

5. Methodical Careful-Mess

Within black studies and anticolonial studies, one can observe an ongoing method of gathering multifariously textured tales, narratives, fictions, whispers, songs, grooves. [...] In assembling ideas that are seemingly disconnected and uneven [...], the logic of knowing-to-prove is unsustainable because incongruity appears to be offering atypical thinking. Yet curiosity thrives. (Katherine McKittrick 2021: 4)

In *Dear Science and Other Stories*, Katherine McKittrick (2021) proposes that the form of the colonial academic scheme is too narrow to allow writing about 'blackness'. I would like to take McKittrick's argument beyond the context of 'blackness' and argue that it also applies to writing about childhood and even more so for black childhoods. With the methods of gathering I used to re-figure children's spatial relations, I tried to create situations in which the speakers could be part of the practice of gathering she describes. Through the biographical narrations and maps, I sent them on a journey through their memory, a journey on which they share 'multifariously textured tales, narratives, fictions, whispers, songs, grooves [of childhood]' (McKittrick 2021: 4). The narrative and open character of the methods I describe have given them a space to participate actively while shaping and altering the entire research project individually and collectively. My main work was to listen and bear moments of silence until the string was picked up again and a figure that continued their narrations appeared. Furthermore, my part in the gathering involved 'assembling ideas that are seemingly disconnected and uneven' (McKittrick 2021: 4).

In this chapter (5), I elaborate on the practice of assembling under the premise 'methodical careful-mess'. This search seeks to determine the focus of academic knowledge by setting a broad scope to allow relevant topics to emerge from the 'bottom up'. In my case, it was to address a group to share their (hi)stories and, by doing so, give insight into places and spaces that were important during their childhoods. Part III began by considering the topic of position(ality) and the problem of asymmetrical power constellations within the research process. In the following, I continue to work with the question of *how* in the sense of: *How did I, as a researcher, create situations with my methodological choices that contextualised the speaker's speech?* As mentioned earlier, I was exposed to 'the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life' (Katz 2001a: 710), additionally at biographical depth. My findings were therefore messy and deep too. With this amount of courage to-

wards the mess, I follow thinkers that criticise when the function of methods is to produce data in which the world looks clear, comparable, and coherent and hence must not be considered as part of the process of constituting the world as such (Law 2004). John Law reconsidered his 2004 book *After Method* in 2021, concluding that ‘messy’ was still a good term to describe the originality, heterogeneity, and complexity of the material that originates from research practice but was unfortunately too often equated with ‘sloppy’, so he proposed ‘care-ful research’ instead (Law 2021: 2). To him, ‘care-ful’ works as an umbrella term for undirected reading, which is reading that is not primarily instrumental, and slow research, which means refusing ‘to engage in the means-ends productivist logic of quick research and quick publication’ (ibid. 2021: 3). In addition, he advises the researcher to, ‘think more about the practicalities of holding open differences and awkwardnesses and tensions within research rather than glossing and smoothing them over’ (ibid.: 3).

This carefulness and messiness have spoken much to me, as during the process of writing this book I had extended periods of questioning why I was reducing the beautiful mess into structured writing. With the term ‘methodical careful-mess’, I would like to combine carefulness and messiness. To get to the ‘fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life’, I must address the subjects of my research in a way that initiates but does not pre-structure their narration, that invites the speakers into a topic or discourse but does not direct the plot of the narrations. In the following, I introduce these methods and elaborate on how they relate to each other, my material and findings, and the premises of the spatial and processual theoretical basis I developed in Chapter 3.

5.1 Biographical Topo-Storytelling and -Mapping

In this chapter, I provide a concise overview of my methodological approach. With the framing of ‘biographical topo-storytelling and -mapping’, I bring together two methodological and theoretical traditions. The first draws from the established sociological tradition of biographical research, particularly approaches that recognise the significant role of broader discourses in shaping how people construct and narrate their life stories (Dausien et al., 2005; Spies 2009; Sommer 2018). These approaches understand biography not just as a sequence of life events but as a narrative process influenced by collective meanings and social structures. As I already elaborated, it was the (hi)stories of the speakers who shared their childhood experiences and memories with me that made me realise that they are not only evidence for the classed figuration of childhoods but that they are also co-telling the history of childhoods in the Anthropocene. Therefore, the second component of my methodical approach builds on the concept of telling ‘geostories’ rather than histories, as introduced by Bruno Latour (2013: 5). This idea proposes a shift from purely human-centred accounts to ones that also attend to the Earth and spatial relationships, emphasising the embeddedness of human lives in ecological and geographical contexts. In integrating these two perspectives, ‘biographical topo-storytelling and -mapping’ offers a way to explore how individual experiences are narrated through space and shaped by both personal memory and collective discourse and its materialisations – where, for example, discourses of risk materialise in security infrastructures and archi-

teatures and become part of children's spatial relations. Geostorytelling is, as Katharina Block puts it,

unfolded as a possibility for the renewal of sociological thinking and proposed as a specific epistemological instrument for grasping the novel [Anthropocene-named] situation [...] not [as something that is] already [...] able to solve the problematic in the situation, but first of all [...] as an epistemological exercise that helps in understanding the situation. (translated from Block 2021: 214)

I would like to see my work in this understanding process. However, I distance myself from the prefix 'geo' and refer to this practice more generally as topological storytelling and -mapping, which as such also connects to the spatial-processual theoretical base developed in Chapter 3. I believe that the wide and unrestricted approach of a biographical lens is key to understanding and not presupposing which spatial processes are relevant in people's lives and, moreover, to revealing the often spatialised intersectionality of the speaker's situatedness. It is common to connect biographies with narrations and biographical material with text, but it is also possible to map one's biography or to draw it. The following methodological approach and reflections will give insight into the advantages and limits of engaging with people's (hi)stories through a mixed method of narrating and mapping.

