consciousness plays a role in the development of both individual Black identities and group movements, as one goal of these is to attenuate a systemic non-representation or misrepresentation of People of Colour in the middle and upper classes of German society, and to criticise their overrepresentation in the working class. And although it is true that the explicit goals of such activists and movements often focus on anti-racism and anti-sexism, building solidarity between different occupations is also important. The Afro-German Graduate Network (ADAN *Afro-Deutsches Akademiker Netzwerk*), for example, offers professional support to people of African descent who want to pursue higher education but do not necessarily come from families with a history of higher education and professional careers and lack the social and cultural resources that could support them. Looking at another identity movement, anthropologist Luisa Steur (2015) considers the rise of Adivasi indigenous identity on the Indian subcontinent through the lens of class relations and sees a class dimension in the claim to Adivasi identity. She asks when, how and why people from a specific region in Kerala began to see themselves as Adivasi. Steur shows how claiming Adivasiness is a way to gain access to material resources (land) and political rights rather than a claim to an essentialised ethnic identity. Claiming an ethnic identity also has to be seen in relation to class.

Class location and consciousness matter in the individual lives of the women I follow. When did these women began to see themselves as Black or Afrodescendant and why? The 'when' takes on a double meaning: It refers to a certain moment in

the course of their lives but also, more generally, to more general developments in Germany and Europe when they grew up in the 1980s and 1990s. I shed light on that question by exploring the personal biographies of the women and analyse the emergence of intersections among class, racialisation, gender and generation in their lives in a specific time and place.

Kinship and diaspora

In addition to class, my thesis engages with questions of kinship and diaspora. The concept of kinship in diaspora communities is significant for my research in two different ways: It was important for the women in my study, both while growing up, when it defined their belonging to family and other communities, and when they travelled, for example to places of ancestral 'origin' – where 'origin' can relate not only to a geographical place but also to cultural and regional practices more broadly. At the same time, it also refers to the practice of engaging in Black (feminist) communities globally and building 'chosen families'.

My work demonstrates how important kinship is in the diasporic identity-making processes of the young women. It analyses how kinship and the tensions inherent in kinship relations inform identity constructions through time; how, for example, efforts of (re)connection with transnational African kin are related to a wish to develop African diasporic identification. It also shows how racialisation plays into kinship relations. The long-term and in-depth engagement with the lives of the five women reveals how experiences of racialisation can lead to phenomena such as rejection of the African part of one's family at one point in life, while, at another time, they can be at the centre of reconnection efforts that challenge racialisation by engaging with African transnational family constructively.

The intimate dimension of diaspora and kinship

The women in this study have dealt with their African origins in diverse ways throughout their lives. Often, their perceptions and practices of identification with their heritage underwent significant modification when they were teenagers and young adults, changing again when they began to have or plan families of their own. I trace the process of developing a diasporic identity by focusing on how Aminata, Maya and Lafia constructed a particular relationship to their African descent (Chapter 3), how that relationship shifted throughout their lives and how their experiences and life in Germany – and of being the first digital natives – informed their consciousness. Generation matters on two levels in my research: It reveals how people can understand themselves as part of a collective through shared experiences and references while growing up, in my case, people of African descent in Germany and Europe born around the 1980s and part of the generation of *Millennials*. And it helps in understanding kinship relations, that is, how members

of a same family deal differently with migration history and how belonging to a first, second or third generation in a family matters for processes of belonging or diasporic practice (Trémon 2019, Smith 2006). In my research, I focus on generation and racialisation in order to explain how diasporic identities are created and the diasporic practices of Germans of African descent evolve throughout their lives.

Taking an intergenerational perspective while focusing on Aminata and her father Lamine Camara in Chapter 4, I contend that besides all the differences between the trajectories and practices of father and daughter, Lamine Camara, who came to Germany with a student scholarship in the 1970s from Guinea, and Aminata, born in Frankfurt in the 1980s, both practise *centred* and *decentred* visions of diaspora, the former directed to Guinean or West African politics and culture, while the latter works transversally with a more hybrid and deterritorialised concept of diaspora. It is precisely the fact that the link to the country of origin has been weakened through migration for subsequent generations that this possibility of a decentred diasporic practice arises. It is a practice that can relate to different countries and regions. In the cases I study, the diasporic practices extend to various African countries but also to African diasporas in Europe. I approach the concept of diaspora ethnographically by focusing on how it is practised by individuals in their everyday lives; practices that can be directed both towards a place of (ancestral) origin, whether imagined or real, but also towards relations and activities in multiple places and for diverse cultural and political purposes. In my cases, these diasporic practices encompass practices of travelling, of caring and of storytelling.

