Conclusion to Part II

Being read or reading oneself as a hybrid or diasporic subject can be an uncomfortable in-between sort of location that people do not wish to inhabit, as Eleana Kim reminds us in her research on Korean transnational adoptees (2010). But it does not have to be that way. Today, as adults, the women I work with largely do not have a problem defining themselves as both German and West African. For them it is not an 'in-betweenness' or a 'neither here nor there'.

Territorially they are more attached and connected to Germany as the country they have been socialised in and where they have most of their social networks, but they nonetheless attribute an importance to their West African heritage in terms of cultural identity and everyday practices and experience. Thus, they embrace this diasporic identity to varying degrees. They come from an urban middle-class milieu where being from different cultural backgrounds is celebrated more than stigmatised. That position in society also gives them a certain economic and cultural capital. They are able to travel and are accepted as travellers/tourists everywhere with their German passports. Although African-ness is racialised in Germany, these women grew up in circles where it was marked as positive – although sometimes with a negative cast in the sense of being exoticised. They still have to live with discrimination, but they grew up knowing that it is a structural problem in society and not theirs. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explore the different shapes that diasporic travels can take in the process of coming of age for the Afrodescendant women in this research.

Travelling to the country of one's ancestors or parents is a way to acquire or practise cultural competences. It is an important step towards embodying a diasporic identity through lived experience and practices in the places associated with one's African origins. The opportunity to live a normality that is not available to them in Germany is something that Maya, Lafia and Aminata look forward to when travelling to West Africa. The chance to go to any hairdresser, to eat West African food, listen to loud music in the street or in the backyard, get clothes made out of wax fabrics, learning some words of the local language, seeing a majority of dark-skinned instead of light-skinned people – these are all things restricted to private spaces in Frankfurt but which are part of everyday public life in Accra or Dakar. Jennifer Bidet and Lauren Wagner (2012) state that whereas the idea of returning to the place of ori-

gin is something that persists among primomigrants, the wish of reconnecting with a country/place of parental origin becomes less for the next generations of descendants and seldom goes beyond spending a holiday there. My research subjects do not fit completely with this paradigm, because they often have only one parent who migrated and this parent did not return to his/her country of origin every year, it was more sporadic; they stayed connected but not necessarily through regular travel. In this regard, the parents' generation differs from people who came to Europe as working-class labour migrants and stayed connected to their co-ethnics or nationals in the country of destination and who were thus far more closely linked to their country of origin. And yet, the desire to travel or live for an extended period in the country of parental origin, which my interlocutors only know from holidays or even sometimes not since childhood, is a relatively prominent theme for the women in my research. This is not because they think they would belong there more than in Germany, but because they feel that spending a while in the country where their parent/s grew up would represent a double gain: Living there can bring them closer to the parent in terms of understanding the cultural context s/he was socialised in and getting to know extended kin, while at the same time building a personal relationship to the territory that has remained largely foreign in their life so far.

The wish to define one's origins beyond family ties, to create a unique connection based more on personal tastes and habits is foregrounded in the travels of Lafia, Maya and Aminata – although it is not an either/or in their cases. They are very interested in getting acquainted with family and places of parental origin, but they also want to get to know the country on their own terms, also exploring it as tourists. This has been easy for Lafia, who travelled to Senegal with her husband, but almost impossible for Aminata, who travelled with her children and husband to Ghana. For Maya the situation is somewhere in between, because she went to Accra for work.

Diasporic travel and kinship

Mutuality of being in the sense used by Trémon when referring to diasporic kinship without close everyday ties is important to all three women: Maya, Aminata and Lafia. Knowing that one has family members in Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea and Ghana makes being of African descent in Germany more real, more palpable. Yet the mutuality of existence – in the sense of creating close kinship relations – is more difficult to achieve as it is characterised by institutional barriers, social, economic and cultural differences as well as diverse expectations.

In the three chapters comprising Part II, Lafia's example is the one that comes closest to classic roots travel – a person's first ever journey to the place they associate with their origins (ethnic or religious). Lafia had never been to Senegal before, but for many years had built up the travel project as an existential quest. The trip

was a chance for her to renegotiate her relationship with her father and with that her origins in Senegal. Her link to Senegal had played no role in her everyday life in Germany. By comparison, Maya and Aminata had already had opportunities to build their Sierra Leonean and Guinean heritage into their understandings of self.