5.1.1 Topo-Storytelling: Biography as Discursive Spatial Practice

Biographical research has by no means always regarded a person's biography as part of a discursively produced collective memory (see Hansens 2010: 251) as a matter of course. More recent approaches to biographical research also recognise discourses, in addition to influencing self-descriptions, as having a generative function vis-à-vis the modes of narration, memory, and the experience of people's life stories (for this, see Spies 2009; Dausien et al. 2005; Alheit 2010; Spies 2015; Spies et al. 2017; Sommer 2018). In this context, Alois Hahn critically notes that 'often a clear distinction is missing between the self as a mere result of one's life and the self as the result of social attributions' (translated from Hahn 2000: 99). Furthermore, Reiner Keller proposes that biographical research should also conceive its research subjects within powerful orders of reality and explore the modes of subjectification of their respective 'desiring, justifying, and belonging' (translated from Keller 2016: 60).

My understanding of biography and biographical practice is informed by discourse and practice theory, follows on from these approaches, and conceives its understanding of the subject within postcolonial theories of subject and identity (Bhabha 1994; Hall 2004), which focus on the 'relations of representation of subjectivity' (translated from Reckwitz 2008: 98) and pursue the question: 'How is the Other, the foreign subject, and, conversely, how is one's "own" subject form represented [through spatial relations] and produced in this representation?' (translated from *ibid.*: 98). Following Michel Foucault, I understand discourses not 'as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.' (Foucault 1972: 49) Discourses are thus significant in the process of biograph-

ical remembering, as they also determine, for example, what is desirable, and ultimately what and how something is remembered and shared. To grasp a connection between space, discourse, and subject, I follow Stuart Hall's understanding of the subject, 'which [as Tina Spies puts it] makes it possible to understand subjects not only as effects of discourses [and spaces] but nevertheless to take discourses [and spaces] into account in the conception of the subject' (translated from Spies 2009: 1). The understanding of the subject underlying Stuart Hall's work on identity rejects the 'uniformity and closure' of subjects and calls for the 'deconstruction of the sovereign subject of modernity' (ibid.: 3).

The emphasis on the speaker's practices of speaking and mapping (evoked by my methodological approach) as discursive space-making practices intends to emphasise the performative, socio-material side of these practices, making it possible to understand self-constructions as part of 'doing self', 'doing time', and 'doing space', i.e., as that practice which actively participates in the process of meaning production (translated from Hörning 2004: 19). In the process, the view will always be directed to the power of action or the subversive potential in positioning processes. The object and context of the meaning of my study are thus spatial subjectivation processes of middle-class children analysed as 'cultural constructs' and based on 'cultural practices' (Fegter/Mock 2019: 17, 19) of doing biography. The emphasis on cultural is linked to Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of culture, which Kien Nghi Ha summarises as follows: 'Instead of locating culture in a "unique" structure of meaning and significance that can be clearly delimited from one another by mental, ethnic, territorial or national factors, the focus is on the diverse practices in the midst of and between actors, territories, and places in which cultural orders are lived, represented, and related.' (translated from 2004: 239) It is assumed that 'through socialisation processes and permanent communication, societies provide their members, especially newcomers, with the "right" knowledge of the world, i.e., with the central elements of an order of reality [...]. This world knowledge also includes the respective self-perception of having this or that self, of belonging here or there, of being able or having to act this way or that, of being able to justify it this way or that, of being able to desire this or that [...]' (translated from Keller 2016: 60).

The fact that life courses are also affected by societal factors and are strongly influenced by the labour market, the state, and the individual, i.e., that lifetime is institutionalised by society, is a discourse that, for example, Martin Kohli strengthens with his works on the 'institutionalization of the life course' (translated from Kohli 1997: 284). This institutionalisation, as Martin Kohli argues, takes place in the course of the structural change of modernity, i.e., the social organisation of work and the development of the welfare state. According to him, the consequences of this structural change in relation to biographies appear as 'first continuity, in [the] form of a reliable, materially secure life course; second sequentiality, in [the] form of [an] ordered (and chronologically defined) schedule of the major life events; and third biographicity, in [the] form of a code of personal development and emergence' (translated from Kohli 2012: 220).

Space, as biographically constructed, has been neglected in comparison to time within biographical explorations. Increased debates on the relationship between social spaces and temporal orders of everyday social reality (Alheit 2010) can be found since the reflexive turn in educational science and in connection with the individualisation thesis of modern societies (see Beck 1986: 205 ff.). Furthermore, identity as stable and

uniform is called into question in this context: ‘The attribution of an identity, which is pinned down to a name, immunises communication against the overabundance of complex realities and possibilities of my empirical spatio-temporal existence.’ (translated from Hahn 2000: 104) Praxeological studies on subjectivation practices, such as that of Andrea Querfurt, furthermore draw attention to the materiality of biographical self-constructions and their interconnectedness with spatio-temporal construction logics: ‘[...] processes of subjectivation [do] take place in the here and now, but they are not exhausted in situ; rather, they are fed by spatio-temporal anticipations and retrospective reflections and thereby span bodies, spaces, objects, and artefacts as storage media’ (translated from 2016: 22).

In the study of biographical learning processes, time of life and living space are also important categories of biographies. Regina Mikula and Reinhard Lechner also point to the spatio-temporal context in biographical narratives: ‘The understanding of life and the telling of life stories take place in three time perspectives (present – past – future), as well as being located in geographical places and in social spaces.’ (Mikula/Lechner 2014: 7) However, the somewhat one-sided understanding of space underlying their theory as a ‘biography-constituting element that is historically pre-constructed and shapes the lifeworld of individuals’ (ibid.: 7) must be viewed critically, as it completely disregards spaces as emerging from social practices. Other than that, the work of Gunter Weidenhaus also shows that the connection between space and time has not yet been investigated in a consistently social heuristic. From precisely this perspective, he finds an empirically grounded ideal typology of spatio-temporal references in biographical narratives. With his work, he was not only able to find out that each type of space also correlates with a type of time but also managed to draw conclusions about the connection between this typology and societal change (Weidenhaus 2015).

