

Abstract

This book examines the making of African diasporic identities among middle-class women born and raised in the German city of Frankfurt. It approaches this by considering practices of travel, care, activism and storytelling on various spatial scales: local (Frankfurt), national (Germany) and global.

Employing ethnographic methods of participant observation, life-story analysis and family ethnography, the study – for which fieldwork was carried out in 2017 and 2018 – reflects on the lives of five Afrodescendant women in Germany, members of the second generation as children of at least one migrant parent. The author of the study was herself brought up in the same Frankfurt neighbourhoods as her research participants, which gave her intimate knowledge of the study contexts and privileged access to interlocutors. The book studies the formation of diaspora identifications through kinship on two levels: 1) the individual and intimate making of diasporic identity via engagement in transnational family life and history, including travelling to ‘origins’, as well as 2) the collective creation of diaspora and ‘chosen family’ through coalitions in Black (feminist) political communities.

The book is structured along three dimensions. The first, employing historical analysis and bibliographical data, locates specific case studies in the more general historical context of the African diaspora in Germany and Frankfurt since the early twentieth century. The second, employing life-story interviews and participant observation, explores the relations between dwelling and travelling among the study subjects over a timespan of more than 30 years. It analyses experiences as well as strategies and practices that the women applied to build Afrodiasporic identity. These range from seeking identification in Black American cultural production as teens in Frankfurt, via engaging actively in anti-racist activism, anti-racist education and literature for themselves and their children, to positive encounters with places of ancestral origin as adult women. The third dimension deals with travelling as an important practice for negotiating Afrodiasporic identity. The lived experience of being mobile is of particular importance for building transnational kinship relations and diasporic communities. The travels undertaken by the women range from a three-week trip to meet (previously unknown) family members to a full year’s work placement abroad. Such diasporic journeys differ from both traditional

roots tourism and ordinary transnational family visits. Building kinship is only one among several motivations driving the women's mobility: others include learning and practising particular parts of their selves, seeking to embody Afrodiasporic identity in places they consider to be origins, and connecting with transnational Black (political) communities. Travel changes perspectives on identity narratives and allows subjects to build new forms of relationships, networks and actions. Last but not least, the book analyses coming of age stories and stories of travelling as narratives of the self.