For Lafia, many things were new in Senegal, especially meeting her Senegalese kin; So the basis for potentially creating a mutuality of existence with her Senegalese family was created by means of her travel. While Maya and Aminata's trips to Nigeria and Ghana were a way to practise and re-encounter the West African culture they had known from their fathers and family, Lafia's journey to Senegal was a means to familiarise herself with a way of life she had not known so far. And as it was her first time there, she got to know the family but was not included in decision-making processes in the way Aminata and Maya are on account of their ongoing transnational kin relations. Indeed, Aminata and her husband are included in a network of family obligations and must contribute to the wellbeing of Albert's family in Ghana. Lafia, on the other hand, could include more tourist elements in her travels, though part of its rationale was also about meeting kin. Lafia's trip to Senegal a few years ago opened up possibilities to create kinship ties; how that will continue is open ended. In the cases of Aminata's Ghanaian in-laws and Maya's family in Sierra Leone, they built continuous links sustained through ongoing communication and occasional visits (although travel could be difficult for financial or security reasons). Kinship ties are created through an everyday practice of transnational family communication. For both women, travelling to West Africa – Aminata for a family holiday and Maya for a work placement – was also diasporic travel that they had long anticipated. For Maya, living in a West African country, if not Sierra Leone then another close by, had been a wish of hers for many years, and she conceived of it as a way to live up to the person she wanted to be – someone who knows about her African origins and understands the reality of life in an African country. For her and her husband, Nigeria was the best of both worlds: They were able to find good jobs and retain the comforts and safety they were used to in Germany, while also being able to get to know a West African way of life. For all three, travelling to West Africa was also a reality check in which imagination and expectations met the complexity of reality.

How class travels: experiencing a 'status paradox'

Becoming aware of one's privilege when travelling is a process my participants have all had to cope with, given that they all come from a wealthy European country. Yet they have also had to deal with how a new environment can be the ground for experiencing shifting social positions in terms of racial identity, for instance. Maya B., Aminata Camara and Lafia T. see their socioeconomic situation in global terms, acknowledging that compared to other countries – such as the countries of origin of

their parents or partners – they are wealthy and considered as such by their transnational kin.

Nieswand (2012) argues that transnational migrants, especially those who migrate from countries of the Global South to the North, have multiple and incongruent class positions in the different nation-states where they live. The social and cultural tensions experienced by my research participants when they travel to visit kin include class negotiation processes which often take place within wider kinship circles. The need to give presents and gifts of money and the expectation that they will help extended kin come to Germany is something Aminata, and to a lesser extent also Maya, confronted in Ghana or Sierra Leone on a regular basis. Aminata knows that although she is not at all wealthy in German terms, she is by Ghanaian standards or in the context of her family there.

Practising cultural skills during diasporic travels

Nonetheless, these journeys do offer Maya, Lafia and Aminata an opportunity to experience, explore and practise parts of themselves differently. For all three of my interlocutors, this aspect of their travel was the most rewarding – getting to know another way of life with new food and everyday rituals which bring them closer to their self-image and their personal African heritages. Through their travels, Lafia, Maya and Aminata became connected to lived reality in Senegal, Nigeria and Ghana, allowing them to see and feel how their families and people in general live in these countries. Today they try to bring some of that experience back to life in Frankfurt by cooking Ghanaian or Senegalese dishes, listening to music or wearing the clothes they got themselves tailored – or simply by remembering a certain mood. The material and immaterial souvenirs they brought back are what tourism scholars Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard describe as 'signs of self', 'objects of memory' and 'objects of transition and trajectory' (2005). They underline an aspect of these individuals' self-fashioning, reminding Lafia, Maya and Aminata that they have been there and of the possibility of bringing new meaning to their lives in Frankfurt.

So far, through their stories and travels, we have followed Aminata, her father and two other friends from Frankfurt, Maya and Lafia, in their coming-of-age processes as people of African descent in Germany. In the final part of the thesis, we will turn to another topic and deal in depth with the world of Black German activism and the role of life storytelling as community-building practice. We will meet two new individuals: Oxana and Layla, a couple engaged in Black and feminist activism. Travelling is also important as a diasporic practice in their lives, but with a focus on connecting to Black and feminist activists globally.