5.1.1.1 Children’s Biographies and Biographical Agencies

Whereas childhood has been explored within biographical research (Behnken/Zinnecker 2001; Bock 2006), albeit as a marginalised subject, children’s biographies remain almost a blind spot. Recently, the German Qualitative Social Research (*Qualitative Sozialforschung*) mailing list sparked a debate when several scholars asked for help finding studies that work with the method of narration analysis and interviews conducted with children. The reactions to this request revealed a common attitude towards children’s ability to narrate, which can be illustrated by the response of one list member who pointed to a body of studies that discuss children’s ‘narrative capacity’¹ and claimed that they all come to the conclusion ‘that narratives are rare in this phase of life, because the time experienced is still relatively short and self-theories are just emerging’.² The narrative-biographical interview method was developed by Fritz Schütze (1983). One list member, who was Schütze’s student, remembers that he advised her and other students against using his method with ‘children below 14 years, due to developmental psychological reasons (reflective level)’.³ If we look at the number of studies that position children as unable to

1 Translated from response of Gwendolyn Gilliéron.

2 Ibid.

3 Translated from response of Uta Braun.

narrate and to self-reflect, then we must note that children are practically denied their biographies in the scholarly discourse and are again conceptualised as the 'others', the 'not-yet'.

Something that is quite vivid in such claims about children is an inherent understanding of lifetime as a chronological and measurable unit. Despite their conceptions of reflected time, in the context of judging children's capacities, biographical scholars suddenly no longer understand lifetime as relational temporality but as a fixed measure in which the number of years is equated with the amount of experience. From this perspective, children's biographical constructions are seen as deficient compared to those of adults. If researchers experience that children do not attend to their methods, then there are in fact two ways to reason this. The first is to claim that children are not capable, while the other is to critically engage with the conditions of speaking and sharing in which the children were put in. Only very few scholars engage with the latter perspective and point to these problematic constellations and the adult-child binary against the background of narrative study designs with children (e.g., Brooker 2007; Fuhs/Schneider 2012). Further reflection on this might indicate that instead of speaking of a dis-ability, we might also speak of a possible de-motivation of children to share their (hi)stories with a stranger or to be involved in an exchange that later will be identified as 'narrative'.

Against the common depiction of children's lack of biographical reflection, a few publications stress the importance of understanding children as biographical agents and actors, not least because people participate in the life course institution from the very beginning (see Behnken et al. 2009). There is a relatively small but existent body of studies that have a biographical focus on children's worlds and explore the potential of narrative methods with children in that context (for example, Sander/Vollbrecht 1985; Dausien/Kelle 2005; Siebholz 2013; Bray et al. 2014; Eunicke 2015; Gomensoro/Burgos Paredes 2017; Eunicke 2018), some of which have explicitly worked with the narrative-biographical interview method developed by Fritz Schütze (Krüger et al. 1994). However, as Nicola Eunicke argues, most of the time, children under 12 years of age are barely visible in these studies (2018: 296).

Last, it seems important to note that children are not the only group with such a contested status in biographical research. The same applies to the old aged, as the quality of their memory has often been questioned. One of the most common claims is that old people romanticise their past. This also renders visible important features of adulthood. Adulthood is a human norm which renders not only childhood as 'not yet' but also old age as 'no longer'. The transgenerational comparison therefore allows me to gain a comprehensive empirical insight into the capabilities of diverse speakers as biographical and therefore historical actors. As such, it helps me to gather empirical evidence that brings clarity to prevailing assumptions within memory studies and biographical research. The research gap that results from these perspectives points to the need for studies that explore the spatial relations of childhood from a biographical point of view. My analysis is positioned precisely here and additionally looks at this blind spot from the perspective of largely invisible global inequalities.

5.1.1.2 The Challenge of Time Travelling

When I presented my work in progress, I also encountered another form of critique besides the general mistrust in children's biographical agency. It involved questioning the value of my cross-generational sampling for studying social change or *figuration* and suggesting that only longitudinal research can capture processes. Since I did not interview all the speakers during the period of childhood, but also asked aged speakers to remember their childhood, this criticism is highly important and points to the limits of an intergenerational comparison. However, connected to this critique was the common claim that longitudinal research is necessary because older people generally romanticise their pasts (e.g., Revere/Tobin 1981; Betts 2003). As a researcher attentive to age as a category of social inequality, I approached this assumption with caution. It reflects a subtle form of ageism that, paradoxically, underpins much biographical research. Certainly, the degree to which processes of *figuration* can be observed in my material is limited by the speakers' capacities and cultures to remember. Yet I resist the idea that memory capacity can be standardised or determined solely by age. Remembering is not only a cognitive act but also a social and affective one. What people recall depends on the personal relevance of events: What matters to them remains vivid, while other details fade into the background. All these complex conditions of memory processes are again part of a complex web of personal and societal (cultural) markers and cannot accurately be framed by age cohorts.

Gilles Deleuze's observation that 'we have confused Being with being-present' and that 'the present is *not*; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself' (1988: 55) offers a useful conceptual frame here. From this perspective, the past does not simply disappear; it persists as an active force within the present. Remembering is therefore not the retrieval of something that has 'ceased to be' (ibid. 1988: 55) but a creative process through which past experiences are continuously re-figured in relation to present conditions. In the moment of narration, participants do not merely reproduce the past – they transform it, investing it with new meanings that emerge through the interaction between researcher and speaker. In this way, the past continues to become and continues to change.