When studying diasporas or diasporic practices, sociologist Rogers Brubaker (2005) claims that it is only when the identification with a diasporic homeland persists for more than one generation that it becomes sociologically persistent and thus appropriate for us to speak of a diaspora.

The connection of kinship, family and coming of age in international migration contexts has become important in anthropology through the emergence since the 1980s of transnational and globalisation studies, with important scholars like Nina Glick Schiller, Karen Fog Olwig or Robert Smith. In France, sociologists such as Abdelmalek Sayad began studying similar things as early as the late 1970s. Diasporic practices and feelings depend a lot on the individual person and how they wish to think about the place framed as their origin or the transnational practices in their life and their wishes to transmit these to children or grandchildren. If parents have a strong desire to keep alive the attachment to a place of origin, then the feeling and practice of transnational attachment can remain strong into the third generation of descendants and beyond (Smith 2006).

Khachig Tölölyan (1996) stresses that a person does not simply belong to a diaspora but that they have to practise that belonging actively. My approach to diaspora is that it is a set of political and cultural relations and practices that must be seen as a constantly active process in the lives of people and their institutions and which can

be *centred* (in relation to a place of 'origin') as well as *decentred* (consisting of relations in their country of residence and/or other places). Diaspora has been studied from three different angles. It has long been studied as a bounded entity and community to which a certain set of predefined criteria apply, such as a shared experience of forced exile and a strong reference and relations with a place of origin – often a place to which it is difficult or even impossible to return (Safran 1991, Tölölyan 1996). William Safran tries to define whether one can speak of a community as diaspora and analyses different communities using predefined criteria which he takes from theories of the Jewish diaspora – the most important being the relation to a (mythical) homeland. He never starts from individuals and how they perceive or practice diaspora, but always remains on the level of community. I chose to use the opposite approach by starting not with the community but with the individual and how s/he practices diasporic identification.

Scholars from the field of cultural studies in particular have contested the inflexible vision of diaspora and countered it with a decentred and multi-polar conception, focusing on its hybrid and diffuse character. Instead of focusing on the reference to a specific place of origin, they have explored, for example, the construction of diaspora stemming from shared experiences of displaced/mobile people in a country of residence (Clifford 1994, Gilroy 1993, Hall 1990). By tracing how understandings of diaspora shifted from essentialist and nationalist visions from the end of the nineteenth century (Black Nationalism and Zionism) to anti-essentialist visions of diaspora as fluid and hybrid identities in the 1990s that speak of multiple centres of belonging or attachment, Clifford (1994) posits diaspora to be a constant dialogue and development between people and places that cannot be reduced to the term's etymological meaning of 'scattered'.

In my approach, centred and decentred practices of diaspora and hybrid and essentialist visions of diaspora are not mutually exclusive – they all come together in the practices of people, which vary in time and space and from person to person (see more below). This approach corresponds with the third phase of diaspora studies, which starts from a more constructivist point of view, understands diaspora as a set of relations and practices to be explored and calls for a focus on 'diasporic relations', feelings and perceptions with an intergenerational perspective (Brubaker 2005, Bidet and Wagner 2012, Trémon 2019).[18] The anthropologist Anne-Christine Trémon, for instance, follows the diasporic relations of people of Chinese descent in Tahiti down to the fifth generation. Trémon (2017) advances the argument that through the rupture/distanciation of China as a homeland for subsequent generations of descendants of migrants a shift of transnational practices occurs:

---

18   For a thorough discussion of the evolution of the concept of diaspora, see, for example, Calafat and Goldblum (2012).

Transnationalism based on migration (attachment to a homeland) becomes a diasporic transnationalism focused on new countries of destination. This approach is able to accommodate the *centred* and *decentred* conception of diaspora in its practical dimension.

Intergenerational relations with kin and diverse processes of 'doing kinship' or 'doing family' are crucial for the processes of coming of age and the diasporic practices of my participants. I argue that in their processes of creating diasporic identities for themselves, kinship holds a crucial place. I show that making kinship is a lifelong process and the wish to do, or indeed undo, kinship can come up at different stages. In the lives of the women I work with, this is particularly presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, where I analyse the 'diasporic travels' of Maya B., Lafia T. and Aminata Camara. The women travel to visit kin in Senegal, Ghana and Sierra Leone where they are confronted with different conceptions of who should give and receive (what) care and who can be trusted as 'family'. To some extent Maya, Lafia and Aminata also experience and have to cope with a 'status paradox' (Nieswand 2012, Simoni & Voirol 2020) within the extended family: being from a rich European country, they face certain expectations from their African family members. They also create expectations towards themselves based on a moral obligation to support their family members. Family relations are not detached from social and economic conditions. Societal problems, gender imbalances, racism, classism are part and parcel of making, practising and negotiating kinship, too. On this note, Kath Weston, researching lesbian and gay family making, points to an important issue to consider:

> Don't make the mistake, though, of thinking that because lesbians and gay men now claim chosen families, these are freely chosen families. There are constraints on any choice. Color, access to money, and social connections leave some people more constrained than others. (1997, p. xv)

Even the 'families we choose', as Weston reminds us, are not chosen without constraint. The motivation to travel to regions of ancestral origins is considerably influenced by the wish to create and experience transnational kinship. By making kin transnationally, these women can actively establish new relations that make their African descent a part of their lives. But this experience also reveals that forging kinship is difficult, especially when it includes people of different national origins and social and economic backgrounds. When it comes to the diasporic identity processes of the women, rupture and tension in kinship relations are as crucial as connections and resemblances. Anne-Christine Trémon (2022) develops Marshall Sahlins' concept of 'mutuality of being' (2011a, 2011b) for analysing the challenges of making diasporic kinship. Sahlins uses 'mutuality of being' and 'mutuality of existence' as synonyms in explaining kinship. Trémon makes a distinction between mutuality of being and mutuality of existence: Mutuality of being refers to having a common

ancestor, sharing a lineage, but without being close kin. By contrast, mutuality of existence refers to close kin who share a certain everyday life together; they are included in each other's lives. The women in my research were usually in a mutuality of being with their diasporic kin and their travels were motivated by the wish to create closer kinship ties. But meetings with kin also revealed the limits of doing kinship and creating a sense of belonging between distant kin.

Through the diasporic travels of the three women, I demonstrate that a crucial part of the desire to (re)connect or not with a region of ancestral origin is to do with relations with parents. In these cases, that means fathers. Just as relationships with parents go through different stages, so do relations to the ancestral place of origin. They are inextricably interconnected. I contend that although all my subjects were visiting their place of 'ancestral origin' as adult women for the first time, they were not perceived as strangers or tourists, nor did they perceive themselves as that. Instead, they were able, even if only for a short time, to be integrated into wider kinship circles and experience 'family' and their position in it, though their socioeconomic status meant they could also occasionally enjoy the privileges of being tourists, too. Many studies on diasporic or roots travel still underline that these travellers often feel like strangers in the places they have defined as their origins.

In studies of both traditional roots travel (Kim 2010, Louie 2004) and visits by the second generation to the villages of their parents (Bidet & Wagner 2012), there is often a focus on alterity. My analysis adds to these findings. My participants share a strong determination to become part of the community in their places of origin. Although they also consider themselves to be strangers and sometimes do not even know the kin they are visiting, they also want to feel part of the ancestral communities for political and personal reasons and put a lot of effort into that undertaking. In the travel narratives, I examine the social and cultural tensions experienced by my research participants when they travel to visit kin. I argue that these include class but also gender negotiation processes, which often take place within these wider kinship circles and are negotiated over the aspect of 'care'. I draw particular attention to the role of care in making kinship and creating a mutual existence in my work.