This also means that memory is shaped by the affective atmosphere of the interview itself. Some participants described the process as 'therapeutic' or 'healing', while others found it more uncomfortable or exposing. These emotional and social dynamics, alongside age and broader cultural discourses, influence what can be remembered and how it is articulated. Memory, and therefore *figuration*, should thus be understood not as fixed data but as part of the ongoing becoming of the present – a process through which the past continues to live and take form. Hence, it seems important here not to allow a structural approach to degenerate into determinism but to also focus on the potential to subvert structures in every biographical person. From this perspective, cases also emerge in which a child does not speak from the position of a child simply because they hold this position in society. It may also become apparent that there is no such thing as the social position of child *per se* and that it remains an empirical question whether and to what extent general assumptions about children and elderly people in biographical studies are accurate and whether common claims, such as for example, children live in the here and now or elderly people romanticise their past account for them at all.

So far I have performed an ambivalent language that oscillates between ‘memory’ and ‘experience’ when framing the speaker’s (hi)stories. Yet the more I think, discuss, and read about this issue, the more I see another aspect that lies at the ground of this dualism. What appears again is the child understood as becoming, as opposed to the adult that has already reached the state of a human being (through the process of socialisation), and is therefore believed to give totally different accounts of themselves than an adult would. In this context, Maurice Halbwachs, a well-recognised memory researcher, claims that ‘[t]he entire societal and psychological experience of the adult is missing in the child’ (translated from Halbwachs 2019 [1952]: 130⁴). Maurice Halbwachs’s works on memory were crucial to freeing up the concept of memory from an understanding of the past as collected by and stored within individuals’ cognitive capacities. His theory of collective memory points to the social dimension of the memory processes in which we collectively constitute memories. His work has been crucial for recognising biographical material as a basis of analysis for socio-political inscriptions in memory on the one hand and for the collective construction of history on the other. Nonetheless, there are countless passages in Maurice Halbwachs’s work in which he contrasts childlike remembering with the remembering of adults, thereby drawing an essentialist and utterly romanticised figure of the child as naïve. In his work, children’s narrations appear pure and, in some ways, innocent. His essentialist perspective of childhood also connects to postcolonial aspects and strengthens, once more, the entanglements between adultism and colonialism that I pointed out earlier (subchapter 1.2).

The passivity and indifference of children is even more pronounced when it comes to the laws and customs of society than when they are brought into contact with natural facts. [...] Rousseau was not mistaken when he said that the child is a little savage [...]. (translated from *ibid.*: 127)

Within memory studies, we can find voices that criticise the Eurocentrism of that field. Connected with that is an overemphasis on ‘hegemonial archives’ (translated from de Wolff 2021: 88), which marginalise postcolonial contexts and colonialism in general.

Indeed, taken together, Halbwachs’s organicism, Nora’s purified national frame, and the Assmanns’ preponderant focus on canonical archives suggest that throughout the twentieth century—the era of colonialism’s apotheosis, collapse, and reconfiguration in neo- and postcolonial guises—cultural memory studies may have inadvertently done as much to reproduce imperial mentalities as to challenge them. (Rothberg 2013: 364, cited in de Wolff 2021: 90)

This means that the wormhole will remain a spatial metaphor. Kaya de Wolff criticises that memory studies have for a long time overemphasised the hegemonial archives and therefore overseen the postcolonial lives which, as Jan Vansina already pointed out in 1961, perhaps practice memory beyond the European archives. Oral and visual (hi)stories cannot replace time travelling. Neither can archives. My work aims to re-figure, and

4 Although there is an English translation of Halbwachs’s book, this passage does not appear in it. It has therefore been translated from the German version.

in that context therefore to de-archive biographical approaches and make biographical stories of young and old postcolonial speakers visible within memory studies. Whereas physicists try to travel to the past through real space-time, my travel tries to reach it (and the future) through the memory (and anticipation) of the people who shared their (hi)stories with me and at times felt that we were together travelling back in time: 'I can feel the reel. The reel is unwinding. [...] Goodness, you're taking me down memory lane (laughs)' (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.).

5.1.2 Topo-Storymapping: Mapping as Emotional and Sensory Practice

Over the past decades, qualitative social research has undergone a notable methodological and epistemological shift toward emotions, affect, and the sensory dimensions of social life. Across fields scholars have challenged the privileging of the visual, the representational, and the static, arguing instead for approaches that attend to embodied experience, atmospheres, and the relational production of meaning in space and time (Bondi 2006; Thrift 2008; Wetherell 2012; Pink 2015; Eisewicht et al. 2021; Howes 2022). Both, the affective as well as the sensory turn have not only expanded what counts as data, but has also prompted renewed experimentation with methods capable of engaging with lived and felt aspects of everyday life.

Within this broader context, mapping has (re-)emerged as a critical and creative qualitative method. No longer confined to positivist cartographic traditions, mapping practices have been reworked as participatory, reflexive, and processual tools (Kitchin/Dodge 2007). Sensory and affective mapping practices – including emotional maps, participatory mapping, and counter-cartographies – have demonstrated how spatial representations can operate as narrative devices and sites of ethical and embodied encounter rather than neutral depictions of space (Powell 2010; Klaus et al. 2022; Luckett/Bagelman 2023).

As such, multi-sensory and emotional qualitative research methods also have a history in childhood studies and especially in the field of children's geographies. Creative and participatory approaches – including drawing, walking interviews, and mapping – have been central to recognising children as competent social actors and to accessing their emotional and sensory engagements with place.

One of the pioneers in this area is Roger Hart (1979), who developed a methodological framework for studying children's experiences of space, which was based on innovative qualitative research methods that engage children actively in the research process, such as geographical diaries, direct observation, and ethnographic interviews. Ever since, childhood researchers have engaged with children's spatiality from a wide visual methodological perspective, ranging from methods such as reflexive photography and photo elicitation (Guillemin/Drew 2010), children's drawings (Kogler 2018), and app-based research tools (Hadfield-Hill/Zara 2018) to tablet-led walking interviews (Fegter/Mock 2019).