In the cases of the women I follow, the wish or need to get to know 'their roots' – in other words, the birth country of their parent – was often suggested to them by other people. It was often an external motivator or a chain of events that ended up turning that wish to explore 'origins' into a personal one. Interested in the role that kinship plays in the construction of self and personhood, Signe Howell explores the process of making or creating kinship in transnational adoption settings, which she refers to as 'kinning' and 'kinned subjectivation'. I take Howell's concept of 'kinning' as a starting point to explore how kinship is made by establishing mutual relations through care and continuity and the importance of kinship for diasporic identity processes:

> By kinning, I mean the process by which a foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom. [...] Through being kinned, the adoptees qualify their personhood through their relations to others. (Howell 2003, p. 465ff)

Since the 1990s, partly due to developments in reproductive technology and an increased interest in (transnational) adoption, there has been a resurgence of kinship studies and anthropologists are increasingly using a relational perspective to explore kinship, personhood and gender. Under this approach, kinship relations are analysed as fundamental to processes of subject formation (Carsten 2004, Faubion 2001, Howell 2003). As James Faubion describes in the introduction to the edited volume *The Ethics of Kinship* (2001), studies about kinship have moved on from 'the semantics to the pragmatics': The practicalities of making family have shifted to the foreground:

> People 'fudge' – quite often with the blithe complicity of those around them. They make kin; they change kin; they forge and consecrate alliances, of greatly diverse sorts, in the very vocabulary of filiation and descent. (2001, p. 1)

Many scholars now agree that caring and nurturing or the idea of sharing an existence (Sahlins 2011a, 2011b) are constitutive of close kinship or family relations.

Though kinship was at the core of the discipline of Anthropology until the mid-twentieth century, it was increasingly criticised by post-structural and feminist scholarship starting in the 1970s (Schneider 1984, Collier &Yanagisako 1987). But it was also feminist anthropologists who increasingly turned to kinship studies in order to understand the positions and roles of women in different societies, reframing and restudying many former kinship topics, such as the family, the household, the division of labour, sex, marriage and procreation (Ortner 1972, Moore 1994). Feminist scholars used Schneider's critique of kinship because it 'illuminated biology as a native cultural system in the West' (Carsten 2004, p. 59).

Adding to Carsten's analysis of what made kinship fashionable again, I would argue that she omits mention of the importance of transnationalism and migration scholarship in anthropology, which also fostered a new interest in changing kinship systems in a globalised and mobile world. Studies of transnational families have focused on how kinship is made/created for people in the diaspora and between diasporas and places of origin. That revision of kinship studies has increasingly led to considering it more *as a practice*, with a focus on building relations.

An aspect that has seldom been explored in kinship studies is the role of race/racialisation in kinship-making processes. I explore the role that (shared)

experiences of being racialised plays in genealogical understandings of kinship but also in defining 'chosen families' (Weston 1993).

The community dimension of kinship and the Black diaspora

Kinship also has a political dimension. For instance, for two Black feminist activists considered in this study, Oxana Chi and Layla Zami (Chapter 10), kinship is constructed on two levels: at the level of community, in the building of solidarity networks of Black and feminist 'sisters' and through the practice of working together towards common goals embodying the mantra of 'the personal is political and the political is personal'; and privately as a queer couple who love and support each other in everything and are willing to share their life publicly, online and in their work collaborations.

Going beyond genealogy, I explore the idea of 'chosen family' as put forward by Kath Weston in her work on lesbian and gay family practices (1997) and apply it to the making of Black political networks – and how sharing one's life story can contribute to the feeling of finding a chosen family: 'sisters' and 'brothers' who share the same fate of being affected by racism. Drawing from the intimate and professional lives and life stories of Oxana Chi (dancer and choreographer) and Layla Zami (Performance Studies scholar), I contend in Chapters 9 and 10 that the act of life storytelling – whether during day-to-day conversations or as speakers and performers at public events – is a way to construct a sense of self as part of a global community of Afro-feminist activists. Personal stories become a tool for political agency, a way to transform private into public meaning and to construct community and Black feminist sisterhood.

Chosen kinship captures the nature of the relationships in Black and feminist communities: It is not necessarily friendship (though very often it is), but characters come together who might be very different. They identify with each other due to specific experiences of marginalisation in society. In the case of Black women, they share a subject position that forces them to deal with racism and sexism constantly in their everyday lives. And this common experience informs their sisterhood. They stand together in solidarity in their fight against racism and meet occasionally at community events. The kinship structure is meant to formalise an informal relationship, saying: Even if we do not agree on other things, we stand together when it comes to fighting racism and sexism and to celebrate African-ness and Blackness. Of course, friendships often co-occur with sisterhood, and then it goes beyond simple friendship, because there is also the common identification as Afrodescendant and a consciousness of facing many of the same challenges in society. In Black women's movements, the ties can run from very deep to fairly loose – the deep ones are always also connected to long-term friendships and the looser ones are acquaintances, e.g. among people who only meet at political events. Kinship is practised and performed in Black feminist communities today by means such as digital networking, engaging

in shared political activities and by creating safe spaces for each other. In the Black queer community associated with the Ballroom culture of the 1970s, chosen families are essential for creating spaces where people can be free from discrimination and marginalisation. 'Houses' and 'families' are usually created among long-time friends who are part of a Black queer or trans community in order to give mutual support, offer shelter and protect each other from physical and psychological harm (Bailey 2014).

When it comes to the chosen family form of sisterhoods (sisterhoods that go beyond blood ties) there are many diverse cultural examples. No clear root can be identified; sisterhoods exist in one form or another everywhere around the globe. But in many examples, sisterhoods were created first to protect women from discrimination and physical danger, and this is also the case for Black feminist collectives. The historian Emily Honig (1985) studied communities of women workers in the Shanghai cotton mills from 1919 to 1949 and found that sisterhoods were created to protect women workers from getting robbed or raped by gangsters on their way home. Tight knots of solidarity and mutual aid formed in response.

Sisterhood has been highly politicised since the 1960s and 1970s, and its emphasis on horizontal relations among equals has been stressed. In those decades, a politics of sisterhood was created through the feminist and Black and Civil Rights movement in the USA (Lorde 2012). In this context, it traces its roots to African American traditions where, since slavery, Black people would refer to each other as 'sister' and 'brother' in church and elsewhere to state their connectedness and mutual respect (Hewitt 1988, Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). Kinship thus also informs a political dimension of Afrodiasporic identity.

This study traces identification practices of a global Black and African diaspora. African diaspora has been thoroughly examined from a cultural studies or historical perspective, but there has been little engaging in ethnographic research and the meanings of the diaspora for people themselves. My contribution is thus to add an ethnographic point of view which focuses on how diaspora is practised and understood in human lives. I analyse practices of travelling to London or Paris but also journeys to African countries of origin to understand how Afrodiasporic identities are created and developed. And I focus on the transnational practices of Black activists.

In Germany it was not until the 1980s and the emergence of mostly feminist Afro-German movements (Chapter 9) that the term '*Schwarz*' (Black) began to circulate widely among Afrodescendant people. For the construction of a Black German identity and community, transnational exchanges and the spread of cultural models from one place to another are essential: from Black music to African American and feminist activist practices (e.g. life storytelling, anti-racist activism), these have all been aspects that helped in the construction of identities for the interlocutors of

this thesis and are crucial for understanding Black German political movements as transnational.

Oxana and Layla connect to Blackness and African diaspora in movement. They are transnationally very mobile, live between New York and Berlin and travel to various international events and conferences worldwide, always with a focus on Black and feminist events and with the wish to connect to the global African diaspora and to Black and feminist activists. Mobility also plays a key role in Oxana's profession. As a dancer and activist, she chooses to narrate the lives of Black and marginalised female historical figures through her dance performances, accompanied by her partner Layla. The practice of mobility in time and place, moving their bodies as well as moving transnationally, is vital to Oxana and Layla's African diasporic identity – through their work and travel they connect to a global Black community. But their identification with Blackness is neither totally hybrid nor is it totally detached from place. Growing up in Germany, Oxana was greatly influenced by the Afro-German movement of the 1980s and began to identify as Afro-German because of books like *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (1986), while also starting to identify as Black through American influences. Growing up in Berlin and Paris, Layla also became acquainted with the Afro-German movement and with Black German activist May Ayim. So, these women practise hybrid as well as emplaced Afrodiasporic identity (Chapters 9 and 10).