Despite the richness of these methodological traditions, the systematic integration of mapping practices with biographical research remains comparatively under-developed. While mapping is frequently used to elicit spatial experiences in the present (Gieseke, 2013), and biographical methods are employed to reconstruct life narratives over

time, the two are rarely combined in a sustained and methodologically explicit way. As a consequence, emotions and sensory experiences are often analysed either spatially or biographically, but not in ways that fully capture how they unfold across both space and the life course.

When focusing on mapping as a tool to accompany the childhood biographical interviews, I was inspired by the research of Imbke Behnken and Jürgen Zinnecker, who explore the potential of 'narrative maps' in conducting 'current and biographical remembered living spaces' (translated from Behnken/Zinnecker 2010: 1). This is a method of visual social research (ethnography) that aims to reconstruct personal living spaces of interviewees and their subjective relevance. It is done by means of cartographic, graphic, and – complementary and parallel to this – biographical narrative forms of representation. Whereas for Imbke Behnken and Jürgen Zinnecker, the mapping is in the foreground and is additionally combined with biographical data, I decided to turn it around. I made this decision on the basis of a previous experience in a research project in which children aged between 6 and 12 years who lived in the Tarlabaşı district in Istanbul (Turkey) had taken photographs of their most common outdoor play spaces and games (auto-photography, Adair/Worth 1972) and were asked to talk about their photos in a group discussion. To me, a group discussion was insufficient to work effectively with all the visual material they had produced. I realised that although the auto-photographic approach had given the researchers access to the children's play spaces and practices, the material resulting from the group discussion was not deep enough to fully reveal the capacity of the visual material. Therefore, in my research in Nairobi and Berlin, I decided to position the maps next to the biographical narrations in order to have information from the narrations that was as direct as possible, yet without proposing speaking as the only form of expression.

Bringing mapping and biographical approaches into closer dialogue constitutes an important methodological opportunity. Mapping biographical narratives allows researchers to trace how emotions, memories, and sensory attachments are spatially situated and re-situated over time, revealing the entanglement of personal histories with shifting material, social, and political landscapes (Tolia-Kelly 2006). Such an approach is particularly valuable for feminist, ethnographic, and child-centred research, where attention to power, embodiment, and voice is paramount. Moreover, mapping can function not only as a data collection tool but also as a reflexive practice through which participants actively re-narrate their life histories and emotional topologies.

By using mappings within a countertopology, my methodological approach relates to the tradition of critical cartography (Harley 1989; Wood 1992) and the practice of counter-cartography within this tradition (kollektiv orangotango+ 2018), which aims to decentre hegemonial – white, male, Eurocentric – practices of mapping and world-making. With the method of topo-storymapping, I also refer to the method of mental mapping, which dates back to the field of environmental psychology and the influential work of the city planner Kevin A. Lynch. In *The Image of the City* (Lynch 1960), Lynch developed a participatory research design in which participants created a mental map of their city to highlight that a city is not only based on common cartographic depictions but is also made up of various kinds of subjective layers and elements that people use to orientate themselves with. Even though Lynch's study contributed greatly to the recognition of partic-

ipatory urban planning and architecture, he primarily researched the physical appearance of the city. However, mapping used primarily as a cognitive tool (Downs/Stea 1973) did not sufficiently emphasise the affect- and feeling-related perception of spatial memory and knowledge that I wanted to achieve. In this connection, mental maps were further developed to serve as a tool for emotional mapping (Powell 2010; Germes/Klaus 2021; Klaus et al. 2022). I applied this form of meaning-centred mapping by asking the speakers which spaces and places were or are important to them in both positive and negative ways. Through the transgenerational and furthermore narrative context, I also draw on what Philip J. Ethington and Nobuko Toyosawa call ‘deep mapping’, creating a map that ‘is historically deep. Its historical depth gives it a narrative dimension. Deep mapping and spatial narrative, therefore, are essentially interwoven.’ (2015: 72) But by deep I also refer to the spatial quality that is excavated with this type of mapping. As an addition to the interviews, the mapping exercise intended to carve out the phenomenological side of the speaker’s memory as a sort of multi-sensory mapping (Powell 2010). The emphasis on deep next to emotional therefore also relates to my spatial theoretical understanding of figuration. As such, it also highlights the more-than-human relations of children in space and reveals something about their ‘geological agency’ (Hadfield-Hill/Zara 2020: 408).

Last, the combination of text and image, of speaking and drawing, served as a way to create a research method that grapples with the diversity of participants by offering different means of expression. This allowed the interview design to be shifted from narration to mapping if that was easier. This method triangulation helped me to realise an inclusive research setting that speaks to a diverse group of people, thus giving me the possibility to modify the method (e.g., offer to switch to the mapping if talking was difficult) in a way that would allow me to react in the event that a difference between the speakers occurred, instead of reifying this difference a priori, e.g., by developing two different methodological designs, one for children and one for adults, from the outset. And indeed, the speakers dealt with the task of mapping in different ways, but these differences were not distinguishable according to age. Whereas some speakers interrupted the narrative to draw ‘in peace’ (which sometimes required switching off the recording device), others preferred to speak and draw synchronously.

In sum, the mapping approach had four aims:

- a) To intensify the spatial-biographical narration in terms of phenomenological aspects
- b) To provide an alternative means of expression for speakers who felt limited by a speech-based approach
- c) To serve as a way of narrowing down the open, complex, and often sprawling narrations
- d) To support my evaluation and methodological reflections in cases where the text and image produced complementary material and to help me gain more security in the practice of interpretation and representation.

The forms of re-figuring are also continued in the practice of mapping. Finding visual access to children’s spatial biographies and using them to make statements about the spatial figurations of childhoods also means seeking these figurations beyond hegemonic

cartographic depictions. Thus, I also see the mapping of the speakers' own childhoods as an adult-critical and decolonial practice.