Cultural theorist Paul Gilroy (1993) shows how Pan-African ideals – a political concept based on the idea of the unity of all people of African descent as a strategy to fight racist and colonial systems of oppression – formed by African American and Caribbean intellectuals circulated in place and time between Africa, America and Europe. Gilroy explains how important it is to focus on historical and national particularities in the development of African diaspora cultures and the concept of race and race relations but also on how these particularities have travelled and influenced other parts of the world. Human mobility for Gilroy remains the most important factor in the creation of a diaspora consciousness. Gilroy underlines the potential of transformation through travel, the potential to overcome socially and culturally constructed categories of race by getting to know other national contexts and traditions. But his analysis is more nuanced than simply stating these facts. For instance, he acknowledges that travel (to both Europe and Africa) made many African American travellers realise how attached they were to the category of national belonging, how travelling helped them grasp that they are American and are also seen and perceived as such in other countries. In this way, a feeling that they were often denied in the USA was able to develop elsewhere.

Gordon and Anderson, on the other hand, in their paper 'The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification' (1999), stress how much place matters in the development of African diaspora consciousness and practice. In doing so they also criticise the then prominent position of 'hybridity' for how it con-

ceptualised diaspora, which decentred the notion of communities as territorial and bounded and instead focused on the diffuse and multi-centred character of identity (Hall 1990). These authors call upon anthropologists to study the conditions (local, national, historical) under which a person comes to identify as 'Black' as well as to identify with a global Black or African diaspora in different places. Gordon and Anderson also proposed that Blackness was not only a racial identity commonly ascribed to people with African origins but that the cultural dimension was just as important:

> It became conceptualised not simply as a racial entity but as a cultural community dynamically uniting Africa and its communities in displacement through commonalities of African cultural practice and worldview. (Gordon and Anderson 1999, p. 285)

It is this practical element, people practising a cultural and political identification/affiliation, that creates African diaspora and Blackness.

Both Gordon and Anderson (1999) and Gilroy (1993) dismiss an ontological essentialism according to which African-ness is seen as a fixed and bounded identity shared by all people of African descent; but they also reject an anti-essentialist claim, advancing instead a hybrid notion of diaspora. In order to include both the practices and imaginaries of African diaspora, Gordon and Anderson (1999) call for ethnographic investigation focusing on how individuals and groups participate in diaspora communities. Through my own ethnographic approach, it becomes possible to engage with both hybrid and essentialist understandings of diaspora as these are practised by people. The same person can use hybrid as well as essentialist visions of doing diasporic identity. Essentialist practices of doing diaspora, such as underlining one's African-ness through speech or dress, can serve specific objectives such as connecting to a community (family, political network, friendship circle, generational peers) or underlining a self-identification which has become important in that particular moment. That does not prevent diasporic identity from being understood or practised in a hybrid manner by the women in this research. A reference to shared African-ness with others accounts for both resemblance and difference; according to context and situation, one or the other will be in the foreground. Cultural differences can be celebrated while still pointing out a shared identification as Black. Pointing to differences within Blackness – differences relating to nationality, ethnicity, gender or class, for example – can serve specific political objectives – for example in deconstructing racism that is based on homogenising practices.

Outline of chapters

My ethnography analyses the process of coming of age as person of African descent in Germany, and in particular of women who are part of the second generation born in the 1980s, children of (an) African migrant parent(s). It analyses their practices of identifying with a global Black diaspora and, on an intimate level, their practices of making kinship. Each chapter describes different aspects in the process of becoming an adult and shows the importance of time, place and socioeconomic background in the development of political identities or the role of travel in defining the 'origins' of the five women, who will be introduced in detail over the course of this book. The research includes different spatial scales to analyse diverse articulations of diasporic identities: The national and the local level are at the centre in Part I. How does the national and the local (city/region) context contribute to the development of particular Afrodiasporic practices? In Part II, which focuses on travelling to 'origins', diasporic practice is analysed in its transnational context, focusing on family relations between countries. Part III then looks at Afrodiasporic practice in its global articulations by focusing on political activism and the career of two globetrotting Afro-German activist-artists.