5.1.3 Four Steps and Settings

In this subchapter, I explain in detail how the method was designed and applied in four steps. After that, I elucidate the specific situation in which the speakers were able to share their childhood experiences and memories with me to provide deeper insight into the conditions of sharing. In the following, I outline the four steps that were planned but openly handled for the basis of each encounter.

Step 1: Introduction, consent, socio-economic questionnaire, and audio-recording

At the beginning of each encounter, I introduced myself and the project, and we began with the procedure of giving consent. In the encounters with speakers under the age of 16, at least one parent/legal representative stayed in the room during the consent process, leaving afterwards. The level of trust given to me by both the children and their parents was enormously important to the research process, because the children's curiosity and courage and the trust given to them to handle the situation on their own created an important basis for the practice of sharing. I was positively surprised that the parents or caregivers left without being prompted, often saying it was better if they were not in the room so the children could speak freely.⁵

After the consent, the speakers were asked to share some socio-economic information about themselves. Besides the open narrations and maps, it seemed necessary to see if what is considered middle class economically also resonates with similar cultural and, even more important to me, spatial patterns. To define my sampling at a socio-cultural nexus, it was necessary to gather some data about the economic situation in which the speaker was growing up. I gathered data such as the parents' educational background, the places of residences during the life course, the typical weekend activities and the number of siblings to understand the speaker's socio-economic situatedness better.

Step 2: Biographical narration (focus on important spaces)

Once consent was given, open questions had been clarified, and the recording device was switched on, I asked every speaker the same thing:

Stimulus (a):

'I would like to ask you to share the story of your childhood in Nairobi/Berlin with me. I am interested in the places and spaces that are and were important to you in that period. Please feel free to also speak about places and spaces outside of Nairobi/Berlin.'

5 As I mentioned before, at some point, when I noticed that the speakers appreciated having copies of their recordings and maps, I offered to share the material. This was problematic for children with no email or cell phone, because I needed to share the files with their parents. To ensure their privacy, I asked these children if they wanted the material to be shared, even though their parents had access to it.

This part took the most time, varying between 40 minutes and several hours, and once even over two days.

Step 3: Structure of weekday and weekend

As the previous step intended to stimulate the speakers to reflect on the important places and spaces of their life/childhood as a whole, the following stimulus served to check whether the spatial relations that emerged in step 2 would also be reflected in the mundane everyday structure of their childhoods.

Stimulus (b):

‘Could you please describe what you would do on an ordinary weekday (when you were around ten years old⁶)? You wake up and then...?’

As the structure of weekdays and weekends differ, I also asked about the weekend structure. I assumed that weekend activities tell a lot about social aspects of middle classness from a spatial perspective.

Stimulus (c):

‘Would you now please do the same for the weekend?’

Step 4: Childhood map

After the narrative part, we usually took a little break to move our bodies, eat and drink, and, at times, reflect on the experience of sharing. After that, I asked the speakers to visualise their childhood and the places and spaces that are important to them on a map.

Stimulus (d)

‘Would you please create a map of your childhood in Nairobi/Berlin? Your personal city map with all the places and spaces that are or were important in your childhood. The aim is not to create an accurate map but rather an illustration of your personal childhood experience in Nairobi/Berlin. Please feel free to add places and spaces outside of the city as well.’

The speakers were also asked to share the most important place/space with me so that I could learn more about what constituted this special spatial arrangement.

Stimulus (e)

‘Would you please circle the most important place on your map and tell me what it means to you?’

6 This was not included if the speaker was approximately ten years old or younger.

At this point, it seems important to note that even though the research encounters were organised in these four steps, the structure of the interviews was open and arrangements were made, for example, in cases where a speaker

- preferred to map/draw throughout the entire interview,
- enjoyed talking more than mapping,
- wanted to additionally show things on Google Maps,
- wished to walk around and change places, dance, run, or jump around,
- had so much to share that we met again the next day,
- enjoyed switching roles and asked me to share parts of my childhood story,
- wanted to drink and/or eat,
- refused to do one of the steps (this only accounts for one case of mapping).

The settings for these encounters varied. Most speakers under 14 years and three speakers older than 30 years were interviewed at their homes, both in Nairobi and Berlin. This was either their or their parent's preference. Three speakers were living in the same compound with me in Nairobi and were interviewed on the doorstep of my apartment, which was on the first floor and led to a gallery entrance – a place that had become a hang-out for the children living there. In Nairobi, many speakers asked me to meet in cafés or restaurants, some of them in shopping malls close to their homes. Others met me in the garden of the Alliance Française in downtown Nairobi or at the canteen of the University of Nairobi, and one speaker met me in the garden of Kunona Artists Collective. In Berlin, most younger participants were interviewed at their homes, some speakers were interviewed at my office, and others at their office or in cafés. One speaker (nine years old) was interviewed in a community garden. Another speaker (31 years old) started his interview on a playground close to his childhood home but had so much to say that we continued the interview on the following day at his house. One person (61 years old) grew up in Nairobi but moved to the United States, so the interview took place on Skype.

Considering these diverse places that were the basis for a space-based narration, it is necessary to further reflect how these spatialities might have also affected the process of sharing. Two aspects seemed to be at stake here. One was the overall quality of the space, which mattered on the one hand in terms of feeling safe and comfortable enough to share personal things. On the other hand, sound quality also played a role. If the place was near a road or a market or in a busy café, the sound quality of the recording would suffer from intense background noise. Second, it mattered whether the speakers shared their story within the topology of their childhood narration itself (e.g., at their childhood home) or in a comparatively neutral space. This is because if we are both in the space we are talking about, then the qualities of this space might no longer be expressed, because we perceive it, while on the other hand I also had direct insights into these places. Therefore, I often asked the speakers who were speaking within such spatial relations to describe how it looks there.

5.2 Architectural Ethnography: Home

While I had initially only planned to conduct biographical interviews and mappings, after a few encounters I realised that the role of home is more central than I had assumed. As I based my research and evaluation strategies on grounded theory (Glaser/Strauss 1967) – where data collection and evaluation phases flow into one another – I was able to refine the collection method during the process in order to highlight the significance of home in connection with its respective housing type. The methods with which I zoomed in on the speakers' housing and home-making practices were inspired by architectural ethnography, a growing interdisciplinary field that deals with socio-material aspects of building processes (Kaijima et al. 2018; Roesler 2021). Here, I was particularly interested in architectural ethnographic work that looks at the typology of residential housing and engages with the socio-material aspects of housing and home-making (Kuroda/Kaijima 2001; Kon/Ignacio 2016; Roesler 2021). Unlike the method of biographical topo-storytelling and -mapping, the home-related explorations were not realised with every speaker. This is because I used this method only after a while, when the narrations and maps continuously pointed to the importance of home in middle-class childhoods. Additionally, not every speaker's home still existed or was accessible to me. So these investigations must be understood as partial and serve as additional tools complementing the narrations and maps.

During my research in Nairobi, I did not come across a genuinely middle-class housing topology that looks at socio-material aspects.⁷ The search often led me to local and foreign websites of real estate developers but not towards scientific inquiry. This finding was strengthened in conversations with local sociologists, architects, and geographers. Yet beyond that specific scope, I would like to mention two works that deal with middle-class housing topologies, but from slightly different angles. In her PhD thesis, Collins Sasakah Makunda (2021), for example, explored middle-class housing in Nairobi's Kileleshwa district. The comparative work of Alex Loy Seid, in his master's thesis, focused on types of housing and home-making of different ethnic and income groups in a case study in Nairobi during the 1970s. Alex Loy Seid developed a general typology of housing and also drew on home-making aspects. He shares an important impression that he made during his fieldwork, which points to the power and influence of European building and housing cultures for past and contemporary Kenyan housing.

In the course of my field research, I encountered an American architect working in the Nairobi City Council Housing Estate Office who was responsible for the design and planning of the various public housing projects. His basic criterion in designing and planning of the house was strictly a physical solution. His considerations were based purely on cost and area standards handed down from the period under European colonialization, totally without respect for the socio-cultural needs and requirements of the African inhabitant/user. Policy and decision makers, who determine the form/type of housing to be built, [...] feel that the handed-down, European standards of design,

7 My search was limited to online libraries, local university libraries in Nairobi, and the National Archives in Nairobi.

planning and building are still applicable to the housing and socio-cultural needs and requirements of the predominantly African population in Nairobi today. (Seid 1974: 164)

While the experience shared by Alex Loy Seid matters greatly for the spatial order of everyday urban life in Kenya, I was not able to find work that sheds light on the global architecture transfer and its implications for Kenya and Nairobi, particularly for the period after independence. But studies on global architecture transfer generally point out that the colonial administrations have often laid out the roots for European cultures of building and housing, and these cultures often affect middle-class and high-income residents in particular, as they move into either colonial structures or state-planned housing. Although the space for a deeper engagement with the effects of colonial and global architecture transfer in this book is limited, it is important to note that my comparative study of practices of home-making and housing in Nairobi and Berlin also aims to reveal situated architecture globalities, which can empirically enrich the discourse from a translocal and classed perspective. On the other hand, it is important to also note the limitations of this book with regard to further contextualising these findings within wider national and transnational building and planning cultures.

In the following, I will explain my approach to architectural ethnography and my use of methods to explore the speakers' homes as the socio-material spatial processes that have been marked as most important in the context of middle-class childhoods. When exploring the meaning of home, I documented architectural aspects of some of the speakers' housing as a built environment through drawings, photographs, and field notes, within and beyond the home as – whatever the case was – house, estate, or neighbourhood. In the following analysis, this documentation of the built environment can only be understood as a complement to the maps and narrations, which add to the dimension of the built environment the dimension of the lived environment. My field notes, for example a sketch of a residential building, only show their meaning in combination with the speaker's map or the narration in which they shared home-related practices, such as playing or eating.

5.2.1 Drawing as caring

From an auto-ethnographic perspective, I already felt in hearing such personal (hi)stories that I was being taken on a very personal journey by the speakers. Additionally, being allowed to enter their homes and gather material there extended that intimacy. Therefore, again the questions of legitimation haunted me. Huda Tayob's reflections on the potential of drawing techniques for studying subaltern architectures (Tayob 2018: 203) were very helpful for me in reflecting on the power structures inherent in this practice of taking material testimony of a place that is often utterly personal and private. She similarly follows Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) appeal against forms of representation that 'speak for' and portray the margins (Tayob 2018: 207) and develops the technique of drawing as a way of 'speaking to' (ibid.: 210), while remaining critical of that method by reflecting, as I did, on Edward Said's questions: 'Who speaks? For what and to whom?' (Said 1989: 212). From this standpoint, she reflects on the agency of her participants –

refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants that occupy markets in Cape Town – within their asymmetrical relation to her as the researcher. In that context, she notes that ‘[i]nstead of photography and voice recordings [...] [t]he adoption of drawing [Figure 17] and hand-writing as primary methods positioned me as active within the field and research, as opposed to being an invisible author’ (Tayob 2018: 209). Whereas Huda Tayob reflects on how her study participants remained concerned with the ‘question of representation’ (ibid.: 208), I experienced quite the opposite.

Figure 17: Drawing of Fatima’s shop.



Source Tayob 2018: 213. Drawing by Huda Tayob, resized by the author.

Perhaps overly sensitive, I approached the field in Nairobi trying to become aware of, respect, address, and negotiate the complex asymmetrical power relations between the speakers and me as the researcher. Despite the care I took in this regard, I was quickly surprised by the openness and the amount of curiosity I met with during the encounters. Against what I had imagined, speakers sometimes even suggested being filmed during the interview or struggled to understand why their names would be replaced by

pseudonyms – something which, after the experience of sharing, seemed more logical to them. According to my experience in the field, I would argue that we need to become aware of the specific cultures of (in)visibilities that apply to our respective research contexts, as well as to each single person, individually. Subalternity in these shifting contexts does not remain one and the same thing. The ways of caring in the field, for others and oneself, therefore need to be developed and modified again and again and cannot simply rely on notions such as subaltern, postcolonial, Black, etc.