In Part I (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), I explore the African diaspora historically and ethnographically down the generations in Germany. I discuss 'The history of African diaspora in Germany' in Chapter 2, considering how African migration and, with it, African diaspora organisations emerged – from colonialism down to the present day. I focus on the history of political organisation and the emergence of Afrodiasporic political communities from the end of the nineteenth to the twenty-first century and analyse the importance that American influences after World War II had on the formation of Afro-German organisations starting in the 1980s. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I examine ethnographically the importance of inter- and intragenerational relations in the process of coming of age as a person of African descent in Germany. I consider the lives of Aminata Camara, her friend Maya B. and Lafia T. in Chapter 3 'Growing up in Frankfurt'. It explores their experiences of dancing and dating while diving into the American GI club scene that still existed then in and around Frankfurt, and how these experiences were crucial in enabling Aminata and Maya to form their first identifications with a Black community as teenagers and young women. Then comes the story of Lafia T., who grew up in Frankfurt around the same time as Aminata and Maya but frequented different places and spaces in the city. For Lafia the process of identifying with her Senegalese origins was handled differently than for Aminata with her Guinean origins or Maya with her Sierra Leonean roots. Chapter 4, 'Family affairs', follows Aminata's process of identifying as a 'Black' adult woman, outlines the importance of the digital world in the process and shows us what identifying as Black German woman means and entails in practice. In this chapter, we are also introduced to Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, who does not

identify as Black but as Guinean with a German passport. The comparison of the political trajectories of father and daughter give ample example about *centred* and *decentred* diasporic practices. Chapter 5, 'Racism and its intersection with class and gender', looks at how Aminata and her father perceive and live with racism/racialisation and being 'migrantised'. It deals with their experiences with and strategies against racism and racialisation, and their hopes and fears for their children and grandchildren.

Part II (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) follows the travels of my interlocutors and considers how the practice of travelling is used to connect to transnational family and to an Afrodiasporic heritage through lived experience. I examine how the women of this study use their travel experiences to connect with a (sometimes unknown) family history and how the experience fuels their self-perceptions as Germans of African descent. Practices of caring for themselves and others are crucial in becoming part of their transnational or chosen families. Their travels and stays in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal become an opportunity to experience, explore and practise cultural skills and aspects of their selves that are often in the background of their lives in Germany, where they are to various degrees involved (or not) in West African communities. In Chapter 6 we follow Maya as she travels first within Europe to connect to larger Afroeuropean communities and later to Nigeria, where she travelled on a work placement and to experience life in a West African country. Chapter 7 is about Lafia's first trip to Senegal. It deals with her growing interest in getting to know her Senegalese heritage and examines her and her kin's efforts to build mutual relations. In Chapter 8, Aminata travels to Ghana with her husband, children and stepfather. They visit her husband's mother and extended kin and seek to initiate their children into their West African heritage. Negotiating care arrangements (for children and older parents) is a crucial part of this travel.

Chapters 9 and 10 form the last part of this study, and there I turn from the personal kinship network back to the political collective and present two more women. It is through Oxana Chi and Layla Zami that I explore the world of Afro-German and feminist activism. What I aim at showing in Chapter 9 'Life storytelling as Black and feminist political practice' and 10 'Oxana & Layla's travelling life stories: Connecting to global Blackness in mobility' is that life storytelling and sharing is a crucial part of making a Black activist self and forging Black political community on a global level and is a practice rooted in a long and varied history of resistance.

Another important aspect of building a Black community is mobility, which I explore through the transnational and motile lives of the activist couple. Furthermore, by making the last part about life stories and activism, I connect the end of this thesis to its beginning, where I start with the tale of Tiffany López Ganet, a young Black Spanish researcher who narrated her life in a panel at the Afroeuropeans conference in Portugal in 2019, the conference where I both started my fieldwork in 2017 and ended it in summer 2019.

The overall conclusion brings together the central arguments of each chapter and attempts to see how far kinship relations and middle classness are constitutive for the makings of Afrodiasporic identities of the millennial women in this research.