Figure 18: *Nduma Hands. Upper Hill, Nairobi.*



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

During my fieldwork in Nairobi, I was not able to react directly to the openness that came across from some of the speakers, often also because this did not resonate with my experience in Berlin. While I was extremely curious to use different media and found it important to respond to the openness of these speakers, I was also overwhelmed with the complexity of material that was already produced by the broad and open childhood-biographical narrations and maps. Therefore, I decided not to add more. However, this experience still initiated moments in which together we explored what this openness to visual representation would lead to. When I met Martha, for example, I had served some *nduma* crisps [arrowroot chips] while she was sharing her story. The narration unfolded over the entire evening, and it was not only Martha telling her story from the beginning

to the end, but I too dialogically webbed in aspects of mine, and in the meantime we ate, made jokes, and took photos – such as in Figure 18, where the *nduma* crisps became part of a still life of Martha's hands.

Despite encounters like that with Martha, I kept mostly to drawing during my research in Nairobi and Berlin, taking photos only if no people were visible on them or were at least hard to identify. As the homes also carried a lot of personal substance, I also often either drew on the spot or took photos to later create the drawings from. With this, I furthermore refer to Huda Tayob (2018: 209), who argues that unlike photographs or other conventional architectural visualisations, drawings are characterised by sketchiness and imperfection. This reminds us that these are by no means complete and accurate records but fragmented spatially, temporally, and culturally situated depictions.

5.2.2 From Housing Typology to Housing Topology

With a focus on tenement housing, Marie Huchzermeyer (2011) compares Nairobi and Berlin across two centuries. Besides illustrating how different the two contexts are, she also points to many similarities, one of which is connected to verticality. As her study deals with the ambivalent effects of verticality on the residents' social life, her work is even more inspiring, as verticality is a spatial figuration that is in tension with the scale of humans, especially when they are small. With her book, Marie Huchzermeyer also debates a broader story about a right to the city, which also strongly concerns children. What is also inspiring about her work is how she handles a similarly asymmetric comparison between Nairobi and Berlin. Even though Huchzermeyer compares the 'multi-story rental housing in 21st century Nairobi and tenements of 19th century western cities' (2011: 23), she does not, as Garth Myers notes in his review of her book, fall prey to a historicism that equates today's Nairobi with 19th century Prussia or Germany and portrays Nairobi merely as a latecomer. She manages to do that, says Garth Myers, 'through her careful, extensive and intensive research and through her lively, cogent engagement with radical urban theory' (Myers 2012: 83).

While Marie Huchzermeyer works with types on a theoretical level, my approach instead engages with topologies of housing and home-making and ties in with the current critical discourse on house types, developed among other things under the keyword of the 'fifth typology'⁸ by the Laboratory of Theory and Project of Domestic Space at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, and particularly with the reflections of Jolanda Devalle. In her essay, Devalle doubts the 'innocence' of type formation due to its colonial entanglements and warns, following Tim Ingold, 'that treating houses as static artifacts runs the danger of turning "native productions into readymade objects, ripe for analysis and interpretation"' (Devalle 2023: 18). To circumvent such turnings, Jolanda Devalle argues in favour of a critical approach to typologies based on four points, which I want to build on with the topological rationale.

8 Recognising a resurgence of the type concept in the past decade, labelled as the 'fourth typology', the fifth typology, influenced by Anthony Vidler's (1996) impactful essay 'The Third Typology', seeks to broaden its application as a method for exploring formal and political aspects in architecture.

Jolanda Devalle's first point concerns the problem of synchronicity in the representation of house types. She argues that '[t]ypological analysis is commonly understood as a synchronic procedure, comparing buildings as static "snapshots" across time and space.' (ibid.: 17). I agree with this criticism and instead work with a biographical perspective, which frames the buildings as processual material assemblages, with changing socio-material relations. With this focus on their topology – and thus their relation in process or practice, which includes their typology in terms of fixed entities, which they also are, but not only – I am able to see them beyond the problem of synchronicity that comes with a typological framing.

Her second point regards the predominance of the visual in housing typologies, which might risk overseeing culture-specific aspects of another phenomenological nature, while the 'significance of form may not be so self-evident' (ibid.: 18). Through the simultaneous collection of biographical narratives and maps and my documentation of the site, I am able to react to this problem by gathering multi-sensory impressions about practices of housing and home-making. This links to her third point and her call to critically engage with the post-humanist potential of typology to 'facilitate discussions on coexistence with other species' (ibid.: 18). To reach this perspective here as well, I call for a processual and topological understanding of buildings that also accounts for the material agencies of buildings to enable some social practices while limiting others. Devalle's fourth point stresses the awareness of the power of 'representational language' (ibid.: 18). In this context, she critically notes that '[t]he tension between the "flattening" abstraction of same-scale floor plans and the intricate complexity of dwellings demands an approach that combines diverse methods and mediums' (ibid.: 18) and which is reached here by the method triangulation of biographical narration, participant mapping, and architectural ethnography. Finally, I will add a fifth point that seems necessary for the critical and careful handling of housing types, which relates to the problem of adultism connected to the scale of housing. Studies on housing types have been exclusively conducted from the adult's perspective. Engaging with children's perspectives in the context of housing and home-making in the context of the debate over the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996) is important and additionally promising, as most aspects of (modern) dwelling structures are not built for the scale of small people. As such, the built environment is highly performative generally in the sense that it also reminds children that they have not yet reached their size. Hence, it is crucial to rescale studies on housing types towards intergenerational spatial justice.